

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In early 1429, a Persian merchant called al-Tabrīzī was condemned to death by one of the four supreme justices of Mamlūk Egypt. The Egyptian authorities carried out the sentence quickly and with great spectacle: as February turned into March, al-Tabrīzī was publicly beheaded under the window of the al-Ṣālihiyya *madrasa*, the formal site for public execution in late medieval Cairo. The Persian declared his innocence until his head was struck from his neck. He also quoted passages from the Quran and proclaimed the Islamic profession of faith.

Officially, al-Tabrīzī was accused of ‘importing weapons into an enemy country’ and ‘playing with two religions’.¹ From a Mamlūk standpoint, he was certainly guilty of both: the merchant had previously been reprimanded for his export of arms and horses from Muslim Egypt to Solomonic Ethiopia, a Christian kingdom located in the highlands of the Horn of Africa. Beyond his role as incidental quartermaster supplying a foreign army to the south of Egypt, al-Tabrīzī was also known to acquire ‘treasures’ such as bejewelled crosses for *aṣe* Yəṣḥaq, the ruler of Christian Ethiopia.

The evidence recovered with the Persian upon his arrest together with some Ethiopian monks in 1429 indicates that the group had been sent out to acquire the rare and beautiful things in life. While some weapons were found among their possessions, they were of little interest to the Mamlūk authorities. Primarily recovered were great amounts of ‘Frankish’ [2] clothing, richly embroidered in gold with Christian symbols, as well as two golden church bells and a letter written ‘in the Ethiopian language’. In it, the Ethiopian sovereign supposedly ordered al-Tabrīzī to acquire items of goldsmithery, crosses, bells and a holy Christian relic – one of the nails with which Jesus had been crucified.²

Meanwhile, Spanish archival material indicates that the Persian merchant and the Ethiopian monks had visited the kingdom of Aragon before attempting to return to Ethiopia via Egypt. They had

arrived in Valencia in late 1427, spending several months in the city and asking the Aragonese king, Alfonso V, to despatch artisans and craftsmen to the court of their master, the *nəguś* – the Ethiopian king.

All this inter-faith contact and collaboration – with an African Christian ruler approaching an Iberian court employing a Persian Muslim in the company of Ethiopian ecclesiastics – provoked the suspicion of generations of Mamlūk Egyptian historians, who subsequently speculated that the *nəguś* must have been calling for a crusade against the Islamic powers of the Mediterranean.³ There was simply no way an Ethiopian king would have sent out emissaries to travel halfway across the known world to acquire ecclesiastical garments, liturgical objects and a relic as well as artisans and craftsmen. Or was there?

In fact, diplomatic endeavours like the one that took such a fatal turn for the Persian merchant al-Tabrīzī seem to have been rather common at the time. The 15th and early 16th century, the timeframe under consideration in this book, coincides with an early golden age of Solomonic Ethiopian sovereignty in the Horn of Africa. The origins of Christianity in the region date back to the first half of the 4th century, when the Aksumite king ‘Ezana converted to the religion together with his court, and Ethiopia became a bishopric of the Coptic Church.⁴ In 1270, the so-called Solomonic dynasty came to power in the central Ethiopian highlands. Throughout the 14th century, successive Solomonic *nəgäšt* – to use the plural of *nəguś* as shorthand for these kings of Christian Ethiopia – extended and consolidated their realm, seizing and submitting new regions from non-Christian principalities under their suzerainty.⁵ At the turn of the 15th century, Solomonic Ethiopia was the largest geopolitical entity in the late medieval Horn of Africa. The territory the Christian *nəgäšt* claimed as their own stretched nearly 700 miles in length and several hundred miles in breadth. It formed a heterogeneous realm that extended over most of the central highland plateau, from the [3] Eritrean coastal regions to the south of modern-day Addis Ababa (compare Map 1).⁶

Between 1400 and the late 1520s, successive Ethiopian sovereigns are recorded as dispatching at least a dozen diplomatic missions to various princely and ecclesiastical courts in Latin Europe. The vast majority of embassies were sent out within the first fifty years of contacts. In the 15th century alone, Solomonic envoys arrived at places as varied as Venice, Rome, Valencia, Naples and Lisbon. Ethiopian pilgrims, sometimes cast into the role of inadvertent ambassadors, are concurrently attested from Lake Constance in modern-day Germany to Santiago de Compostela in the very west of the Iberian Peninsula.

