Guerra com a língoa

Book Culture and Biblioclasm in the Ethiopian Jesuit Mission

Kristen Windmuller-Luna
Princeton University
kwindmul@princeton.edu

Abstract

This article examines the book culture of the Jesuit mission to Ethiopia (1557–1632). Combining archival and field research, it considers the composition of the mission’s now-lost libraries, the use of books as tools of conversion, book production, and missionary engagement with Ethiopian Orthodox book culture. Furthermore, it illuminates the Jesuit reliance upon Ethiopian collaborators both to understand Orthodox texts and to produce Catholic manuscripts in the absence of a printing press. Using the personal libraries of Pedro Páez, S.J. and Afonso Mendes, S.J. as case studies, it posits that the gradual acceleration of acts performed by Jesuits upon Orthodox books—including collecting, translating, editing, and destroying—paralleled the rising aggression and cultural intolerance of the mission. Ultimately, this resulted in the expulsion and murder of the Jesuits, and the destruction of their libraries in a series of state-sanctioned book burnings that permitted a revival of Ethiopian Orthodoxy.

Keywords

transportation of books – Susənyos (Susenyos) – Ethiopian Orthodox Church – book burning – iconoclasm – translation – indigenous African languages – Pedro Páez, S.J. – Afonso Mendes, S.J. – printing press

* This title (“War with words”) is adapted from a 1633 letter by Patriarch Afonso Mendes, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARS1), Goan. 40, f. 46v. All go’az and Amharic translations follow Encyclopaedia Aethiopica conventions. My thanks to Stuart McManus for his comments on an earlier version of this article.
In 1666, the aṣe (emperor or king) Fasilädäs (r. 1632–1667) ordered the books of the Franks to be gathered and set alight at Aringo, east of Lake Tana. This act of biblioclasm—the fiery destruction of books for ideological purposes—ended a thirty-four-year reign that began with the 1632 reversal of Ethiopia's faith from Roman Catholicism back to Ethiopian Orthodoxy. Symbolic of Ethiopian Catholicism's theoretical and material death, the Aringo book burning ended Fasilädäs's anti-Jesuit campaign of persecution, exile, and execution. As a final act of religious cleansing, aṣe Yohannes I (r. 1667–1682) ordered another book burning in 1668. Orthodoxy was now truly free to rise from the ashes of Catholicism.

Both Catholics and Orthodox manipulated books as proxy for manipulating religion and people during the Ethiopian mission. The gradual acceleration of acts perpetrated by Jesuits upon Orthodox books—including collecting, translating, editing, and destroying—paralleled the rising aggression and cultural intolerance of the mission. Absent the mission's books and libraries, alternate sources must be used to determine indirectly which European works were brought to the mission, which indigenous works were encountered in Ethiopia, and how both sets of texts were used. These sources include published Jesuit letters and memoirs.

1 Negus, which translates as king, is used interchangeably with aṣe during this period. René Basset, Études de l'histoire de l'Éthiopie: première partie, chronique brève Éthiopienne (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1882), 138.

2 Ernest Alfred Thompson Wallis Budge, A History of Ethiopia, Nubia & Abyssinia (According to the Hieroglyphic Inscriptions of Egypt and Nubia, and the Ethiopian Chronicles) (London: Methuen, 1928), 398.

3 Perhaps ironically, the so-called library building in the Gondär castle complex is traditionally attributed to Yohannes I. Jean Doresse, Au pays de la Reine de Saba: l'Éthiopie antique et moderne (Paris: A. Guillot, 1956), 113; Metikou Ourgay, “Libraries in Ethiopia before 1900,” International Information and Library Review 23, no. 4 (1991): 391–99, here 394; Stephen Wright, “Book and Manuscript Collections in Ethiopia,” Journal of Ethiopian Studies 2, no. 1 (1964): 11–24, here 21; Basset, Études de l'histoire de l'Éthiopie: première partie, chronique brève Éthiopienne, 296; Budge, A History of Ethiopia, Nubia & Abyssinia, 406; James Bruce, Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773 (Edinburgh-London: J. Ruthven, G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1790), 2:424.

