

Re-examining Foresti's *Supplementum Chronicarum* and the “Ethiopian” embassy to Europe of 1306

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Abstract

A widely reported story in the historiography on medieval Ethiopia relates how, in the year 1306, an “Ethiopian” embassy visited the court of Pope Clement V in Avignon and offered military aid in the fight against Islam to Latin Christianity. This article re-examines the source – Jacopo Filippo Foresti's *Supplementum Chronicarum* – thought to document an episode of one of the earliest European–African Christian contacts. It investigates Foresti's own sources, their historiographical transmission history, and the feasibility of relating it to the socio-political entity of Solomonic Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa in the early fourteenth century, concluding that Foresti's information was based on Latin Christian texts, such as the *Legenda Aurea* and the myth of Prester John, only. The ‘Ethiopian’ embassy of 1306 is thus not borne out by sources and should be dismissed in scholarship, resetting the timeline of official Ethiopian–Latin Christian contacts in the late medieval period.

Keywords: Ethiopian history, Medieval history, Diplomacy, Prester John, Historiography, Solomonic Dynasty, Nubian history, Embassy

A popular story in the historiography on medieval Ethiopia relates how, in the year 1306, an “Ethiopian” embassy visited the court of Pope Clement V.¹ Most scholarship follows a narration by historian Raleigh A. Skelton,² published in 1958, who set the stage for this event as follows:

Not many years after the commercial treaty concluded between Genoa and Egypt in 1290, the Genoese were to see Ethiopian visitors in their city. In 1306 the thirty members of an Abyssinian embassy, returning homeward from Avignon and Rome, were forced to wait at Genoa for a favourable wind. There they were questioned, and from their replies the rector of the church of St Mark, i.e. the cartographer Giovanni da Carignano, compiled a treatise on the government, customs, and religious observances of Ethiopia.³

1 1264–1314; pontiff from 1305 to his death in 1314.

2 Compare Raleigh A. Skelton, “An Ethiopian embassy to western Europe in 1306”, in Osbert G.S. Crawford (ed.), *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400–1524* (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1958), 212–15.

3 Skelton, “An Ethiopian embassy”, 212.

Skelton's oft-cited account on the events of 1306 leaves little doubt that there was an Ethiopian – or, as he specifies, Abyssinian – delegation roaming Latin Christian realms at the beginning of the fourteenth century. A close look at Skelton's source and its transmission history, however, shows that things are far from being straightforward: by Skelton's own admission the original source, an early-fourteenth-century treatise attributed to Giovanni da Carignano, has not come down to us. Indeed, it is impossible to say if it ever existed; only parts of this treatise are believed to have survived in a late fifteenth-century universal history compiled by Jacopo Filippo Foresti.⁴ This universal history, Foresti's *Supplementum Chronicarum*, was first published in 1483 – a full 180 years after the alleged embassy, and just as many years after Giovanni da Carignano's presumed treatise on the "Ethiopians". Yet historiography on medieval Ethiopia – commonly understood in scholarship as the Christian realm located in the highlands of North-East Africa and its historical territories⁵ – has received the "Ethiopian" embassy to Western Europe of 1306 widely, and largely uncritically.⁶ Entries in the

- 4 Jacopo Filippo Foresti, born in 1434 into the Foresti de Solto family of lower nobility in Solto Collina, Lombardia. An Augustinian hermit since 1452, he compiled three major works: *Confessionale sive Interrogatorium*, a penitential; *De claris selectisque mulieribus Christianis*, a compilation of womens' biographies; and the *Supplementum Chronicarum*, a universal history encompassing the creation of the world to the year 1482 in its first edition from 1483. For further information, see Achim Krümmel, *Das "Supplementum Chronicarum" Des Augustinermönches Jacobus Philippus Foresti von Bergamo. Eine der Ältesten Bilderchroniken und Ihre Wirkungsgeschichte* (Herzberg: Bautz, 1992), 57–72.
- 5 Since the conversion of the Aksumite kings in the first half of the fourth century, a Christian realm was situated in parts of what is now the State of Eritrea and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Originally centred in the northern section of the North-Eastern highland plateau in the vicinity of the eponymous city of Aksum, its geographical and political centre shifted southwards during the subsequent rules of the Zag^we Dynasty (eleventh–thirteenth century) and the Solomonic Dynasty (from 1270 onwards).

Within Ethiopian studies, Ethiopia tends to signify the whole country, including its claimed historical territories; Abyssinia, derived from Gə'əz *Ḥabaša't*, Amharic/Tigrinya *Ḥabäša*, and Classical Arabic *al-Ḥabaša*, meanwhile designates the predominantly Christian and Semitic highlands. For an overview of the terms and their origins, see Rainer Voigt, "Abyssinia", in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopia*, 2003, Vol. I, 59–65. On the historical geography of Ethiopia, see George W.B. Huntingford, *The Historical Geography of Ethiopia from the First Century AD to 1704* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). For Aksum, the Zag^we, and Solomonic Dynasty, see Stuart Munro-Hay, "Aksum: history of the town and empire", in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopia*, 2003, Vol. I, 173–9; Gianfranco Fiaccadori, "Zag^we", in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopia*, 2014, Vol. V, 107–14; Steven Kaplan, "Solomonic dynasty", in *Encyclopedia Aethiopia*, 2010, Vol. IV, 688–90 for further references.

- 6 See, among many others, Renato Lefèvre, "Presenze Etiopiche in Italia Prima del Concilio di Firenze del 1439", *Rassegna Di Studi Etiopici*, 23, 1967, 5–26, pp. 7–9; Robert Silverberg, *The Realm of Prester John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), 164–5; Charles F. Beckingham and Edward Ullendorff, *The Hebrew Letters of Prester John* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 8–9; Marilyn E. Heldman, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Šeyon: A Study of Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality* (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 1994), 142 and more recently Stuart Munro-Hay, *Ethiopia Unveiled: Interaction between Two Worlds* (Hollywood: Tsehai, 2006), 89–90; Kate Lowe, "'Representing' Africa: ambassadors and princes

Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, the most important reference work for the field, establish it as fact.⁷

This article intends to re-examine the case of the “Ethiopian” embassy of 1306 as related by Foresti. While Foresti – and his presumed source, Carignano – tell of “Ethiopian visitors”,⁸ it remains to be investigated whether this vague medieval Latin Christian term indeed referred to the specific late-medieval political entity of Solomonic Ethiopia.⁹ To this point, scholarship has conflated the two without question, following Skelton’s assessment that an “Abyssinian embassy” sent by the “Abyssinian king, Wedem Ar’ad” visited the “King of the Spains” with an “offer of help in his wars against the infidels”.¹⁰

from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402–1608”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 17, 2007, 101–28, p. 108; Gianfranco Fiaccadori, “L’Etiopia, Venezia e l’Europa”, in Giuseppe Barbieri and Gianfranco Fiaccadori (eds), *Nigra Sum Sed Formosa. Sacro E Bellezza dell’Etiopia Cristiana. Ca’ Foscari Esposizioni 13 marzo–10 Maggio 2009* (Vincenza: Terra ferma, 2009), 27–48, particularly p. 29; Matteo Salvatore, “The Ethiopian age of exploration: Prester John’s discovery of Europe, 1306–1458”, *Journal of World History*, 21/4, 2010, 593–627, particularly pp. 600–03; Wolbert G.C. Smidt, “Spain, Relations with”, in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2010, Vol. IV, 717–9; Cates Baldrige, *Prisoners of Prester John: The Portuguese Mission to Ethiopia in Search of the Mythical King, 1520–1526* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2012), 22; Benjamin Weber, “Gli Etiopi a Roma Nel Quattrocento: Ambasciatori Politici, Negoziatori Religiosi O Pellegrini?”, *Mélanges de l’École Française de Rome – Moyen Âge*, 125/1, 2013, <http://mefrm.revues.org/1036>, sec. 2; Keagan Brewer (ed.), *Prester John: The Legend and Its Sources* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 23. Matteo Salvatore opened his book with a speculative rendering of this story: Salvatore, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian–European Relations, 1402–1555* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016). Andrew Kurt expressed some doubt about the episode due to its timing; Kurt, “The search for Prester John, a projected Crusade and the eroding prestige of Ethiopian kings, c.1200–c.1540”, *Journal of Medieval History* 39/3, 2013, 297–320, pp. 308–9. Adam Knobler and Benjamin Weber expressed caution about the source’s reliability: Knobler, *Mythology and Diplomacy in the Age of Exploration* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 35–8; and Weber, “An incomplete integration into the Orbis Christianus. Relations and misunderstandings between the Papacy and Ethiopia (1237–1456)”, *Medieval Encounters*, 21, 2015, 232–49, particularly 239. Samantha Kelly remains the only historian actively to exclude the source from her study of late medieval diplomatic contacts between Europe and Ethiopia due to the source’s “doubtful authenticity”: “Ewostateans at the Council of Florence (1441): diplomatic implications between Ethiopia, Europe, Jerusalem and Cairo”, *Afriques*, published online 29 June 2016, <http://journals.openedition.org/afriques/1858>, note 1.

- 7 Smidt, “Spain”, 717; Richard Pankhurst, “Europe, Relations with”, in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2005, Vol. II, 451–4, 452.
- 8 Skelton, “An Ethiopian embassy”, 212.
- 9 See note 5; for in-depth studies of early Solomonic kingship and the relationship with the Ethiopian Church, see Marie-Laure Derat, *Le Domaine des rois Éthiopiens, 1270–1527: espace, pouvoir et monarchisme* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003); Tadesse Tamrat, “The abbots of Däbrä-Hayq 1248–1535”, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 8/1, 1970, 87–117; Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).
- 10 As Skelton assumed from the outset; Skelton, “An Ethiopian embassy”, 212. “Wedem Ar’ad”, also transliterated as Wədəm Rā’ad, is indeed an early ruler of the Solomonic Dynasty, see below.

