



King Solomon's Heirs

So now send me an artisan skilled to work in gold, silver, bronze, and iron, and in purple, crimson, and blue fabrics, trained also in engraving, to join the skilled workers who are with me in Judah and Jerusalem, whom my father David provided.

—King Solomon of Israel to King Hiram I of Tyre, 2 Chronicles 2, 7

TECHNOLOGISTS, ARMS, AND ALLIANCES? DISMANTLING A SCHOLARSHIP NARRATIVE

In 1967, the influential Italian scholar Renato Lefèvre stated the following: *aṣe* Dawit's 1402 mission to Venice, and hence the very first Solomonic Ethiopian embassy to the Latin West, was caused by a desire to obtain 'masters of art and industry that could raise the civil and technical level of the Ethiopian state, and therefore strengthen its military efficiency'.¹ He explicitly tied this initial act of diplomatic outreach to *aṣe* Dawit's local fight against Muslim neighbours and tributaries in the Horn of Africa.²

Lefèvre's assertion—that the *näggäšt* insistently sought to acquire *artigiani e tecnici* and hence 'craftsmen and technologists' to modernise the North-East African highland realm and its army—has had a formative influence on how Ethiopianist research has read early contacts between Ethiopia and Europe. For decades, scholars have propagated a narrative based on his hypotheses: Solomonic missions to Europe were regarded as

primarily caused by the desire to obtain craftsmen-technologists. This desire was itself connected to a purported practical need for ‘European’ technology and arms.³ In recent literature, these ostensible demands have also been tied to a purported Solomonic desire for military alliances with the Christian powers of the Western Mediterranean to fight a presumed common enemy—the Islamic powers of the Eastern Mediterranean.⁴

In his ground-breaking work on medieval Solomonic history of 1972, the Ethiopian historian Tadesse Tamrat stated that ‘more than anything else, the purpose of the delegations sent out to Europe was to ask for more artisans and military experts’.⁵ Following Lefèvre’s interpretation, he, too, read the Ethiopian demand for artisans and craftsmen we have encountered time and again in this book as a demand for technologists. ‘The Ethiopians had always been impressed by the political and military aspects of an all-over Christian solidarity against the Muslim powers of the Near East’, Tadesse declared; he suggested that the *nägästä* recognised the ‘advantages of sharing in the superior technical advancement of European nations’.⁶ In short, *aṣe* Dawit, *aṣe* Yəṣṣḥaq and *aṣe* Zär’a Ya‘əqob had sent their embassies ‘to Europe asking for technical aid’.⁷

In the late 1980s, Charles F. Beckingham similarly put forth that the ‘Ethiopians hoped for weapons and military assistance’ from Europe from the very beginning.⁸ Beckingham furthermore speculated that Europeans present in Solomonic Ethiopia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were likely ‘engaged in selling weapons’.⁹ In 1994, Harold G. Marcus echoed these sentiments: *aṣe* Zär’a Ya‘əqob’s 1450 mission to Aragon and the papacy had been an attempt to ‘breach the Muslim encirclement’ and end Ethiopia’s supposed isolation, with the *nəgus* seeking ‘technical assistance, which the West was willing to provide if travel was made safe’.¹⁰ That same year, Marilyn E. Heldman spoke of a strong Solomonic ‘hope for military assistance’ from Europe, seeing that the Ethiopians were ‘powerless’ in the face of ‘Mamluk restrictions’.¹¹ In 2000, Paul B. Henze admitted that it was difficult to ‘gain anything approaching a complete picture of Ethiopian contacts with Europe in the late medieval period’; yet he, too, stated that *aṣe* Dawit and *aṣe* Yəṣṣḥaq ‘had sent to Europe for technicians’.¹² The 2005 *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* entry on relations between Ethiopia and Europe established that Ethiopia increasingly viewed Europe ‘as a potentially important source of firearms and warriors’.¹³ Similar assertions have also been championed in several recent publications dedicated explicitly to the study of Ethiopian-European diplomatic exchanges in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.¹⁴

As the first three chapters of this book have shown, there is very little source evidence to support such claims. While Ethiopian rulers eventually both agreed to military alliances first proposed by a Latin court and ultimately did ask for military technologists such as gunsmiths and even weapons, they did so only well into the sixteenth century—more than 100 years after the first Ethiopian missions had been sent out.¹⁵ But: our source evidence does not support the hypothesis that military technology, alliances and arms had prompted Solomonic diplomatic outreach to Europe in the very early 1400s, and maintained it for more than a century.

Instead, it is well-established that Ethiopian rulers had their martial demands sufficiently met elsewhere. In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, weapon-smiths, as well as horses and arms, were obtained mainly from Egypt and the Levant. As we have seen in Chap. 3, Arabic sources specify that *aše* Yəṣḥaq's ambassador al-Tabrīzī was executed explicitly for his history of exporting arms and horses from Mamlūk Egypt to Ethiopia in the 1420s.¹⁶ The Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī also noted that *aše* Yəṣḥaq had recruited at least one Circassian Mamlūk master armourer from the Sultanate, who subsequently produced weapons and armour such as swords, spears and breastplates for the Ethiopian court.¹⁷ Over 100 years later, the *nägāšt* are still attested as importing mail, helmets, swords and spearheads from Egypt and the Levant.¹⁸

An extensive body of sources and research likewise demonstrates that Ethiopian rulers were hardly the ones intimidated or even endangered by their Muslim neighbours at this time. In the first half of the fourteenth century, *aše* ʿAmdä Ṣəyon had forcefully expanded the Christian realm, violently annexing and incorporating several non-Christian territories under Solomonic rule.¹⁹ His successors successfully consolidated the realm and continued his expansionist policies until the early sixteenth century.²⁰ In the 1380s and 1440s, respectively, both *aše* Dawit and *aše* Zār'a Ya'əqob explicitly styled themselves as protectors of Christian minorities in Egypt and actively threatened the Mamlūk Sultanate.²¹ Until the sudden, cataclysmic conquest of the Christian highlands by ʿAdali troops under the leadership of *Imām* Aḥmad in 1530–1531, Solomonic Ethiopian sovereignty was hardly under threat from either the Mamlūks or local Muslim principalities in the late medieval Horn of Africa. Instead, the *nägāšt* were the ones aggressively asserting their power over their non-Christian subjects and neighbours from the time of *aše* ʿAmdä Ṣəyon to the late 1520s.²²

It must moreover be stressed: while Ethiopian Christian rule in the North-East African highlands flourished in this period, European

Christianity found itself increasingly under threat. Diplomatic sources time and again show that Latin potentates explicitly hoped for military alliances and armed support from the *nägäšt* throughout the late Middle Ages. Even before the first Solomonic mission of 1402, ecclesiastical and princely Latin Christian courts projected hopes for a shared crusade onto the Christian Horn of Africa.²³ Stories about Solomonic successes in warfare and rumours about humiliations of the Mamlüks were excitedly traded from the Eastern Mediterranean to Western Europe.²⁴ In the mid-fifteenth century, Alfonso V of Aragon repeatedly expressed his interest in Ethiopian military aid.²⁵ At several occasions, the papacy enquired about Ethiopian willingness to participate in a military alliance.²⁶ Pope Sixtus IV is attested as gifting ‘the sword that was used on the night of the Nativity’ to the Ethiopian ambassador in 1481—thus sending an object all but imbued with crusading intentions to the Solomonic *nəgus*.²⁷

The established scholarly view as delineated above is therefore divorced from both available source evidence and local Ethiopian historical context. It appears, instead, based on an underlying Eurocentric narrative of Latin Christian artistic and technological superiority, rooted in the colonialist history of the field—from which certain beliefs have trickled down to the present day.²⁸ Within 50 years, scholarship has seen Lefevre’s original claim solidify into a view in which consecutive *nägäšt* appear as solely looking for technologists to ‘develop’ the Christian highland realm and especially its military, hoping to acquire arms—and even guns—as well as desiring to enter into alliances against an indistinct Muslim threat. Rarely have researchers neutrally noted the Ethiopian interest in craftsmen and artisans without subsuming it under a broader effort to acquire technology.²⁹ Few have openly expressed doubts about a Solomonic interest in arms, military expertise or crusading in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.³⁰

Why then did *äse* Dawit and his descendants dispatch their ambassadors, with initially as many as three missions sent forth in a handful of years? As the sociologist Per Otnes once posited, ‘contact is never pure’ but ‘always about something’.³¹ So if not to seek military technologists, arms and alliances—why *did* Ethiopian rulers dispatch at least a dozen embassies to different princely and ecclesiastical courts in Latin Europe between 1400 and 1526, the vast majority of them within the first 50 years of contacts? What, to phrase it with Otnes, was that all about?

Scholarship has thus far failed to provide a satisfying answer to this question. And yet, there is a wealth of circumstantial and even some direct evidence on Ethiopian interests found in the sources relating to these

diplomatic exchanges. These interests, meanwhile, fit rather well within the local history of Solomonic Ethiopia in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This chapter proposes the following hypothesis: instead of seeking assistance from an allegedly technologically superior Europe to aid Solomonic warfare, the *nägäšt* sent out their missions to acquire religious treasures and construction-related manpower. Both were expedient to their political agenda of building and endowing monumental churches and monasteries in the Ethiopian highlands. Late medieval Solomonic rulers staked their claim of universal Christian kingship and might onto their dominion in the Horn of Africa through prestigious royal foundations. Acquiring foreign artisans and ecclesiastical wares from faraway places for centres intimately tied to Solomonic power would have necessarily increased their local prestige. Crucially, it also would have mirrored the actions of the biblical king Solomon himself, repeatedly described in Scripture as sending an envoy to a foreign king to obtain both precious wares and a master craftsman for the first Temple in Jerusalem.³² For a dynasty understanding itself as the spiritual and genealogical successors of the Israelite kingdom through Solomon's son, Mənilək I, with the Queen of Sheba, such a parallel appears too striking to be solely coincidental. In order to make this case, however, we first need to look back on the history of the rise of this eponymous dynasty within Ethiopia.

A CHRISTIAN ETHIOPIAN EMPIRE? THE REALM OF THE 'BUILDER KINGS'³³

From the adoption of Christianity in the second quarter of the fourth century, the town of Aksum and the Təgrayan hinterland were home to a Christian principality in the Horn of Africa.³⁴ Even after the decline of Aksumite rule in the seventh century, these northern regions of the central Ethiopian highland plateau retained their religious importance. Aksum was the site of the oldest and most important church in the Horn of Africa, and numerous monastic centres had long been established in its environs.³⁵ Over the following centuries, however, the Christian successors to the Aksumite kingdom gradually moved the political centres of their realms southwards.³⁶ Lasta, the region in which the world-famous rock-hewn churches of Lalibäla are located, formed the political heartland of the kingdom ruled by the Zag'we dynasty in the eleventh to thirteenth century.³⁷

When the first Solomonic *nəgus*, *aṣe* Yəkunno Amlak, came to power in 1270, the area most central to the realm of his successors—the regions of Amhara and Šäwa—again constituted a southern and peripheral part of Zag^we territory.³⁸ Parts of what would later become Christian Šäwa even remained home to an eponymous Muslim principality, the Sultanate of Šawah, until the late thirteenth century.³⁹ Over the following two centuries, Solomonic sovereigns established both Amhara and Šäwa as the political and religious heartland regions of their realm, which they ruled from a largely itinerant court.⁴⁰

From the substantial expansion of Solomonic territory under the rule of *aṣe* ‘Amdä Šəyon in the first half of the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, the *nägäšt* gradually seized new regions from non-Christian entities and submitted them to their authority.⁴¹ The timeframe under consideration here—ca. 1400 to the late 1520s—is often considered a golden age of Solomonic sovereignty in the Horn of Africa. The territory Ethiopian Christian rulers claimed as their dominion stretched nearly 700 miles in length and several hundred miles in breadth, extending from the Eritrean coastal regions to the south of Lake Z^way, and from Lake Ṭana to Ifat (compare Map 1). At the very least, the late medieval *nägäšt* portrayed themselves as ruling supreme over numerous regional governors and kings as well as several tributaries adhering to other religions.⁴² In another context, and if that word were not so heavily loaded, one might call their dominion an empire.⁴³

Monasticism and Solomonic Rule

From the extension of Solomonic rule under *aṣe* ‘Amdä Šəyon over most of the central highlands, and the de facto annexation of non-Christian tributaries in the 1330s, the Christian faith of the dynasty and their assertion of literal descent from the biblical king Solomon became one of the defining elements of Solomonic rule.⁴⁴ The monastic tradition in Ethiopia dates back to late antiquity and had long stressed self-renunciation and proximity to nature. In a landmark study, historian Marie-Laure Derat explored in detail how claims over geography, the assertion of royal power and monasticism were entwined in Ethiopia in the late Middle Ages.⁴⁵ The local North-East African highland terrain—with soaring mountain-topped plateaus emerging out of a base altitude often upwards of 7000 feet, cut by deep gorges carved by riverbeds—lent itself exceptionally well to this

purpose. For centuries, monks acted as guardians of the Christian frontiers of the realm and lived close to—or even among—non-Christian groups, which they gradually Christianised, sometimes at royal directive.⁴⁶

Beyond arduous and costly open warfare, cultivating close relations with monasteries already established in Amhara and Šäwa provided an additional strategy for Solomonic rulers to retain and even obtain additional geographical control in a realm where linear distance often held little meaning.⁴⁷ Here, the *nägüst* could partner with existing monastic houses, primarily those of Däbrä Ḥayq Ḥṣṭifanos and Däbrä ʿAsbo, which was renamed Däbrä Libanos in the mid-fifteenth century.⁴⁸ They could also build up networks of their own.⁴⁹ Through endowment of land—often in the form of *gʷalt*, which was land granted by a ruler in exchange for service and support, somewhat equivalent to a fief—Ethiopian rulers were able to both support and employ monastic networks in their favour. *Gʷalt* holdings permitted monks to collect the taxes generally due to the *naguś*, and to benefit from the land's products, feed the community, acquire and manufacture ecclesiastical wares.⁵⁰ In comparison to the other form of land right existent in medieval Ethiopia—*rəst*, which was heritable and inalienable land—*gʷalt*-holdings necessitated continued amicable relations between a monastic community and the sovereign rulership.⁵¹

The arrangement was not without reciprocity: religious leaders played an active role in the political life of the Solomonic realm. The third-highest court office—the *ʿaqqabe säʿat* or 'keeper of the hours'—was, for instance, traditionally held by the abbot of the famed monastery of Däbrä Ḥayq Ḥṣṭifanos by the fifteenth century.⁵² He acted as a close advisor to the *naguś* and could even be part of the regency council of a ruler who was still a minor. Several chronicles stress the importance of the *ʿaqqabe säʿat* at the itinerant royal court.⁵³ Meanwhile, the abbot of the equally important monastery of Däbrä Libanos served as the *əččäge*, the overall head of Ethiopian monasticism and highest autochthonous cleric in the land after the Egyptian metropolitan.⁵⁴

The development of the arrangement between existing monastic communities and Solomonic power was gradual, complex and not without conflict over the centuries.⁵⁵ Even in times of conflict, however, the evangelising efforts undertaken by the monks naturally benefitted the *nägüst*. Throughout the realm, monastic communities provided not just bases for evangelisation, but also social and economic infrastructure. They were sites of education, artistic and ecclesiastic production, administration and even law.⁵⁶

Royal Foundations Proclaiming a Christian Dominion

Given the structure of the Ethiopian realm, it only made sense to expand the monastic networks directly. From the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth century, Solomonic rulers built prestigious new churches and monasteries that remained under their patronage as a way to control their domain and anchor their power. In 2003, Marie-Laure Derat first highlighted how Ethiopian rulers, and to a lesser extent royal women, founded at least 34 royal churches and monasteries between 1270 and 1559.⁵⁷

The overwhelming majority, more than 30, were built from the turn of the fifteenth to the early sixteenth century: *aše* Dawit built one, *aše* Yəṣṣḥaq founded three, his brother *aše* Tāklä Maryam one and *aše* Zär'a Ya'əqob a stunning total of nine royal churches and monasteries. In the second half of the fifteenth century, *aše* Bā'ədä Maryam, *aše* Āskändər and *aše* Ləbnä Dəngəl each founded four such religious centres. When child-kings were increasingly put on the throne and women were involved in governing the country in the latter part of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, royal women also established an additional five churches and monasteries.⁵⁸ Each foundation added to an existing group of monuments, expanding and extending the royal domain both within and—crucially—also beyond the core Solomonic regions of the central highland plateau.

The location of these royal monastic centres was no coincidence: a remarkable number were built in areas where both Solomonic rulership and Christianity were comparatively new.⁵⁹ In the 1420s, *aše* Yəṣṣḥaq had founded his eponymous church of Yəṣṣḥaq Däbr north of Gondär, in an area infringing on the realm of the Betä Īsra'el—the Ethiopian Jews, against which both he and his father had enacted violent campaigns. *Aše* Zär'a Ya'əqob and his great-grandson *aše* Ləbnä Dəngəl marked Solomonic Christian sovereignty over formerly Muslim lands such as Fäṭāgar, Däwaro and Ifat with religious monuments in these territories, sometimes in open provocation to their Muslim tributaries.⁶⁰ Both also established royal centres beyond the river Awaš, some 150 miles south of modern-day Addis Ababa.⁶¹ Even within the heartlands of Amhara and Šäwa, where the majority of foundations were located and each ruler of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries established at the very least one monastery, this practice of assertion of Solomonic power through building Christian shrines appears to have been applied. Mänz, a remote, especially high-altitude part of Šäwa, is a good example for this development. Bounded by a mountain range and cross-cut by steep river gorges, it was theoretically

located close to the Solomonic heartlands.⁶² Local Christianity was a very recent development in this part of Šäwa; its previous rulers had fought on the side of the Sultanate of Ifat against *aše* ʿAmdä Şəyon in the fourteenth century.⁶³ Yet, 100 years later, this district had one of the highest densities of churches and monasteries in the country. *Aše* Zär'a Ya'əqob established a royal church and monastery there; his son *aše* Bä'əda Maryam built a church, selected it as his place of residence and even decided to be crowned there in the second half of the fifteenth century.⁶⁴

Branching out from their territorial anchorage in Amhara and Šäwa, the *nägäšt* thus established tangible and well-connected regional royal centres propagating their religion and claim to power all over the central highland domain.⁶⁵ While many foundations were affiliated with existing ecclesiastical communities, all were born of the will of the ruler and remained independently staffed bases of operation for the itinerant court.⁶⁶ They were material testament to the *nägäšt*'s supreme political control over their dominion, and a physical assertion of each sovereign's rightful and just Christian rulership.⁶⁷ Here, expansionist policy, royal ideology, proselytising monasticism, public assembly and pilgrimage intersected at sites often intended to house the bones of the rulers.⁶⁸ In the fifteenth century, royal churches and monasteries could take on the function of short-term capitals or host religious councils.⁶⁹ Throughout, they served as permanent, representative embodiments of Solomonic sovereignty.

Which raises the question: rather than weapons or military support—wouldn't *aše* Dawit and his descendants consequently be faced with an increased demand for construction-related craftsmanship? Wouldn't they also have an immense need to acquire prestigious Christian religious material culture to endow these centres of Solomonic might?

Regrettably, none of the *nägäšt*'s foundations as they appeared to Ethiopian contemporaries in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries have survived intact to this day. Royal churches and monasteries became specific targets for the advancing ʿAdali army in the wars of the sixteenth century precisely because of their rich furnishings and close association with Solomonic rulership.⁷⁰ Written sources document the certain destruction of about half of all royal sites by *Imām* Aḥmad's troops in the 1530s.⁷¹

Šihāb al-Dīn, the chronicler of the campaigns of *Imām* Aḥmad, left us a lengthy account of the wars titled the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*—the 'Conquest of Abyssinia'.⁷² He often speaks in wonder of these edifices, but also describes in detail how they were stripped of their possessions, demolished and 'burnt to a cinder'.⁷³ An episode on the conquest of Amhara narrates

how *Imām* Aḥmad sent individual commanders against all of the important churches in the region while the ‘Adali leader himself advanced on the prominent royal foundation of Mākanä Šəllase.⁷⁴ The *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* relates that *Imām* Aḥmad’s troops entered the church, which had been inaugurated only a decade earlier after 25 years of construction, in ‘amazement’. The Muslims specifically took the time to appreciate its fine workmanship—before taking as much booty as possible, setting to work ‘with a thousand axes, ripping out the gold and the precious stones which were in the church’.⁷⁵ Its remains were set on fire.

For all that the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*—as a text very much glorifying *Imām* Aḥmad’s campaign—takes great pains to aggrandise tales of ‘Adali daring plunder, its descriptions seem rooted in historical reality. Gə‘əz sources record similar devastation, and participants of the Portuguese military expedition, which had come to aid the Solomonic army in the 1540s, speak of ‘very large’ churches that ‘had been destroyed by the Moors, and the country wasted’.⁷⁶ These European observers also noted the heavy spoliation of buildings, and that the looting of objects almost exceeded belief.⁷⁷ The few royal edifices that survived somewhat intact saw their stones used in the rebuilding efforts following the wars. Some were rebuilt in a new fashion, but more than a few were altogether abandoned, their precise location forgotten in time.⁷⁸

ETHIOPIAN CHURCHES OF ITALIAN APPEARANCE?

Nearly 90 years ago, Enrico Cerulli concluded a lengthy article on fifteenth-century Ethiopian historical sources with a simple question: did the ruins of the church and monastery of Mārṭulä Maryam, built by *ətege* Əleni at the turn of the sixteenth century, show traces of Italian workmanship?⁷⁹ The Italian philologist and future colonial administrator for the fascist *Africa Orientale Italiana*⁸⁰ stated that his query was inspired by the recent judgement of the ruins by a Frenchman stationed in Addis Abāba. Cerulli had not yet seen the ruins himself; he relied on the record of the diplomat Maurice de Coppet, who asserted in the early 1920s that some of the carved ornaments in the arches, doors and windows of Mārṭulä Maryam undoubtedly belonged to *la Renaissance italienne*—‘the Italian Renaissance’.⁸¹

In his article, Cerulli pointed out that Italian labour at a fifteenth-century Ethiopian religious site was not as improbable as it initially might

seem: Baptista of Imola, the letter-carrier travelling repeatedly between Jerusalem and Ethiopia in the early 1480s whom we encountered in the last chapter, had mentioned the presence of Italians at the Ethiopian court in the second half of the fifteenth century. Baptista had also seen an 'organ made in the Italian style' in an Ethiopian church in late 1481.⁸² The delicate carvings of Märtulä Maryam's remaining stones, meanwhile, suggested 'unusual mastery'—which, to Cerulli writing in 1933, could only be Italian in origin.⁸³ Perhaps, he concluded, foreign and especially Italian workmanship at a church such as Märtulä Maryam might not even have been unique: two other fields of ruins existed. They necessitated further study. Quite possibly, the remnants of these buildings might reveal a local history of Italian–Ethiopian relations—or rather: presumed Italian artistic ingenuity in the Horn of Africa—dating back as far as the Renaissance.⁸⁴

It is clear that Cerulli based his assumptions on a highly problematic understanding of Ethiopian craftsmanship very much *en vogue* among Italian scholars of the 1930s and 1940s. Here, masterful ruins necessarily indicated non-Ethiopian workmanship.⁸⁵ Today, very few stones remain of the actual late medieval monument in question. It was largely destroyed in 1535 by 'Adali troops and has since been rebuilt and fallen into ruin twice over.⁸⁶ Who, specifically, built the church of Märtulä Maryam for *atege* Eleni is nigh-impossible to determine—and ultimately, the specific cultural background of its stonemasons, builders and carpenters is of little consequence. Whatever their origin, they were assuredly all bound to have worked according to the wishes and specifications of the Ethiopian queen regent, who had set out to build a magnificent religious centre worthy of housing her tomb.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, for all that he reached his conclusions based on a profoundly colonialist outlook, Cerulli was right to note that late medieval Ethiopian sacred structures were elaborately and magnificently built—and that they showcased very global tastes. This, as we will see, had however nothing to do with a purported lack of skilled indigenous labour.