4 Camillo Beccari, Rerum Aethiopicarum scriptores occidentales inediti a saeculo XVI ad XIX, 15 vols. (Brussels: Culture et civilisation, 1969) (RAESO1); Fernão Guerreiro, Relação annual das cousas que fizeram os padres da Companhia de Jesus na India, & Iapão nos annos de 600. & 601. (~607–608) & do processo da conversão, & Christandade da quellas partes: tirada das cartas gerais que de lá vierão pello padre Fernão Guerreiro, etc. (Évora-Lisbon: Manoel de Lyra, 1603); Fernão Guerreiro, Relação annual das cousas que fizeram os padres da Companhia de Jesus, nas partes da India Oriental, & em algu[n]as outras da conquista deste Reyno nos annos de 604 & 605 & do processo da conversão & Christandade daquellas partes (Lisbon: Pedro
unpublished Jesuit manuscripts, Ethiopian writings, and post-mission Ethiopian art based in part on European printed matter. These sources cannot fully describe the variety of the Ethiopian mission’s books, permit analysis of paratextual material or marginalia, or recount the arrangement of books within residences. However, they can illuminate case studies of personal libraries, the use of books as tools of conversion, book production, and missionary engagement with Ethiopian book culture. This article represents the first analysis of the Ethiopian mission’s book culture, as well as a first attempt at virtually reconstructing its libraries.
The Jesuit Mission to Ethiopia (1557–1632)

Between 1557 and 1632, thirty-seven Jesuits entered the Ethiopian mission (Figure 1). The first mission (1557–1597) was isolated, poorly financed, and disease-ridden, leaving it susceptible to frequent persecution by the Ethiopians and their king. Book culture was accordingly small, and essentially confined to the residence at Faremona in the present-day Tigray region. In contrast, the second mission (1603–1632) had several decades of success, but ultimately ended in bloodshed and failure. The expansion of the mission to fifteen residences and the conversion of the empire to Catholicism was largely the consequence of the close relationship between the aṣe Susənyos (r. 1607–1632) and Pedro Páez, S.J. (1564–1622) of Spain, under whom book collection and translation expanded considerably after 1603.

More European works were translated and disseminated after Patriarch Afonso Mendes, S.J. (1579–1659) of Portugal arrived in 1624. The increasing destruction of Ethiopian books and religious objects during this period prompted anti-Jesuit violence, especially after Susənyos publicly repudiated Ethiopian Orthodoxy in 1625. The resulting civil war ended only with Susənyos’s 1632 abdication and death, and his son Fasilädäs’s expulsion of the Jesuits. The remaining Jesuits were executed in Ethiopia while the exiled patriarch unsuccessfully tried to revive the mission from India.

Methods of Book Acquisition

Materials destined for the Jesuit Ethiopian mission were frequently misdirected, lost, or stolen. The mission received funds from the Portuguese, and later the Spanish, crowns under the Portuguese padroado, and relied upon the Goa-based procurator, who used Portuguese imperial and Jesuit networks to link the mission with Rome, handle its finances, and route its correspondence.9

---

8 ARSI, Goan. 39, ff. 305v–306v.
9 Andreu Martínez d’Alòs-Moner, “In the Company of Iyäsus: The Jesuit Mission in Ethiopia, 1557–1632” (PhD diss., European University Institute, 2009), 234. The book version of this dissertation (Envoyos of a Human God: The Jesuit Mission to Christian Ethiopia, 1557–1632) will be published by Brill in March 2015; Luke Clossey, Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 25; J. Gabriel Martínez-Serna, “Procurators and the Making of the Jesuits’ Atlantic Network,” in Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1830, eds. Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 189.
Map of the Jesuit Mission to Ethiopia (1557–1632)

Map by the author. "Site" is used generally in the map key to denote a site of field study, which may include an individual church, residential complex, or entire city. The Jesuits did not establish cities, but built their residential complexes and churches within or near established Ethiopian settlements, usually the court.
Despite their reach, the long distance transportation of goods and people over these networks was unreliable.10