In what follows, I shall investigate the feasibility of relating Foresti's source to Solomonic Ethiopia, and its use for Solomonic Ethiopian history. After locating the source in its wider historical and historiographical context, I will locate it both within its medieval textual context as well as changing Latin Christian conceptions of Africa, and the mythical Prester John. Finally, I aim to investigate the feasibility of relating the source to the socio-political entity of Solomonic Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa in the early fourteenth century. My analysis will caution against a continued use of the Foresti source for medieval north-east African history; I will suggest that there never was an official Solomonic – and thus Ethiopian – embassy to Europe at this date.

1. A short source history: from Foresti to Early Modern historical fact

In the early 1480s, the Augustinian hermit Jacopo Filippo Foresti set out to chronicle the history of the world from his convent of Sant'Agostino in Bergamo. His resulting *Supplementum Chronicarum* proved an instant success, both in his native Italy and beyond.¹¹ It contained 15 *libri*, where many short *gesta*-like biographies of emperors, kings, popes, poets, artists, and persons of public interest, as well as figures of the Old and New Testament, were presented in chronological order since Creation, serving – as the name indicated – as a supplement to already existing works of universal history.

Overall, the text is arranged in annals. An addition to the entry on the year 80 CE in the eighth book¹² mentions how the Apostle Matthew taught the gospel to “the nation of the Ethiopians at the farthest point of the earth”.¹³ It is a comparatively short note of less than a page – and yet much more extensive than the eight lines dedicated to the Apostle Thomas.¹⁴ The majority of the text recounts legendary traditions of how Matthew preached amongst these Ethiopians: translating the Gospels into Hebrew, causing countless conversions together with his fellow Apostle Barnabas over the course of 33 years, baptising numerous noble virgins including one named Iphigenia, before being martyred by the local ruler, who promptly succumbed to leprosy and committed suicide.¹⁵ After his beheading, the Apostle made a miraculous reappearance: his spirit baptised Iphigenia's

11 The *Supplementum Chronicarum* proved a late medieval bestseller: it was printed at least 11 times in Latin between 1483 and 1547, its Italian translation serving 13 print runs between 1488 and 1581, with a Spanish version following in 1510. Foresti himself modified the *Supplementum Chronicarum* extensively in 1503, with this early sixteenth-century edition containing nearly 50 per cent more pages of text than the 1482 version; Krümmel, *Das “Supplementum Chronicarum”*.

12 The eighth book begins with the birth of Christ and spans most of the first 300 years of Christianity under Roman rule; the main body of the text deals with the persecution and martyrdom of the early Christians, finishing with Constantine the Great. The note concerning the “Ethiopian” embassy is thus only a small aside in an otherwise entirely differently focussed “book”.

13 “Ipsa Ethiopum gens quam de vltimis terre finibus.” Jacobus Philippus Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum* (Venice: Bernardinus Benalius, 1483), VIII, fol. 17v.

14 See Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 17v.

15 Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 17v.

brother, who had since become king of “these Ethiopian peoples”, and was to reign for 70 years, building countless churches, and spreading Christianity in his whole realm.¹⁶ Matthew, departing for the beyond once more, was now succeeded by “the eunuch that Philippus had baptized”¹⁷ – alluding to the New Testament figure of the Ethiopian eunuch, who was baptised by Saint Philip the Evangelist on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza.¹⁸

Foresti then relates information on the current affairs of that same “Ethiopian realm”. He states that he took the above details on the conversion as well as the subsequent information on this “Ethiopian” place, and these “Ethiopian” people, from a:

[...] certain priest from Genoa, provost of St. Mark. This man has published an excellent treatise, and a map, as he called it. In this, he wrote much on the condition of these people, he informs us that the Prester John rules over these people and is their patriarch.¹⁹

The exhortation subsequently identifies the realm with the empire of “Prester John”, king and patriarch over a vast realm encompassing 127 archbishoprics, with each archbishop having 20 bishops under him,²⁰ bringing the total number up to 2,540 bishops. Foresti is glad to inform his readers that these subjects of Prester John adhere to the Latin rite in both baptism and rites of the Sacrament of the Eucharist; they also venerate the Virgin, the Apostles, Antony the Great and other “holy hermits”.²¹ This emperor, Prester John – *presbiterum Janum* – had 74 kings and almost innumerable numbers of princes under him; his dominion also extended over twelve kings of the Muslim faith.²² This very same emperor, Foresti continues, had once dispatched a diplomatic mission to Latin Christendom:

Indeed, it is known that this emperor in the time of Clement V in the year of our Lord 1306 sent 30 legates to the king of the Spains; and let it be known that he was offering him aid against the infidels. They came also to Avignon to present themselves reverently to Clemens V, the Pontifex Maximus, and instructed by many apostolic letters, they went to the well worth seeing places of the relics of the Apostles Peter and Paul to

16 “Apostolus autem per visum populum admonuit ut Ephigenie fratrem ab ipso baptizatum regem constitueret. Qui in regno constitutus 70 annis imperans ecclesias ubique erexit: et uniuersam ethiopiam christianissimam effecit.” Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fols. 17v–18r.

17 Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 18r.

18 Acts 8: 26–40.

19 “Sacerdos quidam Genuensis sancti Martii prepositus: Vir quidem egregius tractatum edidit: quem & Mappam nominauit. In quo de huius gentis conditione multa conscribens refert presbiterum Janum illi populo tamquam patriarcham preesse.” Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 18r.

20 Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 18r.

21 Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 18r.

22 “Cui 74 reges et infiniti propemodum obsequuntur principes duodecim duntaxat regibus exceptis qui Mahumetheas obseruant leges qui tamen imperatori in reliquis parent.” Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 18r.

Rome. Having seen these, they returned with joy to their own home. But in Genoa they had to wait many days for the time to sail back, and while they waited, they had sat down [as] it happens and were asked much about their rites, customs and regions before they left, on which the same author has written.²³

This paragraph marks the end of the section on Matthew, his conversion of the “Ethiopians” together with Barnabas, and on the realm and actions of Prester John; Foresti then turns to entirely different matters.²⁴

Based on this source, the notion of a *de facto* Ethiopian embassy entered Early Modern historiography: mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth-century historians like Cassaneus,²⁵ Godignus,²⁶ and Miraeus²⁷ all received this episode from the *Supplementum Chronicarum* for their own works on universal, ecclesiastical, and specifically “Abyssinian” history. Some differences can be discerned. Writing in 1546, Cassaneus recycles the whole section in a chapter on “Christian nations” of the world, but transposes what Foresti stated for the “Ethiopians” onto the Christian “Indians ruled by Prester John”²⁸ instead. Recounting all of Foresti, Cassaneus adds that it had been these “Indians” who had sent the 1306 embassy; they followed the Latin rite in all manners. However, he also clearly states that these “Indians” of Latin rite are distinct from the “Jacobites” – *Iacobitarum* – found in parts of Asia, Egypt and the land of Ethiopia.²⁹ The “Jacobites” – here a catchall for the miaphysite churches, which include the Syrian Orthodox, the Armenian, the Coptic and its long-time dependent, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church – were meanwhile not following Rome, but their own teachings, and the patriarch of Alexandria.³⁰

Some 70 years later, the geographically fluid medieval term of “Ethiopia” had long been substituted for “Abyssinia” in the ecclesiastical Latin Christian perception; the term now connoted only the Solomonic Christian Empire in the highlands of North-East Africa.³¹ The Jesuit priest Godignus thus concerned

23 “Huc sane imperatorem tempore Clementis quinti anno salutis nostre .1306. ad Hispaniarum regem legatos .30. misisse: illiquem contra infideles auxilium protulisse constat. Qui et Auinionem ad Clementem quintum pontificem maximum cum reuerentia accedentes de multis edocti apostolicis ad limina apostolorum Petri & Pauli visenda Romam venerunt. Quibus inuisis cum gaudio ad propria rediere. Verum Genue multis diebus nauigandi tempus expectantes cum consedissent multa [vt] fit de eorum ritibus: moribus ac regionibus rogati scripto reliquerunt que idem auctor referauit.” Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 18r.

24 Namely the illustrious teachings of excellent men; Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 18r.

25 Barthélemy de Chasseneuz, also known as Cassaneus, French jurist, 1480–1541.

26 Nicolao Godinho, also known as Godignus, Portuguese Jesuit, 1559–1616.

27 Aubert Miraeus, also called Aubert le Mire, Belgian ecclesiastical historian, 1573–1640.

28 “Indiae, in qua est Presbyter Ioannes.” Barthélemy de Chasseneuz, *Catalogus Gloriarum Mundi* (Lyon: Georges Regnault apud Antoine Vincent, 1546), fols. 265r–v.

29 “Hi in partibus orientis occupant magnam partem Asiae, & terram Mambrae est propinqua Aegypto, & terram Aethiopiae [...]” Chasseneuz, *Catalogus Gloriarum Mundi*, fol. 265v.