It bears repeating here that Märtulä Maryam was not a singular case.⁸⁸ As we have seen above, it is but one example of a much larger Solomonic cultural and religious practice. Written Ethiopian sources indicate that dozens of churches and monasteries were founded in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Preliminary archaeological surveys have long documented massive edifices built from ashlar blocks ornamented with rich relief carving dating to the period under examination in this study. Ethiopian, Arabic and Latin Christian texts all describe these royal

foundations, and they describe them strikingly similarly: these centres were richly endowed with lands, but also books, ecclesiastical garments, fine fabrics, bejewelled metal cladding, liturgical utensils, paintings, and eventually also precious icons and relics.⁸⁹

The close reading of written sources relating to Solomonic diplomacy with the Latin West over the last three chapters demonstrated that Solomonic rulers most often requested the despatch of craftsmen and artisans. Sometimes, these men appear as an unspecified group of skilled labourers in the texts that have come down to us—but they are also occasionally explicitly named as painters, stonemasons, sculptors, carpenters, bricklayers and metalworkers. A second Solomonic interest apparent in the written sources relates to ecclesiastical objects. Texts time and again speak of fabrics, from brocades to richly embroidered ecclesiastical garments, but also of mitres, chalices, bells, religious jewellery and even relics as being sent out from the Latin West to Ethiopia.

During the first 100 years of Solomonic diplomatic missions to Europe, dozens of ecclesiastical sites were not just being built, but also had to be ornamented and filled with treasures worthy of a dynasty propagating itself as king Solomon's true descendants. It is impossible not to see a direct through-line between these local building and endowment activities of the *näḡäšt*, asserting Christian suzerainty through rather literal state-building activity, and the concurrent diplomatic missions to princely and ecclesiastical courts in Latin Christian Europe. Diplomatic missions appear to have been one of the ways in which the *näḡäšt* sought to meet the heightened local demand for both craftsmanship and prestigious religious material culture. Textual evidence and archaeological remains support that claim.

Through a Glass, Darkly: Textual Evidence and Archaeological Remains

Numerous royal foundations were described in Gəʿəz, Portuguese and Arabic sources before their destruction, and their archaeological remains have been located and partially surveyed. This allows us to get a sense of these prestigious Solomonic projects—and how their construction might have impacted and even motivated diplomatic outreach to the Latin West. Let us first look at two religious centres for which the record is particularly dense, Mäkanä Šəllase and Atronsä Maryam, before examining the disjointed archaeological and textual evidence more broadly.

The case of Mäkanä Šəllase

Mäkanä Šəllase was built on a mountaintop plain in a comparatively remote part of Amhara.⁹⁰ Its beginnings date to the late fifteenth century, when *aše* Na'od spent 13 years planning, constructing and ornamenting the church and monastery—but still passed on before the project was completed. His son, *aše* Ləbnä Dəngəl, ultimately oversaw the completion and consecration of the church in 1520–1521.⁹¹ Parts of its ruins were partially excavated at the turn of the twentieth century. The dig revealed large blocks of white stone worked with arabesques and flowers, following a square floorplan.⁹² Photos from the 1930s show the remains of a wall built from sizeable ashlar, large rectangular blocks of stone. Friezes seem to run along the entire length of the building.⁹³

Francisco Alvares, the Portuguese chaplain present in Ethiopia in the early 1520s, repeatedly visited Mäkanä Šəllase. According to him, the royal monastery was endowed with inalienable land so vast that a man could 'travel fully fifteen days' through it.⁹⁴ The church itself was surrounded by two large enclosures, one built of strong wood, the other of well-built slabs of wall, bordered by a river and surrounded by heavily cultivated, fertile countryside.⁹⁵ The church building was 'large and high', with three aisles of blocks of well-worked masonry. Walls of hewn white stone were ornamented 'with good tracery', that is, stone relief carving. The main door, meanwhile, was 'lined with plates of metal' and 'in the midst of this plating are stones and false pearls well set'.⁹⁶ A painting of 'two figures of Our Lady very well done, and two angels of the same sort' made by a local, self-taught monk adorned the wall above the door.⁹⁷ Some of its internal structure was made from wood; one of the aisles was raised on high props that appeared 'like very tall masts'. Sixteen enormous embroidered curtains of 'very rich brocade' were suspended within the church.⁹⁸

Šihāb al-Dīn, the chronicler of the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*, also describes the building repeatedly in some detail, matching and confirming Alvares' account.⁹⁹ He, too, states that *aše* Na'od had spent years planning every detail of the building, and asserts that when *aše* Ləbnä Dəngəl continued his work, the young *nəguś* took even 'more pains over it than his father'.¹⁰⁰ The completed building was vast and square in shape, with an exceedingly high ceiling and several courtyards.¹⁰¹ 'Entirely plated in gold leaf [...] inlaid with gems, pearls and corals', its walls were 'embellished with gold and silver plates encrusted with pearls' throughout.¹⁰² Other

‘embellishments of gold and silver’ set with precious stones also covered the doors.¹⁰³ According to Šihāb al-Dīn, *Imām Aḥmad*’s troops were ‘stupefied by the workmanship’ when they first saw the building. Muslim soldiers demanded to be let into the church so they could ‘take some pleasure in looking at it’—before tearing the metal off the walls and eventually setting everything on fire.¹⁰⁴ A later chapter states that the ‘Adali leader afterwards gathered the foreign Muslim fighters in his army and enquired whether any of them had seen anything similar to Mākanā Šəllase’s splendour in Byzantium, India or another place.¹⁰⁵ His question was universally answered in the negative.

Even if we account for hyperbole on the part of the author of the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*, there is considerable overlap among his account, that of the Portuguese chaplain Francisco Alvares, and the modern archaeological record. All assert that, at the very least, Mākanā Šəllase was a monumental, impressive square building made from richly ornamented white ashlar stones. It had been planned and built over decades, and its interior was lavishly endowed and adorned. Some of it was covered in plates of precious metal decorated with precious stones. This religious practice, while at first surprising—one would not necessarily expect a church interior to be plated in gold set with gems—appears to have been a feature of fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century Ethiopian royal foundations. It is attested for numerous churches in very different accounts.¹⁰⁶

The Case of Atronsä Maryam

Ethiopian, Arabic and Portuguese sources also describe the royal church of Atronsä Maryam, consecrated during the rule of *aše* Ləbnä Dəngəl’s grandfather, *aše* Bāʾədä Maryam.¹⁰⁷ Like the church of Mākanā Šəllase, this foundation appears to have been an intergenerational project. According to the chronicle of *aše* Bāʾədä Maryam, his fourteenth-century ancestor *aše* Säyfä Arʾad had first envisioned the building. In the mid-fifteenth century, *aše* Zārʾa Yaʾəqob dedicated an altar for the church. In the 1470s—and thus a century after its ostensible inception—his son *aše* Bāʾədä Maryam cleared the grounds and began construction.¹⁰⁸ Some of the internal decoration dated even later, to the late 1480s and the reign of *aše* Bāʾədä Maryam’s son, *aše* Əskəndər.¹⁰⁹

According to *aše* Bāʾədä Maryam’s chronicle, the church’s floor was paved with stones, and its walls covered in silk.¹¹⁰ Francisco Alvares, who saw it in the 1520s, states that it was a ‘big church, with all the walls painted with suitable pictures and very good stories, well proportioned,

made by a Venetian'. He also notes that very large movable curtains made from brocade, velvet and other rich fabrics bedecked the building.¹¹¹ The Portuguese chaplain explicitly links the church's decorations to those of Mäkanä Šəllase, stating that both had doors lined with plaques of precious metal set with 'stones and false pearls'.¹¹² Atronsä Maryam's principal door appeared fully plated with gold at first glance, but closer inspection revealed it as 'all gold and silver leaf' that was 'very well put on' and covered 'both the doors and the windows'.¹¹³ The walls of the church were built from stone, but its internal structure and pillars were again made of wood 'as thick as the masts of galleys', and covered in paintings.¹¹⁴ Its treasury, among other things, contained dozens of exceptionally rich and—to Alvares—astonishingly large and splendid silk umbrellas.¹¹⁵ These are important liturgical items used in Ethiopian church processions, and the Portuguese chaplain asserts that they 'were more for state than from the necessity of shade'.¹¹⁶

The chronicler of the *Futūḥ al-Habaša* notes that one of *Imām* Aḥmad's emirs had been sent to Atronsä Maryam in late 1531. Again, the 'Adali troops were astounded at the church's beauty—but disappointed to initially find no gold. The soldiers soon discovered a house in the vicinity of the church where the contents of the treasury had been hidden. This contained countless huge bundles of patterned silk brocade, velvet cloth and silk, other precious garments, as well as a great mass of liturgical vessels made from gold and silver, from censers to cups to giant plates 'from which four persons could eat'. According to Šihāb al-Dīn, the booty was too much for the army contingent to carry, and most of it—like the church—was eventually set on fire and burnt to ash.¹¹⁷

The substantial ecclesiastical wealth of this church is echoed in the Gə'əz chronicle of *aše* Bā'ədä Maryam. In the 1470s, this *nəguś* had gifted many ornaments of gold and silver, two remarkable mitres of unusual colour and ornamentation,¹¹⁸ a golden crown, a canopy, carpets, an ewer, crosses and at least one foreign liturgical instrument, as well as a coloured crystal vase, a golden knife and a dish of silver as inaugural gifts to the church's administrator, a man called 'Amdu.¹¹⁹ We may also assume that much ecclesiastical treasure was donated to the foundation in the intervening near-60 years before its destruction: *aše* Bā'ədä Maryam had originally erected the church as his burial place, but he went on to create a mid-size necropolis at the site, transferring the bodies of nearly two dozen noblemen, clerics and earlier *näggäšt* there as well.¹²⁰ The church became a frequent pilgrimage point for subsequent Solomonic rulers and the

itinerant royal court.¹²¹ Each transferral, each royal visit, would have required the gifting of more religious material culture as a token of respect and commemoration.¹²²

Ruin Fields: Archaeological Evidence

While both Atronsä Maryam and Mäkanä Šällase date to the latter half of the fifteenth or even early sixteenth century, their founders followed the examples set by earlier Ethiopian sovereigns. A new way of religious building with monumental ornamented and engraved ashlar is already found in the church of Betä Ləḥem Maryam, built by *aṣe* Dawit's daughter Dəlmä Nəgśa at the turn of the fifteenth century.¹²³ Ruins dating to subsequent decades mirror this foundation: at least a dozen archaeological sites of edifices built from dressed stones, with cut masonry elements featuring distinctive ornamentation have hitherto been documented in the archaeological record.¹²⁴ All were built from engraved ashlar stones, followed a basilican floorplan, and date to the fifteenth or early sixteenth century.¹²⁵

In 1969, Stanisław Chojnacki first published on the ruins of a church called Däy Giyorgis. The ruins were located on an isolated and hardly accessible site that was still centrally located within the region of Šäwa.¹²⁶ Local tradition held that the church had been built by *aṣe* Täklä Maryam, a son of *aṣe* Dawit, dating the edifice to the early 1430s.¹²⁷ Despite being badly deteriorated, one of its walls was still more than 70 feet long, made from rows of finely and regularly cut large dressed stones. These were adorned with an 'elaborate frieze' in a rope pattern throughout—the same pattern also found in Dəlmä Nəgśa's ca. 1400 foundation.¹²⁸ Other stone fragments were decorated with a 'beautiful decorative pattern of rose (or turning sun) design'.¹²⁹ This motif was likewise present on at least one finely worked metal plate preserved in the treasury of the modern church located nearby. It was also found at other archaeological sites dating to the period, among them that of Ənsälale, 'discovered' by a French team in Šäwa only some years earlier.¹³⁰

The ruins of Ənsälale were smaller and square in plan, with thick walls and wide pillars, its flooring largely built from five-foot-long rectangular stones with a tomb dug into the bedrock, covered by a sarcophagus lid. Geometric decoration ranging from herringbone patterns to rosettes, crosses and cord mouldings, as well as the 'turning sun' design, had been carved on its grey and dark pink ashlar.¹³¹ The surrounding fields held many non-local pottery shards, some varnished and glossy, as well as

fragments of white-blue porcelain reminiscent of the Chinese Ming period, two small gold plates, and fragments of a glass flask.¹³² A fire had permanently ruined the building, burning at a heat high enough to melt glass.¹³³

Yet another ruin field, that of Gənbī, was located on an abandoned flat-topped high-altitude mountain not far from Ənsələle.¹³⁴ Its floorplan appeared to measure 180 feet in length and 110 feet across. It was made from large squared stones, with tombs laid with stone slabs embedded into the floor.¹³⁵ Littered throughout the site were architectural fragments made from two types of stone with different types of decoration—cordon reliefs, rope designs, flower designs, floral and arabesque patterns, all of considerable size and heft.¹³⁶ A survey also revealed fragments of ceramics, white faceted glass and clearly cut gold cubes. Tremendous violence had been wrought onto the building: layers of burnt earth two feet underneath the topsoil indicated it had burnt up in a scorching blaze. Some of the architectural remains littered all over the site showed no traces of fire, however, suggesting that the walls had partially been torn apart prior to the monument being set alight.¹³⁷

Numerous others such sites exist, and it would be impractical to list them all. Their geographic distribution ranges from eastern Šāwa to Lake Ṭana; ruins preliminarily dated to the fifteenth century are also found in the northern region of Ṭəgray.¹³⁸ What is remarkable is that their ornamental repertoire seems both unique to the period and dispersed over an immense geographical area: the early-sixteenth-century church of Mārṭulā Maryam, hundreds of miles away and dating decades later than the above-described sites, was similarly large, built from finely cut ashlar and all but mirrored the ornamentation of the above-described ruin fields. Here, carved Tuscan columns alternated with decorations of hemispheres in relief while additional decorations included semicircles, cymbals, lotus flowers and the ‘turning sun’ motif.¹³⁹

From the time of *asē* Dawit’s daughter Dəlmā Nəgśa at the turn of the fifteenth century until the wars of the sixteenth century, the local archaeological record indicates a new, distinct Solomonic tradition of building prestigious royal foundations in richly ornamented dressed stone in the central Ethiopian highlands.¹⁴⁰ By the early 1480s, the practice was so widespread that even a short-term foreign Latin Christian visitor to the country like Baptista of Imola observed that ‘every king, when he is enthroned, builds a church in which he must be buried’. Baptista stressed that, in contrast to the rest of the country, these edifices were made from hewn stone.¹⁴¹

All the Kings' Treasures: Textual Sources

The second chapter of this book began with the rapturous account of the author of the *Homily of the Wood of the Holy Cross* describing the ecclesiastical items brought back from Venice. It also reported *aṣe* Dawit's ecstatic joy at receiving such great numbers of religious objects from a foreign Christian sphere.¹⁴² Through this initial act of long-distance diplomacy with the Latin West, the *Homily* suggests, relics and reliquaries, but also chalices, censers, priestly vestments richly embroidered with religious symbols and biblical scenes, mitres, headbands and girdles had come to Ethiopia.¹⁴³ *Aṣe* Dawit solemnly brought one of the relics, the relic of the True Cross, 'to the church of Michael, which the king himself had built'.¹⁴⁴ Later, the relic raised the status of Amba Gəṣān to a major pilgrimage centre.¹⁴⁵ While the *Homily* does not specify where the other ecclesiastical items were taken, their nature allows us to assume that many were given to religious centres.

Similarly, *aṣe* Dawit's sons are narrated as gifting prestigious objects to important monasteries and churches.¹⁴⁶ The donation of ecclesiastical vestments, fine cloth, mitres and ornaments as well as liturgical items such as ewers made from precious metal to royal foundations appears as a repeated motif throughout both the chronicle of *aṣe* Zār'a Ya'əqob as well as that of his son, *aṣe* Bā'ədä Maryam.¹⁴⁷ An Ethiopian 'Miracle of Mary' probably referring to the reign of *aṣe* Zār'a Ya'əqob relates how a pious and good ruler built a church dedicated to the Virgin, and gave it so many precious liturgical utensils that access to it had to be monitored.¹⁴⁸ He also bestowed 30 ecclesiastical vestments woven with gold, 7 ecclesiastical garments made of silk, 7 gold fans and other valuable objects alongside 150 ounces of gold, 2000 oxen and vast land to the monks of Däbrä Libanos.¹⁴⁹ In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, numerous post-Byzantine icons, as well as painted enamels from France, were directly acquired by royal women, who donated these rare imported articles to royal foundations.¹⁵⁰

The *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*, too, is full of descriptions stressing the importance of Solomonic gifting to royal foundations. Describing the destruction of a royal church in Ifat, Šihāb al-Dīn identifies it as a 'church that had belonged to the previous king', who had richly endowed it with 'vessels of gold and silver'. Among other things, one of the 'Adali commanders took a 'chasuble that belonged to king Ḥskändər' from it before burning it to the ground.¹⁵¹ *Aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl's church in Däwaro, to the far south-east of the realm, was likewise not only a 'mighty building with imposing

columns' and rich decoration, but also rich in 'Byzantine carpets, furnishings, fabrics, silken wares and other things'.¹⁵²

More than anything, the gifting of prestigious objects and specifically ecclesiastical garments and liturgical items forged lasting links between sovereigns and clergy, many of whom were high-ranking noblemen themselves.¹⁵³ Their office and fortunes were intimately tied to the rule of a *nəguś*, and bestowing them with valuable pieces produced and maintained sovereignty and authority within the religious sphere and the Ethiopian court.¹⁵⁴ In many cases, these gifts were undoubtedly sourced locally. In others, Muslim traders such as al-Tabrīzī seem to have acquired precious items for the *nägäšt* from the Islamic world, particularly Egypt.¹⁵⁵ Silk and linen fabrics more generally were brought by Yemeni and Ethiopian Muslim merchants from India and Egypt.¹⁵⁶ Looking at the interests so clearly expressed in the diplomatic record as they were examined over the course of this book, however, it appears that these were not the only channels through which the *nägäšt* tried to acquire things rare and treasureable—or, for that matter, building manpower.

DIPLOMATIC REQUESTS RE-EXAMINED

In 2017, historian Adam Knobler succinctly noted that 'considering that most-if-not-all Ethiopian embassies to the West discuss requests for artists', it was possible that 'such expansionist activities and the desire for sculptors, painters and builders' had prompted the despatch of a late medieval Solomonic mission.¹⁵⁷ While Knobler was referring to a now-contested 'Ethiopian' delegation of the early fourteenth century in this particular instance, he touches upon an important point.¹⁵⁸ From *aṣe* Dawit's first mission to Venice of 1402 to *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl's letters to the Portuguese crown and papacy in the 1520s, the *nägäšt* primarily requested builders, carpenters, stonemasons, gold- and silversmiths as well as painters. They also desired to obtain objects of religious material culture from abroad, from relics to ecclesiastical garments and liturgical objects. Successful or not—and as we have seen, most missions to Europe did eventually yield very little for the *nägäšt*, particularly after the first 50 years of contacts—diplomacy with Latin Europe appears to have been one of the ways through which Solomonic rulers attempted to lend tangibility to their local claims of universal Christian power. Here, Europe's remoteness when seen from the Horn of Africa must have rendered it particularly attractive: anthropological research has long established that the ability to

obtain both resources and riches from a distant, foreign sphere heightened local power in most pre-modern societies.¹⁵⁹ In late medieval Ethiopia, priceless relics, gorgeous garments and religious objects from a faraway Christian realm had the potential to produce more local power than any type of weapon ever could.

Reading Ethiopian diplomatic outreach to the Latin West as at least partially triggered by these local Solomonic state-building activities through royal foundations fundamentally transforms our understanding of these late medieval long-distance contacts. Solomonic diplomacy, a particularly noteworthy case of African-European contacts in the late medieval period, becomes a byproduct and an effect of indigenous Ethiopian policy.

Builders, Carpenters, Stonemasons, Metalworkers and Painters

All late medieval royal Solomonic foundations were built from rock, their interiors supplemented by wooden frameworks.¹⁶⁰ Gə'əz texts state that their construction was financed through extra taxes, and facilitated by drawing on the local population as well as army regiments for labour.¹⁶¹ Specialised craftsmen, especially those trained or capable in the arts of stonecutting, building, carpentry and painting, but also—as evidenced by the descriptions of gold and silver plating—metalworking were necessary to the construction of these edifices.¹⁶²

Incidentally, such were the artisans consistently requested by the *nägäst* through diplomatic means from Latin Europe—whether in 1402 from the Republic of Venice by *aše* Dawit, or the 1520s from Portugal and the papacy by *aše* Ləbnä Dəngəl. In August 1402, the Venetian *Consiglio dei Pregadi*—the department in charge of foreign policy and current issues—allowed the Solomonic ambassador to take a painter, a metalsmith, two builders and a carpenter with him to Ethiopia. Specifically named in the Venetian record is a *pictor*—a painter, a *spatarium*—a swordsmith or armourer, and thus a metalworker, a *murator* and his *socium [qui] scit facere cupos et lateres*—a builder of walls and his associate skilled in making tiles and bricks as well as a *marangonum*—a carpenter.¹⁶³

In 1427–1429, *aše* Yəšhaq's delegation to Aragon had caused the despatch of *tredici homini Mastri in diverse arte*—‘thirteen masters in a variety of skills’.¹⁶⁴ A contemporary document refers specifically to certain *maestres de les cequies* or ‘masters of irrigation’ within the group, and they have subsequently been at the heart of scholarly attention.¹⁶⁵ We may

assume that their unusual specialisation made these men noteworthy—it was undoubtedly rarer than the more ubiquitous trades of building, carpentry or painting. If so inclined, we might indeed term these masters of irrigation as ‘technologists’, though certainly not military technologists.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, they were not the only artisans sent out.

In the early 1430s, an agent acting on behalf of *aṣe* Täklä Maryam was attempting to recruit craftsmen in the Eastern Mediterranean—among them ‘men who can build ships’, but also other skilled foreigners.¹⁶⁷ An Aragonese letter confirms that *aṣe* Zär’a Ya‘əqob had asked king Alfonso V to despatch *mastri et artificii*—‘masters and artisans’—from Naples in 1450.¹⁶⁸ The *nəguś* appears to have posed particular requests, which Alfonso only partially and grudgingly fulfilled.¹⁶⁹ A terse note by an Italian humanist who interviewed the Ethiopian ambassador during his stay at the Aragonese court states that the man had additionally hired ‘many of our craftsmen’ for money to accompany him back to Ethiopia.¹⁷⁰ There, they went on to ‘furnish’ the realm ‘with the arts they gave’—again suggesting that *aṣe* Zär’a Ya‘əqob had primarily been interested in acquiring craftsmen skilled in building and ornamenting.

