

Agostino Vespucci

# A Description of All Spain

*De situ, longitudine, forma et divisione  
totius Hispaniae libellus*

ed. by Gerard González Germain

**H**ISPANIA, quam greci ab Ibero flumine  
Iberiam nominant, in extrema Europe ad  
oceanum parte, quinto coeli climate sita, extrema  
quinti et principium sexti attingit. Terra vasta,  
totaque preterquam ubi iungitur Gallie, mari ambitur  
coeli temperios salubris: ut pote inter Galliam, mau-  
ritaniamque posita, huius frigiditate illius magnis  
caloribus caret. spiritusque equalis aeris, nulla pa-  
ludum graui nobula inficit. De modio loquor:  
per quod tutissima ferre uia quae utriusque ultimam uiti-  
um est, ut hispalis estate ingentis estus, hyeme  
burgi non parua frigora sentiunt. Euentilato in  
Terrestri spiritu, precipua omnibus sanitas reddi-

Sibilia.  
burgos



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Agostino Vespucci

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*De situ, longitudine, forma et divisione  
totius Hispaniae libellus*

Critical edition, translation, introduction and notes  
edited by Gerard González Germain

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ROBERT BLACK

## Forward

Hitherto Agostino Vespucci has been at most a shadowy figure in the background of the Florentine Renaissance at the turn of the sixteenth century. He has been almost exclusively known as a friend, colleague, correspondent and collaborator of Machiavelli, whose first published work, the *Decennale primo*, he saw through the press in 1506. In the past decade, it has also come to light that Vespucci had official dealings with Leonardo da Vinci, in fact providing unique information about the patron, subject and date of his most famous painting, the immortal “Mona Lisa”.

But thanks now to the research of Gerard González Germain, Agostino Vespucci’s own significance in Renaissance culture has begun to emerge. The text published here for the first time, Vespucci’s *De situ, longitudine, forma et divisione totius Hispaniae libellus* (*A Description of All Spain*), is the first antiquarian description of Spain by a Renaissance humanist, inaugurating a long and substantial literary series recounting the antique, principally Roman, remains located in the Iberian Peninsula. Vespucci, amply highlighted by González Germain as a follower of Angelo Poliziano’s school of humanist studies, had been introduced to antiquarian research by his teacher when following his Florentine lecture courses.

Vespucci’s importance for Machiavelli studies is significantly enhanced as a result of González Germain’s research. Vespucci’s classical erudition offers yet more proof that the Florentine chancery was a hub of humanist learning: the consequence is that Machiavelli could hardly have occupied his central cultural position in that intellectual and literary community without a powerful humanist background, education and orientation of his own. González Germain offers evidence suggesting that Vespucci was familiar with a number of the outrageously provocative ideas put forward in Machiavelli’s *Prince*. Machiavelli’s and Vespucci’s previously intense friendship evidently waned after Machiavelli’s dismissal from the chancery in 1512, and *The Prince* was not printed until 1532; nevertheless this most revolutionary of all political pamphlets is known to have been read soon after its composition not only by Machiavelli’s diplomatic colleague Francesco Vettori but also by two other Florentine aristocrats, Francesco Guicciardini and his nephew Niccolò, the son of his brother Luigi. Now Agostino Vespucci



emerges, thanks to González Germain, as another likely precocious reader of *The Prince*. The pattern of Machiavelli's and Vespucci's friendship, moreover, sheds further light on Machiavelli's own biography and intellectual development. González Germain observes that Machiavelli is conspicuously absent from *De situ*, in contrast to his younger brother Totto, who is cited as an expert on cosmography. The chancery and the Florentine diplomats whom it served were the focus of Machiavelli's friendships up to 1512, but then there was a notable shift in direction. Machiavelli drew ever closer to the Florentine aristocracy, first at the famous Rucellai Gardens and then among the close associates of the Medici family – for example, Filippo de' Nerli, Lorenzo Strozzi and particularly Francesco Guicciardini, who became his most intimate friend in the last six or seven years of his life. Machiavelli's relations with Vespucci confirm this pattern – extremely significant for the development of Machiavelli the thinker and writer, who moved from a chancery outsider and then political outcast to a fully-fledged spokesman for the Florentine establishment in the political, historical and literary production of his later years.

The Spanish and Italian academic communities have already had the opportunity to benefit from Gerard González Germain's learned and erudite research, and now a wider English-language readership will be able to profit from his outstanding original contributions to Renaissance scholarship.