Continuous and lasting contacts between distant medieval royal courts are far from surprising. Often, objects rather than written sources bear lasting witness to remote connections between realms. As art historian Finbarr Flood once put it, ‘people and things have been mixed up for a very long time, rarely conforming to the boundaries imposed on them by modern anthropologists and historians.’⁷ In this specific case, however, the people and things mixing up between the Christian Horn of Africa and the Latin West traversed thousands of miles. They needed to cross mountain ranges, deserts and two large bodies of water, as well as territories adhering to different faiths. Even at the best of times, a single journey was bound to take at least half a year. And yet, nearly all rulers and regents of the 15th and early 16th century sent out envoys in some way or other – in the very early 1400s, up to three embassies were dispatched from the North-East African highland court within just five years. Examining late medieval Solomonic Ethiopian missions to the Latin West, this book above all seeks to answer a simple question: why did generations of *nägäšt* initiate diplomatic contacts with different princely and ecclesiastical courts in Europe in the 15th and early 16th century?

HISTORIOGRAPHY, SOURCES AND THE SPECTRE OF PRESTER JOHN

Modern historians and philologists working on the history and literature of Europe and Ethiopia alike have studied these diplomatic encounters for more than a century.⁸ Dating back to the very early 1900s, researchers working on materials examined in this book have noted an Ethiopian interest in

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craftsmen, and occasionally relics.⁹ The mid-20th-century [4] Italian historian Renato Lefèvre concerned himself with the topic of Ethiopian-European exchanges throughout his long career, unearthing more archival material than any other scholar.¹⁰ In a major 1945 article, he suggested that the *nāgāst* first approached medieval Italy out of a need for its artistically and technologically superior workforce, ostensibly caused by a lack of skilled indigenous African labour.¹¹ Two decades later, he opined somewhat less bluntly that Solomonic rulers dispatched their missions out of a desire to obtain ‘masters of art and industry’ to raise the civil and technical level of the Ethiopian kingdom, driven by a need to enhance its military efficiency.¹²

Lefèvre’s views were undoubtedly steeped in the colonialist political climate of his time, not unusual amongst Italian scholars writing in the 1930s and 1940s and thus shortly before, during, and after the fascist Italian occupation of the Horn of Africa.¹³ His particular conclusions on Ethiopia’s supposedly desperate cry for military, political and artistic aid were, however, also influenced by the way the material has been studied. While Ethiopia was often perceived as exceptional within pre-colonial African historiography, its history has often been examined from the perspective of European imagination and exploration, which was often itself steeped in a crusading spirit in the later Middle Ages.¹⁴ Historical mentions of Prester John and his realm, a formidable yet wholly fictitious Christian ruler of extraordinary military power who enjoyed particular popularity in late medieval Europe, have long been examined alongside sources on Solomonic Ethiopia.¹⁵ Until now, the spectre of Prester John – despite its origin as a wholly exogenous, proto-orientalist European fantasy – persists in scholarly writing on the actual geopolitical entity of pre-modern Solomonic Ethiopia.¹⁶ Finally, the rather martial interests of an ostensible early 14th-century ‘Ethiopian’ embassy – whose historicity and connection to the realm of the *nāgāst* has been under question – have also been projected onto later Solomonic missions. Incidentally, Latin Christian sources narrate this mission as offering a military alliance to a ‘king of the Spains’.¹⁷ Over the course of the century, research has thus often read late medieval Ethiopia and its connections to the larger world as cast in a very particular light: we find a largely

established scholarship view where the *nägäšt* are understood as primarily looking for craftsmen to ‘develop’ the Christian highland realm and especially its military, and as hoping to acquire arms and even guns from Europe. Sometimes, these ostensible interests were tied to another rather martial desire – the [5] *nägäšt* were also narrated as primarily looking for military alliances with various courts in Latin Europe.¹⁸

It is the core idea of this book to argue that the available source material on Solomonic diplomatic outreach to the late medieval Latin West tells quite a different story: while some first-hand expressions of diplomatic interests written by Ethiopian rulers from the early 16th century do indeed contain – among many other things – a tangible interest in military matters, alliances and arms, these are utterly absent in sources dating prior to the early 1500s.¹⁹ Yet, Solomonic embassies to Europe date back to the very early 1400s. What drove the *nägäšt* to send their missions throughout the 15th century? Research has thus far failed to offer up a compelling explanation for the first one hundred years of persistent Solomonic diplomatic outreach.

