

Bernardo Jerosch Herold, Thomas Horst and Henrique Leitão, *A História Natural de Portugal de Leonhard Thurneysser zum Thurn, ca. 1555-1556*, Lisbon: Academia das Ciências de Lisboa, 2019, xxxi + 121 pp. ISBN 9789726233688. Available online at [http://www.acad-ciencias.pt/document-uploads/2695205\\_herold,-b,-horst,-t,-leitao,-h---historia-natural-portugal-transcricao-final2019.pdf](http://www.acad-ciencias.pt/document-uploads/2695205_herold,-b,-horst,-t,-leitao,-h---historia-natural-portugal-transcricao-final2019.pdf).

Hieronymus Münzer, *Itinerarium*, edited by Klaus Herbers et al. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Reiseberichte des Mittelalters, 1), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020, cccviii + 572 p. ISBN 9783447109727. €148.

A fine edition of a recently rediscovered sixteenth-century text will be of interest to global historians, social historians, and historians of Renaissance science alike. The Basel-born Leonhard Thurneysser zum Thurn (1531-96) was active for much of his life in Berlin, where he ran a printing and consulting operation as an expert in medicine, alchemy and natural history. The text now published, which was never printed, was written by Thurneysser in his youth, during a stay in Lisbon in 1555-56, and is kept today at the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin (Ms. Germ. Fol. 97). It is, together with the account by Jan Tacoen published in 2015 (*Lisboa em 1514: o relato de Jan Tacoen Van Zillebeke*, ed. by Jorge Fonseca, Eddy Stols and Tjin Manhaeghe, Lisbon: Húmus, 2015), a significant addition to the list of late medieval and early modern works written by northern European travellers to Lisbon. The new edition opens with the unadapted reprint of a 31-page note published in 2016, announcing the “rediscovery” of the manuscript and the start of the transcription project that has in the meantime been concluded. It then offers the full transcription, in *Frühneuhochdeutsch*, that is, the standard educated German of the time of Luther, of Thurneysser’s work. Whilst there is currently no full English translation, excerpts of significant passages are available to the Anglophone public as an appendix to an excellent article by the editor Bernardo Jerosch Herold (“The Diary of the Swiss Leonhard Thurneysser and Black Africans in Renaissance Lisbon”, *Renaissance Studies* 32, 3 [2017]: 463-88).

Apart from countless descriptions of animals, plants and *material medica* in parts 1, 2 and 4 of the text, the most significant passages for historians of the early modern world appear in Part 3. On fol. 130v-133v, Thurneysser describes the rites of initiation practiced in Lisbon by a community of Norwegian merchants, and on fol. 133v-141v, he offers a chapter titled “*Aethiopvm Vel Nigritarum descriptio. Beschreibung der Mohren, Nigriten vnnd Aethiopier*”. The community of merchants from Bergen who were active in the Portuguese capital somehow captured Thurneysser’s attention through its rather extreme rites of passage. These included hanging the candidate upside down inside a chimney where the rotten cadavers of cats and dogs were set on fire. The blackened body would then be put in a putrid bath made of dirty water collected in the streets of Lisbon, only to be flogged violently before being accepted into the community. Thus, Thurneysser explains, the Bergen merchants kept their numbers down in Lisbon and, by implication, their personal profits up. It is a similar “early ethnographic” gaze, one could argue, that the author deploys in the

section that will attract most attention. The violence of the initiatory blackening, smearing and flogging inflicted by Norwegian men on each other lingers on, to be sure, but the tone takes a turn to the surgically clean and precise language of a dedicated white observer of bodies born Black. This does not preclude the habitual admiration of certain qualities (might, beauty, gloss, strength), which some today may wish to read as a sign that a sense of shared humanity somehow bound the observer and the observed together. Much of the description, however, will destroy any such illusions. The language Thurneysser uses to describe his fellow humans of African origin is not the one he uses in his engagement with the Norwegian community, but something closer to the one he deploys when describing plants and animals. “The white of their eyes”, we learn, “is spread with small bloody spots and streaks [...]. Usually they hasten to keep their eyes down to the ground, but when they are alone, they open them horribly wide and slowly.” (English translation from Herold, “The Diary”, 483).

Then come the inevitable references to other body parts of people observed: things such as “the mouth [that] sticks out further than the nose, like the muzzle of a quadruped animal”, the skin and the causes of its complexion, and eventually references to the shape and size of nose, feet and genitalia, followed by considerations about the “irascible” (“*jechzornig*”; *A História Natural*, 98) and irate nature of the people scrutinized. As one would also expect, the libidinous character of Black men and women is emphasized, the sexual desire of the observer transferred to the observed, and the whole catalogue of characteristics completed with a list of prices fetched by enslaved individuals on the marketplace. The experienced reader will catch a considerable amount of detail regarding the observational praxis that made such descriptions possible: the staring, the handling, the measuring, the groping, even the beating (“they do almost not feel or notice any pain, when their heads are hit or thrashed upon”; Herold, “The Diary”, 484). All of which relied, as the reader can easily infer, on the control of Black bodies by white owners and their invited white acquaintances, on hearsay, or occasionally on observation in public spaces. Many lines of the text depend on the ability of some people to make other people stand still or lie down and not fight back while being inspected in every imaginable way. Not much of this horror seems to have touched the editors of the text, though arguably this was not their job in the first place. The one sign that the editors anticipated the reader’s sense of shock is their description of Thurneysser’s prose in these passages as “drastic” (xvi). Historians interested in the ways humans treated and imagined other humans in the sixteenth century will find plenty to comment on here. Thurneysser’s seven folios – roughly six pages of text in the German edition here discussed and in the English translation available in *Renaissance Studies* – are bound to become a classic. It may be possible to read them as an expression of early modern curiosity and the remarkable ability of many during this period to observe and put material realities into writing. It is very difficult not to be drawn into the depths of the labyrinth, however, where such abilities were intertwined with the buying, selling and knowing of humans by fellow humans, that is, the reification and commodification of some humans by others.