Latin sources indicate that the 1481–1482 Ethiopian embassy to Rome also asked for specific personnel. In keeping with how the mission was understood in Latin Europe—as the rather unlikely request to crown the *nəguś*—some sources focus on a purported Ethiopian request for ‘priests or monks’ that were ‘well-instructed in the faith of Christ, as well as teachers’.¹⁷¹ A 1482 letter by Pope Sixtus IV meanwhile specifies that the pontiff would send out *theologos, praedicatores, artifices*¹⁷²—‘theologians, preachers and artisans’—whom the young *nəguś* had ostensibly requested, but only if *aṣe* Ḥskändər complied with a number of conditions.¹⁷³ A 1514 document detailing the gifts and personnel for the Portuguese return-embassy to Ethiopia meanwhile names *dous pintores*—‘two painters’, *huu imprimidor*—‘a craftsman skilled in printing books’, and *dous tanjedores*—‘two organists’ as the only labour commissioned to travel to Ethiopia.¹⁷⁴

Lastly, in the early 1520s, *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl posed repeated requests to several Portuguese officials and potentates.¹⁷⁵ His first letter to a Portuguese official in India asked for ‘craftsmen to work in gold and silver’ as well as expressly workers ‘to make lead to cover churches’ and clay tiles. The *nəguś* specifies that he had built ‘a very large church which is named the Trinity’—alluding to the church of Mäkanä Šəllase—whose roof he hoped to improve with the help of these artisans.¹⁷⁶ A copy of a 1521 letter to king Manuel I, written in Portuguese, asked after ‘craftsmen who can

make figures of gold and silver, copper, iron, tin and lead’ as well as ‘craftsmen in type-founding to make books in our characters for use in church; and craftsmen in gilding with gold leaf to make gold leaf’.¹⁷⁷ A later version of this Portuguese letter also adds that the *nəgus* had moreover demanded ‘craftsmen to work in stone and wood’.¹⁷⁸ In 1522, *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl wrote to king Manuel’s successor, king João III, and demanded ‘artificers, to make images, and printed books’ as well as ‘artificers to beat out gold, and set it, and goldsmiths and silversmiths, and men who know how to extract gold and silver and also copper’ from the earth. He again sought to acquire ‘men who can make sheet lead and earthenware’ as well as masons and carpenters—harkening back to the request for roofers to improve the church to which he had recently translated the body of his father.¹⁷⁹ Finally, in a 1524 letter to Pope Clement VII, the *nəgus* ‘vehemently’ requested *artifices qui imagines fabricent*—which can be read as both ‘craftsmen who might sculpt statues’ or more generally as ‘artisans skilled in creating images’. He also sought to acquire ‘engravers of gold and silver’ as well as woodworkers, architects, builders, stonemasons, tile-makers, roofers, glassblowers, musicians and minstrels.¹⁸⁰ Instead of technologists and military specialists, we thus find an overwhelming wish to recruit artisans skilled in crafts related to construction and ornamentation at the heart of all these missions to the Latin West.

The Dazzling Splendour of the World: Religious Material Culture

A second continuous Solomonic interest concerned religious wares. Ecclesiastical garments and liturgical objects appear consistently in the record on every Ethiopian diplomatic mission to the princely and ecclesiastical courts of Latin Europe, yet research has mostly ignored them. Only the Ethiopian desire for relics has received some attention.¹⁸¹ And indeed, the desire to acquire a piece of the True Cross for Ethiopia is given as the primary motivating factor behind the very first Solomonic mission to Latin Europe in 1402: both the *Homily on the Wood of the Holy Cross* and the *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church* tie the arrival of the relic in Ethiopia directly to *aṣe* Dawit’s embassy to Venice.¹⁸² Nevertheless, this relic of the Passion was not the only one brought back from Italy in 1402: both the *Homily* and the *History of the Patriarchs* mention the arrival of a reliquary for a skull, as well as the whole body of one of the infants killed by Herod, as arriving in Ethiopia as a result of the first Solomonic embassy to the Latin West.¹⁸³

Aṣe Dawit's missions to Rome in 1403 and 1404 meanwhile likewise indicate a great interest in relics located in the Eternal City—the 1403 embassy had explicitly been sent to 'procure some saints' relics' that existed in Rome.¹⁸⁴ The second group of envoys—the three Ethiopian monks of 1404—is contemporarily described as 'asking always about the relics of saints', visiting numerous churches and 'vehemently demanding' to be shown specific relics, such as the 'cradle of the infant Jesus Christ'.¹⁸⁵

Recently uncovered evidence has shown that *aṣe* Yəṣṣḥaq's 1427–1429 mission to the kingdom of Aragon was also tied to Solomonic interest in a specific relic, a Nail of the Holy Cross.¹⁸⁶ According to Ibn Ḥajar, the *nəḡuś* had even explicitly sent out his mission to the 'Land of the Franks' to obtain this important holy object.¹⁸⁷ In 1450, *aṣe* Zār'a Ya'əqob's ambassador in Naples received a silver reliquary to take back to Ethiopia.¹⁸⁸ Six years later, in 1456, Pope Callixtus III ultimately gifted a whole host of precious artefacts to tempt the same *nəḡuś* into joining his crusade: 'relics from the holy Apostles Peter and Paul; from Saint John the Baptist; from the arm of St Andrew the Apostle; from St James the Apostle, son of Zebedee; and from the wood of the cross on which the blessed Apostle Peter was executed'.¹⁸⁹ In 1482, Pope Sixtus IV praised the eagerness of the Ethiopian ambassador Ḥntonəs to see and worship at all the relics and saints' places located in Rome.¹⁹⁰ An account related to the embassy specifies that the pope gifted the Ethiopian party 'the sword that was used on the night of the Nativity'—not a relic in the usual sense, but a rare blessed object annually awarded by the papacy.¹⁹¹

Ecclesiastical garments and textiles, as well as liturgical items, appear in connection to even more Solomonic missions to the Latin West. The *Gə'əz Homily* on the 1402 mission to Venice mentions the arrival of priests' garments and girdles,¹⁹² of golden-fringed vestments embroidered with images, and embellished multi-coloured tunics with religious iconography¹⁹³—from the annunciation to the baptism and depictions of prophets, Apostles and martyrs—and of shirts made of scarlet cloth.¹⁹⁴ According to the *Homily*, the *nəḡuś* and his priests and officers all explicitly admired these garments, whose appearance was judged wondrous to the point of possessing an otherworldly quality.¹⁹⁵ Also brought were mitres, headbands, religious engravings on glass or crystal as well as chalices, censers, pitchers and bowls made from precious metal.¹⁹⁶ A Venetian treasury list specifies that a 'gilded silver chalice worked in the *niello* style' had been taken out of the Sanctuary of St Mark's church and gifted to the Ethiopians.¹⁹⁷

In 1429, *aṣe* Yəṣḥaq's ambassador al-Tabrīzī was apprehended in Cairo with many foreign textiles embroidered in gold with Christian iconography as well as 'two golden bells' and a letter urging him to buy items of gold-smithery, crosses and bells upon his return from the court of Alfonso V of Aragon in Valencia.¹⁹⁸ In 1441, the Papal Camera allotted 30 *soldi* for 80 white mitres for the Coptic and Ethiopian delegations at the Council of Florence—which would be specific types of liturgical head coverings, made out of white damask or silk with lappets featuring red fringes.¹⁹⁹

In 1450, *aṣe* Zār'a Ya'əqob specifically requested *panni de brochato*—'brocade fabrics'—and *panni finissimi de lana*—'finest woolen cloths'—as well as 'vessels of gold and silver' from Alfonso V of Aragon.²⁰⁰ An Aragonese source noted that, amongst other things, a reliquary, a gilded silver box and a silver cross fashioned by Alfonso's goldsmith were sent out.²⁰¹ In 1481, Pope Sixtus IV was eventually narrated as sending a brocade robe, a biretta—a special peaked type of ecclesiastical hat—as well as several *Agnos Dei* to the Solomonic court. One of these was set as a piece of religious jewellery.²⁰²

Lastly, the wealth of gifts commissioned by king Manuel I of Portugal for the Ethiopian queen regent Ḫeleni in 1514 included an extraordinary list of textiles, as well as chalices, goblets, richly ornamented bells and censers made of gold and silver, communion instruments such as patens and cruets alongside candlesticks, two full organs, golden altar fronts and hundreds of books to show his appreciation for her mission to the Lusitanian court.²⁰³ The Portuguese also sent images of Jesus and Mary,²⁰⁴ as well as a sculpture of Christ as a child with a golden crown and an apple in his hand.²⁰⁵ A 1524 letter by *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl to Pope Clement VII contains an explicit demand for similar articles: the *nəguś* expressly enquired after statues of the saints, specifying that he would take great pleasure in such presents,²⁰⁶ just as he would, of course, in the people who could create such objects for him locally.²⁰⁷

So why these specific diplomatic demands—why relics, why censers and chalices, why fine cloth? The interest in these objects is hardly surprising—after all, many royal foundations were intentionally set up to become pilgrimage centres. Any relic was sure to raise the significance of a religious site.²⁰⁸ As Robert Bartlett, speaking about the veneration of sacred bones in medieval Latin Europe and citing St Augustine put it, relics were a 'trusty pledge', 'a token of power, a sign of the faith and a pointer to the resurrection'.²⁰⁹

It is also important to note that the cultural practices of late medieval Ethiopian Christianity caused a scarcity of locally available relics. Unlike their brethren in Latin Europe, Ethiopian ecclesiastics did not subscribe to the practice of deliberate and sometimes vigorous dismemberment of a saint's body in order to create more sacred parts.²¹⁰ If anything, local saints' bodies were preserved whole. This led to a distinct shortage of venerable matter in the North-East African highlands. Nevertheless, even the dust from a saint's grave or relic site was considered to have miraculous properties.²¹¹ Diplomatic contacts with a fellow Christian court would have been one of the few ways in which this particular need could have been met—genuine, venerable relics were, after all, one of the few things impossible to create or purchase.

In their general interest to acquire sumptuous fabrics and religious treasures from abroad, the *nägäšt* meanwhile hardly differed from their contemporaries throughout medieval Afro-Eurasia. Rare, costly and exotic items are well-attested as having been perceived as imbued with exceptional qualities in many different pre-modern societies.²¹² Numerous Norse sagas speak about Viking men dressed in fine imported fabrics from Byzantium, and more than one German bishop is recorded as conducting services in garments featuring Arabic inscriptions proclaiming the supremacy of the Mamlūk Sultan and the Islamic statement of faith.²¹³ Especially unique or beautiful objects were not infrequently even narrated as 'Solomonic' works—in the sense that they were ostensibly created by or connected to the biblical king—by medieval contemporaries of different faiths in the Mediterranean.²¹⁴

There is every reason to assume Ethiopian royals, like their coreligionists in Europe, were similarly interested in acquiring extraordinary religious items for themselves and their realm. Such objects could be locally produced, of course, but also imported—or secured through diplomatic outreach. Medieval Gə'əz and slightly later Amharic texts note that magnificent items were present at the Ethiopian court: in the early fifteenth century, *aše* Dawit was for instance narrated as fervently praying before a striking statue of the Virgin adorned with gold, silver and precious stones.²¹⁵ More than 100 years later, *aše* Ləbnä Dəngəl's widow Säblä Wängel prayed before three different large-scale triptychs, which are specified as having been brought over from Latin Europe.²¹⁶ Precious or rare objects affirmed and cemented links between Solomonic rulership and Ethiopian clergy at influential religious centres. To name but a few examples: in 1290 and thus not long after the Solomonic line had come to

power, a *nəguś* gifted precious carpets, candles, sacerdotal garments and lamps to the existing community of Ethiopian monks in Jerusalem.²¹⁷ By the mid-fifteenth century, *aṣe Zār'a Ya'əqob* donated an exceptional processional cross made from bronze with golden inlays, insets of glass paste and *niello* decoration to his church of Däbrä Nəg'ädg^wad.²¹⁸ An inscription on a post-Byzantine icon reveals it as having been gifted by *aṣe Ləbnä Dəngəl* to an important monastic centre in the north of the realm.²¹⁹ His aunt, princess Marta, is similarly noted as importing and donating numerous foreign objects to monasteries under her patronage in Goḡḡam at the turn of the sixteenth century.²²⁰ A custom-made painted enamel from Latin Europe was acquired by *aṣe Ləbnä Dəngəl*'s mother, who subsequently presented it to the monastery and church of Dima Giyorgis.²²¹

Cloth and garments could play a similarly important role. That foreign, precious fabrics were also used in Ethiopian churches is illustrated by an episode in Alvares' account. Speaking about the church of Mäkanä Šəllase, Alvares describes that two large door curtains were covered with vivid embroidery showing biblical scenes.²²² *Aṣe Ləbnä Dəngəl* had inherited them from one of his ancestors and asked the Portuguese to identify the origin of the fabrics. As the Portuguese chaplain readily recognised and identified them as 'made in Christendom, and nowhere else', we may presume that these were richly embroidered Latin European draperies—which were subsequently hung in an Ethiopian royal church.²²³ In response, *aṣe Ləbnä Dəngəl* conveyed his strong interest in purchasing similar foreign-made textiles with religious embroidery through the Portuguese.²²⁴ Thus, the episode also gives insight into the continued royal Solomonic interest in procuring such objects well into the sixteenth century. Through Alvares' eyes, we also learn that the *nəguś* was rather disappointed in the Portuguese gifts given to him—which had included a 'valuable sword', a 'gold-mounted dagger', 'handsome cuirasses' and two short cannons with ammunition alongside four tapestries. *Aṣe Ləbnä Dəngəl* is narrated as stating that his predecessors had come to expect the despatch of prestigious ecclesiastical fabric from Latin Europe to Ethiopia. The gifts that the Portuguese had presented were meanwhile thoroughly lacking—and would have even resulted in an inhospitable welcome by his forefathers.²²⁵

Summing up—the donation of religious treasures to a monastery was one of the ways in which the *nəgästä* could assert and stage their prestige and wealth, but also claim and maintain their Christian sovereignty over

the region, the churches and their clergy. To take the words of Marie-Laure Derat: in consecrating his church the ‘founding king appears as the master builder of a monument to the glory of Christianity, but also to his own’.²²⁶ A study of the sources on the late medieval Solomonian missions reveals a wish to acquire relics, ecclesiastical fabrics or religious objects—and sometimes all of the above—as being at the heart of all embassies to the Latin West. Diplomacy with various European courts appears to have been one of the ways through which the *näggäst* attempted to meet the rather considerable local demand for exceptional and rare religious wares.

Foreign Craftsmanship, Royal Foundations, and Diplomacy

Following the writings of Enrico Cerulli, who thought in 1933 that the ‘unusual mastery’ in the beautiful carvings of the church of Märṭulä Maryam must have necessarily indicated Italian workmanship, Western scholars have long theorised about a possible ‘foreign influence’ visible in the numerous ruins littering the Ethiopian highland plateau. The presumed point of origin of these foreigners, however, has shifted over time. In 1937, Guglielmo Heintze conceded that the ruins of Märṭulä Maryam—which he had cleared over the course of three days with the help of a leprous monk—showed a ‘primitive grandiosity’ that held a ‘certain value’ for the history of art.²²⁷ He read its remains as a testament to the ‘southern irradiation of Coptic art’, and postulated that its craftsmen, from bricklayers and blacksmiths to carpenters, had all been Egyptians.²²⁸ Ironically, Heintze’s condescending appraisal of ostensible Coptic architectural achievements described a more recent church at the same site, built by an Italian Jesuit in the 1620s.²²⁹ The real ruins of Āleni’s original late medieval foundation were actually located a few dozen feet to the side of the revamped Catholic basilica.²³⁰ The remains of this building—of old Märṭulä Maryam—eschewed all simple comparisons to Coptic traditions: Heintze judged its tapered arches to be of a ‘Moorish’ style, but the walls also featured a ‘Roman arabesque frieze’. Other decorations, meanwhile, appeared utterly unique to him.²³¹ *Ītege* Āleni’s Märṭulä Maryam defied all straightforward assumptions and expectations.

In 1965, writing about the ruin field at Ānsälale, Francis Anfray likewise struggled to find an equivalent to the carved stones littering the plain of this remote tabletop mountain in rural Šäwa. Some of it reminded him of Islamic decoration, with Aksumite traces, but puzzlingly it appeared ‘attributable to the Ethiopian Middle Ages’.²³² Four years later, Stanisław

Chojnacki wondered whether the remains of the church of Däy Giyorgis had been ‘inspired’ by ‘Graeco-Roman civilisation’. They presented a ‘new style’, showing ‘sophisticated taste and excellent execution’. Asking whether ‘new builders with new ideas and skill appeared in the country’, Chojnacki mused that the ruins might hold new answers on European-Ethiopian relations in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.²³³ In the late 1970s, Lanfranco Ricci also struggled to make sense of the ruins at Gənbi. He agreed with Anfray’s judgement that these crumbling monuments opened up a new chapter of Ethiopian art history and, possibly, a new chapter of Ethiopian history more broadly. He, too, floated the idea of foreign builders.²³⁴

However, clear assertions about such ‘foreign influence’—a term rightly criticised as vague and unproductive—in these Ethiopian ruins were complicated by contradicting evidence from the start.²³⁵ Already in 1978, Francis Anfray noted that the carved stone ornaments found at an archaeological site in Šäwa mirrored those painted into the background of an icon by a famous Ethiopian painter of the mid-fifteenth century held in the monastery of Daga ʿEṣṭifanos on Lake Ṭana, located hundreds of miles to the west.²³⁶ Other carvings seemingly also corresponded with decorations found in the faraway Zag^we churches of Lalibäla and Yəmṛəḥännä Krastos.²³⁷ As such, the ruined decorations found in many places appeared puzzlingly new and foreign. They were, however, clearly also local, and seemed to draw from a much older artistic well that was undoubtedly Ethiopian. Even more incredibly, this simultaneously foreign-local, new-old material evidence was dispersed over an immensely wide geographic area in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

It must be said that the above ideas floated by twentieth-century scholars were not drawn entirely from thin air or based entirely on inadvertent holdovers of colonialist belief. Contemporary written sources indeed sometimes linked foreign labour—or the products of foreign labour—with late medieval royal foundations: we have already heard about the ‘organ made in the Italian style’ in the royal church of Gännätä Giyorgis in Amhara in 1482.²³⁸ An Italian, the former Venetian monk Nicolo Brancalion, did paint the murals of *aṣe* Bäʾädä Maryam’s church of Atronsä Maryam sometime between 1480 and 1494.²³⁹ He was one of a rough dozen foreigners detained for decades at the Ethiopian royal court.²⁴⁰ In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Brancalion would manufacture several smaller, portable objects of highly esteemed religious material culture for members of the Solomonic court.²⁴¹ Another Venetian—a

merchant from a prominent family by the name of Hieronimo Bicini—had a second career in which he, among other things, apparently ‘painted many things’ for *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl.²⁴² In 1526, the *nəgus* personally requested that the painter Lazaro de Andrade and the barber João Bermudes remained in Ethiopia when the Portuguese embassy took its leave.²⁴³ Francisco Alvares noted that Pêro da Covilhã, the Portuguese envoy long-detained at the Ethiopian royal court, had been ordered by *atege* Āleni to make an altar of gold and wood for her foundation of Märtulä Maryam.²⁴⁴ Lastly, in the 1620s, local Ethiopians had told the Jesuit Manoel de Almeida that Āleni had sent for workmen from Egypt to build Märtulä Maryam, and that she had offered a large reward and extraordinary remuneration for the work. When Almeida saw the ruins in the early seventeenth century, much of its workmanship was still recognisable. The Jesuit described its stones as beautifully cut, broad and smooth, with ‘many varied and different roses’ still discernible. Each of them was ‘so perfectly done in fine tracery that they looked as if they could not be bettered’. These delicate carvings, locals told Almeida, had once been ‘covered over with silver and gold’.²⁴⁵ It was undeniable to him that the ‘church was not only built at great expense, but was adorned and endowed with liberality’.²⁴⁶ The Ethiopian queen regent had also conceived it with love to detail: Almeida’s contemporary, Jerónimo Lobo, mentioned that when the Jesuits began to dig up the foundations of the original church in order to restore it, they ‘found four square plates of gold of the size of the palm of the hand’. Each plate had the name of one of the Evangelists engraved in ‘Ethiopic’ upon it, so that it seemed that the ‘chapel had been founded on the four Evangelists’.²⁴⁷

The above example illustrates beautifully that, whatever the background of the individual artisans, there must have been considerable Solomonic involvement in the building process. From everything we have seen, Ethiopian rulers were highly committed to their building activities. They are narrated as spending years and even decades meticulously planning and constructing a foundation ultimately worthy of housing their grave, or at the very least suitable to commemorate their life, death and deeds.²⁴⁸

Early in this chapter, we encountered the question of ostensible ‘Italian workmanship’ posed by Enrico Cerulli nearly 90 years ago. Unlike Cerulli, I do not think skilled European or otherwise foreign labour fundamentally impacted Ethiopian building activity in the late Middle Ages. Artisans working for the Ethiopian builder kings, however specialised and wherever from, remained workmen in the employ of the Solomonic elite. The

diplomatic record indicates that most Ethiopian wishes posed to Latin Christian potentates remained eventually unfulfilled. The foreigners attested as working for the court were more often than not re-employed strangers without the necessary specialist skillset or training. Nevertheless, the emerging Solomonic practice of building and endowing monumental religious edifices to showcase their Christian power appears to have been what effectively drove and maintained diplomatic outreach to Latin Europe in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

The Ethiopian practice of attempting to secure distant or even ‘exotic’ craftsmen and artisans has ample precedent in other parts of the late medieval world. Generally, it is rarely helpful to read processes of artistic adaptation, or the sharing and introduction of new cultural elements as a competition between cultures—which is what some older research, often coloured by colonialism such as that of Cerulli, has done. Cultural exchange and the introduction of new, ‘foreign’ styles and iconography must not be understood as a kind of local surrender to a purportedly superior, outside artistic power. Kingly crafting established, affirmed and sanctioned a premodern sovereign’s appointment from a higher authority. It also demonstrated a king’s might to his contemporaries, and particularly his subjects.²⁴⁹ The incorporation of far-off elements was not a passive capitulation to the supposedly greater achievements of a foreign other—but demonstrated a ruler’s power and reach. Acquiring wares and manpower from distant places exponentially increased local sovereignty: the farther removed from a given cultural heartland particular objects or corresponding men with ‘esoteric knowledge’ were in origin, the more they or their craft were imbued with potency and significance.²⁵⁰ Instead of signalling weakness, the integration of the new and far-off into Ethiopian cultural practice would have embodied the *näggüšt*’s authority, worldliness and geographical scope.

An early-fifteenth-century Ethiopian ‘Miracle of Mary’ showcases how this link between artisanal skill and esoteric knowledge was understood in late medieval Solomonic society: here, an Ethiopian manuscript illuminator was told how to mix a batch of gold paint for a prestigious manuscript commissioned by *aṣe* Dawit in a dream—by a foreigner, a ‘Byzantine’ man.²⁵¹ The artisan’s distant dream apparition and subsequent advice not only enabled a satisfactory completion of the illuminated manuscript after several failed attempts—it explicitly pleased the *nəguś* and even the Virgin herself. The ability to recruit actual skilled labour from a faraway Christian sphere to work locally at his behest would have been testament to a

pre-modern Ethiopian ruler's control over a vast geographical, and even spiritual, distance.