30 Chasseneuz, *Catalogus Gloriarum Mundi*, fols. 265r–266r.

31 As Andreu Martínez d’Alòs-Moner has recently shown, beginning with the account of the Portuguese priest Francisco Alvares, first published in 1540, and through the writings

himself exclusively with the socio-political and religious entity of Solomonic Ethiopia and its predecessors in his treatise *De Abassinorum rebus*.³² Conceived as a first “global Latin compilation of facts on “Abyssinia” and the Jesuit missionaries”,³³ Godignus draws extensively from sixteenth-century Spanish and Portuguese sources.³⁴ He also clearly receives Foresti, stating as fact that already more than a hundred years prior to the presence of Ethiopian monks at the Council of Florence in 1441, an “Abyssinian” delegation had paid obeisance to Pope Clement V in Avignon.³⁵ Four years later, in a similar volume on Christianity in Europe, Asia, and Africa, the theologian Miraeus all but verbatim reproduced the episode of the “Abyssinian” delegation to Avignon.³⁶ Both Godignus and Miraeus excised any association with, or descriptions of, the empire of Prester John with the embassy to Avignon. Moreover, Godignus includes an earlier chapter on how the myth of Prester John had been applied to the Solomonic Emperors incorrectly in the past.³⁷

At the end of the seventeenth century, Hiob Ludolf – the father of Ethiopian Studies in Europe, who had worked closely with the Ethiopian monk *abba* Gorgoryos on several books on the Ethiopians – unsurprisingly took the “Ethiopian” embassy of 1306 for granted.³⁸ All mention of Foresti or Carignano as the original source on the embassy had long since disappeared – alongside the legendary traditions on the Apostle Matthew, and the information on the realm of the mythical Prester John.

2. Receiving saintly and mythical models: *Legenda Aurea* and the Prester John in Foresti

This transition from legendary account on the “Ethiopians” under Prester John to the Abyssinians as the socio-political entity of Solomonic Ethiopia is at the heart of the conundrum on the alleged embassy of 1306 to Avignon. Scholarship has

of Jesuit priests in the latter part of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, Ethiopia or Abyssinia had emerged as a distinct socio-political entity in Latin Christian writing after 1600; Andreu Martinez d’Alos-Moner, *Envoys of a Human God: The Jesuit Mission to Christian Ethiopia, 1557–1632* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 159–60.

32 See Nicolao Godinho, *De Abassinorum Rebus, I* (Lyon: Horatius Cardon, 1615).

33 Andreu Martinez d’Alos-Moner, “Godinho, Nicolao”, in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2007, Vol. III, 821–2.

34 The subtitle of the volume already states the Portuguese Jesuit João Nunes Barreto and the Spanish Jesuit Andrés de Oviedo, the latter active as Catholic Patriarch in Ethiopia after 1550, as his sources. For Barreto and Oviedo, see Isabel Boavida, “Barreto, João Nunes”, in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2003, Vol. I, 484; Andreu Martinez d’Alos-Moner, “Oviedo, Andrés de”, in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2010, Vol. IV, 83.

35 “Sed iam prius, annos plusquam centum legati alii, ut idem facerent, ad Clementem V. Auenionem venerant; quos ille benignissime exceptos, plurimisque donis & gratiis exornatos ad suos remisit.” Godinho, *De Abassinorum Rebus*, 145.

36 Aubert Le Mire, *De Statu Religionis Christianae, per Europam, Asiam, Africam, et Orbem Novum, IV* (Cologne: Gualther, 1619), 195.

37 Chapter 5 of the first book in *De Abassinorum rebus*; Godinho, *De Abassinorum Rebus*, 18–23.

38 Hiob Ludolf, *Historia Aethiopica* (Frankfurt am Main: Zunner, 1681), book III, chapter 9.

largely received only the last section of Foresti's account, starting with the paragraph describing the events of "the time of Clement V".³⁹ This paragraph is, however, only part of the much longer note on the Apostle Matthew. It directly relates to, and refers back to, the preceding paragraphs: first, the legendary traditions on the conversion of an "Ethiopian" people by the Apostle Matthew, including stories about the Virgin Iphigenia, her brother, the "Ethiopian" king, and biblical figures such as the "Ethiopian" eunuch.⁴⁰ Only then does the text relate two other parts of information purportedly drawn from the Genoese provost of St Mark: news on the state and affairs of the realm's supposed current ruler, Prester John, and his envoys' visit to Avignon, Rome and Genoa – the news on the "Ethiopian" embassy, and their supposed interests and activities in Latin Europe in the early fourteenth century.⁴¹ All three sections were conceived as a whole by Foresti. Identifying the sources Foresti drew from for the whole passage not only sheds light on Foresti's approach to compiling the *Supplementum Chronicarum*, it also enables us to judge the reliability of the information on the embassy of 1306 – and its purported connection to the socio-political entity of Solomonic Ethiopia.

2a. Matthew and Iphigenia or "Ephigenia of Ethiopia"

Foresti himself informs us that he drew some information in the first section of the text – on the Apostle Matthew and Iphigenia or "Ephigenia of Ethiopia" – from Bede⁴² and John Chrysostom.⁴³ However, the majority of his information is actually and unmistakably taken from the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine. A compilation of lives of the saints and biblical episodes, it was written in the 1260s; like Foresti's *Supplementum Chronicarum* several hundred years later, Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* proved a medieval bestseller. Originally composed in Latin, it was frequently copied and translated into various vernacular languages, particularly over the course of the fifteenth century.⁴⁴ Curiously enough, Foresti omits having used the *Legenda Aurea* as source for his information.

Foresti's late fifteenth-century version of the life of the Apostle Matthew in the *Supplementum Chronicarum* offers a near-exact retelling of the Life of St Matthew as found in the thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea*. In the latter text, the Apostle Matthew finds himself preaching in "Ethiopia". There, he is based in the city of "Nadaber", lodging with the biblical figure of the Eunuch baptised

39 Excepting Skelton, "An Ethiopian embassy", 212 and Charles F. Beckingham, "An Ethiopian embassy to Europe c. 1310", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 43/2, 1989, 337–46.

40 The last paragraph of fol. 17v starting with "Matheus ex Publicanis" to line 8 on fol. 18r, "suscepit". Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fols. 17v–18r.

41 The second section begins with "Sacerdos quidam"; the third part with "hunc sane imperatorem" to the end of the paragraph on fol. 18r; Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 18r.

42 "De quo Beda sic habet." Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 17v.

43 "(vt Chriso. ait)." Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 17v; both also noted in Skelton, "An Ethiopian embassy", 214.

44 See Giulia Barone, "Legenda aurea, A. Werk", in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 1999, Vol. V, cols. 1796–97.

by Philip;⁴⁵ setting out to rid the town of two enchanters and their fire-belching dragons.⁴⁶ After driving away the sorcerers' dragons, Matthew resurrects a young man to life with the power of prayer. That young man had been the son of the local king; as a token of thanks, the local king, called Egippus,⁴⁷ had a church built for the Apostle in the locality:⁴⁸

They completed the church in thirty days, and the apostle presided in it for thirty-three years and converted all of Egypt. King Egippus was baptized with his wife and the whole people. Matthew dedicated Ephigenia, the king's daughter, to God, and put her at the head of more than two hundred virgins.⁴⁹

Soon after, however, Egippus was succeeded by Hirtacus, who "lusted after the virgin Ephigenia" and desired to marry her. The Apostle, not to be tricked or tempted by the new ruler, publicly declared Ephigenia married to Christ, instead. As a consequence, Hirtacus had him martyred in his own church. Reappearing from the realm of the dead, the Apostle saved Ephigenia and the other virgins from certain death, cursed Hirtacus, who contracted leprosy and subsequently killed himself.⁵⁰ Now, "the people established Ephigenia's brother, whom the apostle had baptised, as their king, who reigned for seventy years" and "aided the spread of the Christian religion and filled the whole province of Ethiopia with churches of Christ".⁵¹

Thus, all key elements appear in the *Supplementum Chronicarum* and the *Legenda Aurea*, although the former version is stripped of the clearly supernatural elements such as sorcerers and dragons: both have Matthew preaching in "Ethiopia", both narrate the building of a first church and the Apostle presiding in it for 33 years, both contain the conversion of local populations including the noble Ephigenia and her 200 virgins, as well as the Apostle's martyrdom at the hands of a lecherous king, who explicitly contracts leprosy and commits suicide.

45 "Matthaeus apostolus in Aethiopia praedicans in civitate, quae dicitur Nadaber [...]. Matthaeus autem apostolus praedictam civitatem ingressus et apud eunuchum Candacis reginae, quem Philippus baptizaverat, hospitatus [...]"; Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea Vulgo Historia Lombardica Dicta*, ed. Johann Grässe (Leipzig: Impensis Librariae Arnoldianae, 1850), 622–3.

46 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, trans. William G. Ryan (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 570.

47 "Rex nomine Egippus" Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 623.

48 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 570–1.

49 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 571. The Latin version runs as: "ipso jubente ecclesiam magnam fabricaverunt, quam intra XXX dies consummaverunt, in qua apostolus triginta annis et tribus sedit et totam Aegyptum ad fidem convertit, rex autem Egippus cum uxore sua et omni populo baptizatur. Ephigeniam quoque filiam regis apostolus Deo dedicatam plus quam ducentis virginibus praefecit". Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 624.

50 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 571.

51 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 572; the Latin original runs as "Populus autem fratrem Ephigeniae ab apostolo baptizatum regem constituit, qui per annos LXX regnavit et filium suum sibi substituens christianum cultum magnifice ampliavit et totam Aethiopiae provinciam ecclesiis Christi replevit". Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 625.