No first-hand letters written by Ethiopian rulers have come down to us for this lengthy, early phase of contacts. However, a multitude of other texts from Ethiopia, Egypt and Latin Europe have survived. These texts contain a wealth of circumstantial evidence and provide a view on the desires and interests of these African Christian rulers. Most of our sources have been preserved in European archives, ranging from administrative notes and copies of official letters to treasury records, city annals and chronicles, itineraries, diary entries, personal letter collections and even cartouche legends on maps. Many are written in the languages of the Latin West: medieval Latin, of course, but also Italian, Catalan, German, French and Portuguese, with the occasional indistinct local mix of a few of the above thrown in for good measure. Ethiopian texts written in Gə‘əz, the ancient literary and liturgical language of the country, provide an additional perspective. They contain important nuggets of historical information, as do Arabic records from Mamlūk Egypt, Ethiopia’s northern neighbour.

Combining all these sources – some of which have been known for more than a century, others having come to light more recently – makes visible several golden threads running through each and every late medieval Solomonic embassy to Latin Europe: as we will see, not a single source relating to the first one-hundred years of Ethiopian diplomacy portrays a clear Solomonic interest in obtaining military craftsmen-technologists or alliances, arms or guns from the Latin West. Instead, we find an immense desire to acquire foreign religious material culture, especially relics, ecclesiastical fabrics and liturgical objects, but also artisans and craftsmen [6] skilled in trades necessary to construct magnificent architectural monuments – builders, carpenters, stonemasons, metalworkers, painters.

These common themes, these tangible Solomonic desires, fit in rather well into the local history of Ethiopia in the 15th and early 16th century. The consolidation of Solomonic power over most of the central North-East African highlands had ushered in substantial religious reform, as well as the translation and flourishing of local religious literature.²⁰ This period also witnessed the advent of monumental local building activity: it saw the construction of dozens of prestigious royal churches and monasteries, material testament to the *nägäšt*'s supreme political claim to power, and a physical assertion of each sovereign's rightful and just Christian rulership.²¹ These royal religious centres naturally not only had to be built and ornamented, but also endowed and furnished with precious books, ecclesiastical garments, fine fabrics, liturgical utensils, relics and eventually also icons.

Reading the diplomatic sources within the framework of local late medieval Ethiopian history, this book proposes that Ethiopian rulers sent out their missions to acquire rare religious treasures and foreign manpower expedient to their political agenda of building and endowing monumental churches and monasteries in the Ethiopian highlands. Acquiring artisans and ecclesiastical wares from faraway places for religious centres intimately tied to Solomonic dominion would have necessarily increased their prestige within the Christian Horn of Africa, following a mechanism well-attested for numerous societies in the pre-modern world. Such requests from a foreign sovereign sphere were rarely caused by a shortage of indigenous labour or materials – particularly not within 15th- and early 16th-century

Ethiopia. Here, they appear instead to be an intentional emulation of actions ascribed to the biblical king Solomon, propagated by the Solomonic Ethiopian rulers as the dynasty's genealogical ancestor in their foundational myth of the *Kəbrä nəgäšt* – the 'Glory of Kings'.²² This very same king Solomon, too, is repeatedly narrated as sending envoys to another sovereign ruler to obtain both precious wares and a master craftsman to construct the first temple in Jerusalem in the Bible.²³ The sending of missions to Latin Christian potentates appears to have been one of the strategies through which the *nəgäšt* locally asserted their claim of rightful Solomonic descent – and actively if somewhat incidentally initiated a particularly noteworthy case of African-European contacts in the late medieval period. [7]

The careful study of the *nəgäšt*'s diplomatic relations in the late Middle Ages is moreover not an end unto itself alone. In closely examining the actions, behaviours, diplomatic conduct and self-representation of Ethiopia's ruling elite towards both their late medieval European contemporaries and their populace we also gain rare insight into the workings of a powerful pre-colonial African kingdom encountering the larger world on its own terms. Late medieval Solomonic outreach towards Europe was largely the result of aesthetic and dynastic, and not territorial or militaristic, acquisitiveness. This, at the very least, radically reframes prevalent ideas about pre-modern African agency – and challenges conventional historical narratives of African-European encounters on the eve of the so-called 'Age of Exploration'.