THE POWER OF DISTANCE AND SOLOMONIC EMULATION

It necessitates repeating here that intense endeavours to procure objects, as well as artisans—particularly builders and painters—from outside one's own immediate cultural and political sphere was far from unusual within pre-modern contexts. Some brief examples may suffice: within Western Europe, the exchange and 'interlending' of artisans and particularly painters from one court to the other is well attested.²⁵² The practice was not limited to Europe or the Christian Mediterranean: in 1479, an ambassador of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II, the strongest power of the Eastern Mediterranean, asked the *Signoria* in Venice for the despatch of 'a good painter' to Istanbul as part of a peace settlement.²⁵³ Under the rule of Muḥammad bin Tughluq in the 1330s and 1340s, a sizeable percentage of the court of the Sultanate of Delhi was made up of learned foreigners, increasing its draw on scholars from all over the Muslim world.²⁵⁴ Roughly 100 years earlier, a French goldsmith called Guillaume Boucher produced much-admired items of metal-smithery for Möngke Khan, fourth ruler of the Mongol Empire, and arguably the most powerful man of his time.²⁵⁵ If anything, the Solomonic case adds a particularly impressive African Christian example of a court going to great lengths to acquire the rare and precious to this list. Building monumental Christian centres and attempting to recruit foreigners to build these foundations on royal order would have necessarily increased Solomonic sovereignty within the claimed dominion.²⁵⁶

Beyond enhancing local power, however, there might also have been another, less pragmatic reason for the *nägäšt's* diplomatic desires—which opens up a window onto how these Ethiopian kings understood themselves. Through their foundational myth, the *Käbrä nägäšt*, Solomonic rulers actively propagated themselves as not just the rulers of Christian Ethiopia, but also as first among all kings of the earth.²⁵⁷ Israelite kings David and Solomon served as archetypes of wise kingship for numerous rulers within medieval Europe. The *nägäšt*, however, claimed literal and spiritual descent from these biblical kings through Mäniläk I, Solomon's oldest son sired upon the Queen of Sheba.²⁵⁸ It appears that the sending of embassies to Latin potentates was an additional way through which Ethiopian rulers could assert their claim of rightful Solomonic descent.

The historical books of the Bible provide highly interesting details on king Solomon's state-building activities in ancient Israel: setting out to build the first Temple, Solomon sent out a diplomatic mission to king Hiram of Tyre, asking him to dispatch a 'wise man' skilled to work in gold, silver, bronze and iron, in purple, crimson and blue fabrics, who was also trained in engraving. This request was not owed to a potential lack of skilled indigenous labour—Solomon had already conscripted thousands of his men for the work. Solomon and Hiram both stress that the foreign master artisan was to join king Solomon's local skilled workers in Judah and Jerusalem. Together, however, they would be able to tackle the impossible: build the most perfect Temple to please God and showcase Israel's true power.²⁵⁹ The Bible also narrates that the Temple was built on a site selected by Solomon's father, David. The building and furnishing process took many years, and the edifice was eventually large and rectangular in shape. Its exterior was built from finely dressed stone with an interior structure made from wood; the interior—the walls, the doors—were furthermore overlaid and panelled with gold set with precious stones. The doors, doorframes and walls were covered in gold, with carved figures of cherubim adorning the walls and massive curtains of precious, colourful fabrics suspended within.²⁶⁰

The correlations between the biblical descriptions of Solomon's First Temple and late medieval Solomonic royal church-building activity are striking and hard to miss. *Gəʿəz* as well as foreign sources repeatedly mention the inter-generational building activities of the *nägäst*. Several royal chronicles stress, for example, that *aṣe Zär'a Ya'əqob* built a church on a high and beautiful mountain site upon which his father, *aṣe Dawit*, had already erected a wall but died before making inroads on the endeavour. Here, the late medieval Ethiopian chronicler directly alludes to the biblical history as told in the First Book of Kings and the Second Book of Chronicles. He states that, just like the former king David—who had planned to build the House of God but had been unable to complete the work until his son Solomon finished it—'our King Zär'a Ya'əqob finished this temple on the west of this mountain, which his father has been unable to build'.²⁶¹ There are numerous other examples of such inter-generational building activity: the church of Märṭulä Mika'el was ostensibly begun by *aṣe Dawit* and again completed by his son, *aṣe Zär'a Ya'əqob*.²⁶² *Aṣe Ĕskändər* is narrated as completing Atronsä Maryam which his father had begun to build,²⁶³ his brother, *aṣe Na'od*, dedicated a church which was again finished by his son, *aṣe Ləbnä Dəngəl*.²⁶⁴ We have already seen that

the building of Mäkanä Šəllase, consecrated in 1521, had spanned the reigns of three *nägäšt* according to two different sources.²⁶⁵

Moreover, like Solomon's First Temple, the churches of the *nägäšt* were built from finely cut ashlars, yet their interior structure was made from wood. The Bible describes Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem as clad with precious metal set with gemstones—which is striking when we recall the multiple sources explicitly asserting that many late medieval Ethiopian churches were adorned quite similarly. Unexpected for a medieval Christian church in other parts of the extended Mediterranean, such architecture and ornamentation would, however, all but mirror descriptions of the Temple of Solomon.²⁶⁶ Again, this connection was very visible to Ethiopian contemporaries: the Chronicle of Iyasu, although dating to the eighteenth century, explicitly states that *atege* Eleni's church of Märṭulä Maryam had once been plated with gold and silver, 'like the temple of the wise Solomon'.²⁶⁷ Furthermore, the Bible of course narrates how king Solomon placed the Ark of the Covenant into the Holy of Holies in his Temple, which had been decorated with beautiful things from all over the known world. According to the *Kəbrä nägäšt*, Solomon's Ethiopian son Mənilək brought the Ark from Jerusalem to the Horn of Africa. To this day, a *tabot*—a copy of the biblical Ark of Covenant—forms the centrepiece of every Ethiopian church.

It has long been known that the term *İsra'elawiyan* or 'Israelites' was readily and flatteringly employed in medieval Gə'əz texts to describe those of presumed Solomonic descent.²⁶⁸ The reverse—that biblical Israelites were co-opted as Solomonic Ethiopians—also appears traceable in late medieval Ethiopian material culture. By the mid-fifteenth century, a visual conflation of Israelite kingship and Solomonic rule was intentionally propagated: illuminations in Ethiopian manuscripts now in Oxford and Paris take great care to depict the biblical rulers David and Solomon as Solomonic sovereigns of the 1400s.²⁶⁹ The Oxford manuscript, dated to the mid-fifteenth century, portrays both biblical kings as wearing large earlobe ornaments, headdresses and headbands. All of these features were contemporaneously codified as symbolising a specific type of late medieval Solomonic royalty, connected to an Aksumite past. The biblical Solomonic ancestors were also visually complemented by the very regalia of Solomonic sovereignty as conventionalised in Gə'əz chronicles: they were painted with a flywhisk, royal umbrella and sword—and as playing the *bägāna*, a local harp-like instrument of powerful symbolic association.²⁷⁰

The Paris manuscript repeats the visual affirmation of biblical Israelite kingship as Solomonic Ethiopian kingship: amongst all its illuminations showing personnel from Old and New Testament, only king David and Solomon are painted as wearing large, noticeable earlobe ornaments, headbands and headdresses matching those of the late medieval *nägästä*.²⁷¹ The ancient sovereigns are depicted as either brandishing a sword or playing the *bägäna*; crucially, they are attended by a servant with a flywhisk and royal umbrella.²⁷² We can firmly locate this manuscript in its time, place, and patronage: it was made for a regional Solomonic administrator, ‘*aqašen* Bälän Sägäd, the ruler of Säräye—a northernly Ethiopian region, home to many Ewostätean monasteries that had not been on necessarily amicable terms with Solomonic rulership for many decades before 1450.²⁷³ Nevertheless, the illuminations made for governor Bälän Sägäd visually established biblical Israelite kings as examples of Solomonic kingship by 1476–1477, the date the manuscript was completed. In fifteenth-century Ethiopia, it appears, David and Solomon were not just narrated as Solomonic forefathers. The biblical sovereigns themselves were also intentionally—and rather literally—propagated as late medieval Solomonic Ethiopian rulers.

The *nägästä*’s professed descent from the illustrious biblical kings and notably Solomon was also actively promoted in their diplomatic overtures to Latin Europe by the early fifteenth century. In 1428, Alfonso V of Aragon addressed *aše* Yəshaq as the heir to the ‘throne of David’, and stated that the *nəguś* possessed the ‘Tablets of Mount Sinai’, that is, the Ark of the Covenant. The transferal of the said ark to Ethiopia is narrated in the *Kəbrä nägästä*, which was unknown in Latin Europe at this time. The Ethiopian ambassadors must therefore have related this piece of information to the Aragonese king.²⁷⁴ If such notions could be impressed upon a geographically distant Iberian sovereign, we may assume that local Ethiopian contemporaries would have been very much aware of the correlation between how the Bible narrated ancient Israelite Solomonic activities and kingship—and how kingship was maintained and produced by the *nägästä* in late medieval Solomonic Ethiopia.

There are several things to take from this. Beyond asserting Solomonic rulership over the domain, the very building of royal religious centres served to create direct cross-generational links and affirmed rightful claims to the Solomonic throne. The sparkling splendour of the buildings themselves was designed to remind their visitors of the biblical Temple established by the dynasty’s legendary founder in Jerusalem, long since

destroyed. In fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century Ethiopia, however, Solomon's heirs lived on and flourished. They propagated themselves as such to not just their subjects, but also to the ecclesiastical and princely rulers of the Latin West.

The parallels between Ethiopian Solomonic kingship and the biblical Solomon, including diplomatic despatches calling for foreign specialist labour to build edifices glorifying God, must have been readily apparent to both these African Christian kings and their subjects. It did not matter whether these missions were successful. The preceding chapters of this book have shown that Solomonic-Latin Christian contacts were often a history of failures, misunderstandings and unmet requests. Nevertheless, the *nägäšt* reached out time and again. In asking other Christian kings for stonemasons, builders, carpenters, painters and metalworkers, Ethiopian sovereigns were not trying to acquire hitherto unknown 'technologists' to develop their state. For the longest time and certainly for the first 100 years of diplomatic contacts, Solomonic rulers were simply trying to, perhaps ritually, acquire foreign skilled labour and treasures to enhance the glory of their prestigious local projects. The interest was not to establish lasting relations with a particular European princely or ecclesiastical court. Instead, a specific means-to-an-end outlook appears to have been the main driving force for Solomonic diplomatic outreach. Reading Solomonic diplomacy as a ritual action primarily enacted to produce and re-assert local kingship also explains why contacts curiously yet repeatedly petered out. Even successful missions were not necessarily followed up upon by the *nägäšt*, who chose to address themselves to new recipients time and again.

Whether any of the craftsmen sent out from Europe ever made it to Ethiopia is far from certain. It seems improbable that many reached the Horn of Africa as a result of Solomonic diplomatic outreach. The monuments whose ruins now litter the central highland plateau tell us little about who built them. However, it stands to reason that the vast majority of skilled workers were local North-East African and especially Ethiopian artisans. Available written sources indicate that Latin Christian foreigners who had come to Ethiopia by chance—a monk, a merchant, a scout—were indefinitely detained, and subsequently put to work by the Ethiopian elite however much they could, mostly as painters. Crucially, however, the remnants of these once-magnificent royal centres offer an answer as to why the *nägäšt* sent out repeated diplomatic missions to Western Europe in the fifteenth century in the first place. This, in turn, opens up a window

onto how Ethiopian rulers saw themselves: as the true heirs of Solomon, carrying on his legacy of building magnificent temples of universal appeal.

CHAPTER AFTERWORD: THE BUILDER KINGS' REALM IN TURBULENT TIMES

This study would not be complete without a few pages dedicated to the requests that have, for such a long time, shaped scholarship's view of Solomonic diplomacy: arms and alliances. In the early sixteenth century, these ostensibly perpetual and often-evoked Ethiopian requests eventually do appear in the sources that have come down to us. In 1508–1509, *atege* Ēleni signalled her willingness to join a military alliance first proposed by the Portuguese in her letter to the Lusitanian king Manuel I. She makes clear that she was eager to support the Portuguese fight against Muslim powers in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean region by providing local troops on land, and primarily through rations and food.²⁷⁵ Notably, however, such an alliance did not materialise. More than a decade later, in the early 1520s, her former charge *aše* Ləbnä Dəngəl repeatedly entertained plans for alliances between his people and the Portuguese against the Ottomans, who had by then become the prominent power in Egypt. Specifics, however, remain hard to grasp in his letters to the Lusitanian kings or the papacy. A distinct plan for aggressive action, not even to speak of a pre-emptive military alliance, again never materialised.²⁷⁶

The first definitive Ethiopian diplomatic request for arms and actual military technologists from Latin Europe also dates to this period, starting with the arrival of the Portuguese embassy at the Ethiopian court in late 1520.²⁷⁷ Thus, a full 120 years into the course of Ethiopian diplomatic outreach did a *nəguś*, *aše* Ləbnä Dəngəl, finally show a clear, discernible interest in acquiring weapons from the Latin West. The underlying principle of firearms and gunpowder seems to have been well-known in Ethiopia by this point.²⁷⁸ According to Francisco Alvares, the *nəguś* repeatedly enquired whether the Portuguese king had sent any arms to accompany the embassy.²⁷⁹ One of his first direct questions posed to the Portuguese concerned muskets and bombards; *aše* Ləbnä Dəngəl was particularly interested in their use by both the Portuguese and the 'Moors', that is, Ottomans.²⁸⁰

This partial about-face is hardly surprising. By the late 1510s, muskets and bombards were fundamentally transforming warfare throughout the

Mediterranean and beyond. Their use had been one of the reasons why Egypt fell to the Ottomans in the late 1510s after more than two and a half centuries of Mamlūk rule, upsetting the old balance of power in North-East Africa. It is no surprise that just a few years later, in 1524, *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl went on to request 'swords and every sort of weapon of war' from Pope Clement VII alongside statues of the Virgin Mary.²⁸¹ However, even in these changing political climes, the wish to acquire artisans and religious treasures remained central to *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl's contacts with the Latin West right until the onset of the wars with the Sultanate of 'Adal, which would devastate his kingdom in the second quarter of the sixteenth century.

The eventual shift in Ethiopian diplomatic policy necessitates more study but seems tied to several local and more global developments. One is undoubtedly the much-changed political climate in the larger region: seen from the Christian Horn of Africa, the early sixteenth century witnessed the rise of the Ottomans in North-East Africa as well as growing instability in Mamlūk Egypt, the appearance and establishment of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean and eventually even the Red Sea, and the reinvigation of the Sultanate of 'Adal and its ties to Muslim principalities on the Arabian Peninsula.²⁸² Another development appears to have been an emergent eschatological expectation about the End of Times in Ethiopia, stemming from several millenarian movements that originated locally in the mid-fifteenth century.²⁸³ By 1500, the belief in a redeemer figure adhering to a different branch of Christianity and the Last Days seems to have become firmly established in Ethiopia. It appears to have significantly transformed and re-shaped Ethiopian policy in the early sixteenth century.

In her letter to king Manuel I of Portugal, written in 1508–1509, *atege* Ḫeni alludes to a prophecy in which a Latin Christian ruler was read as a harbinger of universal Christian peace at the End of Times.²⁸⁴ When the Portuguese embassy first landed on Ethiopian shores and its members identified themselves as Christians in early 1520, they were confronted with exultations: eye-witnesses describe an ecstatic welcome and relate that both a local official as well as the provincial Solomonic governor thanked God specifically for the fulfilment of 'the prophecies'.²⁸⁵ In his letter to Manuel I of Portugal written in 1521, *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl also referenced a prophecy. It stated that 'a Frank King should meet with the King of Ethiopia, and that they should give each other peace'. The *nəguś* stresses that he 'did not know if this would be in my days and time or in

another'. Yet, the combination of the Portuguese activity in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, as well as the presence of this Latin Christian embassy itself, seem to have convinced him that this prediction would now indeed have come to pass.²⁸⁶

It was not only the tremendous change and recent Portuguese presence in the region that charged the local political climate, however. According to the Ethiopian calendar, the year 1500 CE coincided with the beginning of the eight millennium—during which the end of the world was believed to happen.²⁸⁷ Francisco Alvares relates one more aspect of this coagulation of different eschatological expectations, claiming that the Ethiopians 'had a prophecy that there would not be more than a hundred Popes in their country'. The current metropolitan living in Ethiopia, *abunä* Marqos, was a very old man during Alvares' stay of the early 1520s. He was believed to complete this fateful number.²⁸⁸ The Portuguese chaplain also noted that the Ethiopians had two other prophecies, namely that 'the Franks from the end of the earth would come by sea and would join with the Abyssinians', destroying Jeddah and Mecca, vanquishing the Egyptians and taking the great city of Cairo. Afterwards, 'the Abyssinians would go back to their country of their own will and the Franks would stay in the great city and then a road would be opened by which one could easily come from Frankland to the country of the Abyssinians'.²⁸⁹

In the early sixteenth century, four different prophecies and beliefs had thus been merged, creating a climate of eschatological anticipation: one regarding the end of an age, another about the maximal number of metropolitans and two regarding the shared victory of Latin and Ethiopian Christianity over the Muslims, and a subsequent immediate connection between Ethiopian Christianity and other Christians.²⁹⁰ The Ethiopian Solomonic collaboration with a foreign, 'Roman' Christian power was even seen as of tantamount importance to the fate of the world as a whole. It would ensure the ultimate triumph of Christianity.²⁹¹ Which ruler would not be interested in arms and religious-military alliances when facing the End of Times?

A few years after the Portuguese embassy sailed home again in 1526, the apocalypse seemingly indeed began—at least when viewed from a Solomonic courtly perspective. In the late 1520s, troops from the Sultanate of 'Adal launched a series of escalating raids on Christian territory that eventually resulted in the temporary loss of Solomonic control over most of the highland realm. Churches and palaces were razed to the ground. Until the death of *Imām* Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Gāzī in 1543, 'Adali

soldiers claimed the formerly Christian territory as their own, all but excising all traces of Solomonian royal power in the domain. When Ethiopian Christian rule was re-established in the 1540s under *aṣe* Gälawdewos, the vast majority of his ancestors' glorious royal foundations had been destroyed, their vestiges all but removed from historiography. Strangely enough, today, it is of all things the history of Solomonian Ethiopian diplomatic contacts with Latin Europe that helps us catch just a glimpse of this forever-lost late medieval Christian realm in the Horn of Africa. It helps us fathom how the *näjäst* conceived of themselves, and their role in the world in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

NOTES

1. He states: 'Nè doveva essere ultimo tra i motivi e gli scopi dell'ambasceria l'interesse ad accaparrarsi qualcuno di quei maestri d'arte e d'industria che potevano elevare il livello civile e tecnico dello stato etiopico e quindi rafforzare la sua efficienza anche militare (richiesta di artigiani e tecnici, che sappiamo insistente in tutto il '400 e anche nel '500).' Renato Lefèvre, 'Presenze Etiopiche in Italia Prima Del Concilio Di Firenze Del 1439', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* 23 (1967): 5–26:14.
2. Cf. Lefèvre, 'Presenze Etiopiche in Italia Prima Del Concilio Di Firenze Del 1439', 13–14.
3. Cf. Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 258–65; Charles Fraser Beekingham, 'European Sources for Ethiopian History before 1634', *Paideuma* 33 (1987): 170–73; Marilyn E. Heldman, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Ṣeyon: 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; Richard Pankhurst, 'Europe, Relations With', in *EAE* 2 (2005), 452; Matteo Salvatore, 'The Ethiopian Age of Exploration: Prester John's Discovery of Europe, 1306–1458', *Journal of World History* 21, no. 4 (2010): 624–27; 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): 310–14; Matteo Salvatore, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402–1555* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2016), 24–26, 203–4; Matteo Salvatore, 'Encounters Between Ethiopia and Europe, 1400–1660', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), para. 1.

4. Cf. Kurt, 'The Search for Prester John, a Projected Crusade and the Eroding Prestige of Ethiopian Kings, c.1200–c.1540', 311, 314; 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): paras 3–4; 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.
5. Cf. Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527*, 258.
6. Cf. Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527*, 265.
7. Tadesse Tamrat also asserted that the missions to the papacy should be read as an Ethiopian recognition of the Latin Church in Rome as a 'strong European state in its own right', which could be appealed-to for 'technical assistance'; see Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527*, 265.
8. Cf. Beckingham, 'European Sources for Ethiopian History before 1634', 173.
9. Cf. Beckingham, 'European Sources for Ethiopian History before 1634', 170.
10. Cf. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 28.
11. Cf. Heldman, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Šeyon: A Study of Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality*, 143.
12. Cf. Henze, *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia*, 70.
13. Cf. Pankhurst, 'Europe, Relations With', 452.
14. In 2013, Andrew Kurt held that 'Ethiopian rulers requested help from and even attempted to establish an alliance with European powers' due to being 'bordered to the east and south by hostile Muslim territory'. He postulated that *aše Zär'a Ya'əqob* 'wanted the military force' a possible 'union of Churches would bring', and that the *nəguś* requested 'technical aid', reading his missions to Pope Nicholas V and to the king of Aragon in 1450 as 'an indication that Ethiopia perceived its vulnerability'. At the same time, Kurt admits that Ethiopia 'saw itself in a position for potential victory over Muslim territories on a wider scale, yet menaced by an enemy that continued to pose a danger' in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, cf. Kurt, 'The Search for Prester John, a Projected Crusade and the Eroding Prestige of Ethiopian Kings, c.1200–c.1540', 311–314. Matteo Salvatore stated in 2010 that the Ethiopians understood 'Europeans as military allies', possessed a 'penchant for Western technology and art', and held a 'Promethean image of Europeans as purveyors of technical knowledge'; that 'Ethiopian elites sought to establish relations with Western powers in order to find allies against Islam and acquire technological know-how', cf. Salvatore, 'The Ethiopian Age of Exploration:

Prester John's Discovery of Europe, 1306–1458', 624, 626. In a 2016 monograph, Salvatore acknowledged that relics were of some relevance to *aṣe* Dawit's embassy to Venice in 1402, but 'equally or possibly more attractive for the sovereign was European technology'. As Salvatore subsequently stresses 'Ethiopia's technological limitations' vis-à-vis its Muslim neighbours, which he reads as 'foes', it becomes clear that 'technology' here connotes arms instead of recent Italian advances in wool-weaving or timekeeping. A 'triple menace' of 'domestic instability, the Mamluks in the north, and Ifat in the south' had allegedly caused Dawit to send his envoys to Venice at the turn of the fifteenth century, 'hoping to elicit support from distant yet well-known co-religionists'—'in all likelihood', Bartoli had been 'instructed to seek allies, useful technology, and relics'. In order to circumvent supposed Mamlūk interference, the 'migration of skilled individuals to Ethiopia' was promoted by his ambassador to 'facilitate technological transfer'. Already at the very onset of Solomonic relations with the Latin West, the *naguś* had thus 'displayed remarkable acumen by dispatching his representatives to procure not only guns and artefacts but also their makers', cf. Salvatore, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402–1555*, 24, 26. A 2018 encyclopaedia entry states that 'Ethiopians reached multiple locales across Latin Europe to forge political alliances, acquire technology, and pursue religious knowledge', compare Salvatore, 'Encounters Between Ethiopia and Europe, 1400–1660', para. 1.

