SOURCES PRIOR TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

C. 800 - C. 1600

COLLECTION: HOPKINS, J.F.P., & LEVITZION, Nehemia


This collection contains what has survived of the Arabic accounts of the western and central Sudan that were written in North Africa and the Levant from the earliest times, the ninth Christian century, to the sixteenth century. Relevant sections from 58 authors or collections are presented in English translation with very full annotation. Only the last nine authors lived in the period covered by this Guide, and none of these knew West Africa at first-hand. By their time, too, external Arabic knowledge of West Africa had deteriorated considerably from that achieved by the best authorities of the 11th to 14th centuries.

This is probably the best of three similar works which have appeared in recent years (see review article by Humphrey J. FISHER in JAH, 23, 4 (1982) 549-60); the other two appear as the next two items in the Guide.

C. 800 - C. 1600

COLLECTION: CUOQ, Fr Joseph


See comment under 800 COLLECTION: HOPKINS & LEVITZION. The sources are presented in French translation. Cuq's work is reviewed by Humphrey J. FISHER in JAH, 19, 4 (1978) 617-19.

C. 800 - 1299

COLLECTION: KOUBBEL, L.E., & MATEEV, V.V.

Istochniki po etnografii i istorii Afriki yuzhnee Sakhary: Arabskie

See comment under 800 COLLECTION: HOPKINS & LEVITZION. It should be noted that the geographical scope of this collection is wider than that of the other two, and also that it is the only one that prints its texts in the original Arabic as well as in translation (in this case into Russian).

1342 onwards

COLLECTION: BRÁSIO, Fr António


This is a collection of fundamental importance. Although Brásio's prime concern is with Catholic missionary activity, his material is also informative about a wide range of other matters.

The volumes are in two series. Series 1 is concerned with the old diocese of S. Tomé, that is with the lands from Mina to the Cape of Good Hope. Series 2 deals with the old diocese of Santiago, i.e. [cont.]
Upper Guinea. By 1988, the first series, beginning in 1471, had extended to 15 volumes and had entered the eighteenth century, while the second series, beginning in 1342, was half way into the 17th century in five volumes.

Most of the items printed by Brásio are short, averaging perhaps 3 or 4 pages; they are letters, charters, commissions, reports etc found for the most part in archives in Portugal, Italy, Spain, France etc. But the collection also includes substantial extracts from early chronicles and from authors such as 1441 EANES, 1457 GOMES, 1505 PACHECO, 1506 FERNandes, and 1552 BARROS. Some of the longer descriptive pieces printed by Brásio have been given separate entries in this Guide. Brásio sometimes checked his extracts against the original MSS, and these can be better readings than may be available elsewhere. But it should be noted that he provides hardly any annotation.

1415 onwards

COLLECTION: MAGALHAES GODINHO, Vitorino


1438-95

PIANA, Ruy de

(1) Chronica del Rey Dom Affonso.
(2) Chronica del Rey Dom João II.
   ed. J. CORREA da SERRA, Colleção de livros inéditos de história portugueza,
   Vol. 1, Lisbon, 1790.

There are modern eds, e.g. Coimbra 1950; Porto, 1977.
Extracts in Eng. trans. may be found in 1450 COLLECTION: BLAKE; extracts in the
original are printed in 1342 COLLECTION: BRASIO.

Pina was Chronicler Royal and Keeper of the Records at the Torre do Tombo at the time of the great
discoveries under John II (1487-95) and Manuel (1495-1521). F. LEITE de FARA in Studia (Lisbon),
19 (1966) 223-303 throws some light on Pina’s sources for the Congo and prints an earlier version of his
Congo text.

1441-60

EANES de AZURARA (or ZURARA), Gomes

Chronicica do descobrimento e conquista de Guiné..., ed. Visconde de SANTAREM,
Paris, 1841.

Modern Portuguese eds include:
Chronicica do descobrimento e conquista de Guiné, ed. José de BRAGANCA,

Chronicas dos feitos notáveis que se passaram na conquista de Guiné...,

Annotated eds in other languages:
The chronicle of the discovery and conquest of Guinea, ed. C.R. BEAZLEY &

This contemporary account of the earliest Portuguese voyages remained unpublished until 1841. An
abridgement of it was made by 1506 FERNANDES, but this too remained in manuscript until
the nineteenth century; it may be found in the edition of Fernandes by Baião. See António J. DIAS DINIS, *Vida e obras de Gomes Eanes de Zurara*, Lisbon, 1949.

1441-1807

**COLLECTION: DONNAN, Elizabeth**


Documents relating to western Africa are to be found mainly in Vol. 1, especially pp. 141-236, and Vol. 2.

1447

**MALFANTE, António**

*Letter written in Latin from Tuat to Genoa.*

First pub. by Charles de LA RONCIÈRE, e.g. in *La découverte de l'Afrique au moyen âge*, Vol. 1, 151-58; *Mémoires de la Soc. Roy. de Géog. d'Egypte*, 5, Cairo, 1925. There is further information in Vol. 3 (Mémoires, 13, Cairo, 1927), 15-33.


1450-1560

**COLLECTION: BLAKE, John W.**


Vol. 1 contains material in Eng. trans. relative to Portuguese and Castilian activities in Guinea; vol. 2 presents material relating to the early English voyages to Guinea.

