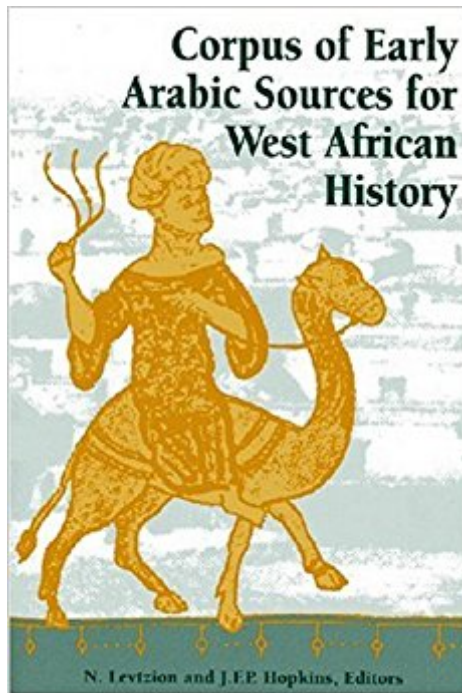




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Corpus Of Early Arabic Sources For West African History



Synopsis

From the eighth century onwards, the Muslim townsfolk of North Africa were well aware that fifty stages away across the desert to the south lay a land inhabited by black people which was the source of gold, ivory and slaves. It was no mere rumour stemming from occasional journeys of special daring, as it had been in the time of Herodotus. For the Muslims, the black slaves were in their midst as labourers and soldiers, servants and concubines. And soon the passing caravans began to be swelled by black students and pilgrims, showing that the religion and civilization of Islam were spreading across the Sahara into the western and central Sudan...

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Customer Reviews

Levtzion and Hopkins are to Islamic History in West Africa as Albert Einstein is to physics and the theory of relativity. They were students, teachers and experts in multiple angles of study on the subject. The "Corpus" is the most extensive collection of Arabic source documents about West Africa that we have to date. The Corpus demonstrates what Arabic writers perceived of the region from Southern Morocco, south to Mauritania and Senegal and then East to Chad. The regions in discussion include modern day Mali, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Chad. The perceptions of the early writers of the Sudan, or "black Africa" reflect the lore and mystery surrounding the region as a whole, not dissimilar in its tales of gold mines and endless riches that later European explorers pursued in their thirst for stock piles of wealth. The vast majority of the accounts are barely second hand accounts, most of them building on the same foundational myths from the previous authors; Ibn Battuta being the noteworthy exception. But as Ali Mazrui, the famous Kenyan scholar once

lamented, very rarely did an early account of "black Africa" from either the Arabs or Europe discard the ethnocentric, cultural superiority bias that came with it. The early Arab and Muslim writers were mostly concerned with Muslim lands. Non-Muslim, "Kafr" lands were disdained for their lack of culture, many early stereotypes describing them as peoples of "feeble intellect". Therefore, what was of greatest interest to any early explorer or scholar, and indeed what dominates the earliest manuscripts, are accounts of gold fields, magic powers, fine women and slave potentials of highest quality.

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