All Ethiopia-bound shipments were sent via intermediate ports to Massawa (in present-day Eritrea). By the early 1600s, the Massawa-Diu route was fixed, but dependent upon weather and international politics. In 1615, Páez reported that deteriorating relations between aṣe Susənyos and the Turkish pasha of Massawa had prompted the seizure of goods sent to the mission from India, which had only been partly returned by 1616.11 Books and religious icons reached Massawa through other ports, including the island of Çuaquem (modern Suakin, Sudan) and, around the 1620s, Moca (modern Mocha, Yemen). While the missionaries praised the former port’s lack of import taxes or harassment, they deplored the latter for its frequent delays of letters and supplies.12

Those charged with safely transporting gifts or supplies to Ethiopia frequently thwarted their safe passage.13 Corrupt agents of the Portuguese Indian state were frequent culprits, a problem that also plagued Portugal’s first embassies to Ethiopia.14 More often, Jesuit colleges at Goa and Diu delayed or stole the Ethiopian mission’s deliveries. In 1555, Patriarch João Nuñes Barreto, S.J. (1517–1562), and his entourage were sent to Ethiopia with nearly 10,000 cruzados’ worth of religious paraphernalia, clothing, and printed books. Of this cargo, only Coadjutor Bishop Andrés de Oviedo, S.J. (1518–1577) arrived in Ethiopia. Coadjutor Bishop Belchior Carneiro Leitão, S.J. (1516–1683) went to Macau, Barreto remained in Goa, and the treasures—including the books—were distributed to the College of São Paulo and the Sé (cathedral) of Goa.15 In one particularly brazen theft, procurator Francisco de Azevedo, S.J. (1578–1660), was found to have pilfered items bound for Ethiopia around 1625.16 Individuals not officially affiliated with the mission used these same networks to send books and letters to the missionaries. Páez maintained an epistolary relationship with his friend and theology teacher Tomás de Iturén, S.J. (1556–1630) from

10 Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization*, 49; Martínez-Serna, “Procurators and the Making of the Jesuits’ Atlantic Network,” 190.
11 Richard Pankhurst, *History of Ethiopian Towns. [1.] From the Middle Ages to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Stuttgart: Steiner-Verlag-Wiesbaden-GmbH, 1982), 88–89.
12 ADB, Ms. 779, f. 152v; RAESOI, II:410.
13 Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization*, 24.
14 Francisco Alvarez, *Verdadeira informação das terras do Preste Jõao das Indias* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1889), v.
15 Martínez d’Alòs-Moner, “In the Company of Iyäsus,” 236–37.
16 Ibid., 239.
the Jesuit college of Belmonte. In his letters, Páez frequently thanks Iturén for sending news of family, blank paper, and much-appreciated books.\textsuperscript{17}

Once in Ethiopia, goods moved between residences via existing trade routes and caravans in a matter of days, using Gorgora as a hub after 1605.\textsuperscript{18} While it took about six months to connect Ethiopia with Rome, and up to two-and-half-years to travel between Ethiopia and the Iberian peninsula, it took only three months to link Massawa with Diu, allowing for books to be requested and received from India in approximately one year.\textsuperscript{19} Weather also impacted deliveries: roads became impassible during \textit{keremt}, the Ethiopian rainy season, effectively stopping overland shipments intended for India-bound ships from June until after August.\textsuperscript{20} Without stable fiduciary or material support from their order, the missionaries had to rely on friends to obtain or produce books.