1455-62

**CA' DA MOSTO, Alvise da**

*Delle navigazioni di Messer Alvise da Ca' da Mosto, gentilhuomo Venetiano written between 1463 and 1468, and first pub. in 1507 VOYAGES: PAESI; then republished with glosses in 1550 VOYAGES: RAMUSIO, Vol. 1.*

Ger. trans. 1508 (facs 1980); Latin trans., Milan, 1508; Fr. trans. 1556 (mod. ed. by Ch. SCHEFER, 1895); Dutch trans., Antwerp, 1563; abridged Eng. trans. in 1745 VOYAGES: ASTLEY, Vol. 1.

Modern Italian variorum ed:


Modern annotated Eng. trans:


(Sierra Leone section only) P.E.H. HAIR, *S. Leone Bull. Relig. 11* (1969)

Modern ed. with Port. trans:


Cadamosto, a Venetian in the Portuguese service, traded during 1455-56 at Arguin, in the Wolof kingdoms, and as far as the Gambia, but his narrative also encompasses the voyage of Pedro de SINTRA to Sierra Leone in 1462.
c.1457-60

GOMES, Diogo

De prima inventione Guineae.

The original text of this seems to have been written down in German by Martin Behaim from an oral statement made by Gomes more than 20 years after his voyages, but all that has survived is the Latin translation (see 1506 FERNANDES) which was first published by:


Modern Port. eds:


Modern annotated ed. of Latin text with parallel Fr. trans:

Th. MONOD, R. MAUNY, & G. DUVAL, De la première découverte de la Guinée; récit par Diogo Gomes, Bissau, 1959.

The matter omitted in some of the editions of Gomes is essentially his recollections of Portuguese maritime exploration prior to his own first voyage in c.1457.

c.1470-c.1880

COLLECTION: PALMER, Sir Herbert Richmond

(1) Sudanese Memoirs..., 3 vols, Lagos, 1928. facs. 3 vols in 1, London, 1967

A miscellany of translations (of varying quality) of Arabic documents written and collected in the central Sudan. Few of the MSS are thought to be earlier than the 19th century, but some are likely to be recensions of a literary tradition going back to the 15th century, and some must originally have been orally maintained traditions which peer even further into the past. One of the most substantial of the documents is the 'Kano Chronicle', in Vol. 3, pp.92-132.


A second and substantial miscellany of translations of Arabic MSS, relating particularly to Bornu and to Air. See also 1564 AHMAD b. FURTU.

c.1474

PULGAR, Hernando del

Crónica de los señores reyes católicos Don Fernando y Dona Isabel..., modern ed. by Juan de MATA CARRIAZO, 2 vols, Madrid, 1943.

The chronicle was written at some time between 1482 and 1492, and was first published in 1565. It includes an account of the claimed Castillian discovery of Mina; this is printed in translation and with comment in 1450 COLLECTION: BLAKE, Vol. 1, 205-7.
1479-80

LA FOSSE, Eustache de

"Voyage à la côte occidentale d'Afrique",
ed. R. MAUNY (West African section only), BCGP, 14 (1949) 181-95.

La Fosse's account, written down in old age, of his voyage to and his stay on the Gold Coast in 1479-80, when the Portuguese were just establishing themselves there, is one of the earliest surviving accounts of West Africa by a European who was not in the Portuguese service. For comment and interpretation see J.D. FAGE in HA, 7 (1980); on the Mina vocabulary recorded by Fernandes, see P.E.H. HAIR, JWAL, 3 (1966), and HAIR & D. DALBY, JWAL, 5 (1968).

c. 1480-1520

COLLECTION: PERES, Damião

Os mais antigos roteiros da Guiné, Lisbon, 1952.

1482 onwards

COLLECTION: ALBUQUERQUE FELNER, Alfredo de

(1) Angola: apontamentos sobre a ocupação e início do estabelecimento dos Portugueses no Congo, Angola e Benguela, Coimbra, 1933.
(2) Angola: apontamentos sobre a colonização dos planaltos e litoral do sul de Angola, 3 vols, Lisbon, 1940.

1487-89

BEMOIM, Prince João

A. TEIXEIRA da MOTA, "D. João Bemoim e a expedição portuguesa ao Senegal em 1489", BCGP, 26 63-111.

Bemoim was a Wolof prince who sought Portuguese help in a conflict with his brothers. When this was not forthcoming and he was driven out, he took shelter with the Portuguese, who took him to Lisbon and converted him to Christianity, intending to instal him as a puppet ruler. But Bemoim died upon his return, and the Portuguese abandoned their enterprise. Some of the documentation is available in French translation:


1492-1600

COLLECTION: BAL, Willy


A collection for the general reader. The documents printed here in French translation have all been published elsewhere in the original languages.

This includes the first publication of letters from the Manicongo Mbemba Nzinga or Afonso I (1506-43). The early 18th century documents are also important. See also 1506 AFONSO.

(1494) MÜNZER (also MONETARIUS), Hieronymus

ed. with Port. trans., Basilio de VASCONCELOS, O Instituto, Coimbra, 83 (1932).

Münzer's work is often little more than a transcription of 1457 GOMES.