Both also feature the miraculous re-appearance of the Apostle from the grave, which ushers in a grand new age for Christianity, with Ephigenia's brother being crowned and reigning as Christian king for 70 years, converting the whole country of "Ethiopia", and filling it with churches. Even the associated saintly personnel appear in both texts: in the *Legenda Aurea*, Matthew lodges with the eunuch converted by Philip, in the *Supplementum Chronicarum*, the eunuch succeeds him as patriarch; Matthew's companion Barnabas is said to have converted the local population together with Matthew in the *Supplementum Chronicarum* – in the *Legenda Aurea*, Barnabas returns from "Ethiopia" with a copy of the Gospel written in Matthew's hand.⁵²

In his short but influential study of the Foresti source, Skelton proposed in 1958 that the "legendary (but late) tradition of the introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia" must have been narrated to Giovanni da Carignano in 1306 by the Ethiopian envoys.⁵³ However, "Ephigenia of Ethiopia" is known as a folk saint in the Latin Christian tradition only.⁵⁴ She is unknown to both Coptic or Ethiopian Orthodox Synaxaria. Moreover, the Coptic and Ethiopian versions of the Life of Matthew contain no mention of localities and personnel adjacent to Ephigenia at all: the Coptic Synaxarium narrates Matthew as mainly active in Jerusalem and Judea.⁵⁵ It places him in an unidentified "foreign country" only briefly – and retells how Matthew converted the followers of the Greek god Apollo to Christianity there.⁵⁶ The Ethiopian Synaxarium similarly relates that the Apostle Matthew converted a priest called Hermes and followers of the Greek god Apollo in an unnamed city. Neither the Coptic nor Ethiopian Orthodox traditions place Matthew as being active in Ethiopia at all, and the Ethiopian version in particular locates him in Jerusalem, Juda and Antioch only.⁵⁷ Foresti – or his supposed source, Carignano – could not have got the information on the conversion of the Ethiopians through the Apostle Matthew from "Ethiopian" informants in Genoa.⁵⁸ The legend is not native to a north-east African tradition.

Foresti's actual source, the *Legenda Aurea*, is instead firmly Latin Christian in nature. It uses the term "Ethiopian" – *Aethiops* – as referring to any black man or peoples, usually in a pejorative fashion.⁵⁹ *Aethiopia* in the *Legenda Aurea* also describes no specific locality: it is a country of "black" people of unclear localization. Somewhat inexplicably, it states that Matthew "converted all of

52 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 574.

53 Cf. Skelton, "An Ethiopian embassy", 214.

54 Her feast day is on September 21, which she shares with the Apostle Matthew. For more on the origins of the saint, see A. Carucci, "La vergine Ifigenia negli 'Acta' di San Matteo", *Rassegna storica salernitana* 6, 1945, 39–64.

55 His feast day is on 12 Babeḥ; see René Basset (ed.), *Le Synaxaire Arabe Jacobite (mois de tout et de Babeḥ)* (Patrologica Orientalis, 1. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907), 330–33.

56 Basset, *Le Synaxaire Arabe Jacobite*, 331.

57 Compare the edition of the Ethiopian Synaxarium, especially the reading on the Apostle Matthew – called Matewos in Ethiopian tradition – on 12 Ṭəqəmt; Gérard Colin (ed.), *Le synaxaire Éthiopien. Mois de Teqemt* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1987), 59–61 and Gérard Colin (ed.), *Le synaxaire éthiopien. Mois de Miyazya* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), 493.

58 Cf. Skelton, "An Ethiopian embassy", 214.

59 See Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 283, note 10 and 738, note 3.

Egypt” – *totam Aegyptum* – from the church donated by the king Egypus. Meanwhile, Egypus’ unnamed son later filled “the whole province of Ethiopia” – *totam Aethiopiae provinciam* – with churches.⁶⁰ The “Ethiopian” city named as “Nadaber” has roused the imagination of early nineteenth-century English poets,⁶¹ but no connection to any locality – whether in North-East Africa or otherwise – can be identified. The *Legenda Aurea* also names “Murgundia”⁶² and “Mirmidona” as synonymous with “Ethiopia” – the latter being the land of the legendary Greek peoples of the Myrmidons in the region of Thessaly.⁶³ Within the text, these places are conceived as not located too far from Antioch or Achaia on the Peloponnese peninsula;⁶⁴ indeed, most of the figures involved in the conversion of the “Ethiopians” in the *Legenda Aurea* are actually located in an Eastern Mediterranean rather than an African context.⁶⁵ The names of the “Ethiopians” – king Egypus and the princess Ephigenia – bear no resemblance to any attested north-east African ruler beyond the obvious allusion of the name “Egypus” to “Egypt” itself.

The first section of Foresti’s source on the “Ethiopians” and the embassy of 1306 is thus a variation of the popular Latin text of the *Legenda Aurea*, stripped of its mythical and supernatural elements. It describes the life of the Apostle Matthew as understood by its medieval Latin Christian authors, whose geographical concepts of “Ethiopia” refer only in the very vaguest of terms to the African continent. They are unrelated to any discernible socio-political and religious African Christian entity. The first section of the source has no relation to, and is indeed unknown in, the respective north-east African Christian traditions.⁶⁶

2b. From “Ethiopia” to the realm of Prester John

The second part of Foresti’s narrative on the “Ethiopians” purports to report on the contemporary state of affairs in the country. Foresti states that he took this information from a Genoese cleric, the provost or rector of St Mark;⁶⁷ he also

60 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 2012, 571 and Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 624–5.

61 Compare the Orientalist imagining of the “Ethiopian” city of Nadaber based on the *Legenda Aurea* by the early nineteenth-century poets Charlotte and Martha Rowles (*A Tradition: with other Poems*. London: Samuel Bagster, 1829).

62 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 13–14; it has been suggested that this might be a corruption of *Burgundia* in Andreas Hammer, *Erzählen von Heiligen. Narrative Inszenierungsformen von Heiligkeit im Passorial* (Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2015). There is no locality known as “Murgundia” associated with north-east Africa.

63 The German translation of the *Legenda Aurea* also names Murgundia as Mirmidona, the land of the legendary Greek peoples of the Myrmidons in the region of Thessaly, compare Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, trans. Richard Benz (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999).

64 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 13–14.

65 St Andrew, St Matthew and St Barnabas; Barnabas is attested to in the Holy Land, Antioch and Cyprus before venturing to Ethiopia to retrieve Matthew’s Gospel. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 13–14, 320–21.

66 Directly contradicting Skelton’s assumptions on an Ethiopian origin of the information; Skelton, “An Ethiopian embassy”, 214.

67 “Sacerdos quidam Genuensis sancti Martii prepositus.” Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 18r.

asserts that his man had written an excellent treatise and “what he called a map”⁶⁸ based on his encounter with the envoys in Genoa in 1306.⁶⁹ In scholarship, this man has long been identified as Giovanni da Carignano.⁷⁰ The identification is convincing – beyond being rector of San Marco al Molo in Genoa⁷¹ at this time, Carignano is known to have made a portolan chart in the early fourteenth century.⁷²

Carignano’s portolan chart was destroyed in World War II,⁷³ making it inaccessible for further investigation. In his detailed study of the document, Theobald Fischer described its state of preservation as “de-valued” in 1866; Fischer specifically notes that “pieces of the edge of the map have been torn off, namely the ones concerning Abyssinia”.⁷⁴ Renato Lefèvre studied the map extensively prior to its destruction;⁷⁵ in a 1943 article, he too repeatedly laments the severely “deteriorated state” and “poor conditions” of the parts of the map that depict the regions abutting the Red Sea and south of the Suez Canal.⁷⁶ Conversely, in 1949, Enrico Cerulli⁷⁷ opined Carignano’s knowledge of “Ethiopia” to have been extensive, positing that he must have interviewed a Solomonic Ethiopian delegation extensively in 1306. Skelton also conceded in 1958 that the “lower edge, where Ethiopia should be drawn” had been severely mutilated prior to the war.⁷⁸ It is thus somewhat surprising that Charles Beckingham affirmed in 1998 how Cerulli had shown “conclusively that the envoys came from Ethiopia” due to the information found on the portolan chart.⁷⁹ Considering that both Carignano’s original treatise as well as

68 Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 18r.

69 While the first two editions of the *Supplementum Chronicarum* failed to connect the story of the Apostle Matthew, the Genoese mapmaker and the delegates of “Prester John”, in the third edition of 1485, the words “the Genoese writes” – *Genuensis scribit* – were inserted for clarity between the account of the 30 legates and the information on their realm: Jacobus Philippus Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum* (Brescia: Boninus de Boninis, 1485), fol. 154r.

70 Since the mid-nineteenth century, first in Theobald Fischer, *Sammlung Mittelalterlicher Welt- und Seekarten Italienischen Ursprungs und aus Italienischen Bibliotheken und Archiven* (Venice: F. Ongania, 1886), 117–20; Skelton, “An Ethiopian embassy”, 212–3; Beckingham, “An Ethiopian embassy”, 339.

71 From 1293 to 1329.

72 The portolan chart is most often dated to the first third of the fourteenth century, Theobald Fischer dates its design as most definitely having been devised before 1326; Fischer, *Sammlung Mittelalterlicher Welt- Und Seekarten*. The “excellent treatise” alluded to only in the *Supplementum Chronicarum* meanwhile remains unidentified.

73 Skelton, “An Ethiopian embassy”, 213, note 3.

74 Fischer, *Sammlung Mittelalterlicher Welt- Und Seekarten*.

75 Renato Lefèvre, “Riflessi Etiopici Nella Cultura Europea Del Medioevo E Del Rinascimento – Parte Seconda”, *Annali Lateranensi*, 9, 1945, 331–44, particularly pp. 341–4.