15. Unless we read the single 1402 *Spatarium*, a metalworker, as a technologist, all Solomonic demands for weapons and technologist-craftsmen such as gunsmiths date to the early 1520s; see end of this chapter.
16. Compare Chap. 3; also see Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-Ghumr Bi-Anbā' al-'Umr*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashi, vol. 3 (Cairo, 1971), 426, Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb Al-Sulūk Li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, eds. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyāda and Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Āšūr, vol. 4.2 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1939), 797 and Yūsuf Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhira Fī Mulūk Miṣr Wa l-Qāhira*, ed. M.A. Hātim, vol. 14 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1963), 324–25.
17. See Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Al-Maqrīzī, *The Book of the True Knowledge of the History of the Moslem Kings in Abyssinia*, trans. George W. B. Huntingford (London: SOAS Archives, 1955), 6; also see Julien Loiseau, 'The Ḥaṭī and the Sultan. Letters and Embassies from Abyssinia to the Mamluk Court', in *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies: Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics*, eds. Frédéric Bauden and Malika Dekkiche, (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 638–57; Anaïs Wion, 'Medieval Ethiopian Economies: Subsistence, Global Trade and the Administration of Wealth', in *A*

- Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, ed. Samantha Kelly (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 395–424:416–17.
18. Charles F. Beckingham and George W. B. Huntingford, eds., *The Prester John of the Indies. A True Relation of the Lands of the Prester John, Being the Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520, Written by Father Francisco Alvares* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 429, 434; Paul Lester Stenhouse and Richard Pankhurst, eds., *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia* (Hollywood: Tsehail Publishers, 2005), 78.
 19. See Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527*, 119–56; Marie-Laure Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens, 1270–1527: Espace, Pouvoir et Monarchisme* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003), 76–77. He also threatened the Mamlūks in Cairo with blocking the river Nile should the Sultan not cease hostility against the Copts of Egypt; see Julien Loiseau, ‘Chrétiens d’Égypte, Musulmans d’Éthiopie. Protection Des Communautés et Relations Diplomatiques Entre Le Sultanat Mamelouk et Le Royaume Salomonien (ca 1270–1516)’, *Médiévales* 79, no. 2 (2020), 37–68:50–51.
 20. Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527*, 130–247; Manfred Kropp, *Der Siegreiche Feldzug Des Königs ‘Āmda-Ṣeyon Gegen Die Muslime in Adal Im Jahre 1332 n. Chr.* (Leuven: Peeters, 1994); Steven Kaplan, ‘Solomonic Dynasty’, in *EAE* 4 (2010), 688–90; Amélie Chekroun and Bertrand Hirsch, ‘The Sultanates of Medieval Ethiopia’, in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, ed. Samantha Kelly (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 86–112; 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), 57–85. *aṣe* Dawit, *aṣe* Yəṣḥaq and *aṣe* Zār’a Ya‘əqob all acted forcefully against principalities they considered tributary to their realm, Muslims, Betä ʿIsraʾel and adherents to local religions alike. Aggression towards the former in the Horn caused the chagrin of Mamlūk historians such as al-Maqrīzī, who bemoaned that *aṣe* Yəṣḥaq presented himself in the finest ‘kingly splendour’ and stark Christian iconography when dealing with Muslim vassals; see Al-Maqrīzī, *The Book of the True Knowledge of the History of the Moslem Kings in Abyssinia*, 6. In 1445, *aṣe* Zār’a Ya‘əqob won a resounding victory against the Walasmaʿ Sultanate of Ifat-ʿAdal, a Muslim principality he considered a rebellious tributary to his realm; see Franz-Christoph Muth, ‘Aḥmad Badlāy’, in *EAE* 1 (2003), 158–59; Marie-Laure Derat and Steven Kaplan, ‘Zār’a Ya‘əqob’, in *EAE* 5 (2014), 149; Chekroun and Hirsch, ‘The Sultanates of Medieval Ethiopia’. The *nəḡus* was narrated as personally killing and dismembering the body of Sultan Aḥmad Badlāy; see Jules Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de*

- Zar'a Yâ'eqôb et de Ba'eda Mâryâm, Rois d'Éthiopie de 1434 à 1478* (Paris: É. Bouillon, 1893), 88–89; Muth, 'Aḥmad Badlāy'; Derat and Kaplan, 'Zār'a Ya'eqob'. Echoes of this Solomonic triumph were carried over to Latin Europe throughout the 1440s, compare François-Joseph-Jean Lastic, *Chronique de La Maison de Lastic : D'après Les Archives Du Château de Parentignat et Quelques Autres Documents. Des Origines à La Fin Du XV^e Siècle* (Montpellier: Firmin et Montane, 1919), 329–30; Julian Plante, 'The Ethiopian Embassy to Cairo of 1443. A Trier Manuscript of Gandulphus' Report with an English Translation', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 13, no. 2 (1975): 133–140. The 'Royal Chronicle' of *aše* Āskändər, for example, also narrates episodes of unprompted Solomonic violence against perceived Muslim tributaries, among them the invasion of the 'Adali capital of Dakar and destruction of houses and mosques in ca. 1490; see Jules Perruchon, 'Histoire d'Eslander, d'Amda Seyon II et de Nâ'od, Rois d'Éthiopie', *Journal Asiatique* 9, no. 3 (1894): 357–58. Lastly, although *Imām* Maḥfūz bin Muḥammad—the governor of Zayla', an important city on the Red Sea Coast under the rulership of the Sultanate of 'Adal—fought a decades-long and bloody conflict against the *nägāst* at the turn of the sixteenth century, he was beaten by *aše* Ləbnā Dəngəl in 1517; see Ewald Wagner, 'Maḥfūz b. Muḥammad', in *EAE* 3 (2007), 659; Chekroun and Hirsch, 'The Sultanates of Medieval Ethiopia', 104–5; Alessandro Gori, 'Islamic Cultural Traditions of Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea', in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, ed. Samantha Kelly (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 142–61.
21. Compare, for example, Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527*, 255–56, 261–62; Verena Krebs, 'Crusading Threats? Ethiopian-Egyptian Relations in the 1440s', in *Les Croisades En Afrique. XIII–XVI^e Siècles*, ed. Benjamin Weber (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Midi, 2019), 245–74 and also Loiseau, 'Chrétien d'Égypte, Musulmans d'Éthiopie. Protection Des Communautés et Relations Diplomatiques Entre Le Sultanat Mamelouk et Le Royaume Salomonien (ca 1270–1516)'. An Ethiopian *Nägś* hymn written in the mid-fifteenth century also demonstrates that Ethiopian rulers very much saw themselves as protectors of Christian minorities in the Eastern Mediterranean; see Getatchew Haile, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's Tradition on the Holy Cross* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 4–14.
22. Also see Loiseau, 'Chrétien d'Égypte, Musulmans d'Éthiopie. Protection Des Communautés et Relations Diplomatiques Entre Le Sultanat Mamelouk et Le Royaume Salomonien (ca 1270–1516)', 65. For a study of Solomonic kingship and the basis of Christian power in the Solomonic highlands, see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*.

23. As Adam Knobler recently put it, Latin Christians had been all but conditioned to such a view by the identification of Solomonic Ethiopia as the realm of Prester John by the late fourteenth century, prior to the onset of actual Solomonic diplomacy; see Adam Knobler, *Mythology and Diplomacy in the Age of Exploration* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 42. The legend and letter of Prester John dates to the twelfth century, the subsequent development of the myth of Prester John in Europe held that this mythical monarch wished to ‘visit the Sepulchre of the Lord with a great army’ to ‘humiliate and vanquish the enemies of the cross of Christ and to exalt his blessed name’; see Marco Giardini, ‘The Quest for the Ethiopian Prester John and Its Eschatological Implications’, *Medievalia* 22 (2019): 55–87:57. On the legend of Prester John in Europe and Latin Christian hopes projected onto Ethiopia, see, for example, Keagan Brewer, ed., *Prester John: The Legend and Its Sources* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Gianfranco Fiaccadori, ‘Prester John’, in *EAE* 4 (2010), 209–16; Benjamin Weber and Robin Seignobos, ‘L’Occident, La Croisade et l’Éthiopie: Introduction’, *Annales d’Éthiopie* 27 (2012): 15–20; Benjamin Weber, ‘An Incomplete Integration into the Orbis Christianus. Relations and Misunderstandings between the Papacy and Ethiopia (1237–1456)’, *Medieval Encounters* 21 no. 2–3 (2015): 232–49; Knobler, *Mythology and Diplomacy in the Age of Exploration*, chap. 3; Samantha Kelly, ‘Heretics, Allies, Exemplary Christians: Latin Views of Ethiopian Orthodox in the Late Middle Ages’, in *Late Medieval Heresy: New Perspectives. Studies in Honor of Robert E. Lerner*, eds. Michael D. Bailey and Sean L. Field (York: York Medieval Press, 2018), 195–214; Giardini, ‘The Quest for the Ethiopian Prester John and Its Eschatological Implications’; Verena Krebs, ‘Fancy Names and Fake News: Notes on the Conflation of Solomonic Ethiopian Rulership with the Myth of Prester John in Late Medieval Latin Christian Diplomatic Correspondence’, in *Orbis Aethiopicus*, 2021, 89–124.
24. Compare the July 1448 letter by Jean de Lastic, the Grand Master of Rhodes, to Charles VII, king of France; Lastic, *Chronique de La Maison de Lastic : D’après Les Archives Du Château de Parentignat et Quelques Autres Documents. Des Origines à La Fin Du XVe Siècle*, 329–30 or the 1444 letter of Gandulph of Sicily to Pope Eugene IV, ed. in Luke Wadding, *Annales Minorum Seu Trium Ordinum a S. Francisco Institutorum*, Vol. 11 (Rome: Typis Rochi Bernabò, 1734), 220–21; transl. in Plante, ‘The Ethiopian Embassy to Cairo of 1443. A Trier Manuscript of Gandulphus’ Report with an English Translation’ as well as the 1480s account of Georges Lengherand; see Godefroy-Ménilglaise, Denis C. de, ed., *Voyage de Georges Lengherand, Mayeur de Mons En Haynaut, a Venise, Rome, Jérusalem, Mont Sinai & Le Kayre* (Mons: Masquillier & Dequesne, 1861), 185–88.

25. ACA, Ms. 2677, f. 54v; ACA, Ms. 2658, fol. 57v; ACA, Ms. 2658, fol. 178r; ACA, Ms. 2661, fol. 20v.
26. That is, in 1441, the Ethiopian delegates at the Council of Florence were directly questioned about such a possibility, see Bartolomeo Nogara, *Scritti Inediti e Rari Di Biondo Flavio* (Rome: Tipografia poliglotta Vaticana, 1927), 26–27; in 1456, Pope Callixtus III directly proposed a shared crusade to *aṣe Zär'a Ya'əqob*; see Osvaldo Raineri, *Lettere Tra i Pontefici Romani e i Principi Etiopici (Secc. XII–XX). Versioni e Integrazioni* (Città del Vaticano: Archivio Segreto Vaticano, 2005), 36; in 1481–82, Pope Sixtus IV appears to have entertained similar ideas according to the testimony of Johanne Baptista Brochus; see Renato Lefèvre, 'Richerche Sull'imolese G.B. De Brocchi, Viaggiatore in Etiopia e Curiale Pontificio', *Archivio Della Societa Romana Di Storia Patria* 81 (1958): 108.
27. This object was bestowed annually by the pontiff upon those seen as defenders of the Christian faith or the Holy See; see Benjamin Weber, 'Vrais et Faux Éthiopiens Au XVe Siècle En Occident? Du Bon Usage Des Connexions', *Annales d'Éthiopie* 27 (2012): 115.
28. In publications of the 1930s and 1940s, a number of Italian scholars (many with ties to the fascist occupation of Ethiopia as part of the *Africa Orientale Italiana* between 1936 and 1941) postulated, for example, that the purported presence of 'foreign' or 'European' elements in late medieval Ethiopian material culture and architecture was owed to a lack of skilled indigenous labour, and asserted that Ethiopia had profited from Italian technological and artistic advancement already in the late Middle Ages; 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; Renato Lefèvre, 'Riflessi Etiopici Nella Cultura Europea Del Medioevo e Del Rinascimento—Parte Seconda', *Annali Lateranensi* 9 (1945): 380–83; Ugo Monneret de Villard, 'Miniatura Veneto-Cretese in Un Codice Etiopico', *La Bibliofilia* 47 (1945): 13. Notions based on assumptions of an ostensible lack of skilled indigenous labour and Italian artistic transfer survive, for example, in the narrative surrounding the Venetian Nicolo Brancalon, who has been styled as a master artist instructing a 'school' of Ethiopian pupils; see Stanisław Chojnacki, 'Notes on Art in Ethiopia in the 15th and Early 16th Century', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 8, no. 2 (1970): 21–65; Stanisław Chojnacki, 'The Discovery of a 15th-Century Painting and the Brancalon Enigma', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* 43 (1999): 15–42; Stanisław Chojnacki, 'New Discoveries: The Italianate School Reconsidered', in *Ethiopian Art: A Unique Cultural Heritage and Modern Challenge*, eds. Stanisław Chojnacki, Walter Raunig, and Asfā-Wossen Asserate (Lublin: Orbis Aethiopicus, 2007), 1–20; I exam-

- ined this topic in great detail in Verena Krebs, ‘Windows onto the World: Culture Contacts and Western Christian Art in Ethiopia, 1402–1543’ (PhD thesis, Universität Konstanz / Mekelle University, 2014), chap. 5 as well as my forthcoming monograph, *Africa Collecting Europe*.
29. Francesco Cerone, ‘La Politica Orientale Di Alfonso Di Aragona’, *Archivio Storico per Le Province Napoletane* 27 (1902): 3-93:67; Lefèvre, ‘Riflessi Etiopici Nella Cultura Europea Del Medioevo e Del Rinascimento—Parte Seconda’, 381, 389; Knobler, *Mythology and Diplomacy in the Age of Exploration*, 40–41.
 30. Knobler, *Mythology and Diplomacy in the Age of Exploration*, 42.
 31. Per Otnes, ‘Other-Wise: Alterity, Materiality, Mediation’ (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997).
 32. Compare 2 Chronicles, 2 and 1 Kings, 6 and 7.
 33. The term was first coined by Marie-Laure Derat in her study of Early Solomonic Kingship; Marie-Laure Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens, 1270–1527: Espace, Pouvoir et Monarchisme* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003), chap. 6.
 34. For Aksum, see 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.
 35. For a brief overview, see Verena Krebs, ‘Christianity, Ethiopian’, in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History: Asia and Africa* (Wiley, 2021).
 36. For the Zagwe, see 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; Gianfranco Fiaccadori, ‘Zagwe’, *EAE* 5 (2014), 107–14.
 37. While it certainly centred on Lasta, the realm of the Zagwe has recently been shown to extend far beyond this region; see 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); Derat, ‘Before the Solomonids: Crisis, Renaissance and the Emergence of the Zagwe Dynasty (Seventh–Thirteenth Centuries)’.
 38. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 7.
 39. The Muslim principality of Šawah, ruled by the Maḥzūmī family, existed on the southern end of the central highland plateau by the twelfth century; it was destroyed by a Muslim rival—probably with Christian support—in the late 1280s and eventually integrated into the Solomonic Christian realm; see Chekroun and Hirsch, ‘The Sultanates of Medieval Ethiopia’, 93–95; Deresse Ayenachew, ‘Territorial Expansion and Administrative Evolution under the “Solomonic” Dynasty’, 65–70.

40. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 7, 23–24. For a definition of the distinct geographical borders and sub-regions of Amhara and Šäwa, see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 19–49. On the question of the capitals of Ethiopia, the ‘cities of the king’ and especially the town of Bärara, mentioned as something akin to a capital in numerous exogenous texts but yet to be securely located, see Richard Pankhurst, ‘Bärara’, in *E Ae* 1 (2003), 473. The royal court or *kätäma*, some 30,000 to 40,000 people strong, moved through the realm for the long dry season; its itinerant nature was based on the assumption that no single area could support its consumption for too long and also owed to the practicalities of governing a rugged highland realm. On the *kätäma*, the royal court or ‘camp’, see Manfred Kropp, ‘The Šər‘atä Gəbr: A Mirror View of Daily Life at the Ethiopian Royal Court in the Middle Ages’, *Northeast African Studies* 10, no. 2–3 (1988): 51–87; Deresse Ayenachew, ‘The Southern Interests of the Royal Court of Ethiopia in the Light of Bərbər Maryam’s Ge’ez and Amharic Manuscripts’, *Northeast African Studies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 43–57; Deresse Ayenachew, ‘Territorial Expansion and Administrative Evolution under the “Solomonic” Dynasty’.
41. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 35.
42. From the chronicles of fourteenth- to sixteenth-century Ethiopian rulers, it is clear that the *nägäšt* at least claimed to rule supreme over most of the central highlands, reaching from the governorship of the *baḥər nägaš* in the Eritrean coastal region to the Sultanate of Hadiyya and the Awaš, some 100 miles south of modern-day Addis Ababa; see Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar’a Yä’eqōb et de Ba’eda Märyām*; Perruchon, ‘Histoire d’Eskender, d’Amda Seyon II et de Nā’od, Rois d’Éthiopie’; 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 ‘Amda-Şeyon gegen die Muslime in Adal im Jahre 1332 n. Chr.* as well as George W.B. Huntingford, *The Historical Geography of Ethiopia From the First Century AD to 1704* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); 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).
43. The Ethiopian rulers of this time humbly referred to themselves as ‘kings’—using the term *nəguš*—and I have accordingly adopted that terminology throughout this book. Generations of scholars have indeed referred to the medieval *nägäšt* as ‘emperors’, or to an Aksumite as well as a Gondärine Empire; see among many others Merid Wolde Aregay, ‘Society and Technology in Ethiopia 1500–1800’, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 17 (1984): 127–47; Henze, *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia*,

- 22–26, 119; Marilyn E. Heldman, ‘A Chalice from Venice for Emperor Dawit of Ethiopia’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 52, no. 3 (1990): 442–445. On the use of the title *nəguś* by the Ethiopian kings, see Andreu Martínez d’Alòs-Moner, ‘The Selling Of The Nəguś: The «Emperor Of Ethiopia» In Portuguese And Jesuit Imagination’, *Scrinium* 1, no. 1 (2005): 161–73.
44. The Solomonic royal ideology propagated in the dynasty’s foundational myth, the *Kəbrä nəgäšt*, the ‘Glory of the Kings’ or ‘Nobility of the Kings’, postulated a direct biological descent from the Biblical king Solomon through his son with the Queen of Sheba. Its first extant redaction in Gəʿəz dates to the first quarter of the fourteenth century while the text’s colophon proclaims it to be a much older text originally written in Coptic and Arabic; see Paolo Marrassini, ‘Kəbrä Nəgäšt’, in *EAE* 3 (2007), 364–68 for a textual history and bibliography. In the early twentieth century, it was edited and translated to German; see Carl Bezold, ed., *Kebrä Nagast: Die Herrlichkeit der Könige, nach den Handschriften in Berlin, London, Oxford und Paris* (München: k. b. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1905) as well as English; see Ernest Alfred Thompson Wallis Budge, ed., *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek (Kebrä Nəgäšt)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
45. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*.
46. Steven Kaplan, ‘Monasteries’, in *EAE* 3 (2007), 989. The Christianisation of Amhara is, for example, narrated as originating with a ninth-century Aksumite king ordering Christian missionaries from the northern highlands to teach in the region; see Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527*, 35.
47. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 8, 87.
48. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 87–136. Both monastic motherhouses had been founded by one of the two most revered saints and important figures of Ethiopian monasticism: Iyäsus Moʿa and Täklä Haymanot. For an overview and bibliography, see Stanisław Kur, Steven Kaplan, and Denis Nosnitsin, ‘Iyäsus Moʿa’, in *EAE* 3 (2007), 257–59; Denis Nosnitsin, ‘Täklä Haymanot’, in *EAE* 4 (2010), 831–34. In the timeframe under consideration here, their hierarchically organised religious communities had spread throughout the realm; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, chaps. 3, 4, and 5 and especially 87–88. The monastic centres were also somewhat interrelated—the abbot of Däbrä ʿAsbo, Täklä Haymanot, was traditionally held to be a pupil of Iyäsus Moʿa of Däbrä Ḥayq ʿƏṣṭifanos before founding his own community, which would become Däbrä Libanos.
49. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 84.

50. Non-monastic individuals and communities could also be given *gʷalt*; in that case, the owner had certain obligations to the *näḡäśt*, that is, raising troops if asked to do so, and paying specific taxes to the king.
51. Deresse Ayenachew, 'Territorial Expansion and Administrative Evolution under the "Solomonic" Dynasty', 61–62.
52. Deresse Ayenachew, 'Territorial Expansion and Administrative Evolution under the "Solomonic" Dynasty', 73; Steven Kaplan, 'Aqqabe Säʿat', in *EAE* 1 (2003), 292–93; Tadesse Tamrat, 'The Abbots of Däbrä-Hayq 1248–1535', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 8, no. 1 (1970): 87–117. Numerous other ecclesiastics were also attached to the court, acting as intermediaries between the *näḡäśt* and the monks. These court clergymen are known as *kabənataḡ dābtära* or 'priests of the tabernacle'; on their role and function; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 174–77.
53. Jules Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar'a Ya'eqōb et de Ba'eda Maryām, Rois d'Éthiopie de 1434 à 1478* (Paris: É. Bouillon, 1893), 7–8, 27–28, 109, 168; Perruchon, 'Histoire d'Eskender, d'ʿAmda Seyon II et de Nā'od, Rois d'Éthiopie', 353; Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 93.
54. See Getatchew Haile, 'Ḥččäge', in *EAE* 2 (2005), 212–13; Kaplan, 'Monasteries', 990.
55. On the relationship between Solomonic rule and monasticism, see Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527*, 156–205; Steven Kaplan, *The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonic Ethiopia* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1984); Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*; Gianfrancesco Lusini, 'The Ancient and Medieval History of Eritrean and Ethiopian Monasticism: An Outline', in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, ed. Samantha Kelly (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 194–216. Monastic ideals and royal agenda could be—and sometimes were—diametrically opposed. Religious reforms and the lifestyle of the *näḡäśt* invited criticism from the religious communities. Particularly fierce conflicts are tangible for the fourteenth century, and the rule of *aše* 'Amdä Şəyon and *aše* Säyfa Ar'ad. An issue of contention was the practice of polygyny and marriage of a father's wife. For some examples of particularly violent clashes, torture and even martyrdom of ecclesiastics at the hand of several *näḡäśt*, see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, chap. 4. By the mid-fifteenth century, Solomonic rulers had however established a working and stable relationship with both Däbrä Ḥayq Ḥəṯifanos and Däbrä Libanos; Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 189. For an exhaustive study on the underlying and specific reasons for this change, see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, chap. 5. Religious reforms enacted under *aše* Dawit and particularly *aše* Zär'a Ya'eqob in the fifteenth century resulted, however, in the (contin-

- ued) resistance from specific other monastic groups, that is, the Ewostateans and the Ḕstifanosites or Stephanites.
56. Kaplan, ‘Monasteries’, 988.
 57. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Ḕthiopiens*, 209. I would add the church built by princess Dəlmā Nəgśa, a daughter of *aše* Dawit, in the late fourteenth or very early fifteenth century, to this list; see 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), 336–41. Derat distinguishes five different types of foundations: chapels, sanctuaries, churches, convents and important monasteries; it is frequently impossible from the textual evidence to distinguish between churches and monasteries, and many seem to have been both; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Ḕthiopiens*, 210–11.
 58. For a table of foundations, compare Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Ḕthiopiens*, 328. It is possible that the surviving and accessible source evidence distorts our picture of this phenomenon; both written and archaeological sources are limited for an earlier period but comparatively good for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Ḕthiopiens*, 209.
 59. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Ḕthiopiens*, 215, 217, 224–25.
 60. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Ḕthiopiens*, 218–19. The building of the church of Anşokiya of Ifat appears to have been all but a provocation towards the Sultanate of ‘Adal.
 61. Compare Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Ḕthiopiens*, 79–81. In the sixteenth century, royal women also founded prestigious religious centres in eastern Goğğam: Ḕskəndər’s mother Romna founded Mə‘ərafā Maryam on the shores of Lake Ṭana, Na‘od Mogäsa established Getesemane Maryam and *ətege* Ḕleni Märtulā Maryam in her large fief at Ḕnnäbse; see Margaux Herman, ‘Towards a History of Women in Medieval Ethiopia’, in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, ed. Samantha Kelly (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 365–94:392–93. Goğğam had come under Solomonic control during the expansion of the realm in the 1330s; in the fifteenth century, the formerly sovereign *nəgäsi* or ‘king’ of Goğğam was appointed by the *nəguś* himself, placing the region under direct Solomonic control. *Aše Zär’a* Ya‘əqob had also installed a royal *čäwa* military regiment in Goğğam. Still, the region remained a Christian frontier area until the latter part of the fifteenth century, with the monk Nob—a Solomonic prince—building the church of Mādḥane ‘Alām on an island in Lake Ṭana in the 1410s. The subsequent royal foundations of this region, pushed by royal women, played a pivotal role in Goğğam’s evangelization; the political affiliation of the monasteries adhered to the religious movements favoured by the queens.