STRUCTURE

A close re-reading of the source material from both North-East Africa and Europe on Solomonic diplomacy towards the Latin West lies at the heart of this study. The book is structured along a chronological investigation of the course of Ethiopian diplomatic outreach in the late Middle Ages. Successive chapters chart three distinct phases of Solomonic missions to the Latin West: Chapter Two traces diplomacy's onset during the rule of *aše* Dawit II shortly after the turn of the 15th century. Chapter Three follows the envoys and agents despatched by *aše* Dawit's sons from the 1420s to the

1450s, sent out into an increasingly charged political climate in the Latin Mediterranean. Chapter Four examines how Ethiopian outreach tapered off and began to change by the latter decades of the 15th and early 16th century, when only three missions are traceable within nearly eighty years. Excepting two short examinations of Latin Christian mercantile scouts in the early 1400s and a missionary venture in the 1480s, our focus will remain firmly on the actions and interests of the *nägāšt* and their ambassadors. After all, these African Christian rulers were the ones who first established long-distance diplomacy with Europe, and it was their interests and desires that maintained – or halted – connections in the late Middle Ages.

Finally, Chapter Five reads and interprets Solomonic diplomatic requests against the broader backdrop of Ethiopian history in the North-East African highlands. Looking at local historical and archaeological evidence, it asserts that Solomonic diplomatic outreach was caused by the desire to [8] acquire ecclesiastical objects – primarily ecclesiastical fabrics and liturgical items, but also relics – and foreign manpower such as builders, carpenters, stonemasons, metalworkers and painters, for which there was a heightened demand in a realm concurrently being transformed through monumental building activity. Such interests were not motivated by a sense of Ethiopia’s inferiority vis-à-vis the Latin West. Instead, they were driven by a desire to heighten the Solomonic rulers’ local prestige by acquiring rare, foreign and even ‘exotic’ objects and labour from a distant Christian sphere, as their biblical ancestor had done – and thus impress their claims of political and religious supremacy upon their North-East African subjects.

¹ Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb Al-Sulūk Li-Ma’rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyāda and Sa’īd ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ ‘Āšūr, vol. 4.2 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1939), 797.

² Compare Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb Al-Sulūk Li-Ma’rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, 4.2:795–97, Yūsuf Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhira Fī Mulūk Miṣr Wa l-Qāhira*, ed. M.A. Hātīm, vol. 14 (Cairo: Dār al-kutub, 1963), 324–25 and Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-Ghumr Bi-Anbā’ al-‘Umr*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashi, vol. 3 (Cairo, 1971), 426–27. This material was first discovered and examined by Julien Loiseau, who graciously provided me with early insight into his research. His article on the subject is forthcoming: Julien Loiseau, ‘The Negus Merchant. Fortunes and Misfortunes of an Overseas Trader in 15th-Century Cairo’, in *An African Metropolis. Cairo and Its African Hinterland in the Middle Ages*, ed. Julien Loiseau (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

³ Compare the accounts of al-Maqrīzī and his pupil, Ibn Taghrī Birdī, Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb Al-Sulūk Li-Ma’rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, 4.2:795–97, Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhira Fī Mulūk Miṣr Wa l-Qāhira*, 14:324–25. This claim is AAM Version of Chapter 1, Introduction, of “Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy” by Verena Krebs, published with Palgrave MacMillan, March 2021. © Verena Krebs 2021.

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refuted and revealed as an act of calumny in Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-Ghumr Bi-Anbāʾ al-ʿUmr*, 3:426–27; also see the detailed examination of this episode in Chapter Three.

⁴ Stuart Munro-Hay, *Aksum: An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991); Stuart Munro-Hay, 'Aksum: History of the Town and Empire', in *EAE* 1 (2003), 173–79. Since the conversion of the Aksumite kings in the first half of the 4th 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 central highland plateau in the vicinity of the eponymous city of Aksum, its geographical and political centre shifted southwards during the rule of Zagʷe Dynasty (11th–13th centuries) and again under the Solomonic Dynasty (from 1270 onwards). For the Zagʷe, see Gianfranco Fiaccadori, 'Zagʷe', in *EAE* 5 (2014), 107–14; Marie-Laure Derat, *L'énigme d'une Dynastie Sainte et Usurpatrice Dans Le Royaume Chrétien d'Éthiopie Du XIe Au XIIIe Siècle* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018); Marie-Laure Derat, 'Before the Solomonids: Crisis, Renaissance and the Emergence of the Zagʷe Dynasty (Seventh–Thirteenth Centuries)', in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, ed. Samantha Kelly (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 31–56. For an overview and extensive bibliography on the Solomonic dynasty, see Steven Kaplan, 'Solomonic Dynasty', in *EAE* 4 (2010), 688–90; 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 the structure of the Ethiopian Church and its metropolitan, an Egyptian monk appointed by the Patriarch of Alexandria, see Denis Nosnitsin, 'Abunä', in *EAE* 1 (2003), 56; Getatchew Haile, 'Ethiopian Orthodox (Tāwahédo) Church', in *EAE* 2 (2005), 414–21.