76 Lefèvre, “Riflessi Etiopici”, 342–3.

77 Cf. Enrico Cerulli, “Giovanni da Carignano e la cartografia dei paesi a sud dell’Egitto Agli inizi del secolo XIV (Riassunto)”, in *Atti Del XIV Congresso Geografico Italiano. Tenuto a Bologna dall’8 Al 12 Aprile 1947* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1949), 507.

78 If only in a footnote; see Skelton, “An Ethiopian embassy”, 213, note 3.

79 Cf. Beckingham, “An Ethiopian embassy”, 339. In a similar fashion, Matteo Salvatore stated that Carignano “included an impressive degree of novel details on the Nile Valley” and connected this observation directly to the Foresti source; cf. Salvatore, *The African*

the parts of the map referring to the regions south of Egypt had already been lost or so severely corrupted as to be nearly unintelligible prior to the map's destruction, such assumptions appear untenable.

It remains difficult to judge whether the Carignano portolan contained any truly innovative information on the Horn of Africa. Renato Lefèvre states that a notation reading "Land of Abaise" – *Terra Abaise* – could clearly be discerned at the confluence of the Blue and White Nile. According to Lefèvre, another note read "black Christians" – *christiani nigri* – alongside numerous cities marked by a cross⁸⁰ at the rendered meeting point of the African and Asian continents with the Indian Ocean.⁸¹ None of these notations were truly novel by the fourteenth century, however: a number of Latin Christian writers had long remarked on the existence of "black Christians", specifically those of "Abaise" or Abyssinia. In 1217, the German pilgrim Thietmar informed his readers of a "country beyond Egypt", whose inhabitants are called "Issini" – a corruption of Abissini⁸² – that was "wholly Christian".⁸³ Ralph de Diceto mentions "Abesiam" prior to 1202, and Lefèvre reminds us that Gervaise of Tilbury includes the "Abassiti" in his *Otia imperialia* of 1211; Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris speak of "Abasia" in their chronicles prior to 1236.⁸⁴ Around the year 1300, Marco Polo included a very detailed account on the Christian country of "Abasce, which is called Ethiopia" in his famous narrative. Polo openly admits never travelling to the region, but his account is startlingly accurate: among other things, he relates a near-contemporary account on an incident of 1288, occurring during the reign of *aše* Yagba Şəyon, second ruler of the recently established Solomonic Dynasty.⁸⁵

Prester John, I. Salvatore notes that his statement is based on a low-quality reproduction of the map available in the British Library and the observations of Renato Lefèvre as given in Lefèvre, "Riflessi Etiopici", 341–4.

80 Lefèvre, "Riflessi Etiopici", 342–3.

81 Lefèvre, "Riflessi Etiopici", 342.

82 Itself derived from the self-designation Gə'əz *Habašāt*, Amharic/Tigrinya *Habāša* (see above); *Issini* appears to be a copying mistake due to the "ab" being mistaken for a Latin preposition, i.e. *Abissini* copied as *ab Issini*.

83 "Est eciam quidem terra ultra Egyptum, cuius incole vocantur Issini. Que tota christiana est. Et habent singuli homines provincie illius crucem in frontibus, quia, cum parvi sunt, cauteriantur in frontibus suis in signum crucis." Thietmar, *Mag. Thietmari Peregrinatio*, ed. Johann C.M. Laurent (Hamburg: Nolte und Köhler, 1857), 49. He also states that not long after birth, these *Issini* Christians were cauterized on their foreheads with a sign of the cross – describing a well-attested-to Ethiopian Christian cultural practice. Ritual scarification and tattooing are still practiced in Ethiopia; particularly in the northern highlands, it remains common to see Christian crosses scarred or tattooed onto forehead, hands or lower arms as a sign of faith; see Klemm, Peri, "Body ornamentation: scarification and tattooing", in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2003, Vol. I, 600–01.

84 See Lefèvre, "Riflessi Etiopici", 341, note 1 and de Diceto, Radulfi, *Decani Lundoniensis opera historica. The Historical Works of Master Ralph de Diceto, Dean of London*, ed. Stubbs, William. (London: Longman 1876), Vol. II, 82. Also see the sources collected in Enrico Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina: Storia della comunita Etiopica di Gerusalemme Vol. I*. (Rome: Liveria dello Stato, 1943).

85 The episode on "Abasce" and its conflict with Adal – rendered "Aden" by Polo – appears primarily in Book 3, Chapter 35; see Christopher Moule and Paul Pelliot (eds.): *Marco Polo: The Description of the World* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1938), 434–43;

The *Supplementum Chronicarum* foregoes any such precise specifications; indeed, after the section copied out of the *Legenda Aurea* concludes, the term “Ethiopia” disappears from the source entirely. It is substituted with the “nation of Prester John” in the second section of the source, where Foresti purports to summarize the “excellent account” of the Genoese cleric on the nation of “those people [...] to whom Prester John is also like a patriarch”.⁸⁶ One must wonder why, if Carignano had indeed met “Ethiopians” in 1306, they had confided only news entirely of European Christian nature in him: as the *Supplementum Chronicarum* tells, the “Ethiopian” realm converted by the Apostle Matthew resembles the most standard exposition of “facts” on the empire of the mythical Prester John only – from the priest-king ruling over 74 kings, including 12 of the Muslim faith, to the huge number of archbishoprics and bishops all dutifully following the Latin Rite except for the most minor of differences.⁸⁷

Much ink has been spilled on the mythology of Prester John.⁸⁸ Ever since the inception of the myth in the twelfth century, the priest-king imagined as located beyond the realms of Islam engaged the European Christian mind.⁸⁹ The timing of the inception of the myth was no coincidence: through the Crusades, European Christians had come to know parts of the wider world, but were also increasingly losing their foothold in those same regions. This process was bound to stimulate fanciful musings on a thriving empire in the hands of a Christian brother beyond the borders of the known world: such a realm – such an emperor – could help European Christendom turn the tide, and secure – or later, reclaim – the Holy Land from the Muslims once and for all. Regrettably, the geography of this empire remained sketchy for the longest time. It was situated in the great but vaguely defined realm of “India”, the

for the Ethiopian sources on Ase Yagba Şəyon’s messengers to Egypt and gifts to the Ethiopian monastery at Jerusalem at exactly this time see Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina*, 88–90.

86 Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 18r.

87 This would be surprising if Foresti was describing a miaphysite north-east African church; in the context of the European imagination on Prester John, however, it is par for the course.

88 For a recent compilation and translation of sources on the myth, see Brewer, *Prester John*; for the relationship between medieval European mythologies of the non-Western world and early European expansion, see Knobler, *Mythology and Diplomacy*. For its African context and a bibliography on the myth’s application to Christian Ethiopia, see Francisc Relaño, *The Shaping of Africa. Cosmographic Discourse and Cartographic Science in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 51–74; Gianfranco Fiaccadori, “Prester John”, in *Encyclopedia Aethiopia*, 2010, Vol. IV, 209–16; Franco Cardini, “La crociata e il ‘Prete Gianni d’Africa’”, in Alessandro Bausi, Alessandro Gori, and Gianfrancesco Lusini (eds), *Linguistic, Oriental and Ethiopian Studies in Memory of Paolo Marrassini* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014), 213–24. On the movement of Prester John within the European imagination, see Camille Rouxpetel, “La figure du Prêtre Jean: les mutations d’une prophétie souverain chrétien idéal, figure providentielle ou paradigme de l’orientalisme médiéval”, *Questes*, 28, 2014, 99–120.

89 For an edition and translation into English of the letter of Prester John and its different interpolations, see Brewer, *Prester John*, 46–96.

all-encompassing term for the “unknown world beyond the Islamic territories of the Near East”,⁹⁰ conceptualized as stretching from today’s West Africa to the Far East in the Latin Christian imagination of the late Middle Ages.⁹¹

Several high-profile missions from Rome were dispatched east for this purpose in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.⁹² Decades of fruitless search had offered no satisfying conclusion to the riddle of Prester John by the fourteenth century; gradually, we witness a shift in his possible location from one part of “India” to another – from Asia to Africa – in Latin writing. The conflation of the fanciful notions on Prester John’s empire with the factual Christian realm of “Abasce” or the “Issini” was gradual; Latin clerics-cum-authors, some of them well travelled, wrote with increasing interest about the Christian realm south of Mamluk-ruled Egypt in the fourteenth century. The Dominican missionary and explorer Jordanus Catalani⁹³ is believed to have been the first to relocate Prester John from Asia to the African continent in his *Mirabilia descripta*. Jordanus himself had sailed around the Horn of Africa but never ventured inland.⁹⁴ Still, he presents a slightly different vision of the realm of the black Christians of “Abasce”, speaking of the realm of “[...] the emperor of the Ethiopians, whom you call Prestre Johan”⁹⁵ instead. This place is presented as a place of marvels – rich in gold and precious stones, its ruler emperor over 52 kings, so powerful that even the Mamluk Sultan was forced to pay an annual tribute to him – the subjects all Christian, yes, but regrettably heretics.⁹⁶ Jordanus located this realm of wonders and unbridled Christian power south of Egypt, close to a place where zebras – “certain animals like an ass, but with transverse stripes of black and white, such as that one stripe is black and the next white” – could be found.⁹⁷

Half a century after Marco Polo’s breathless report on the military exploits of the Christian king of “Abasce”, the European understanding of the realm of Prester John and all he signified had begun to shift gradually; Prester John was to become an African king. A portolan chart drawn by Angelino Dulcert⁹⁸ in 1339 locates a “Saracen king” at “continuous war with the

90 So aptly termed in Brewer, *Prester John*, 23.

91 This “India” encompassed in different variations the realms of the *Bilad al-Sudan*, the Horn of Africa, Southern Arabia, Yemen, Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Indian subcontinent and at times even the island countries further east, i.e. Indonesia; Ulrich Kniefelkamp, “Indien”, in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 1999, Vol. V, cols. 404–5.