62. The specific, rugged geography made Mänz comparatively removed and isolated, but its climate was temperate and its soils fertile, allowing for multiple harvests a year; see Ronald A. Reminick and Evgenia Sokolinskaia, 'Mänz', in *EAE* 3 (2007), 753–54:753.
63. Reminick and Sokolinskaia, 'Mänz', 752. For Yoḥannäs Məśraqawi, understood as the (possibly even fifteenth-century) 'apostle of Mänz' ordered by *aṣe* 'Amdä Şayon to evangelize in the area; see Paolo Marrassini, 'Yoḥannäs Məśraqawi', in *EAE* 5 (2014), 82–83.
64. Reminick and Sokolinskaia, 'Mänz', 753.
65. Ruins of dressed-stone edifices possibly dating to the fifteenth century are also found in the north of the realm, see Francis Anfray, 'Notes archéologiques', *Annales d'Éthiopie* 8 (1970): 31–56:36–40. Solomonic rulers did however not focus their building activities on Təgray or Lasta, the former centres of the Aksumite and Zag^we kingdoms, home to an extensive network of churches and monasteries dating back to late antiquity.
66. The important monastic motherhouses in the fifteenth century remained Däbrä 'Asbo and Däbrä Libanos, as well as the Ewoṣṭean communities of Däbrä Maryam and Däbrä Bizän in Təgray. The affiliation of more than half of the royal churches is unknown; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 242–44, 259–60, 266.
67. While built for many purposes, these edifices are often tied to practices of religious unification and assertion of power: in the very early fifteenth century, *aṣe* Dawit is narrated as weathering a religious controversy and subsequently founding a very big and beautiful church on Amba Gəṣän; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 181–83. Zär'a Ya'əqob built his church of Däbrä Bərhan between 1450 and 1453, the same time his throne was allegedly under threat from a court conspiracy; see Tadesse Tamrat, 'Problems of Royal Succession in Fifteenth-Century Ethiopia: A Presentation of the Documents', in *IV Congresso Internazionale Di Studi Etiopici, Roma 1972*, ed. Enrico Cerulli (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1974), 242 and Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 273. He also built several churches in short order after the victory over a rebellious Muslim tributary, and gifted the rich clothes and jewellery of his opponent Aḥmad Badlāy to his royal foundation of Däbrä Näg^wädg^wad, Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar'a Yä'əqob et de Ba'eda Märyām*, 66–67, 89, 92–93. *Aṣe* Ĕskəndar meanwhile built a church to assuage his guilt after an incursion on the Sultanate of 'Adal led to loss of life among his troops; he called it the 'Monastery of Sacrifice'; see Perruchon, 'Histoire d'Ĕskender, d'ḂAmda Seyon II et de Nā'od, Rois d'Éthiopie', 357–58.

68. Of the 34 royal churches securely attested, at least 9 were funerary sites; all except 1 were located in Amhara. Some could become veritable necropolises; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 224, 259, 272, 284–290.
69. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 272–79.
70. The *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* describes the ‘Adali leader *Imām* Aḥmad as enquiring after and subsequently specifically targeting royal churches. Threats of violence against royal churches are narrated as a major factor in the intermittent negotiations between Christian and the ‘Adali troops between 1529 and 1531; see, for example, Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 89, 129, 184, 245–46. Other important religious centres, such as the monastery of Däbrä Libanos, were also significant targets; see Francesco Béguinot, *La Cronaca Abbreviata d’Abissinia: Nuova Versione Dall’Etiopico e Commento* (Rome: Tipografia della Casa Edit. Italiana, 1901), 17; Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 187, 190–92.
71. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 213.
72. See Franz-Christoph Muth, ‘Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša’, in *EAc* 2 (2005), 592–93; Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*.
73. Compare among many passages Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 246–49, 250, 251, 253.
74. Attested separately in Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 256 and Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 220.
75. Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 246–47.
76. Compare, for example, Richard Stephen Whiteway, ed., *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1541–1543, as Narrated by Castanhoso, with Some Contemporary Letters, the Short Account of Bermudez, and Certain Extracts from Correa* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1967), 6 and Solomon Gebreyes Beyene, ‘The Chronicle of King Gälawdewos (1540–1559): A Critical Edition with Annotated Translation’ (PhD thesis, Hamburg, Universität Hamburg, 2016); Kropp, *Die Geschichte des Lebna-Dengel, Claudius und Minas*.
77. Whiteway, *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1541–1543*, xxxvi.
78. Compare Ignazio Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyāsu I et Bakāffā* (Leuven: Peeters, 1905), 70–71, which dates later but notes that Ḫēni’s church of Mārṭulā Maryam had been dismantled by subsequent local Christian rulers who let it fall into ruin. The exact location of many royal foundations is only approximately determined; compare the map in Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 214.

79. Cerulli, 'L'Etiopia Del Secolo XV in Nouvi Documenti Storici Con 12 Illustrazioni', 110.
80. For a rather sanitized overview of Cerulli's career as both a colonial administrator and seminal scholar of Ethiopian Studies, see Lanfranco Ricci, 'Cerulli, Enrico', in *EAE* 1 (2003), 708–9. He had been an Italian legate in Addis Ababa between 1926 and 1931; in 1939 and 1940, he became governor of two provinces during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia.
81. Cerulli, 'L'Etiopia Del Secolo XV in Nouvi Documenti Storici Con 12 Illustrazioni', 110; Maurice de Coppet had become the French minister in Addis Ababa in January 1917 and left Ethiopia in the late 1920s; he travelled through Gogġam in late 1922 and early 1923; see Susanne Hummel, 'Das hagiografische Werk zu Šarša Petros. Werkgenese und Teiledition' (PhD thesis, Hamburg, Universität Hamburg, 2020), 14.
82. Cerulli, 'L'Etiopia Del Secolo XV in Nouvi Documenti Storici Con 12 Illustrazioni', 110. Also see Chap. 4 of this book; the passage in Suriano's *Treatise on the Holy Land* states that Baptista saw an 'organ made in the Italian style' in a 'church of the king', which was as 'large as the church of St Mary of the Angels' and called 'Geneth Ioryos'; see BAP, Ms. 1106, fol. 45v, ed. in Marzia Caria, 'Il Tratatello Delle Indulgentie de Terra Sancta Secondo Il Ms. 1106 Della Biblioteca Augusta Di Perugia. Edizione e Note Linguistiche' (PhD thesis, Sassari, Università degli Studi di Sassari, 2008), 165; transl. in Theophilus Bellorini, Eugene Hoade, and Bellarmino Bagatti, eds., *Treatise on the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1949), 98. 'Geneth Ioryos' clearly refers to the royal church of Gännätä Giyorgis, founded by *aše* Ĕskändər; Baptista's account indicates that it served as erstwhile burial place for Ĕskändər's father, *aše* Bä'ödä Maryam.
83. Cerulli notes that while seventeenth-century Portuguese sources speak of Egyptian workmen employed for the building of Märṭulä Maryam, Italian artisans would have travelled through Egypt on their way to Ethiopia, rendering the point somewhat moot; see Cerulli, 'L'Etiopia Del Secolo XV in Nouvi Documenti Storici Con 12 Illustrazioni', 110.
84. One field is identified with the church of Mäkanä Šəllase, founded by *aše* Na'od at the turn of the sixteenth century; compare Cerulli, 'L'Etiopia Del Secolo XV in Nouvi Documenti Storici Con 12 Illustrazioni', 111–12.
85. Cf., for example, the sentiments echoed in Cerulli, 'L'Etiopia Del Secolo XV in Nouvi Documenti Storici Con 12 Illustrazioni', 107–12; Lefèvre, 'Riflessi Etiopici Nella Cultura Europea Del Medioevo e Del Rinascimento—Parte Seconda', 380–83; Monneret de Villard, 'Miniatura Veneto-Cretese in Un Codice Etiopico', 13.
86. Claire Bosc-Tiessé, 'Märṭulä Maryam', in *EAE* 3 (2007), 801–2.

87. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 459.
88. Instead, its ostensible peculiarity seems owed to fact that the building was not completely razed to the ground during the wars of the sixteenth century, that the ruins eventually were described in wonder by European observers, and that modern scholars have been able to locate the building in the first place.
89. Icons arrived in Ethiopia comparatively late and were only introduced as a result of major religious reform in the first half of the fifteenth century; see Annegret Marx, 'Technical Aspects of Painting', in *E Ae* 4 (2010), 90–92; Marilyn E. Heldman, 'Painting on Wood', in *E Ae* 4 (2010), 99–101; Claire Bosc-Tiessé et al., *S'el. Spirit and Materials of Ethiopian Icons* (Addis Ababa: Centre français des études éthiopiennes, 2010); Stanisław Chojnacki and Carolyn Gossage, *Ethiopian Icons: Catalogue of the Collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies Addis Ababa University* (Milan: Skira: Fondazione Carlo Leone Montandon, 2000). The heightened veneration and institution of numerous Marian feasts during the rule of *aše* Dawit and *aše* Zär'a Ya'əqob resulted in the manufacture of increased numbers of portable images of the Virgin within the highland realm; see Heldman, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Šeyon: A Study of Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality*; Marilyn E. Heldman, 'St Luke as Painter: Post-Byzantine Icons in Early-Sixteenth-Century Ethiopia', *Gesta* 44, no. 2 (2005): 125–48; Bosc-Tiessé et al., *S'el. Spirit and Materials of Ethiopian Icons*. This flourishing of Marian veneration is largely parallel to, and likely connected with, similar movements in Latin and Eastern Orthodox Churches; for Ethiopia, the need for icons of the Virgin appears to have arisen by the 1410s; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 283.
90. Marie-Laure Derat, 'Mäkanä Šällase', in *E Ae* 3 (2007), 672. It was located in the local region of Amhara Sayənt, a mountainous area west of Lake Ḥayq.
91. The church was consecrated on 12 January 1521; see Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 337–39; Derat, 'Mäkanä Šällase'.
92. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 226–27.
93. Cerulli, 'L'Etiopia Del Secolo XV in Nouvi Documenti Storici Con 12 Illustrazioni', 111.
94. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 256. It is unknown with what type of land (*rəst* or *g^wult*) the church was endowed, see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 249.
95. It is given as 'quite half a league out of circular', which would equate to roughly two miles, in Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 254–55.

96. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 340.
97. Alvares only specifies that the work had been done ‘with a paint brush’, leaving it unclear as to whether it was a mural or an icon affixed to the wall.
98. He speaks of 16 curtains made of 16 pieces each, indicating large swaths of fabric sewn together; Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 340.
99. Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 220–21, 246–49.
100. Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 220.
101. The *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* states that its floorplan was 100 cubits in width and length; the cubit was a popular unit of length and would range from roughly two feet in a cubit to more than double that, Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 220–21.
102. Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 220–21, 246.
103. Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 246.
104. Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 247.
105. Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 247.
106. See above as well as Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 265. Also compare the ‘Chronicle of Gälawdewos’, which states that the ‘Adali army ‘had destroyed the shrines of prayer [monasteries and churches] whose walls were built with gold, silver and precious stones from India’; see Solomon Gebreyes Beyene, ‘The Chronicle of King Gälawdewos (1540–1559): A Critical Edition with Annotated Translation’, 95, 184.
107. Alvares refers to Atronsä Maryam as the ‘Church of St George’; that both are one and the same is specified in an earlier section of his text and supported by previously provided geographical identification; see Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 255.
108. See Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar’a Yâ’eqôb et de Ba’eda Mâryâm*, 120–21.
109. Perruchon, ‘Histoire d’Eskender, d’Amda Seyon II et de Nâ’od, Rois d’Éthiopie’, 355; Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 234–35.
110. Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar’a Yâ’eqôb et de Ba’eda Mâryâm*, 120–21.
111. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 332–33.
112. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 340.
113. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 333.
114. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 333.

115. The umbrella or canopy, locally called the *dəbāb*, is a symbolic covering for both church dignitaries, held, for example, aloft the *tabot* as well as coffins in processions.
116. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 334.
117. Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 247–49.
118. They are described as pinkish and wine-coloured, with twelve tassels at the front and twelve at the back worked in gold.
119. He held the title of *mākbəb*, a specific ecclesiastical title connoting a preacher calling together an assembly, literally denoting ‘(the one) forming a circle’; see Christian Friedrich August Dillmann, *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicae, Cum Indice Latino. Adiectum Est Vocabularium Tigre Dialecti Septentrionalis Compilatatum a W. Munzinger* (Lipsiae: T. O. Weigel, 1865), 848. Also see Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar’a Yā‘eqōb et de Ba’eda Māryām, Rois d’Éthiopie de 1434 à 1478*, 121–22. Notably, *aṣe* Bā’edā Maryam had engaged in all these dedicatory and endowment processes even prior to his coronation at Aksum; see Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar’a Yā‘eqōb et de Ba’eda Māryām*, 125.
120. Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar’a Yā‘eqōb et de Ba’eda Māryām*, 171–72; also see the table in Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 307. *Aṣe* Bā’edā Maryam’s own bones were ultimately also translated by a successor to an even larger necropolis at Daga Ḥṣṭifanos.
121. See, for example, Perruchon, ‘Histoire d’Eskender, d’Amda Seyon II et de Nā’od, Rois d’Éthiopie’, 355–56, 363; Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 255–56, 324, 332–35.
122. The systematic refusal of royal gifts by individual monks or monastic communities becomes a literary *topos* in Ethiopian religious writing; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 160.
123. Dəlmā Nəḡśā was appointed a regional governor by her father; she built a large church in Gayənt, in the borderland district of Bāḡemdər province; see Ahmed Hassen Omer, ‘Gayənt’, in *EAE* 2 (2005), 716–17. It followed a basilican layout and was built from huge dressed stones of different colours, set in an alternating pattern on a wooden framework. Other architectural features included cupolas, cruciform pillars and barrel vaults, all framed by wooden structure, partially receiving earlier Aksumite architecture. There is evidence that the recessed stones of the outer walls were ornamented with silver and gold; surviving elements still show engraved decoration of cord friezes and elaborate knotwork; see Bosc-Tiessé, ‘Christian Visual Culture in Medieval Ethiopia: Overview, Trends and Issues’, 336; Claire Bosc-Tiessé, ‘Betā Ləhem’, in *EAE* 1 (2003), 560. The case of Dəlmā Nəḡśā’s church is quite exceptional—for one, it was not ruined by the ‘Adali army. As no in-depth research on *aṣe*

Dawit's daughter and her building has been conducted, the current state of research makes the foundation appear a somewhat puzzling example that defies the temporal framework and larger concept of the establishment of royal churches. Yet the edifice shows an early example of building in huge ashlar of different colours set with ornamentation, and Dəlmä Nəgśa—like her brothers *aṣe* Yəṣṣhaq and *aṣe* Zär'a Ya'əqob—undoubtedly was a member of the royal house and a regional stakeholder with considerable political power.

124. See Bosc-Tiessé, 'Betä Ləḥem' and Francis Anfray, 'Enselalé, avec d'autres sites du Choa, de l'Arssi, et un îlot du lac Tana', *Annales d'Éthiopie* 11 (1978): 153–180:153. For a list of the eleven sites, see Anfray, 'Enselalé, avec d'autres sites du Choa, de l'Arssi, et un îlot du lac Tana', 154. Ten of the sites are located in Šäwa, all were 'discovered' from the late 1960s to mid-1970s. While the stones of some of these edifices were used as spolia in later churches, a surprising amount of ruins was absolutely abandoned after the wars of the sixteenth century.
125. Bosc-Tiessé, 'Christian Visual Culture in Medieval Ethiopia: Overview, Trends and Issues', 339. Research on these ruins remains preliminary to this day; see Stanisław Chojnacki, 'Däy Giyorgis', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 7, no. 2 (1969): 43–52; Lanfranco Ricci, 'Resti di antico edificio in Ginbi (Scioa)', *Annales d'Éthiopie* 10 (1976): 177–210; Anfray, 'Enselalé, avec d'autres sites du Choa, de l'Arssi, et un îlot du lac Tana'; Francis Anfray, Guy Annequin et al., 'Chronique Archéologique, 1960–1964', *Annales d'Éthiopie* 6 (1965): 3–48; Anfray, 'Notes archéologiques'. A recent, far more comprehensive investigation of one site attributed to *aṣe* Bā'ədä Maryam, is available in Marie-Laure Derat and Anne-Marie Jouqand, *Gabriel, Une Église Médiévale d'Éthiopie. Interprétations Historiques et Archéologiques de Sites Chrétiens Autour de Meshala Märyām (XVe–XVIIe Siècle)* (Paris: De Boccard, 2012).
126. Chojnacki, 'Däy Giyorgis', 43.
127. Ruled 1430–1433, also known as Ḥəzbä Nañ, third son of *aṣe* Dawit; see Marie-Laure Derat, 'Täklä Maryam', in *EAE* 4 (2010), 841. His scout Pietre of Naples is recorded in Pera at the Golden Horn in 1431–1432 scouting for skilled labourers; compare Chap. 3.
128. Chojnacki describes that the walls were held together without the obvious use of mortar, and that finely cut slabs covered an inner wall of irregularly cut stones; see Chojnacki, 'Däy Giyorgis', 43–45.
129. Chojnacki, 'Däy Giyorgis', 45.
130. Chojnacki, 'Däy Giyorgis', 45, note 5 and Anfray, 'Enselalé, avec d'autres sites du Choa, de l'Arssi, et un îlot du lac Tana', 159. It also appears in Märtulä Maryam, built at the turn of the sixteenth century; see Guglielmo Heintze, *La Basilica Sul Nilo Azzuro Della Imperatrice Elena 1500*

- (Milan: Allegratti, 1937), 33–34 as well as the ruin site of Īnsələle, also in Šäwa; see Anfray, ‘Enselalé, avec d’autres sites du Choa, de l’Arssi, et un îlot du lac Tana’, 154–58; Anfray, Annequin et al., ‘Chronique Archéologique, 1960–1964’, 25–26.
131. Anfray, ‘Enselalé, avec d’autres sites du Choa, de l’Arssi, et un îlot du lac Tana’, 154–56.
 132. Anfray, ‘Enselalé, avec d’autres sites du Choa, de l’Arssi, et un îlot du lac Tana’, 156–57.
 133. Anfray, Annequin et al., ‘Chronique Archéologique, 1960–1964’, 25.
 134. Compare Ricci, ‘Resti di antico edificio in Ginbi (Scioa)’, 194, especially Figures XXXVIa–d. This site is only some 20 miles as the crow flies from Īnsələle; the church has been dated as preceding the wars of the sixteenth century and identified as potentially built by *aše* Zär’a Ya‘əqob or *aše* Ləbnä Dəngəl; it has also been suggested that it might be identified with the church of Badəqe, whose destruction is narrated in the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*; see Ricci, ‘Resti di antico edificio in Ginbi (Scioa)’, 195 and Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 163.
 135. Ricci, ‘Resti di antico edificio in Ginbi (Scioa)’, 178–79, 195.
 136. Ricci, ‘Resti di antico edificio in Ginbi (Scioa)’, 188–89, 198. Some sizeable square stones were adorned with cross decorations and a rope pattern, interlacing bands carved also on their sides; see Anfray, ‘Enselalé, avec d’autres sites du Choa, de l’Arssi, et un îlot du lac Tana’, 158.
 137. Ricci, ‘Resti di antico edificio in Ginbi (Scioa)’, 195–96.
 138. Anfray, ‘Notes archéologiques’, 36–40 Among the northern ruins are the church of Nazret in the village of ‘Addi Abbona in Təgray, seemingly built on an earlier Aksumite and possibly Zag^{ve} site. A formerly sizeable church preliminarily dated to the fifteenth century, it was built on a quadrangular floorplan, over 100 feet in width, with foundations made from solid, well-assembled dressed stones; see Anfray, ‘Notes archéologiques’, 36–37. Five unusual, high cupola-roofed chambers were attached to the building, leading to speculation that craftsmen from Egypt or Yemen were employed in building the edifice; see Paul B. Henze, ‘Nazret’, in *EAE* 3 (2007), 1158–59. Many of the remaining dressed stones are of substantial size, over five feet in length and nearly a foot tall. Remains of decorated plaster were recognizable until the 1960s; a Portuguese account of the second half of the sixteenth century describes the church as a battle site during the wars with the Sultanate of ‘Adal; twentieth-century oral tradition identified the ruins as a former palace of *aše* ‘Amdä Şəyon turned into a church after his death; see Anfray, ‘Notes archéologiques’, 39.

A similar ruin of monumental dressed stones, following a basilica floor-plan, was located at Agulaḥ Qirqos. A detailed 1868 drawing identified the edifice as 'ruins of an ancient Greek church'; the rendering suggests that large parts of the ruin's base structure had remained standing until the late nineteenth century. It consisted of a base wall made up of four massive steps of dressed stones, possibly adorned with carved ornamentation. By the late 1960s, the ruins had deteriorated considerably; a floor-plan produced by Francis Anfray suggests that the church was of considerable size—100 feet in length and 50 feet wide; see Anfray, 'Notes archéologiques', 39–40. The ruins have also been suggested as dating to late Aksumite or post-Aksumite times; see Wolbert Smidt, 'Kwiḥa', in *EAE* 3 (2007), 468–70.

139. A very preliminary survey of the ruin of Märtulä Maryam was carried out in the 1930s by Guglielmo Heintze, who mostly mistook a much younger Jesuit church for Ḥleni's original foundation. Marie-Laure Derat analysed the ruins and showed that Heintze's floorplans and drawings mostly concerned the Jesuit church; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 228–31; the only drawings of Ḥleni's ca. 1500 foundation are Fig. 15 and Tab. VII in Heintze, *La Basilica Sul Nilo Azzuro Della Imperatrice Elena 1500*, 16, 33–34. Jesuit descriptions of the site mentioned a wall standing at about 150 feet in length in the seventeenth century; see George W. B. Huntingford and Charles Fraser Beckingham, *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593–1646* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1954), 104.
140. Claire Bosc-Tiessé has recently pointed out that the dressed stone churches of the late Middle Ages remain understudied, at least when compared to Aksumite sites or the rock-hewn churches of Lasta. For an overview, see Bosc-Tiessé, 'Christian Visual Culture in Medieval Ethiopia: Overview, Trends and Issues', 336–41. For existing but very preliminary studies of some of these sites, see Anfray, 'Enselalé, avec d'autres sites du Choa, de l'Arssi, et un îlot du lac Tana'; Heintze, *La Basilica Sul Nilo Azzuro Della Imperatrice Elena 1500*; Chojnacki, 'Däy Giyorgis'; Ricci, 'Resti di antico edificio in Ginbi (Scioa)'.
141. BAP, Ms. 1106, fol. 46r, Bellorini, Hoade, and Bagatti, *Treatise on the Holy Land*, 99; Caria, 'Il Tratatello Delle Indulgentie de Terra Sancta Secondo Il Ms. 1106 Della Biblioteca Augusta Di Perugia. Edizione e Note Linguistiche', 166–67.
142. BAV, Ms. Raineri 43, fols. 9r–12v.
143. BAV, Ms. Raineri 43, fols. 22v–25r, 33v–36r.
144. BAV, Ms. Raineri 43, fols. 10r–v; this might allude to a church built by *aṣe* Dawit at Amba Gəṣān, which was, however, dedicated to the Virgin Mary; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 288–89.