⁵ On the Solomonic expansion of the 14th–16th century, see Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Marie-Laure Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens, 1270–1527: Espace, Pouvoir et Monarchisme* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003); Deresse Ayenachew, 'Territorial Expansion and Administrative Evolution under the "Solomonic" Dynasty', in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, ed. Samantha Kelly (Leiden: Brill, 2020). The expansion of the realm under aṣe ʾAmdä Şəyon in the 1330s is described in Manfred Kropp, *Der Siegreiche Feldzug Des Königs ʾĀmda-Şeyon Gegen Die Muslime in Adal Im Jahre 1332 n. Chr.* (Leuven: Peeters, 1994); G.W.B. Huntingford, *The Glorious Victories of Amda Seyon, King of Ethiopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁶ Chronicles of Solomonic rulers of the 14th to 16th centuries make clear that the *nägāšt* at least claimed to rule supreme over most of the central highlands, reaching from the governorship of the *baḥar nāgaš* in the Eritrean coastal region to the Sultanate of Hadiyya and even beyond the river Awaš, some 100 miles south of modern-day Addis Ababa; compare Jules Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zarʾa Yâʿeqôb et de Baʿeda Mâryâm, Rois d'Éthiopie de 1434 à 1478* (Paris: É. Bouillon, 1893); Jules Perruchon, 'Histoire d'Eskender, d'ʾAmda Seyon II et de Nâʾod, Rois d'Éthiopie', *Journal Asiatique* 9, no. 3 (1894): 319–66; Franz Amadeus Dombrowski, *Tānāsee 106: Eine Chronik Der Herrscher Äthiopiens* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1983); Manfred Kropp, *Die Geschichte Des Lebna-Dengel, Claudius Und Minas* (Leuven: Peeters, 1988); Kropp, *Der Siegreiche Feldzug Des Königs ʾĀmda-Şeyon Gegen Die Muslime in Adal Im Jahre 1332 n. Chr.* as well as Huntingford, *The Historical Geography of Ethiopia From the First Century AD to 1704*; Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: From the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000). For a general introduction on the heterogeneous make-up of the region, including its Muslim principalities and lands ruled by adherents to local religions, see Samantha Kelly, ed., *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

⁷ Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1.

⁸ The literature on late medieval Ethiopian contacts is vast: compare e.g. Renato Lefèvre, 'Riflessi Etiopici Nella Cultura Europea Del Medioevo e Del Rinascimento', *Annali Lateranensi* 8 (1944): 9–90; Renato Lefèvre, 'Riflessi Etiopici Nella Cultura Europea Del Medioevo e Del Rinascimento - Parte Seconda', *Annali Lateranensi* 9 (1945): 331–444; Renato Lefèvre, 'Documenti Pontifici Sui Rapporti Con L'Etiochia Nei Secoli XV e XVI', *Rassegna Di Studi Etiopici* 5 (1946): 17–41; Renato Lefèvre, 'Presenze Etiopiche in Italia Prima Del Concilio Di Firenze Del 1439', *Rassegna Di Studi Etiopici* 23 (1967): 5–26; Renato Lefèvre, 'I Rapporti Culturali Tra L'Italia e L'Etiochia', *Africa: Rivista Trimestrale Di Studi e Documentazione Dell'Istituto Italiano per L'Africa e L'Oriente* 28, no. 4 (1973): 583–86; Stuart Munro-Hay, *Ethiopia Unveiled: Interaction Between Two Worlds* (Hollywood: Tsehail, 2006); Matteo Salvatore, 'The Ethiopian Age of Exploration: Prester John's Discovery of Europe, 1306–1458', *Journal of World History* 21, no. 4 (2010): 593–627; Andrew 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, no. 3 (2013): 297–320; Benjamin Weber, 'Gli Etiopi a Roma Nel Quattrocento: Ambasciatori Politici, Negoziatori Religiosi o Pellegrini?', *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome - Moyen Âge* 125, no. 1 (2013); Benjamin Weber, 'An Incomplete AAM Version of Chapter 1, Introduction, of "Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy" by Verena Krebs, published with Palgrave MacMillan, March 2021. © Verena Krebs 2021.