92 I.e. the journeys of William of Rubruck, John of Plano Carpini, John of Montecorvino, among several others; see Frances Wood, *The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) as well as Brewer, *Prester John*.

93 Also known as Jordanus de Severac, Dominican missionary and explorer in Asia, first Catholic bishop on the Indian subcontinent. His life dates are not well documented and are approximated as 1290–1336.

94 See Jordanus, *Mirabilia Descripta*, trans. Henry Yule (London: Haklyut Society, 1863), 45–6.

95 Jordanus, *Mirabilia Descripta*, 42.

96 See Jordanus, *Mirabilia Descripta*, 45–6.

97 Jordanus, *Mirabilia Descripta*, 44.

98 Also called Angelino de Dalorto, probably a Genoese active in Mallorca by the early to mid-fourteenth century. He is famous for two signed maps, one dated to 1330 (formerly

Christians of Nubia and Ethiopia, who are under the rule of the Prester John, the black Christian”.⁹⁹ Just a few years later, the anonymous author of the “Book of Knowledge of All Kingdoms” – the *Libro del Conoscimiento de todos los reinos*,¹⁰⁰ speaks of an empire of a man called “Servant of the Cross”, the “defender of the Church of Nubia and of Ethiopia”¹⁰¹ – who “defends Prester John, who is the patriarch of Nubia and Ethiopia and governs many great lands and many cities of Christians”.¹⁰² The mythical Prester John and “Servant of the Cross” – alluding to the militarily highly aggressive and successful Solomonic *nəguś* Amdä Şəyon¹⁰³ – had not yet been collapsed into one person. Only over the course of the fifteenth century, in which multiple Solomonic missions reached Latin Europe, were the two fully conflated.¹⁰⁴

Foresti, writing in the 1480s, and his source Carignano, said to have encountered envoys in Genoa in 1306, would fall on opposite sides of this process. Supposing for a moment that Foresti had studied an early fourteenth-century treatise by Giovanni da Carignano for his *Supplementum Chronicarum*, it stands to reason that he would have imagined – and written about – a very different “people of Prester John” from Carignano some 150–180 years earlier. Even if we were to assume that Carignano was the first to relocate the empire of Prester John to “Ethiopia”¹⁰⁵ – and there is little indication for this on the destroyed portolan chart¹⁰⁶ – nothing found in the second section of the

dated to 1325) and one to 1339. Both show Europe and the Mediterranean, as well as parts of northern Africa and the region of the Red Sea; see Piero Falchetta, “Manuscript no. 10057 in the Biblioteca Marciana, Venice. A possible source for the Catalan atlas?”, *Imago Mundi*, 46, 1994, 19–28.

- 99 Nancy F. Marino, *El Libro Del Conoscimiento de Todos Los Reinos (The Book of Knowledge of All Kingdoms)* (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999), xxx.
- 100 Its dating ranges from 1350 to 1385, according to different evaluations by the two groups of researchers who edited and extensively studied it; the two most recent editions independently concluded a dating into the last quarter of the fourteenth century as most likely; see Marcos Jiménez de la Espada, “Libro del Conoscimiento de todos los reinos y tierras y señoríos que son por el mundo, escrito por un franciscano español a mediados del siglo XIV”, *Boletín de La Sociedad Geográfica de Madrid*, 2, 1877; Marino, *El Libro Del Conoscimiento*; María Jesús Lacarra and María Carmen Lacarra Ducay, *Libro del conocimiento de todos Los regnos et Tierras et Señoríos Que Son por el Mundo, et de las Señales et Armas Que Han* (Zaragoza: Institución “Fernando el Católico”, 1999).
- 101 Lacarra and Lacarra Ducay, *Libro del Conoscimiento*, 60–61.
- 102 Marino, “El Libro del Conoscimiento”, 60, 61.
- 103 See below.
- 104 For a very concise rundown of Ethiopian missions to Latin Europe in the fifteenth century, see Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, 248–67. These missions are the focus of one of my forthcoming monographs, as based – in part – on Verena Krebs, “Windows onto the world: culture contacts and Western Christian art in Ethiopia, 1402–1543”, PhD Thesis, Universität Konstanz and Mekelle University, 2014.
- 105 As put forward by Cerulli, “Giovanni da Carignano”; Skelton, “An Ethiopian embassy”, 213; Beckingham, “An Ethiopian embassy” and – based on Skelton and Beckingham – in Brewer, *Prester John*, 213.
- 106 The sections identifiable on north-east Africa have already been mentioned above; it contains no discernible note on Prester John in this region. Instead, Theobald Fischer

Supplementum Chronicarum pertains to an actual socio-political entity resembling Solomonic Ethiopia or even Nubian Christian Makuria. Instead, Foresti presents us once again with a rendering of a Latin Christian source. It offers only the most commonplace benchmarks on the indistinct realm ruled by Prester John established since the twelfth century in European Christendom – truisms unknown in, and unrelated to, north-east Africa.

2c. 1306: a phantom embassy?

In the last segment of the source, Foresti stresses that it was this mythical Prester John, this very emperor – *huc sane imperatorem* – who had sent ambassadors to the “king of the Spains” and paid obeisance to the Pope in Avignon.¹⁰⁷ There is no indication of a direct connection to a socio-political entity in north-east Africa; similarly, the information of the envoys’ mission and itinerary stays vague and generic: they were said to have travelled to the Iberian Peninsula, to France to meet Clement V, to Rome, and to have stayed in Genoa. Moreover, the last section of the source confronts us with yet another conundrum: Foresti specifies that the 30 delegates from the “kingdom of Prester John” had encountered Pope Clement V in Avignon “in the year 1306” – but papal records show that Clement V did not even go to Avignon until March 1309, a discrepancy that has thus far been all but disregarded.¹⁰⁸ Beckingham proceeded simply to postdate the embassy to any date after March 1309;¹⁰⁹ however, he conceded that there was no reference to any such embassy in the extensive *Regesta* of Clement V.¹¹⁰ No other mention of the 1306 embassy has so far been discovered, either for the year 1306 or a later date in the early fourteenth century, when the Papacy was located in Avignon.¹¹¹ This in itself is surprising, as Papal archives have proved very reliable in documenting the presence of Solomonic Ethiopian envoys in the fifteenth century, even documenting lone pilgrims to Rome.¹¹² It seems remarkable that a large delegation such as that of 1306 should have drawn no mention at all; substantiating sources are also

argued in his examination of the map that the envoys of Prester John must have been responsible for the level of detail on the western part of the Ilkhanate, locating Prester John within his contemporary early thirteenth-century Asian context. See Fischer, *Sammlung Mittelalterlicher Welt- Und Seekarten*; also mentioned in Beckingham, “An Ethiopian embassy”, 339.

107 Foresti, *Supplementum Chronicarum*, VIII, fol. 18r.

108 Thus far, Andrew Kurt has been the only one to point out the contradiction directly and question the authenticity of the record: Kurt, “The search for Prester John”, 308.

109 See Beckingham, “An Ethiopian embassy”.

110 Beckingham, “An Ethiopian embassy”, 341.

111 Beckingham expressed a hope for answers lying undiscovered in “Genoese, Papal, Aragonese or Castilian archives which will answer some of the many questions provoked by Foresti’s narrative”; Beckingham, “An Ethiopian embassy”. Now, 30 years later, no further evidence has come to light.

112 Renato Lefèvre has compiled a comprehensive *regest* of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century mentions in “Documenti Pontifici Sui Rapporti Con L’Etiopia Nei Secoli XV E XVI”, *Rassegna Di Studi Etiopici*, 5, 1946, 17–41.

missing from “Spanish” archives.¹¹³ There is no known evidence of an early fourteenth-century embassy in Solomonic Ethiopian sources.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the *Supplementum Chronicarum* is a rare source to mention a 1306 embassy – which begs the question of the reliability which has been ascribed to Foresti when it comes to the “Ethiopian” embassy of 1306.

Modern historians of Ethiopia have pointed to three other sources which might support the veracity of an “Ethiopian” embassy to Pope Clement V in 1306. In 1943, Enrico Cerulli pointed to a passage in *La flor des estoires de la Terre d’Orient* – presented by the Armenian nobleman and historian Hayton of Corycus to Pope Clement V in 1307.¹¹⁵ Hayton states that he had recommended to Pope Clement to write a letter “to the king of the Nubians” to propagate an alliance between the Latin Church and the African Christians. Cerulli followed that Hayton must not have referred to Christian Nubians, but to Ethiopian Christians instead.¹¹⁶ It bears repeating that Hayton referred explicitly to the “king of the Nubians, who are Christians, and were converted to the Faith by the Lord Apostle Thomas in the lands of Ethiopia”.¹¹⁷ Cerulli’s choice to see this as supporting evidence for the feasibility of a Solomonic Ethiopian embassy to Avignon in 1306 is interesting. By 1307, two of the three medieval Nubian Christian kingdoms – Nobadia, Makuria, and Alodia or Alwa – were still politically independent, if in a slow process of decline.¹¹⁸ It would seem disingenuous to negate Nubian religious and political sovereignty and substitute it for Solomonic Ethiopia by default at this date.