June 2016

## Preface

Until recently, the figure of Agostino Vespucci was shrouded in mystery. The chancery assistant, on the one hand, and the pupil of Poliziano, on the other, were regarded as two different, unrelated persons, the former surnamed Vespucci (often assumed to be a cousin of the more famous Amerigo Vespucci) and the latter Nettucci. ‘Vespucci’ was acknowledged as one of Machiavelli’s main correspondents before 1512, the editor of the *Decennale primo* (1506) and the author of some documents among Leonardo da Vinci’s papers; ‘Nettucci’ was considered to be the author of a Latin treatise regarding Spain, and the owner of several annotated books, one of them reporting Poliziano’s course on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Beyond these isolated facts, both figures remained equally unknown.

Armin Schlechter’s discovery in 2005 of a copy of Cicero’s *Letters to his Friends* with a note by Vespucci alluding to the identity of Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa* put, finally, a well-deserved focus on this humanist. In 2010, Schlechter himself first formulated the hypothesis that both Vespucci and Nettucci referred to the same individual, an idea that I supported in the 2012 Congress of the International Association for Neo-Latin Studies. A year later, Francesca Klein provided evidence from the Florence State Archives that there existed only one Agostino, whose real family name was Nettucci, but who was mainly known by the Florentine surname of Vespucci. Since 2014, Agostino Vespucci has been the focus of attention by scholars such as Francesca Klein, Rab Hatfield, Riccardo Fubini, Marco Versiero and myself. These efforts have brought to light a fascinating humanist, who was well connected in Florentine intellectual life and involved in contemporary politics, as well as deeply interested in the classical world.

In spite of recent progress in research on Agostino Vespucci, a major obstacle to the study of this figure has persisted until now: his only surviving literary work hitherto known – *De situ totius Hispaniae* – has remained unpublished, hardly read at all for the past five hundred years. The present edition aims to change this by making Vespucci’s work available to a wide readership. With this purpose in mind, the critical edition of the Latin text is accompanied by an English translation, while both the introduction and notes have been kept short, with the sole intention of contextualising the work and making it fully comprehensible. It is my

hope that this edition may help promote further research both on Vespucci and on this treatise.

Naturally, the importance of this work – and consequently the need for an edition – goes beyond the question of its authorship. The text is sprinkled with a vast amount of information (a great deal of it previously unknown) concerning Italian and Spanish humanists alike. Similarly, this treatise stands out as one of the very few surviving sources from the early sixteenth century attesting to the study of historical geography in Renaissance Spain, and – to my knowledge – it represents the earliest antiquarian description of Spain. The main reasons why this work is remarkable have been briefly explained and contextualised in the Introduction.

My interest in *De situ totius Hispaniae* started about 2008, even before it was attributed to Agostino Vespucci. At the time, I was studying the false Latin inscriptions for Iberia created in the early Renaissance, and this treatise – then unknown to historians of epigraphy – represented the earliest source for about ten of those forgeries. The chance for me to carry out systematic research on Vespucci's life and works arrived in 2014, when I took up a Mellon Visiting Fellowship at Villa I Tatti – The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies (Florence) – which allowed me to devote six months to explore Florentine libraries and archives in search of primary sources. Part of the retrieved material was more carefully examined later that year during a four-month fellowship at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Neo-Latin Studies (Innsbruck). Finally, the actual writing of this book has been carried out thanks to a postdoctoral research position at the University of Alcalá (Alcalá de Henares) in 2015-2016.

During all these years of chasing, so to speak, an elusive figure such as Vespucci, I have been blessed with the assistance and counsel of many colleagues (and often also good friends), from which this research has immensely benefited. I should at the very least name and thank Antonio Alvar, Davide Baldi, Will Barton, Joan Carbonell, Helena Gimeno, Teresa Jiménez Calvente, Clementina Marsico, José Luis Moralejo, Laura Refe, Valerio Sanzotta, Karl Schlebusch and Mark Youssim. I am especially grateful to I Tatti's former director Lino Pertile, and to the director of the LBI for Neo-Latin Studies Florian Schaffenrath, for having supported me in every way during my research stays at these two centres, both academically and personally.

Finally, I would like to express my warmest gratitude to Professor Robert Black, who has been a staunch supporter of my research on Vespucci over the past two years. He has greatly encouraged me in seeing through the publication of this work, and took upon himself, with the utmost generosity, a complete and thorough revision of the English text, which has immensely improved the translation.

May 2016