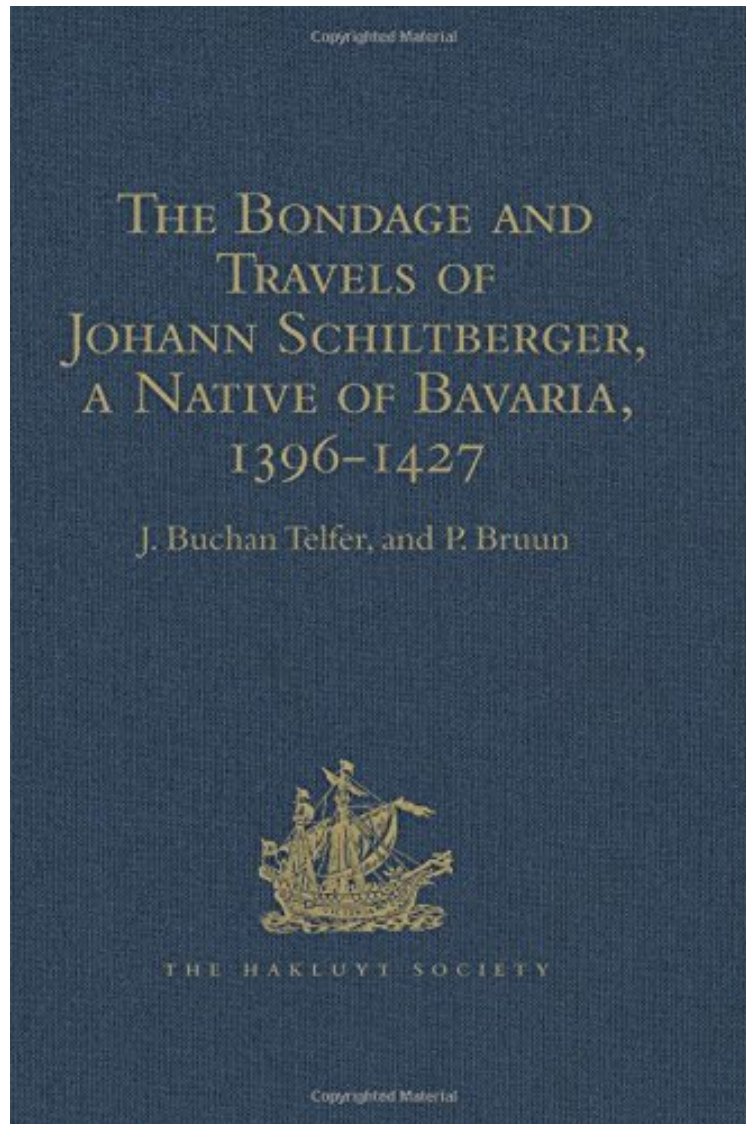


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From Hakluyt Society : The Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger, a Native of Bavaria, in Europe, Asia, and Africa, 1396-1427 (Hakluyt Society, First Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger, a Native of Bavaria, in Europe,

Asia, and Africa, 1396-1427 (Hakluyt Society, First Series):

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. West Explores East: early 15th century; Great Adventure. By P. J. Rowan. Hello. I am not an expert on the 14th or 15th century, or on the near east, or anything like that. I was motivated to find and read this travel account after reading Barbar Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror*. As far as *Distant Mirror* goes, I really agree with the negative reviews on DM. DM was exhaustive yes, but exhausting. It took me forever to complete that book, and I am not sure why I did, other than stubbornness. However, at the end of *Distant Mirror*, the story of Schiltberger is portrayed. Schiltberger was basically a 14 year old foot soldier in one of the final crusades: lead by King Sigismund of Hungary, with a fight against Bayezid I as Bayezid crossed from Turkey into Europe. Well, the battle does not go well for the "west," and the 14-year-old Schiltberger gets captured by the "east." This intriguing story from DM drove me to look up info on Schiltberger, and I discovered that he had this account of his decades-long experience. Schiltberger becomes a slave, and spends much of his adult life being employed in his slavery role here and there across the near east, and into Africa. So, he provides a naive but first-hand account of many places and peoples at that time. He also conveys many anecdotes of history, etc. that he learns along the way. Several concern Christian beliefs, such as the burial place of significant Biblical figures, and some highly unlikely stories about the enigmatic figure Prestor John, and reports of the existence and beliefs of various Nestorian and other Christian enclaves scattered across the middle east. Although this is not a direct intention of Schiltberger, the book gives a portrayal of one way that slaves were regarded, treated, and used. Schiltberger survives over 30 years of being a slave, with a successful escape on his 2nd reported attempt. Here in the U.S. I think we tend to believe that a slave will be treated as African-origin slaves were in the Americas from the 1500s to 1800s: whipped, oppressed, with little chance for advancement or significant responsibility, etc. Schiltberger's experience was not quite like that. He was used as a laborer, but his roles also include envoy and other roles. It also seems as if a foreign religion was not forced upon him, although he does tell how a Christian would convert to Islam. He gives a ground-level view of Islam of the day that is interesting. He is fairly impartial regarding Islam, and other religions, for the edification of the reader, while, throughout, maintaining his Christian faith and consistently referring to Muslims by the label "Infidels" as if that were the commonly accepted, accurate, and specific term for Muslims. He also uses the more accurate "Musselman." The book is not very long, but this edition includes the accompanying notes of Telfer, a 19th century translator and scholar who helps relate the various locations and people mentioned by Schiltberger. The notes are actually longer than Schiltberger's account. To triangulate some of the info, Telfer's comments include reference to others who traveled across these paths at other times, including Marco Polo and Ibn Batuta. Overall, the narrative has a kind-of "off-the-top-of-my-head" style, and seems written by an average guy versus some scholar of the times. Schiltberger is not Froissart. This gives the book a raw, fresh feel, and some of the stories give the thrill of true adventure. The optimistic outlook was maybe due to the fact that Schiltberger survived to write, but I can imagine this guy survived largely due to pluck, cleverness, and a bit of luck. Worth a read if any of these historical topics are interesting to you. I can't compare this to other versions. Another version might be preferred for supporting material, such as if it has maps and even more informed background than Telfer was able to provide, or more consistent/current names of places and people - Schiltberger varies within his own ms. This is the first book I have read from the Hakluyt Society - a centuries-old society dedicated to discovering, preserving, and publishing these various authentic historical travel accounts. I think Schiltberger's account is a good way to get into the type of literature. I enjoyed the variety and freshness compared to textbook-type histories from current authorities, even though those may be more accurate and efficient in conveying history.

Translated from the Heidelberg MS edited in 1859 by Professor Karl Friedrich Neumann, by Commander J. Buchan Telfer, R.N., F.S.A., F.R.G.S. With Notes by Professor P. Bruun of the Imperial University of South Russia, at Odessa, and a Preface, Introduction and Notes by the Translator and Editor. The supplementary material consists of the 1879 annual report. This is a new print-on-demand hardback edition of the volume first published in 1879.

About the Author J. Buchan Telfer