A second source brought forward in scholarship to support the feasibility of an Ethiopian delegation to Europe dates from 1317: the Dominican friar William of Adam submitted plans for a joint crusade between Latin and “Ethiopian” Christians to the Cardinal Raymond of Farges, nephew of Clement V.¹¹⁹

113 These also document Solomonic envoys reliably for the fifteenth century, particularly those of Aragon, see Peter P. Garretson, “A note on relations between Ethiopia and the Kingdom of Aragon in the fifteenth century”, *Rassegna Di Studi Etiopici* 37, 1993, 37–44.

114 See below.

115 Cf. documents 33 and 35 in Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina*.

116 Documents 33 and 35 in Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina*.

117 Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina*, 91–4, 98.

118 For a breakdown on the collapse of the Nubian kingdoms, see Derek A. Welsby, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia: Pagans, Christians and Muslims along the Middle Nile* (London: British Museum Press, 2002), chapter 10. Andrew Kurt appears to over-emphasize Nubian decline at this time; Kurt, “The search for Prester John”, 305. The cathedral at Dongola was converted into a mosque only in 1317 according to Giovanni R. Ruffini, *Medieval Nubia: A Social and Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 254. Adam Simmons, whose recent PhD thesis at Lancaster University examines the medieval Nubian kingdoms in detail, places the definite collapse of Makuria towards the late fourteenth century; “Understanding the wider world: (re)introducing Nubia and Ethiopia to Europe during the Age of the Crusades”, PhD thesis, Lancaster University, 2018.

119 Charles F. Beckingham, “The quest for Prester John”, *Bulletin of the John Reynolds University Library* 62, 1980, 290–310, particularly pp. 295–9; Kurt, “The search for Prester John”, 305. For a recent edition and translation, compare William of Adam, *How to Defeat the Saracens – Tractatus Quomodo Sarraceni sunt Expugnandi*, ed. Giles Constable (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2012).

Adam had travelled as far as the island of Socotra in the Red Sea in the early fourteenth century; he never reached the highland realm we today refer to as Ethiopia. Indeed, his “Ethiopia” relates solely to the Red Sea region, and the Christians found on the islands within that same body of water¹²⁰ – a distinct region again unconnected to Solomonic Ethiopia.

Lastly, scholars have pointed to a rather strange text published by the Italian scholar Leone del Prete in 1857.¹²¹ It is a text from a private archive, and seems to be a letter addressed to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV.¹²² The missive is most definitely a forgery. It is an exhortation for a crusade against the Muslims – and the anonymous author, writing in Italian, purports to be the king of “Ethiopia”. He introduces himself as:

King Voddomaradeg, son of the most excellent King of Ethiopia, of Saionio, of Tobbia, of Nubia, the lands of Bettesi and Moritorio, and Prester John, King of India the Major and Minor.¹²³

The majority of the given place names are fantasies,¹²⁴ but the name of the king – “Voddomaradeg” – is a corruption¹²⁵ of Wədəm Rā’ad,¹²⁶ throne name of the Ethiopian *nəguś* regnant at the time the supposed “Ethiopian” embassy of 1306. Del Prete assures us that the letter was written around the year 1320. As the original letter is unknown and no other edition has been published, this is impossible to verify.¹²⁷ Should we take del Prete’s word for granted, however, Wədəm Rā’ad would still already have been succeeded by

120 Compare especially William of Adam, *How to Defeat the Saracens*, 99–107.

121 Salvatore, “The Ethiopian age of exploration”, 602–3; Salvatore, *The African Prester John*, 6; as well as Beckingham, “An Ethiopian embassy” and Charles F. Beckingham, “Ethiopia and Europe 1200–1650” in Cecil H. Clough (ed.), *The European Outthrust and Encounter: The First Phase c. 1400–c. 1700. Essays in Tribute to David Beers Quinn on His 85th Birthday* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994), 77–97, especially p. 79.

122 1316–1378, Holy Roman Emperor from 1355.

123 The full salutation reads as follows: “Al nobilissimo signore messer Carlo per la grazia di Dio Imperadore famoso de’ Romani e sempre augusto, il vostro fratello Re Voddomaradeg figliuolo dello eccellentissimo Re d’Etiopia, di Saionio, di Tobbia, di Nubbia, di terra di Bettesi e di Moritorio, e Preste Gian Re dell’India maggiore e minore salute con desiderio di vidervi in grande felicità”. Leone Del Prete, *Lettera Inedita Del Presto Giovanni All’imperatore Carlo IV, Ed Altra Di Lentulo Ai Senatori Romani Sopra Gesù Cristo, Secondo Il Volgarizzamento Citato Dagli Accademici Della Crusca Diverso* (Lucca: Figli Giacomo Rocchi, 1857), 9–10.

124 To my knowledge, Saionio is an entirely fanciful name; Tobbia is a malapropism of “Ityop’ya” or “Itob’ya” – and therefore of the name Ethiopia itself. Similarly, “Moritorio” appears a particularly evocative corruption of “moro” – for “blacks” or “Moors”.

125 Although Gə’əz is one of the vocalized Semitic languages, the consonants still hold a pivotal importance. A look at the consonants in Voddomaradeg, V-D-M-R-D-G, and Wədəm Rā’ad, W-D-M-R-D, clearly demonstrates the obvious similarity between the two names, as also noted in Beckingham, “An Ethiopian embassy”.

126 Wədəm Rā’ad, sometimes transcribed as Wedem Arad, *nəguś* of Ethiopia, 1299–1314.

127 Del Prete, *Lettera Inedita Del Presto Giovanni*.

aše Amdä Şəyon¹²⁸ for some six years – and the future Charles IV have been a child of four years of age.¹²⁹ Even beyond the problems posed by the unavailability of the source to scholarship, this timeline would be highly problematic. That the name of an Ethiopian ruler should be known in Latin Europe in the fourteenth century, however, is not as unprecedented as it might initially seem: in 1339, the name “Abdeselib” appears in a cartouche of the portolan chart of Angelino Dulcert as name of a ruler living in the vicinity of the realms of Christian Nubia and the highlands of Solomonic Ethiopia.¹³⁰ Just a few years later, the author of the already mentioned “Book of Knowledge of All Kingdoms” speaks of the “empire of Abdeselib, which means ‘servant of the cross’ [who] is the defender of the Church of Nubia and of Ethiopia”.¹³¹ While “Abdeselib” might at first glance appear a fanciful name given by Europeans to a distant “Ethiopian” emperor, it is the Arabic version of an actual Solomonic Ethiopian regal name: Abdeselib is a correct, if slightly corrupted, version of the Arabic “Abd as-Salib”, which translates as “Servant of the Cross”.¹³² “Servant of the Cross”, meanwhile, translates to “Gäbrä Mäsqäl” in Gəʿəz, and is the throne name of *aše* Amdä Şəyon, one of the most prominent and militarily and politically successful rulers of Solomonic Ethiopia in the fourteenth century. *Aše* Amdä Şəyon ruled until 1344, and thus was the incumbent sovereign of the Solomonic Empire when both Dulcert and the author of the “Book of Knowledge of All Kingdoms” noted a variant of his name in their sources.¹³³

The three sources introduced by modern scholars to support the veracity of an “Ethiopian” embassy to Latin Europe in 1306 thus do not necessarily shed light on Solomonic Ethiopian history. If anything, they portray how the longstanding and complex landscape of Christianity beyond the African Mediterranean coast was slowly understood in the Latin West. Located along the cataracts of the Nile, the Nubian kingdoms of Makuria and Alwa or Alodia had been Christian since the sixth century,¹³⁴ they preserved their political independence and Christian faith after the Islamic Expansion of the seventh century.¹³⁵ Church and State in Nubia were in decline from the late thirteenth century onwards, but a Makurian army had still attacked and plundered parts of Upper Egypt in the

128 Amdä Şəyon, throne name Gäbrä Mäsqäl, *nəguś* of Ethiopia, 1314–44.

129 A contradictory anachronism not remarked upon in Beckingham and Ullendorff, *The Hebrew Letters*, 8. Considering the fact that Charles IV himself only ascended to the throne in 1346, del Prete’s proposed date of 1320 seems untenable.

130 Marino, *El Libro Del Conoscimiento*, xxx.

131 “[...] ynperio de Abdeselib, que quiere dezir siervo de la cruz.” Lacarra and Lacarra Ducay, *Libro Del Conoscimiento*, 60–61.

132 See Gianfranco Fiaccadori, “Libro Del Conoscimiento”, in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2007, Vol. III, 564–5.

133 Should the Spanish “Book of Knowledge” indeed have been compiled around the year 1350, the attribution would be both correct and mention near simultaneous events. Dulcert’s information for the map of 1339 would have been current and correct.

134 The third Nubian Christian kingdom, Nobatia, was annexed by Makuria in the eighth century.

135 See Peter L. Shinnie and Margaret Shinnie, “New light on medieval Nubia”, *The Journal of African History* 6/3, 1965, 263–73 and Jay Spaulding, “Medieval Christian Nubia and the Islamic world: a reconsideration of the Baqt Treaty”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28/3, 1995, 577–94.

