



Periplo hasta las regiones ubicadas al sur del equinoccio. Alejandro Geraldini. Ed. and trans. Carmen González Vázquez and Jesús Paniagua Pérez. Colección humanistas españoles 35. León: Universidad de León, 2009. 510 pp. €25.00. ISBN 978-84-9773-482-0.

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Many early modernists know the humanist Pietro Martire d'Anghiera (1457–1526) as one of the first chroniclers of Iberian expansion in the New World. Far fewer, however, know that early editions of Martire's famous *Decades de orbe novo* always juxtaposed his American writings with a second work, the *Legatio Babylonica*, in which Martire narrated his voyages in Egypt as Ferdinand and Isabella's ambassador to the Mamlūk Sultanate. This was no accident. The two works are intimately related, and Martire had something to say about the relationship between Old World and New, between the civilizations of Africa and the Caribbean.

Evidently Martire was not the only Italian humanist in Ferdinand and Isabella's stable to make the connection. In his *Periplo hasta las regiones ubicadas al sur del equinoccio*—finished in 1522, printed in 1631, and given new life by Carmen González Vázquez, Jesús Paniagua Pérez, and the splendid series of “humanistas españoles” published by the Universidad de León—Martire's colleague Alessandro Geraldini (1455–1524) likewise united

Africa and the Caribbean in striking ways. Geraldini enjoyed a distinguished career between his Italian homeland and the Iberian Peninsula. Having trained with Pomponio Leto, Geraldini followed his elder brother Antonio into the Catholic Monarchs' service at an early date, and left his fingerprints on almost every significant event of their reigns. He raised funds for the conquest of Granada. He tutored Catherine of Aragon, accompanying her to England for her ill-fated nuptials. Most importantly, he was a key proponent of Columbus's proposal to sail west to the Indies, and ultimately followed him there in 1519, having been appointed bishop of Santo Domingo on the island of Hispaniola.

It was in Santo Domingo that Geraldini put the finishing touches on his remarkable *Periplo*, ostensibly a faithful, eyewitness account of his extended journey down the African coast en route to his Caribbean diocese. In fact, the African (or "Ethiopian") portion of Geraldini's travelogue—which comprises the first twelve of the *Periplo's* sixteen books—is a fantasy, an imaginative and jumbled pastiche of ancient and modern chorographical knowledge. (Pliny and the fifteenth-century Venetian explorer Alvise Cadamosto feature prominently among Geraldini's sources.) In order to make this bolus of recycled trivia palatable, Geraldini resorted to two tactics. First, he claimed that his secondhand information about Africa's ancient civilizations was, in fact, freshly derived from a series of inscriptions which Geraldini had himself unearthed; these he reproduced in the body of the text, "deciphering" them for his readers with mock erudition. In this respect, Geraldini's text is more than a typical travelogue; it is an African *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, and it begs further study.

Geraldini's second tactic was to interpolate a series of forged "interviews" with African dignitaries, through which he taught his reader about the history and culture of contemporary African peoples. If the editors' conjecture that some of these dialogues may have been based on actual conversations which Geraldini conducted with African slaves in Hispaniola seems like a bit of a stretch, the editors are nevertheless absolutely right to highlight the extent to which Geraldini used these interviews to depict African civilizations in a positive light. The African polities featured in the *Periplo*, graced with noble leaders and legal systems in harmony with natural law, appear entirely commensurable with their European counterparts. It is, therefore, nearly impossible to miss the contrast which Geraldini drew between his African hosts and the barbaric cannibals whom he discovered upon arriving in the Caribbean, and whom he made the subject of his *Periplo's* final books. Here again Geraldini's stands out among early modern travel narratives: it is rather extraordinary to find a bishop of Santo Domingo more at home in Africa than the Caribbean.

To be fair, Geraldini was not entirely unsympathetic to the plight of the virtuous Native Americans to whom he ministered in Hispaniola. He objected, albeit quietly, to the nature of the *encomienda* system, and he may have used the final book of his *Periplo* to deliver a stinging rebuke to the Spanish for the unspeakable destruction they had wrought upon the native populations of the Americas. In the first edition of the *Periplo*, printed in Rome in 1631—the text of which constitutes the basis of the present edition—the sixteenth and final book functions as an indictment of Spanish atrocities, which Geraldini blames for the deaths of one million natives. If the 1631 edition is indeed an accurate representation of Geraldini's text, then this final book would place Geraldini within the rich tradition of Las Casasian humanitarian protest against the effects of Spanish colonization. There is, however, a problem: nobody actually knows what Geraldini intended to say in book 16, for the manuscript tradition spanning the century between the *Periplo's* original composition and its first printing reveals substantial variations, at least some of which suggest that Geraldini intended to blame the *natives* for their extinction.

While the editors are probably correct in believing that Geraldini meant to criticize the Spanish rather than the Native Americans, this instability of Geraldini's text across its various manuscript and printed versions mirrors a certain instability at the heart of this new edition. In several ways, this volume looks and operates like a top-notch critical edition and translation. The editors have produced an eloquent Castilian translation to accompany the original Latin text, and have provided an extremely useful introduction to Geraldini's life and work. They have also included an extensive discussion of the manuscript tradition of Geraldini's work, a list of proposed emendations to the Latin text, and two new indexes—one to classical references, and one onomastical and geographical—to complement the seventeenth-century original. At the same time, however, this volume is decidedly not the exhaustive critical edition that specialists might want. The Castilian and Latin texts are printed in series, rather than in facing-page format for easy consultation. More important is the fact that, as mentioned above, the editors have chosen simply to reproduce the 1631 Latin text—a text which they acknowledge was heavily interpolated by one or more subsequent editors—rather than to generate their own text incorporating the manuscript variants with which they are quite familiar. As it is, they have put off that work with the excuse that even an imperfect version of Geraldini's text seemed valuable enough. They are probably right: we are tremendously fortunate to have Geraldini's work available in such a handsome edition, and one hopes that this is not the last that we will hear about this fascinating text.