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⁹ The diplomatic interest in craftsmen – read very differently from the way this book interprets them – is also noted in e.g. Francesco Cerone, 'La Politica Orientale Di Alfonso Di Aragona'; Lefèvre, 'Presenze Etiopiche in Italia Prima Del Concilio Di Firenze Del 1439'; Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527*, 258–65; Charles Fraser Beckingham, 'European Sources for Ethiopian History before 1634', *Paideuma* 33 (1987): 167–178; Marilyn E. Heldman, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Šeyon: A Study of Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994), 143; Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 26–28; Paul B Henze, *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 70; Claire Bosc-Tiessé et al., *Se'el. Spirit and Materials of Ethiopian Icons* (Addis Ababa: Centre français des études éthiopiennes, 2010); Salvatore, 'The Ethiopian Age of Exploration: Prester John's Discovery of Europe, 1306-1458'; Kurt, 'The Search for Prester John, a Projected Crusade and the Eroding Prestige of Ethiopian Kings, c.1200–c.1540'; Salvatore, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402-1555*; Adam Knobler, *Mythology and Diplomacy in the Age of Exploration* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 37–42; Salvatore, 'Encounters Between Ethiopia and Europe, 1400–1660'; Claire Bosc-Tiessé, 'Christian Visual Culture in Medieval Ethiopia: Overview, Trends and Issues', in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, ed. Samantha Kelly (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 322–364:363; Samantha Kelly, 'Introduction', in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, ed. Samantha Kelly (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 1–30:22. A clear diplomatic interest in relics is noted in Osvaldo Raineri, 'I Doni Della Serenissima al Re Davide I d'Etiopia (Ms Raineri 43 Della Vaticana)', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 65 (1999): 363–448; Lowe, '"Representing" Africa: Ambassadors and Princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402-1608', 102, 109; Osvaldo Raineri, 'Abba Kirākos: Omelie Etiopiche Sulla Croce (Ms. Raineri 43, Della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana)', in *La Croce. Iconografia e Interpretazione (Secoli I–Inizio XVI). Atti Del Convegno Internazionale Di Studi (Napoli, 6–11 Dicembre 1999)*, ed. Boris Ulianich (Napoli: Elio de Rosa editore, 2007), 207–230; Weber, 'Gli Etiopi a Roma Nel Quattrocento: Ambasciatori Politici, Negoziatori Religiosi o Pellegrini?', para. 10; Salvatore, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402-1555*, 26.

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¹⁰ See e.g. Renato Lefèvre, 'La Leggenda Medievale Del Prete Gianni e l'Etiopia', *L'Africa Italiana* 53 (1936): 201–55; Lefèvre, 'G.B. Brocchi Da Imola Diplomatico Pontificio e Viaggiatore in Etiopia Nel '400'; Lefèvre, 'Su Un Codice Etiopico Della "Vaticana"'; Lefèvre, 'Cronaca Inedita Di Un'ambasciata Etiopica a Sisto IV'; Renato Lefèvre, 'Roma E La Comunità Etiopica Di Cipro Nei Secoli XV e XVI', *Rassegna Di Studi Etiopici* 1, no. 1 (1941): 71–86; Lefèvre, 'Riflessi Etiopici Nella Cultura Europea Del Medioevo e Del Rinascimento'; Lefèvre, 'Riflessi Etiopici Nella Cultura Europea Del Medioevo e Del Rinascimento - Parte Seconda'; Lefèvre, 'Documenti Pontifici Sui Rapporti Con L'Etiopia Nei Secoli XV e XVI'; Lefèvre, 'Documenti Pontifici Sui Rapporti Con L'Etiopia Nei Secoli XV e XVI'; Lefèvre, 'Ricerca Sull'imolese G.B. De Brocchi, Viaggiatore in Etiopia e Curiale Pontificio'; Lefèvre, 'Note Su Alcuni Pellegrini Etiopi in Roma al Tempo Di Leone X'; Renato Lefèvre, 'L'Etiopia Nella Stampa Del Primo Cinquecento', *Africa: Rivista Trimestrale Di Studi e Documentazione Dell'Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 20, no. 4 (1965): 345–69; Lefèvre, 'Presenze Etiopiche in Italia Prima Del Concilio Di Firenze Del 1439'.