145. BAV, Ms. Raineri 43, fols. 10r–v; also see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 288–89.
146. According to the Chronicle of Däbrä Libanos, *aṣe* Yəṣḥaq had given numerous brocade garments and linen tunics with golden bells sewn onto them to the monastery. Yəṣḥaq's brother as well as his nephews and all their descendants are also recorded as donating precious fabrics to the monastery throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries: *aṣe* Zär'a Ya'əqob gave 'golden garments' and silk flywhisks, *aṣe* Ĕskändər donated tents, *aṣe* Na'od a garment adorned with precious stones, and *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl silk garments alongside other precious items. In the 1540s, *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl's son—*aṣe* Gälawdewos—is narrated as doing the same as part of the re-building efforts after the wars of the sixteenth century; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 334–35.
147. Compare, for example, Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar'a Yâ'eqôb et de Ba'eda Mâryâm*, 52, 54–55, 120–22.
148. Enrico Cerulli, *Il Libro Etiopico Dei Miracoli Di Maria e Le Sue Fonti Nelle Letterature Del Medio Evo Latino* (Roma: Dott. Giovanni Bardi, 1943), 127.
149. Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar'a Yâ'eqôb et de Ba'eda Mâryâm*, 90, also compare Manfred Kropp, "Altersversorgung und garantierter Familienbesitz mit steuerlicher Begünstigung? Fragen Sie Ihren Abt!" Die traditionelle Struktur einer äthiopischen Klosterökonomie im Mittelalter am Beispiel von Urkunden aus dem Condagie des Stephanusklosters im Hayq-See', in *Orbis Aethiopicus. Band XV. Völker, Kulturen Und Religionen Am Horn von Afrika*, eds. Walter Raunig and Asfa-Wossen Assefate (Dettelbach: J.H. Röhl, 2016), 2016, 23–82. The tradition of tying sovereign monastic communities to Solomonic rulership through the gifting of precious ecclesiastical items dates back to the very foundation of the dynasty: in the late thirteenth century, *aṣe* Yəkunno Amlak had richly endowed the monastery of Däbrä Ḥayq Ĕṣṭifanos in Amhara with 'seventy ecclesiastical gowns, two golden trays, two golden chalices, and thirteen trays and chalices' to ensure its loyalty and support after his ascension to power; see Tadesse Tamrat, 'The Abbots of Däbrä-Hayq, 1248–1535', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 8, no. 1 (1970): 87–117:91.
150. Compare the direct import of *Madre della Consolazione* icons by princess Marta, a daughter of *aṣe* Ĕskändər, as well as the painted enamels acquired by Na'od Mogäsa, the wife of *aṣe* Na'od and mother of *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl. Both are examined in detail in Krebs, 'Windows onto the World: Culture Contacts and Western Christian Art in Ethiopia, 1402–1543', chaps. 6 and 7 and in my forthcoming monograph *Africa Collecting Europe*. For a catalogue of late medieval post-Byzantine icons imported to Ethiopia, see

- Verena Krebs, 'A Preliminary Catalogue of Post-Byzantine Icons in Late Medieval Solomonian Ethiopia', in *Orbis Aethiopicus*, 2021, 205–48.
151. Šihāb al-Dīn, describing the destruction of a royal church in Ifat in 1531; Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 210.
 152. See Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 144. Another of Ləbnä Dəngəl's churches contained silver dishes, mysterious 'images that resembled animals' made of silver, a vast quantity of fabrics including highly admired curtains; see Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 185.
 153. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 239–40. The systematic refusal of royal gifts by individual monks or monastic communities eventually even becomes a literary *topos* in Ethiopian religious writing.
 154. For a particularly evocative description of the gifting of royal clothes by *aše* Na'od to a monastic community, see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 202–3. Vestments and liturgical objects were necessary to conduct services, but also needed for burials and the translation of royal bones—and many of these royal foundations served a funerary purpose; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 295–96. Alvares, for example, describes the translation of Na'od's bones, placed on a bier covered with a gold brocade, closed in with curtains of satin in 1521; see Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 361.
 155. Compare Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-Ghumr Bi-Anbāʾ al-ʿUmr*, 3:426 and Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Al-Nuḥūm al-Zāhira Fī Mulūk Miṣr Wa l-Qāhira*, 14:324–25. For a brief overview of Islamic objects brought to Ethiopia also, see Bosc-Tiessé, 'Christian Visual Culture in Medieval Ethiopia: Overview, Trends and Issues', 359. Huge Mamlūk brass objects are, for example, still preserved in the churches of Yəmṛəḥannā Krəstos and Gännätä Maryam in Lasta.
 156. Wion, 'Medieval Ethiopian Economies: Subsistence, Global Trade and the Administration of Wealth', 417.
 157. Knobler also notes that churches found in Šäwa might bear witness to this diplomatic request; see Knobler, *Mythology and Diplomacy in the Age of Exploration*, 37, 41–42.
 158. The mission was likely unrelated to the geo-political entity of Solomonian Ethiopia and most certainly unofficial in nature; 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. Paolo Chiesa and Alessandro Bausi have recently published a new source which narrates the arrival of an embassy from a geographically vague entity identified as 'Ethiopia' in Latin Europe in the year 1300; see 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. The text necessitates much further examination; it, too, offers no conclusive evidence of an official Solomonic embassy to the Latin West at the onset of the fourteenth century.
159. For studies of this mechanism, see, for example, Mary W. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail. An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Mary W. Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade, and Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).
 160. Instead of carved into or out of the living rock, an established way of building churches in Ethiopia since late antiquity. Written sources indicate that African olive trees were preferred over other kinds of timber for their interior architecture; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 221.
 161. For details on the levying of taxes and recruitment of the army as labour, see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 219–23. For descriptions on local labour being recruited, see Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar'a Yā'eqōb et de Ba'eda Māryām*, 71, 169.
 162. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 236.
 163. ASV, Senato Misti, reg. XLVI, fol. 36v.
 164. ACA, Ms. 2658, fol. 57r.
 165. ACA, Ms. 2677, fol. 54r. Also 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; Constantin Marinescu, *La Politique Orientale d'Alfonse V d'Aragon, Roi de Naples (1416–1458)* (Barcelona: Institut d'estudis catalans, 1994).
 166. Writing about the 1520s, Alvares describes a site in an otherwise highly cultivated and densely inhabited part of Amhara and mentions marshes next to a number of lakes; he specifies that 'people do not know how to draw off the water at the base of the mountains in drainage channels'. A few paragraphs later, however, he seemingly contradicts himself, stating that the plain surrounding the church of Mākanā Śállase was irrigated by channels coming from the mountains that allowed for fresh crops all year round; see Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 253, 255.
 167. Charles Henri Auguste Schefer, ed., *Le Voyage d'outremer de Bertrandon de La Broquière : Premier Conseiller de Philippe Le Bon, Duc de Bourgogne* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1892), 144; Galen Kline, ed., *The Voyage d'Outremer by Bertrandon de La Broquière* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 91.
 168. ACA, Ms. 2658, fol. 57r.
 169. That is, meaning that he would only send more if Zār'a Ya'eqōb entered into a proposed shared crusade against Egypt with him; see ACA, Ms.

- 2658, fol. 57r. An exchequer's list of September 1450 states that 100 ducats had been set aside to fund the travel of four unspecified companions to the Ethiopian embassy to travel back to the North-East African highlands; we may assume that at least two artisans were among this group; see Cerone, 'La Politica Orientale Di Alfonso Di Aragona', 1902, 72.
170. Compare the note in the *Annales Omnium Temporum*, a universal history by the Italian Dominican Pietro Ranzano written in ca. 1460. Most of Ranzano's interview with the Ethiopian ambassador is edited; see Carmelo Trasselli, 'Un Italiano in Etiopia Nel XV Secolo Pietro Rombulo Da Messina', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* 1, no. 2 (1941): 173–202; this particular passage—from fol. 65v—is not contained in Trasselli's edition, but given in translation in Salvatore, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402–1555*, 52, note 40.
171. BAV, Ms. Vat. Lat 12270, fols. 88r, ed. in Lefèvre, 'Richerche Sull'imolese G.B. De Brocchi, Viaggiatore in Ethiopia e Curiale Pontificio', 108. The word *magistros*—'teachers'—is the most ambiguous here. It connotes both 'teachers' as well as 'experts' or 'masters' and appears to act as an umbrella term for generally well-learned, but not necessarily clerical men.
172. In the context of the time, *artifices* denoted 'craftsmen', 'masters of an art' as well as 'artists'. BNCF, Ms. II–III 256, fol. 255v, ed. in Raineri, *Lettere Tra i Pontefici Romani e i Principi Etiopici (Secc. XII–XX). Versioni e Integrazioni*, 43.
173. Particularly a demand that the *nagūs* should first send out another embassy to Rome—which needed to include a high-ranking Ethiopian noble, identified as *aṣe* Ṭskändər's 'uncle'—to agree to an Union of the Churches; see Osvaldo Raineri, *Lettere Tra i Pontefici Romani e i Principi Etiopici (Secoli XII–XX)* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2003), 42–43.
174. TTNA, Corpo Cronológico, 1a, Maço 17, Doc. 75, ed. in Aida Fernanda Dias, 'Um Presente Régio', *Humanitas* 47, no. 2 (1995): 685–789:690. The painters, specifically, were notably to be paid according to their own wishes.
175. The letters reached Portugal by 1527; Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 501.
176. This letter was addressed to 'Diogo Lopez de Sequiera, Captain Major of the Indies'; see Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 476–80. *Aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl hoped to acquire ten craftsmen of each specialisation; the list is mostly focussed on building-related labour but also does include a request for someone to 'make swords and weapons of iron and helmets'.
177. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 501.

178. See Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 501, note 1.
179. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Portuguese version of the letter also had the *nəguś* enquiring after swordsmiths and men who could produce ‘arms for all sorts of fighting’ as well as ‘men who make medicines, and physicians, and surgeons to cure illnesses’ and—as a last item—gunsmiths. The Gə‘əz version of the same letter elides the last request, the passage only asks for *sä’aläyanä məsl*—‘painters of images’, for artisans skilled in bookmaking, for ‘teachers of craftsmanship’, physicians and ‘builders of houses’ alongside ‘wise men who know how to extract gold, silver and lead (from the earth), and other wise men who would improve our kingdom’. Mentions of gunsmiths, swordsmiths and ‘men who could produce all sorts of arms for fighting’ are absent. Both the Portuguese and Gə‘əz version of the letter specifically name painters as the primary request posed by the *nəguś*; see Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 505; Sergew Hable Selassie, ‘The Ge‘ez Letters of Queen Eleni and Libne Dingil to John, King of Portugal’, in *IV Congresso Internazionale Di Studi Etiopici, Roma 1972*, ed. Enrico Cerulli (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1974), 547–566:560.
180. *Legatio David*, Fols. D3–D4 and E1–E2, ed. in Raineri, *Lettere Tra i Pontefici Romani e i Principi Etiopici (Secoli XII–XX)*, 47–55.
181. The 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; Kate Lowe, “‘Representing’ Africa: Ambassadors and Princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402–1608”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 17 (2007): 101–128:102, 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?’, 2013, para. 10; Salvatore, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402–1555*, 26.
182. BAV, Ms. Raineri 43, fols. 9r–12v; Antoine Khater and Oswald Hugh Edward Burmester, trans., *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria. Volume III Part III. Cyril II—Cyril V (A.D. 1235–1894)* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l’Institut Francais d’Archeologie Orientale, 1970), 249–50. The acquisition of the True Cross fragment is meanwhile noted as one of *aše Dawit*’s most memorable deeds in later Ethiopian chronicles; Dombrowski, *Ṭānāsee 106: Eine Chronik Der Herrscher Äthiopiens*, 154;

- René Basset, *Études Sur l'histoire d'Éthiopie* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1882), 101; Béguinot, *La Cronaca Abbreviata d'Abissinia: Nuova Versione Dall'Etiopico e Commento*, 10. To this day, oral Ethiopian tradition relates that a ruler called 'Dawit' had brought a piece of the True Cross from 'Egypt'; see Heldman, 'St Luke as Painter: Post-Byzantine Icons in Early-Sixteenth-Century Ethiopia', 2005, 140; Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa: 1450–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 33–34. A great number of objects originating in the Mediterranean and Europe—particularly post-Byzantine Cretan icons brought to Ethiopia in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries—are remembered in Ethiopian oral history as coming from either *Gəbs*, *Məsr*, or *Şər*, a geographical realm encompassing both the northern and southern shore of the Mediterranean (Greece as well as Egypt). The trade and pilgrimage routes connecting the Mediterranean and Ethiopia would have inevitably led through Egypt.
183. BAV, Ms. Raineri 43, fols. 33v–36r; Khater and Burmester, *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, 249. The latter was attested as preserved in the church of Tādbabā Maryam until the late twentieth century; see Diana Spencer, 'In Search of St Luke Icons in Ethiopia', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 10, no. 2 (1972): 67–95:78.
 184. Museo di Cividale di Friuli, Codice diplomatico Boiani 6, doc. 352, ed. in Vittorio Lazzarini, 'Un'ambasciata Etiopica in Italia Nel 1404', *Atti Del Reale Istituto Veneto Di Scienze, Lettere Ed Arti* 83 (1924): 846.
 185. Ed. in Lazzarini, 'Un'ambasciata Etiopica in Italia Nel 1404', 846.
 186. Compare Chap. 2 and the forthcoming article by 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).
 187. The Egyptian jurist mentions a letter in the 'language of the Abyssinians' which urged the Ethiopian ambassador al-Tabrīzī to acquire one of the *masāmīr* or 'nails' with which Jesus was crucified; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-Ghumr Bi-Anbāʾ al-ʿUmr*, 3:426–27.
 188. See Francesco Cerone, 'La Politica Orientale Di Alfonso Di Aragona', *Archivio Storico per Le Province Napoletane* 27 (1902): 71; Benjamin Weber, 'Gli Etiopi a Roma Nel Quattrocento: Ambasciatori Politici, Negoziatori Religiosi o Pellegrini?', para. 10.
 189. 'Mittimus venerandas reliquias, videlicet de reliquiis S[anctorum] Apostolorum Petri et Pauli, de reliquiis S[ancti] Joannis Baptistae, de brachio S[ancti] Andreae Apostoli, de reliquiis S[ancti] Jacobi Zebedei Apostoli, de ligno crucis, in qua suspensus fuit beatus Petrus Apostolus; quas quidem reliquias, quoniam venerari sunt dignissimae, serenitati tuae, pro

- tua devotione destinamus.’ BAV, Reg. Vat. 445, fol. 274r, ed in. Raineri, *Lettere Tra i Pontefici Romani e i Principi Etiopici (Secoli XII–XX)*, 41.
190. BNCF, Ms. II–III 256, fol. 255v, ed. in Raineri, *Lettere Tra i Pontefici Romani e i Principi Etiopici (Secc. XII–XX). Versioni e Integrazioni*, 43 and BAV, Ms. Vat. Lat 12270, fol. 88r, ed. in Lefèvre, ‘Ricerca Sull’imolese G.B. De Brocchi, Viaggiatore in Ethiopia e Curiale Pontificio’, 109.
191. See Weber, ‘Vrais et Faux Éthiopiens Au XVe Siècle En Occident? Du Bon Usage Des Connexions’, 115.
192. BAV, Ms. Raineri 43, fol. 7v.
193. BAV, Ms. Raineri 43, fols. 23v–25v.
194. BAV, Ms. Raineri 43, fol. 29r–v. The *History of the Patriarchs* also mentions that *aṣe* Dawit had acquired ‘magnificent copes’—ceremonial cloaks—fit for kings and priests as part of the 1402 mission to Venice; see Khater and Burmester, *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, 249.
195. BAV, Ms. Raineri 43, fol. 25r.
196. BAV, Ms. Raineri 43, fols. 7v, 18r–25r, 43r. This is supported by a note in the *History of the Patriarchs*, which mentions ‘gold and silver vessels’ together with a brief description of a beautifully worked reliquary; see Khater and Burmester, *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, 249–50.
197. BNM, Ms. it. VII, nr. 374, coll. 7781, fol. 40, ed. in Rodolfo Gallo, *Il Tesoro Di San Marco e La Sua Storia* (Venice: Istituto di Storia dell’ Arte, 1967), 288.
198. The Egyptian jurist Ibn Ḥajar states succinctly that ‘Frankish clothing’ was found in the Persian merchant’s possession; see Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-Ghumr B-Anbā’ al-‘Umr*, 3:426. The historian Al-Maqrīzī specifies that the Ethiopian ambassador had acquired ‘many vestments embroidered with golden crosses made in the land of the Franks’ for the *nagūs*; see Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb Al-Sulūk Li-Ma’rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, 4.2:797.
199. Georgius Hoffmann, *Acta Camerae Apostolicae et Civitatum Venetiarum, Ferrariae, Florentiae, Ianuae de Concilio Florentino. Concilium Florentinum. Documenta et Scriptores. Series A* (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1950), 106. It is unclear whether these mitres were just used during the conciliar session of the Council or taken back to the Eastern Mediterranean by the Copts and Ethiopians.
200. ACA, Ms. 2658, fol. 57r.
201. ACA, Ms. 2658, fol. 57r; Cerone, ‘La Politica Orientale Di Alfonso Di Aragona’, 1902, 76.
202. BAV, Ms. Vat. Lat 12270, fols. 88r, ed. in Lefèvre, ‘Ricerca Sull’imolese G.B. De Brocchi, Viaggiatore in Ethiopia e Curiale Pontificio’, 109.

203. Compare TTNA, Corpo Cronológico, 1a, Maço 17, Doc. 75, ed. in Dias, 'Um Presente Régio'. Most textiles could be used in an ecclesiastical setting: altar frontals, curtains, cushions, tablecloths and towels, tapestries, door hangings, vestments, covers, cloaks, carpets, curtains in all sorts of colours—made from silk, brocade, damask, crimson velvet and other types of fine cloth, sourced from Granada, Holland, and Brittany. Many pieces were decorated with ornate religious or courtly scenes, including a *pano d'armar de Ras*—a specific type of embroidered tapestry from Arras—depicting the Virgin and Child, an archbishop with a double-cross seated at their feet, I thank Alexandra Curvelo of the University of Lisbon for her aid with this passage. Also see Dias, 'Um Presente Régio', 694.
204. TTNA, Corpo Cronológico, 1a, Maço 17, Doc. 75, ed. in Dias, 'Um Presente Régio', 689.
205. TTNA, Corpo Cronológico, 1a, Maço 17, Doc. 75, ed. in Dias, 'Um Presente Régio', 702.
206. *Legatio David*, Fol. E1–E2, ed. in Raineri, *Lettere Tra i Pontefici Romani e i Principi Etiopici (Secoli XII–XX)*, 53.
207. *Legatio David*, Fol. E1–E2, ed. in Raineri, *Lettere Tra i Pontefici Romani e i Principi Etiopici (Secoli XII–XX)*, 53.
208. In the case of *ase* Dawit's piece of the True Cross, this most sacred relic was first brought to Amba Gəšan, an important and sacred place of privileged location within the Solomonic dominion, before being transferred to Tädbabä Maryam; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 26; Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, 'Relics of the True Cross in Ethiopia', in *E Ae* 4 (2010), 357–58; Steven Kaplan, 'Relics', in *E Ae* 4 (2010), 355–57; Haile Gabriel Dagne, 'Amba Gəšan', in *E Ae* 1 (2003), 220–21.
209. Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things. Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 327.
210. Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things. Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*, 242–43 for this Latin Christian practice.
211. Kaplan, 'Relics', 356. It appears that the frequent re-burying of the bodies of previous rulers as well as local saints was one of the strategies by which the *nägäst* addressed this particular issue.
212. Compare, for instance, the examples presented in Allegra Iafrate, *The Wandering Throne of Solomon. Objects and Tales of Kingship in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).
213. Compare Karl Heinz Brandt, *Ausgrabungen Im Bremer St.-Petri-Dom 1974–76. Ein Vorbericht* (Bremen: Rudolf Habelt Verlag, 1976), 72.
214. Allegra Iafrate, 'Opus Salomonis: Sorting Out Solomon's Scattered Treasure', *Medieval Encounters* 22 (2016): 326–78.