In contrast with the Thurneysser and Tacoen texts, Hieronymus Münzer’s *Itinerarium* has long been known and used by historians of Portugal and Spain as a prime source

documenting changes in European urban life (and representational practices) at the transition from the Medieval to the Early Modern periods. Yet a comprehensive, fully annotated edition of the original Latin text with an apparatus of background and contextual historical studies has long been a desideratum. This is now presented as a hefty volume in a promising new subseries of *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* dedicated to medieval travel accounts (“Reiseberichte des Mittelalters”). The chief editor, Klaus Herbers, thus brings to conclusion a research cycle that has lasted over two decades, involved a significant number of experts (including Wiebke Deimann, René Hurlienne, Sofia Meyer, Miriam Montag and Lisa Walleit, all mentioned as collaborators in this edition), and evolved together with the wider renovation of the scholarship on Nuremberg as a major European center of humanistic learning and knowledge production.

Münzer’s passages about Santiago de Compostela and Lisbon have attracted particular attention in the past, but there is much more in this account for historians to engage with anew. Münzer, born in Feldkirch, studied in Leipzig and Pavia, was active for much of his life in Nuremberg, and took a trip in 1494-95 through large swathes of Western Europe. From Franconia, he traveled through Zurich and Geneva to the Provence. He then circumabulated the Iberian Peninsula clockwise from Barcelona through Valencia, Seville and Lisbon to Santiago. On his way back, he took a detour through Guadalupe and Toledo, then crossing the Pyrenees at Roncesvalles and travelling through France to Flanders, from where he returned through the Rhineland to Franconia. Apart from countless passages on shrines and relics, the *Itinerarium* contains descriptions of courtly encounters (namely in Évora, Madrid and Mechelen), reflections on innovations in administration and trade, and observations on the cultural landscapes surrounding urban centers such as Valencia. In this city, Münzer was received by German traders of the Ravensburg community and observed two social groups that were new to him: enslaved people from Tenerife (“*homines fusci, non nigri [...] sed sunt bestiales in moribus*”, 67) – and so-called *Marranos*. In the recently conquered realm of Granada, the traveler observed the early social, cultural and economic dynamics of transition to Catholic rule. In Lisbon, Münzer famously observed the work of enslaved Black people in a foundry that he compared to “the cave of Vulcanus” (177; the passage is exceedingly brief though, hence the importance of Thurneysser). On his way back from Santiago, he met Isabella and Ferdinand in Madrid and paused in Zaragoza to learn more about *Morisco* culture and society. Münzer, a man of wealth, learning, and high social standing, cultivated contacts with and interests for different social groups, and saw the world through the combined lenses of devotion, cosmographic humanism, an interest in trade and nature, and an appetite for the novelties afforded by Iberian conquest and exploration. His account gives unique insights into the historical conjunction following the fall of Nasrid Granada, the first voyage of Columbus, and the voyage of Bartolomeu Dias into the Indian Ocean, just before the New World began to emerge as a continent on Europe’s western horizon.

This solid edition based on the main surviving manuscript (a copy by Hartmann Schedel) comes with lengthy prefatory materials about the author, the voyage and the text,

supplemented by a study of Münzer's language (a relatively pedestrian, readable Latin) by Tina B. Orth-Müller and a vast (albeit dated), 156-page bibliography. There are also reproductions of some pictorial details of the manuscript including sketches of the urban layout of Numancia and the cathedral of Santiago. The detailed notes are in German but point to bibliography in other languages, too. An important section on the Portuguese expeditions in the Atlantic has unfortunately not been included. For the reader not fluent in Latin and German, there is a French edition (*De Nuremberg à Grenade et Compostelle. Itinéraire d'un médecin allemande*, ed. by Denise Péricard-Méa et al., Biarritz, 2009). But above all there is the remarkable English edition by James Firth, a hobby historian and fellow of the Royal Historical Society, who spent over ten years of his life producing arguably the most readable, most impressively researched, and most usefully annotated and indexed Münzer (*Doctor Hieronymus Münzer's Itinerary [1494 and 1495]; and Discovery of Guinea*, ed. by James Firth, London, 2014; this rare author's edition, not listed by Herbers, can be ordered through [john@john-firth-editor.co.uk](mailto:john@john-firth-editor.co.uk)). Both Münzer and Thurneysser deserve renewed attention, and these editions provide excellent tools for fresh research into their overlapping worlds.

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