¹¹ Cf. Lefèvre, 'Riflessi Etiopici Nella Cultura Europea Del Medioevo e Del Rinascimento - Parte Seconda', 380–83.

¹² Cf. Lefèvre, 'Presenze Etiopiche in Italia Prima Del Concilio Di Firenze Del 1439', 13–14.

¹³ Also remarked upon in Benjamin Weber and Robin Seignobos, 'L'Occident, La Croisade et l'Éthiopie: Introduction', *Annales d'Éthiopie* 27 (2012): 15–20:15. For examples of colonialist attitudes in Italian scholarly writing of the time on Ethiopia, e.g. cf. Enrico Cerulli, 'L'Etiopia Del Secolo XV in Nouvi Documenti Storici Con 12 Illustrazioni', *Africa Italiana. Rivista Di Storia e d'Arte a Cura Del Ministero Delle Colonie* 5, no. 1–2 (1933): 107–12; Ugo Monneret de Villard, 'Miniatura Veneto-Cretese in Un Codice Etiopico', *La Bibliofilia* 47 (1945): 13. Several of the 'greats' of Ethiopian Studies had not been unconnected to the fascist *Africa Orientale Italiana*, see Giampaolo Calchi Novati, 'Africa Orientale Italiana', in *EAE* 1 (2003), 129–34. Lefèvre's sympathetic views in the early stages of his career become clear e.g. in Renato Lefèvre, *Terra Nostra d'Africa (1932-35)* (Milan: Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 1942).

¹⁴ Compare e.g. Munro-Hay, *Ethiopia Unveiled: Interaction Between Two Worlds*; Kurt, 'The Search for Prester John, a Projected Crusade and the Eroding Prestige of Ethiopian Kings, c.1200–c.1540'; Matteo Salvatore, 'Gaining the Heart of Prester John: Loyola's Blueprint for Ethiopia in Three Key Documents', *World History Connected* 3, no. 10 (2013); Weber, 'An Incomplete Integration into the Orbis Christianus. Relations and Misunderstandings between the Papacy and Ethiopia (1237–1456)'; Knobler, *Mythology and Diplomacy in the Age of Exploration*, chap. 3; Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, 'Travel and Exploration in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa', in *Ethiopia. History, Culture and Challenges*, eds. Siegbert Uhlig et al. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017), 307–11.

¹⁵ Compare e.g. Lefèvre, 'Riflessi Etiopici Nella Cultura Europea Del Medioevo e Del Rinascimento'; Lefèvre, 'Riflessi Etiopici Nella Cultura Europea Del Medioevo e Del Rinascimento - Parte Seconda'.

¹⁶ To this day, the term Prester John appears – largely unironic – in works concerned with late medieval Ethiopian history, perpetuating the application of an entirely exogenous stereotype on this African realm, cf. Salvatore, 'The Ethiopian Age of Exploration: Prester John's Discovery of Europe, 1306-1458'; Cates Baldrige, *Prisoners of Prester John: The Portuguese Mission to Ethiopia in Search of the Mythical King, 1520-1526* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2012); Salvatore, 'Gaining the Heart of Prester John: Loyola's Blueprint for Ethiopia in Three Key Documents'; Salvatore, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402-1555*. The origins of this formidable yet wholly fictitious Christian ruler of extraordinary military power – a staunch opponent of Islam said to be governing justly over a paradisiac realm of seemingly boundless riches somewhere beyond the Muslim world – may be traced to European sources of the late 12th century. By the late 14th century, and thus prior to the arrival of the first Solomonic mission to the Latin West, European Christians had begun conflating the Christian kingdom of the *nāgāst* with the realm of Prester John. Expectations and 'knowledge' on the priest-king frequently coloured how Solomonic missions and Christian Ethiopia more generally were understood by European contemporaries, and how they came down to us in the historical record. For the myth of Prester John and its many iterations and elaborations, see Keagan Brewer, ed., *Prester John: The Legend and Its Sources* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015). For its development and impact on medieval European society, see e.g. Robert Silverberg, 'The Realm of Prester John' (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972); Knobler, *Mythology and Diplomacy in the Age of Exploration*. On the geographical movement 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. For its African context and a bibliography on the myth's application to Christian Ethiopia, see Francesc Relaño, *The Shaping of Africa. Cosmographic Discourse and Cartographic Science in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Gianfranco Fiaccadori, 'Prester John', in *EAE* 4 (2010), 209–16; Franco Cardini, 'La Crociata e Il AAM Version of Chapter 1, Introduction, of "Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy" by Verena Krebs, published with Palgrave MacMillan, March 2021. © Verena Krebs 2021.