215. Getatchew Haile, 'Documents on the History of Aṣṣ Dawit (1382–1413)', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 16 (1983): 25–35:30–32.
216. The so-called 'Goḡḡam Chronicle' asserts that these objects were made by *färänḡ*—'Franks' and subsequently given to the royal foundation of Däbrä Səmmuna; see Gərma Getahun, *Yä-Goḡḡam Təwlədd Bä-Mulu Kä-Abbay İskä Abbay. Aläqa Täklä İyäsus Waḡḡəra İndä-Şafut (in Amharic)* (Addis Ababa, 2010), 37.
217. Loiseau, 'The Haḡī and the Sultan. Letters and Embassies from Abyssinia to the Mamluk Court', 640, also see Loiseau, 'Chrétien d'Égypte, Musulmans d'Éthiopie. Protection Des Communautés et Relations Diplomatiques Entre Le Sultanat Mamelouk et Le Royaume Salomonien (ca 1270–1516)', 37–68:44–46.
218. Marilyn E. Heldman and Stuart C. Munro-Hay, *African Zion. The Sacred Art of Ethiopia*, ed. Roderick Grierson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 181. It is impossible to say where this object originated—it adheres to the general pattern and shape of an Ethiopian processional cross and features a Gə'əz inscription identifying it as having been presented by the *nəḡus* to his foundation. It was clearly held in especially high esteem, as it was translated together with the body of *aṣṣ Zär'a Ya'əqob* to Daga Əṣṡifanos by his grandson, *aṣṣ Na'od*.
219. Now located in the monastery of Samu'el Zä-Q'woyäša; see Krebs, 'A Preliminary Catalogue of Post-Byzantine Icons in Late Medieval Solomonic Ethiopia', 229–31.
220. Roger W. Cowley, 'Zəkre and Pāwli —Ethiopic Bible Translators or Interpreters?', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 34, no. 2 (1989): 387–98; Marilyn E. Heldman, 'St Luke as Painter: Post-Byzantine Icons in Early-Sixteenth-Century Ethiopia', 125–48; Krebs, 'A Preliminary Catalogue of Post-Byzantine Icons in Late Medieval Solomonic Ethiopia', 209–15.
221. Examined in detail in *Africa Collecting Europe*, also see Krebs, 'Windows onto the World: Culture Contacts and Western Christian Art in Ethiopia, 1402–1543', chap. 7.
222. He said they were 'very rich in figures'; see Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 341.
223. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 341.
224. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 341.
225. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 342–43.
226. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 256.
227. He carried out his work on the eve of the Italian Fascist occupation of the Horn of Africa and expressly thanks the Italian colonial authorities for his support; Heintze, *La Basilica Sul Nilo Azzuro Della Imperatrice Elena 1500*, 17. For Heintze's story of the 'discovery' and clearing of the site,

- compare Heintze, *La Basilica Sul Nilo Azzuro Della Imperatrice Elena 1500*, 35–37.
228. Heintze, *La Basilica Sul Nilo Azzuro Della Imperatrice Elena 1500*, 17, 19–20. He also expressly disputes that the ruins were ever rebuilt, and reads a number of ornaments—for example, the lily-motifs and rosettes of the main nave, which was rebuilt by the Jesuits in the early seventeenth century—as ‘typically Coptic’ in style, Heintze, *La Basilica Sul Nilo Azzuro Della Imperatrice Elena 1500*, 26–27.
229. The Jesuit Bruno Bruni had been responsible for rebuilding the site in the seventeenth century; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 228.
230. Compare the analysis of the ruins by Marie-Laure Derat Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 228–31, demonstrating that Heintze’s floorplans and drawings mostly concern the Jesuit church. The only drawings of Ēleni’s ca. 1500 foundation are Fig. 15 and Tab. VII Heintze, *La Basilica Sul Nilo Azzuro Della Imperatrice Elena 1500*, 16, 34.
231. Heintze judged the *ruote di fuoco* or ‘wheel of flames’ decoration as absolutely unique, if somewhat reminiscent of a Coptic motif formed with tree branches; see Heintze, *La Basilica Sul Nilo Azzuro Della Imperatrice Elena 1500*, 34.
232. Anfray, Annequin, et al., ‘Chronique archéologique, 1960–1964’, 26.
233. Chojnacki, ‘Däy Giyorgis’, 48.
234. Ricci, ‘Resti di antico edificio in Ginbi (Scioa)’, 199–200.
235. Compare Percy Ernst Schramm, ‘Einfluss: Eine irreführende Methaper’, in *Kaiser, Könige und Päpste 4.2*, ed. Percy Ernst Schramm (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1971), 702–5.
236. The icon was painted by the Ethiopian painter Färe Şəyon, who lived during the reign of *aşe Zär’a Ya’əqob*; see Anfray, ‘Enselalé, avec d’autres sites du Choa, de l’Arssi, et un îlot du lac Tana’, 164.
237. Anfray, ‘Enselalé, avec d’autres sites du Choa, de l’Arssi, et un îlot du lac Tana’, 164.
238. Given as ‘Geneth Ioryos’ according to BAP, Ms. 1106, fol. 45v, Bellorini, Hoade, and Bagatti, *Treatise on the Holy Land*, 98; Caria, ‘Il Tratatello Delle Indulgentie de Terra Sancta Secondo Il Ms. 1106 Della Biblioteca Augusta Di Perugia. Edizione e Note Linguistiche’, 165. We know that this royal donation was consecrated during the reign of *aşe Ēskändər*, affiliated with the monastery of Däbrä Libanos and not intended as a funerary site. In his chronicle, *aşe Ēskändər* is narrated as visiting it with his court as part of a pilgrimage to the burial grounds of his ancestors at the royal monasteries of Däbrä Näg^wädg^wäd and Atronsä Maryam; see Perruchon, ‘Histoire d’Eskender, d’Amda Seyon II et de Nā’od, Rois d’Éthiopie’, 335; Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 276–77. In late 1531, troops of the ‘Adali army burned the church and seized a large

- quantity of gold-ornamented brocade garments, bejewelled golden crowns ‘that belonged to the king, or to the kings who went before him’, jewellery, ornamental weapons, plates and cups made from gold in exquisite workmanship; see Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaṣa: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 251–52.
239. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 235; Alvares states that they were ‘painted with suitable pictures and very good stories, well proportioned’; see Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 332. He also noted that a different church in Təgray, which appears to have been under royal patronage, was a ‘very well arranged building, almost in the fashion of our churches, small and vaulted, its paintings very well executed’; see Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 175. Its image repertoire—depicting Apostles, patriarchs, prophets, Elijah and Enoch—was easily recognizable enough for the Portuguese chaplain, who compares the iconographic repertoire of Portugal with that of Ethiopia throughout; Alvares stating that the building and paintings reminded him of home is therefore evocative.
240. BAP, Ms. 1106, fols. 45v–46r; Bellorini, Hoade, and Bagatti, *Treatise on the Holy Land*, 99.
241. For Brancaleon and his second career in Ethiopia, see Krebs, ‘Windows onto the World: Culture Contacts and Western Christian Art in Ethiopia, 1402–1543’, chap. 5 and my forthcoming monograph, *Africa Collecting Europe*.
242. BNCF, Ms. Magl XIII, 84, fol. 48v, ed. and transl. Osbert G. S. Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400–1524: Including Those Collected by Alessandro Zorzi at Venice in the Years 1519–24* (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1958), 169.
243. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 380; the Portuguese text reads ‘pintor’ in all references to Lazaro de Andrade; see Francisco Alvares, *Verdadeira Informação Das Terras Do Preste João Das Indias: (Conforme a de 1540, Illustr. de Diversos Fac-Similes)* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1889), chap. 105.
244. The church’s altar-stone was held to be of solid gold and so large and valuable that it had to be guarded at all times; on the episode, see Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 458–59.
245. See Huntingford and Beckingham, *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593–1646*, 104.
246. See Huntingford and Beckingham, *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593–1646*, 104. From Almeida’s judgement of the ruins, the only fault lay with the darkness of the building, as ‘nothing could be seen without lamps, even at midday in a broad, big church like this’. Almeida largely blamed the thatch roofing of the church for this; his account remains unclear on

- whether he could actually still survey parts of the roof; see Huntingford and Beckingham, *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593–1646*, 105.
247. Quoted in Charles T. Beke, 'A Description of the Ruins of the Church of Märtula Máriam in Abessinia', *Archaeologia* 32 no. 1 (1847): 38–57:44.
248. Compare, for example, the descriptions in the following sources: Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar'a Yä'eqòb et de Ba'eda Máryám*, 53, 67, 120–21; Perruchon, 'Histoire d'Eskender, d'Amda Seyon II et de Nà'od, Rois d'Éthiopie', 355; Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 337–39, 459; Stenhouse and Pankhurst, *Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 220. In arranging his royal church as a worthy future burial place, each *nəguś* could ensure in life that he would be adequately remembered and celebrated after his passing; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 287. This is related to the Ethiopian tradition of the *täzkar*, a commemorative feast for a dead person of paramount importance; see Mersha Alehegne, 'Täzkar', in *EAE* 4 (2010), 881–82.
249. Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade, and Power*, 81.
250. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail. An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance*, 4–11.
251. Compare Cerulli, *Il Libro Etiopico Dei Miracoli Di Maria e Le Sue Fonti Nelle Letterature Del Medio Evo Latino*, 92; Manfred Kropp, 'Die ältest bekannten äthiopischen Sammlungen der Marienwunder im Codex Aureus der Marienkirche von Amba Gäßen und der Bethlehemkirche bei Däbrä Tabor', *Oriens Christianus* 100 (2017): 57–103:66, 73, 76–81; the episode is echoed in a hymn also composed in the fifteenth century; see Steven Kaplan, 'Notes Towards a History of Aše Dawit I (1382–1413)', *Aethiopia* 5 (2002): 78. Golden paint was indeed first used in prestigious illuminations dating to *aše* Dawit's rule; see Marilyn E. Heldman and Tania Tribe, 'Traditional Painting', in *Ethiopia. History, Culture and Challenges*, eds. Siegbert Uhlig et al. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017), 196.
252. Alfonso V of Aragon sent his court painter Lluís Dalmau to the Low Countries to learn about Flemish paintings; the Sforza court painter spent years with the workshop of van der Weyden; several Flemish painters were active at nearly every court during the fifteenth-century in Europe; the Limbourg brothers were sent to work from one master to another; Matthias Corvinus, the king of Hungary and leading patron of the Renaissance north of the Alps, patronised Italian artists; see, for example, Caroline Campbell and Alan Chong, *Bellini and the East* (London: National Gallery Publications Ltd, 2005); Joachim Poeschke, ed., *Italienische Frührenaissance Und Nordeuropäisches Spätmittelalter. Kunst Der Frühen Neuzeit Im Europäischen Zusammenhang* (Munich: Hirmer, 1993); Carol M. Richardson, Kim W. Woods, and Michael

- W. Franklin, eds., *Renaissance Art Reconsidered: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Milton Keynes: Wiley, 2007). In Iberia, the active recruitment and migration of skilled artisans crossed religious and geographic boundaries was far from unusual; compare Thomas Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), chap. 7. Alfonso V of Aragon recruited Mozarab craftsmen to his court in the fifteenth century; see Richard Hitchcock, *Mozarabs in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Identities and Influences* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 71.
253. Venice, mindful of the importance of placating the Ottomans, sent the best painter it had to offer: Gentile Bellini; see Campbell and Chong, *Bellini and the East*, 18.
254. Among them the famed Muslim traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, who specifically set out for Delhi for this reason; see Ross E. Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta* (University of California Press, 2012), 179; Aniruddha Ray, *The Sultanate of Delhi (1206–1526): Polity, Economy, Society and Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).
255. Sarolta Tatár, ‘The Iconography of the Karakorum Fountain’, in *Life and Afterlife & Apocalyptic Concepts in the Altaic World*, eds. Michael Knüppel and Alois van Tongerloo (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 77–78.
256. Such actions might even have served as a way to stave off internal conflict, as proposed in Knobler, *Mythology and Diplomacy in the Age of Exploration*, 37.
257. Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 60–61, as told in the *Kəbrä nägäšt*, in which the Queen of Sheba is identified as the Ethiopian queen Makadda.
258. See Bezold, *Kebra Nagast: Die Herrlichkeit Der Könige*; Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek (Kəbrä Nägäšt)*.
259. 2 Chronicles, 2. The word in the Ethiopian version of the Bible is ‘ጳጳሲ ጠቢብ’, the accusative of ጳጳሲ ጠቢብ, literally denoting a ‘wise man’, which now survives as ጠቢብ or ‘artisan’ in Təgrāñña and Amharic.
260. 2 Chronicles, 3 and 1 Kings, 6 and 7.
261. The passage runs: ‘Just as the former king David, when he had planned to build the house of God and it was not successful for him, and he did not finish it, but his son Solomon [did], so our King Zär’a Ya’əqob [finished] this temple on the west of this mountain, which his father has been unable to build.’ Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar’a Yä’eqob et de Ba’eda Märyām*, 53. Aṣe Zär’a Ya’əqob actually built two churches at the site: Mäkanä Gol and Däbrä Näg’ädg’ad; see Derat, *Le Domaine Des Rois Éthiopiens*, 328.
262. Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar’a Yä’eqob et de Ba’eda Märyām*, 67; from the chronicle of aṣe Ḥskändər, we know that aṣe Bä’ədä Maryam had

- also favoured the region, Perruchon; 'Histoire d'Eskenđer, d'Amda Seyon II et de Nā'od, Rois d'Éthiopie', 354.
263. Perruchon, 'Histoire d'Eskenđer, d'Amda Seyon II et de Nā'od, Rois d'Éthiopie', 355, seemingly referring to Atronsä Maryam; see Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zar'a Yā'eqōb et de Ba'eda Māryām*, 123.
264. Huntingford and Beckingham, *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593–1646*, 99.
265. It had first been envisioned by *aṣe* Bā'ədā Maryam, adorned by *aṣe* Na'od and finally consecrated under the rule of *aṣe* Ləbnā Dəngəl.
266. Compare 2 Chronicles, 3 and 1 Kings, 6 and 7.
267. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyāsu I et Bakāffā*, 72.
268. Compare, for example, the 'Acts' of Abuna Yoḥannes from Däbrä Zämmädo, who is described as exceedingly handsome, jovial, and as looking 'like an Israelite person'; see Sophia Dege-Müller, 'Between Heretics and Jews: Inventing Jewish Identities in Ethiopia', *Entangled Religions* 6 (2018): 258.
269. Compare, for example, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, MS. Aeth. d. 19 and BNF, Paris, MS d'Abbadie 105. Both are examined in detail in a forthcoming article, see Jacopo Gnisci, 'Constructing Kingship in Early Solomonic Ethiopia: The David and Solomon Portraits in the Juel-Jensen Psalter', *The Art Bulletin* 102 no. 4 (2020), 7–36.
270. See Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, MS. Aeth. d. 19, fol. 6v and fol. 138v. These regalia were firmly codified by the early sixteenth century.
271. Interestingly, an illumination of the Roman emperor Constantine—identified as 'Q'wāštāntinos, king of Rome'—shows that this king was awarded a similar honour of 'Ethiopianisation' within the manuscript; see BNF, Ms. d'Abbadie 105, fol. 13v and fol. 127v.
272. BNF, Ms. d'Abbadie 105, fol. 13v and fol. 121v, with early reprints of the illuminations in Carlo Conti Rossini, 'Un Codice Illustrato Eritreo Del Secolo XV', *Africa Italiana* 1 (1927): 83–97.
273. Also called Bəlen Sägädä; he was active in the foundation and construction of several monasteries established by the monk Yonas; see Gianfrancesco Lusini, 'Bəlen Sägädä', in *EAE* 1 (2003), 524–25. For the manuscript, see Anaïs Wion and Claire Bosc-Tiessé, 'Les Manuscrits Éthiopiens d'Antoine d'Abbadie à La Bibliothèque Nationale de France', in *Antoine d'Abbadie de l'Abyssinie Au Pays Basque—Voyage d'une Vie*, ed. Jean Dercourt (Paris: Atlantica-Séguier, 2010), 91–96.
274. Compare ACA, Ms. Reg. 2680, fol. 165r, ed. in António Joaquim Dias Dinis, ed., *Monumenta Henricina III (1421–1431)* (Coimbra: Comissão Executiva das Comemorações do Quinto Centenário da Morte do Infante D. Henrique, 1961), 208–9 and ACA, Ms. Reg 2684, fol. 145v.
275. Compare Henry Thomas and Armando Cortesao, *The Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1530. A Facsimile of the Relation Entitled Carta Das Novas Que Vieram a El Rey Nosso Senhor Do Descobrimento Do Preste Joham (Lisbon 1521)* (London: British Museum, 1938), fol. B6r,

- transl. in Thomas and Cortesao, *The Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1530*, 91; for the Gəʼəz version, see Sergew Hable Selassie, ‘The Geʼez Letters of Queen Eleni and Libne Dingil to John, King of Portugal’, 554, 556–57.
276. Compare Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 495–506 and Sergew Hable Selassie, ‘The Geʼez Letters of Queen Eleni and Libne Dingil to John, King of Portugal’, 564; *Legatio David*, Fol. D3–D4 and Fol. E1–E2, ed. in Raineri, *Lettere Tra i Pontefici Romani e i Principi Etiopici (Secoli XII–XX)*, 47–50 and 51–55. In the 1530s, with his kingdom overrun and largely dispossessed of land, *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl would eventually send for military aid from the Portuguese.
277. As mentioned above, the request for swordsmiths, men who could produce ‘arms for all sorts of fighting’ as well as gunsmiths is only found in the Portuguese version of the letter and not its Gəʼəz equivalent; also, even in the Portuguese letter, these did not pose a top priority—the ‘gunsmiths’ are added in an afterthought in an exceptionally extensive and varied list of demands.
278. That is, *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl freely stated that both saltpetre and sulphur and thus the basis for chemical explosives were found in his realm; he was interested in acquiring a specialist maker of gunpowder; see Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 288.
279. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 288–89.
280. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 286. Immediately afterwards, *aṣe* Ləbnä Dəngəl is narrated as making the Portuguese engage in a mock swordfight and sing and dance for his entertainment, casting the audience in a very different light.
281. Raineri, *Lettere Tra i Pontefici Romani e i Principi Etiopici (Secoli XII–XX)*, 53.
282. See, that is, Gaston Wiet, ‘Les Relations Égypto-Abyssines Sous Les Sultans Mamlouks’, *Bulletin de La Société d’Archéologie Copte* 4 (1938): 115–140; Palmira Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Ewald Wagner, ‘Adal’, in *EAE* 1 (2003), 71–72; Malyn Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400–1668* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Michael Winter, ‘The Ottoman Occupation’, in *The Cambridge History of Egypt. Volume I. Islamic Egypt, 640–1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 490–516; Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Amélie Chekroun, ‘Ottomans, Yemenis and the “Conquest of Abyssinia” (1531–1543)’, in *Movements in Ethiopia/Ethiopia in Movement. Proceedings of the 18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, eds. Éloi Ficquet, Ahmed Hassen Omer, and Thomas

- Osmond (Los Angeles: Tsehai Publishers, 2016), 163–74; Chekroun and Hirsch, ‘The Sultanates of Medieval Ethiopia’.
283. For different approaches to the individual movements, see Sergew Hable Selassie, ‘The Ge’ez Letters of Queen Eleni and Libne Dingil to John, King of Portugal’; Merid Wolde Aregay, ‘Millenarian Traditions and Peasant Movements in Ethiopia 1500–1855’, in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies: University of Lund, 26–29 April 1982*, ed. Sven Rubenson (Addis Ababa, Uppsala and East Lansing: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1984), 257–62; Tadesse Tamrat, ‘Feudalism in Heaven and on Earth: Ideology and Political Structure in Medieval Ethiopia’, in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, University of Lund, 26–29 April 1982*, ed. Sven Rubenson (Addis Ababa, Uppsala and East Lansing: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1984), 195–200; Merid Wolde Aregay, ‘Literary Origins of Ethiopian Millenarianism’, in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies. Moscow, 26–29 August 1986*, ed. Andrei Andreevich Gromyko (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1988), 161–78; Pierluigi Piovanelli, ‘Les Controverses Théologiques Sous Le Roi Zar’a Yā’qob (1434–1468) et La Mise En Place Du Monophysisme Éthiopien’, in *La Controverse Religieuse et Ses Formes*, ed. Alain Le Boulluec (Paris: Editions du cerf, 1995), 189–228; Marie-Laure Derat, ‘The Zāg’wē Dynasty (11–13th Centuries) and King Yemrehanna Krestos’, *Annales d’Éthiopie* 25 (2010): 157–96; Robert Beylot, ‘Le Millenarisme Article de Foi Dans l’Église Éthiopienne, Au XVe Siècle’, *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* 25 (1971–72): 31–43 and William Alfred Shack, ‘On Anti-Millenarian Elements in Medieval Christian Ethiopia’, in *Les Orientalistes Sont Des Aventuriers: Guirlande Offerte a Joseph Tubiana Par Ses Eleves et Ses Amis* (Saint-Maur: Bibliothèque Peiresc, 1999), 91–95.
284. The Portuguese version of her letter states ‘now has the time arrived of the promise made by Christ and Saint Mary His mother, who said that in the last times the King of the parts of the Franks would rise up, and that he would put an end to the Moors’; see Thomas and Cortesao, *The Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1530*, fol. B6r; transl. in Thomas and Cortesao, *The Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1530*, 91. From this text alone, it is unclear what ‘promise’ Eleni is referring to. Research has linked the emergence of this eschatological movement to an increased sense of helplessness after the raids of Maḥfūz, which in turn gave rise to a legend regarding the death of aṣe Na’od and caused the Ethiopians to direct themselves towards Europe; see Merid Wolde Aregay, ‘Literary Origins of Ethiopian Millenarianism’, 168. Also see Merid Wolde Aregay, ‘Millenarian Traditions and Peasant Movements in Ethiopia 1500–1855’.

285. The eyewitnesses were Diogo Lopes de Sequeira and Pero Gomes Teixeira, two high-ranking Portuguese officials who participated in the landing of the Portuguese on Ethiopian shores in April 1520. They sent a written report on their experiences in Ethiopia to high court officials in Portugal, subsequently published as a small booklet called *Carta das novas que vieram a el rei nosso senhor do descobrimento do preste João* by 1521 in Lisbon; a facsimile and translation to English is published as Thomas and Cortesao, *The Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1530*. The local official is identified as the ‘Captain of Harkiko’ in the Portuguese account; see Thomas and Cortesao, *The Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1530*, fol. A3v, transl. in Thomas and Cortesao, *The Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1530*, 67–68; Ethiopian allusions to the prophecy can be found in Thomas and Cortesao, *The Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1530*, fols A3v, A5v, transl. in Thomas and Cortesao, *The Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1530*, 67–68, 72. The *baḥər nāgāš*, the governor of the coastal Eritrean region, is also narrated as alluding to this prophecy: in a meeting with the Pero Gomes Teixeira, the *baḥər nāgāš* gave ‘many thanks to Our Lord that the prophecies they had always had were fulfilled, that they should be united one with another’; see Thomas and Cortesao, *The Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1530*, fol. B3r, transl. in Thomas and Cortesao, *The Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1530*, 85.
286. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 498. According to Alvares, this prophecy was based on writings found in the ‘life and passion of St Victor’. In fact, these writings are based on Pseudo-Methodius’ *Revelationes* and an apocalypse of the late seventh century, written in Syriac, in which a ‘king of the Greeks’ will attack the ‘Ishmaelites’ from the ‘sea of the Kushites’ while the ‘sons of the king of the Greeks’ will attack them from the Western lands. Afterwards, both kings would discuss matters of the faith and settle their doctrinal divisions, with the Byzantine ruler accepting the Ethiopian creed, thus fulfilling his mission and inaugurating the kingdom of peace and justice. The prophetic motif of the ‘two kings’ moreover also appears in the *Kəbrä nāgāšt*, for all; see Giardini, ‘The Quest for the Ethiopian Prester John and Its Eschatological Implications’, 66, 68, 78.
287. According to Sergew Hable Selassie, the local Ethiopian expectation of the End of the World was noted in a contemporary chronicle as follows: ‘The old people were sad and were saying: “What a bad time has come to us!” [...] David has prophesied about the 8th millennium in his 11th Psalm. “Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth”. They read and interpreted the whole passage in front of all people, but they did not hear at all because their ears become deaf. [*Aṣe Na’od*] became kind, pious and

- devout in prayer and alms. He loved our Lady Mary and he beseeched and prayed to her always—day and night—not to allow the 8th millennium to come.’ Sergew Hable Selassie, ‘The Ge’ez Letters of Queen Eleni and Libne Dingil to John, King of Portugal’, 551–52, as well as 552 note 22.
288. He had first come from Egypt in the early 1480s together with *abunä* Yəshāq; see Steven Kaplan and Gianfranco Fiaccadori, ‘Marqos’, in *E Ae* 3 (2007), 789–90.
289. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 358–59. This interestingly enough also echoes Muslim prophecies from Egypt based on a prophetic *ḥadīth* about the destruction of Egypt and Mecca by an Ethiopian at the End of Time; see Loiseau, ‘Chrétiens d’Égypte, Musulmans d’Éthiopie. Protection Des Communautés et Relations Diplomatiques Entre Le Sultanat Mamelouk et Le Royaume Salomonien (ca 1270–1516)’, 49–50.
290. Given as based on the ‘writing of St Victor and St Sanutius’ [Shenoute] of Alexandria in Alvares’ account; see Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 358, note 1 and 2. Indeed, there is a recall of the above-mentioned Pseudo-Methodius, the Second Apocalypse of Pseudo-Athanasius and the Ethiopian reception of Shenoute; see Derat, ‘The Zāg^wē Dynasty (11–13th Centuries) and King Yemreḥanna Krestos’, 179–80 and Giardini, ‘The Quest for the Ethiopian Prester John and Its Eschatological Implications’, 68–80.
291. In this specific case, it appears as though this Ethiopian expectation would have also included the belief that the ‘other’ Christians recognize the sovereignty and supremacy of their own Ethiopian Church and rulers; see Derat, ‘The Zāg^wē Dynasty (11–13th Centuries) and King Yemreḥanna Krestos’, 180; Giardini, ‘The Quest for the Ethiopian Prester John and Its Eschatological Implications’, 68.