1270s.¹³⁶ Christian kings and bishops persisted in parts of Nubia well into the fifteenth century.¹³⁷

Meanwhile, the highlands in the Horn of Africa had been home to a Christian realm since the fourth century. Around 1270, the Solomonic Christian dynasty had come to power; its founder, *aše* Yəkunno Amlak,¹³⁸ and his successors were to extend its territory far beyond their original dominion – from the historical regions of Lasta, Šäwa and Amhara all over the north-east African highland plateau.¹³⁹ Scholars have much neglected to ask themselves whether an outreach for a military alliance with Western Europe in the very early 1300s would have actually made sense from an Ethiopian perspective. The short answer is that it would not have. In the early decades of Solomonic reign – and particularly during the time of the purported embassy of 1306 – Ethiopian sources show that Solomonic sovereigns were busy securing their own, comparatively newly-formed, realm: while Yəkunno Amlak had consolidated power over extensive areas to the north and south of Lasta in the late thirteenth century,¹⁴⁰ his son, *aše* Yagba Šəyon,¹⁴¹ strove to maintain his father's recent legacy¹⁴² – an echo of an episode of his reign appears in Marco Polo's narrative. The "Ethiopian" embassy of 1306 would fall into the reign of Yəkunno Amlak's other son, *aše* Wədəm Rā'ad,¹⁴³ who succeeded his brother after a phase of unrest and uncertainty in 1299.¹⁴⁴ Very little is known about Wədəm Rā'ad's comparatively long reign – we only know of struggles between him and a Muslim tributary abutting the highland plateau, and that there were disputes between important monastic communities in his heartland, the historical regions of Lasta, Šäwa and Amhara.¹⁴⁵ Only his heir, *aše* 'Amdä Šəyon I,¹⁴⁶ managed to stabilize fully the Solomonic dynasty in the first half of the fourteenth century.¹⁴⁷ 'Amdä Šəyon I aggressively and successfully expanded the dynasty's realm: he fully incorporated the regions from Goğgam to Christian Təgray up to the Red Sea into the dominion, integrating Muslim principalities such as

136 Welsby, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia*, 242–5.

137 See Spaulding, "Medieval Christian Nubia" and Ruffini, *Medieval Nubia*.

138 *Aše* Yəkunno Amlak, Ethiopian ruler considered to have established the Solomonic dynasty, ruled from 1270–85.

139 Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, 66–70; Kaplan, "Solomonic Dynasty".

140 Marie-Laure Derat and Denis Nonsitsin, "Yəkunno Amlak", in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2014, Vol. V, 43–6.

141 *Aše* Yagba Šəyon, ruled 1285–94.

142 He is narrated as fighting pretenders to the throne and unsuccessfully attempting to negotiate with the Sultan of Mamluk Egypt about the dispatch of an *abun* – the metropolitan leading the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; Denis Nonsitsin, "Yagba Šəyon", in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2014, Vol. V, 11–12; Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, 70–72.

143 *Aše* Wədəm Rā'ad, ruled 1299–1314.

144 The intervening four years saw five successive kings come to power; Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, 72.

145 Marie-Laure Derat, "Wədəm Rā'ad", in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2010, Vol. IV, 1177.

146 *Aše* 'Amdä Šəyon I, also known as Gəbrä Mäsqäl, "Servant of the Cross", ruled 1314–44.

147 Joanna Mantel-Niecko and Denis Nonsitsin, "'Amdä Šəyon I", in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2003, Vol. I, 227–9.

Ifat, Damot and Hadiyya as rebellious tributaries into his Christian empire.¹⁴⁸ At his death, ‘Amdä Şəyon’s dominion stretched over a thousand miles from north to south, from the Red Sea coast down most of the Ethiopian highlands, and hundreds of miles from east to west, having subjugated – at least temporarily – lowland and eastern highland Muslim principalities all the way to ‘Adal.¹⁴⁹ Against this backdrop, it is of little surprise that a variant of his name – in the form of the Arabic translation of its meaning, “Servant of the Cross” – had made its way across the Red Sea and Mediterranean, to be incorporated into the Dulcert portolan, and the “Book of Knowledge of All Kingdoms”.

3. Conclusion: resetting the time line of Solomonic–Ethiopian contacts with the Latin West

By the early fourteenth century, Latin Christian authors had tentatively become cognizant of the actions and agency of Christian rulers and their subjects located in north-east Africa. The mentions of “Nubian” or “Black” Christians located in “Abassia” or “Ethiopia” should be read as a belated awareness of local north-east African politics; increasingly twinned with fanciful notions on the concurrent, popular myth on the Christian empire, the empire of Prester John. It is within this framework of gradually increasing knowledge about the world beyond the Mediterranean and the Levant, and nearly two centuries of unsuccessful exploration in Asia, that the above-mentioned references to African Christians in Hayton of Corycus and Guillaume Adam, and the “letter of Voddomaradeg” alias Wəḍəm Rā‘ad to the future Charles IV, should be understood.

The *Supplementum Chronicarum*, however, reflects none of this increased Latin Christian awareness of north-east African socio-political entities. I have demonstrated how the first section of Foresti’s passage was derived from the *Legenda Aurea* – a Latin Christian source with no discernible relation to an African Christian tradition, whether Coptic, Nubian, Ethiopian or otherwise. The second section of the passage, purporting to report contemporary news on the realm of Prester John, recycles a standard narration native to Western Europe; it, too, offers no information pertaining to any specific contemporary socio-political entity in north-east Africa. There is evidence that the time gap between Foresti and Carignano might have resulted in a significant difference in perception of the location of the realm of Prester John, that the intervening centuries would have turned formerly Asian delegates into African envoys in the Latin Christian mind. A recent discovery of a different manuscript receiving fragments of Carignano appears to indicate the opposite, however: it suggests that Carignano’s lost account was possibly based on distorted echoes about Solomonic Ethiopia mixed with Latin Christian imaginings and sources, too.”¹⁵⁰ The impossible timing of the 1306 delegation, and the total lack of

148 Mantel-Niećko and Nosnitsin, “‘Amdä Şəyon I”.

149 Mantel-Niećko and Nosnitsin, “‘Amdä Şəyon I”; Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, 89–103; for the chronicle of the wars of *ase* ‘Amdä Şəyon I, see George W.B. Huntingford, *The Glorious Victories of Amda Seyon, King of Ethiopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

150 Shortly before the publication of this piece, Carlo Taviano drew my attention to a recently published article by Paolo Chiesa who, together with his students, had

substantiating sources in European archives, raise fundamental questions on the reliability of Foresti for north-east African historiography, however. Did Foresti – or even Carignano – possibly simply fabricate the reference altogether for unknown reasons, after offering a retelling of a part of the *Legenda Aurea*, and “facts” on the realm of Prester John? It is impossible to say.

So where does this leave us? Early Modern and twentieth-century historiography took the episode of 1306 and its connection to Solomonic Ethiopia as fact. The examination of the source material itself shows that any connection to the socio-political entity of Solomonic Ethiopia – or Nubian Makuria, for that matter – is not supported by the information contained within the *Supplementum Chronicarum*. The “Ethiopian” embassy of 1306 appears to be yet another episode of Ethiopian–European contacts not borne out by the sources upon close inspection.¹⁵¹ This is significant in a number of ways: thus far, the “Ethiopian” embassy of 1306 has set the time line for the course of Solomonic–Latin Christian diplomacy in the late medieval period in scholarship. The purported interests and wishes of these “Ethiopians” – a joint crusade, military aid – appear to have moreover shaped how scholarship read and received actual, later Solomonic embassies to the West. And yet, all things being equal, Foresti’s *Supplementum Chronicarum* is a Latin Christian source that draws on information only known within Western Europe itself; there is nothing to recommend the source’s value for the study of medieval Ethiopian history. The “Ethiopian” embassy of 1306, as based on Foresti’s *Supplementum Chronicarum*, thus needs to be reconsidered, if not dismissed – thoroughly resetting the time line for official Solomonic Ethiopian contacts with the Latin West.

discovered a manuscript by Galvaneus de la Flamma († c. 1345) in a private New York library. This text appears to draw from Giovanni da Carignano’s treatise and map – the text also purportedly used by Foresti. It refers to an “Ethiopian” embassy of 1300. While the section entitled *Ystoria Ethiopie* in Flamma largely relates Latin Christian knowledge on a somewhat vague geographical entity called “Ethiopia” mixed with “knowledge” on the realm of Prester John, and offers no conclusive evidence in favour of the existence of a 1306 Solomonic embassy, a more thorough study and *Quellenforschung* of Flamma’s text, the textual transmission and dissemination of (imagined) Latin Christian knowledge on foreign realms such as Solomonic Ethiopia and especially the Nubian kingdoms is needed. Compare Chiesa, Paolo, “Galvano Fiamma e Giovanni da Carignano. Una nuova fonte sull’ambasceria etiopica a Clemente V e sulla spedizione oceanica dei fratelli Vivaldi”, *Itineraria*, 17, 2018, 63–107. Paolo Chiesa and Alessandro Bausi have also been preparing the publication of a critical edition of the Latin text as well as an English translation of the section on Ethiopia in Flamma and were so kind as to provide me with an early proof of their article, forthcoming as Alessandro Bausi and Paolo Chiesa, “The *Ystoria Ethiopie* in the *Cronica Universalis* of Galvaneus de la Flamma (d. c. 1345)”, *Aethiopica*, 22, 2019, 1–51.

- 151 Compare historiography referring to “an embassy of 1395 to Milan”, which draws solely on the introduction of Gustav Salomon Oppert, *Der Presbyter Johannes in Sage und Geschichte: Ein Beitrag zur Voelker- und Kirchengeschichte und zur Heldendichtung des Mittelalters* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1870), 6. Oppert provided no base for his claim; for scholarship still receiving him, cf. Munro-Hay, *Ethiopia Unveiled*, 269 note 147 and Constantin Marinescu, *La Politique Orientale d’Alfonse V d’Aragon, Roi de Naples (1416–1458)* (Barcelona: Institut d’estudis catalans, 1994), 17.