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¹⁷ A 1306 ‘Ethiopian’ embassy appears e.g. in Lefèvre, ‘Presenze Etiopiche in Italia Prima Del Concilio Di Firenze Del 1439’, 7–9; Silverberg, ‘The Realm of Prester John’, 164–65; Charles Fraser Beckingham and Edward Ullendorff, *The Hebrew Letters of Prester John* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 8–9; Charles Fraser Beckingham, ‘An Ethiopian Embassy to Europe c. 1310’, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 43, no. 2 (1998): 337–46; Munro-Hay, *Ethiopia Unveiled: Interaction Between Two Worlds*, 89–90; Lowe, “‘Representing’ Africa: Ambassadors and Princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402-1608”, 108; Gianfranco Fiaccadori, ‘L’Etiopia, Venezia e l’Europa’, in *Nigra Sum Sed Formosa. Sacro e Bellezza Dell’Etiopia Cristiana. Ca’ Foscari Esposizioni 13 Marzo–10 Maggio 2009*, eds. Giuseppe Barbieri and Gianfranco Fiaccadori (Vincenza: Terra ferma, 2009), 29; Wolbert Smidt, ‘Spain, Relations With’, in *E Ae* 4 (2010), 717–19; Baldrige, *Prisoners of Prester John: The Portuguese Mission to Ethiopia in Search of the Mythical King, 1520-1526*, 22; Kurt, ‘The Search for Prester John, a Projected Crusade and the Eroding Prestige of Ethiopian Kings, c.1200–c.1540’, 311, 314; Salvatore, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402-1555*, 203–4; Salvatore, ‘Encounters Between Ethiopia and Europe, 1400–1660’, paras 11, 27. Recent research has questioned the existence of such a mission as based on one Latin Christian source, see Verena Krebs, ‘Re-Examining Foresti’s Supplementum Chronicarum and the “Ethiopian” Embassy to Europe of 1306’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 82, no. 3 (2019): 493–515; it has also drawn attention to a recently discovered text that opens up new questions on the episode, compare Alessandro Bausi and Paolo Chiesa, ‘The Ystoria Ethyopie in the Cronica Universalis of Galvaneus de La Flamma (d. c.1345)’, *Aethiopica* 22 (2019): 1–51.

¹⁸ These narratives are examined in great detail at the beginning of Chapter Five.

¹⁹ Kelly, ‘Introduction’, 21. For the early 16th century, letters have been preserved in Gə‘əz as well as Portuguese and Latin, with some interesting discrepancies in the translations, compare Chapter Four.

²⁰ See e.g. Alessandro Bausi, ‘Writing, Copying, Translating: Ethiopia as a Manuscript Culture’, in *Manuscript Cultures: Mapping the Field*, eds. Jörg Quenzer, Dmitry Bondarev, and Jan-Ulrich Sobisch (Berlin - New York: De Gruyter, 2014), 37–77; Alessandro Bausi, ‘Ethiopia and the Christian Ecumene: Cultural Transmission, Translation, and Reception’, in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, ed. Samantha Kelly (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 217–51; Antonella Brita, ‘Genres of Ethiopian-Eritrean Christian Literature with a Focus on Hagiography’, in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, ed. Samantha Kelly (Leiden: Brill, 2020) for an introduction.

²¹ Compare Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens, 1270-1527: Espace, Pouvoir et Monarchisme*, chaps 6–7.

²² The first Gə‘əz redaction of the *Kəbrä nägäšt*, whose title might also be translated as the ‘Nobility of Kings’, dates to the first quarter of the 14th century. The text’s author proclaims it to be a translation of a much older text in a colophon; see Paolo Marrassini, ‘Kəbrä nägäšt’, in *E Ae* 3 (2007), 364–68 for a textual history and bibliography.

²³ Compare 2 Chronicles 2 and 1 Kings 7.