\textbf{Company and Personal Libraries}

While the \textit{annuæe} vividly describe new churches and residence houses, they remain silent on the construction of purpose-built libraries. Late or post-mission sources imply that large book collections or possibly formal libraries were created at the residences of Fәremona (founded 1566), Gorgora Velha (founded 1606), Qʷәlәla (founded 1612), Azәzә (founded 1623–24), and Gorgora Nova (founded 1626). European printed books were concentrated at Fәremona, Gorgora, and Qʷәlәla, each the hub of a regional residential network.\textsuperscript{21} The oldest volumes may have existed in Fәremona, the site of an Ethio-Portuguese settlement since the mid-sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{22} In 1660, the Ethiopian ambassador Hag Mika'el Abu Yusuf reported that an exceptional library existed at Azәzә.\textsuperscript{23} Known for the translation activities based at its Jesuit college and church, Azәzә also included a palace and gardens favored by both Susәnyos and Fasilәdәs during their reigns.\textsuperscript{24} Any Catholic books remaining in this library likely later

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{raesoi}, 11:33.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, “In the Company of Iyäsus,” 102.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 105, 238–39.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 103.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 210.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Sanjay Subrahmanyan, “A Roomful of Mirrors: The Artful Embrace of Mughals and Franks, 1550–1700,” \textit{Ars Orientalis} 39 (2010): 39–83, here 43.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Emerich J. Van Donzel, \textit{Foreign Relations of Ethiopia: 1642–1700: Documents Relating to the Journeys of Khodja Murād} (Istanbul: Nederlands historisch-archaeologisch Instituut, 1979), 13–19.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Siegbert Uhlig, \textit{Encyclopaedia Aethiopica}, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 416.
\end{itemize}
became tinder, Fasilädäs's fondness for the site notwithstanding. Those books at Gorgora Nova not spirited away by the Jesuits were also likely destroyed when the compound was wrecked, shortly after its 1632 abandonment.25

Little is known about how these and other volumes were stored. Residences and churches were primarily made in mud and straw in the local fashion, and book storage may have followed local conventions. Ethiopian books were wrapped in leather sheets or enclosed in mähdar; leather cases with straps for hanging from zebu horns or wooden pegs affixed to walls.26 Alternatively, books were stored in ad hoc stone and wood cupboards under the beds of Orthodox priests. Prior to the fixed capital at Gondär, and likely during the transitional period of the mission (when both fixed capitals and roving camps were used), books may have been stored in permanently sited churches. In the post-1614 Jesuit mission, churches were built from stone in the prosperous and politically stable residences. Purpose-built niches visible in the ruined Jesuit residences at Debsan and Gorgora Nova (Figure 2), may also have been used for book storage. Manoel de Almeida, S.J., who primarily lived in Gorgora, kept books in his cubiculo [room], perhaps in one of the niches evident in each of the ruined seminary's cubiculos.27 Intriguingly, both niches and horns are present in the so-called “Pedro Páez house” in Bahir Dar, at the southern edge of Lake Tana.28 A 1605 description of the now-lost residence at Fəremona describes bookshelves made by placing boards in the walls; this rare description matches the architectural remains exactly.29

The annuae remain equally silent on these libraries’ holdings. Following Noël Golvers, the “constitution of book collections and libraries and a regular/systematic book consultation may be seen as a ‘congenital’ characteristic of the Jesuit Society. As such, these characteristics were also ‘exported’ to the extra-European missions.”30 Ignatius of Loyola personally launched the

25 Siegbert Uhlig, Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, vol. 2 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 854.
26 Marc Drogin, Biblioclasm: The Mythical Origins, Magic Powers, and Perishability of the Written Word (Savage, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1989), 66; William Bryce Paton, “Libraries in Ethiopia,” Unesco Bulletin for Libraries 24, no. 1 (1970): 27–31.
27 BNL, “Memorias para a historia ecclesiastica do arcebispado de Goæ e seus suffraganeos,” f. 49f.
28 My dissertation on the mission’s art and architecture will consider the unconfirmed attribution of this house to Pedro Páez and the Portuguese. In August 2013, the priest at the church of St. Giyorgis, in whose compound the structure is found, called it the “Portuguese house.” Ethiopian-produced tourist maps of the Lake Tana region refer to it likewise.
29 Guerreiro, Relação anuas, 400.
30 Noël Golvers, Libraries of Western Learning for China. Circulation of Western Books Between Europe and China in the Jesuit Mission (c. 1650–c. 1750), vol. 1, Logistics of Book Acquisition and Circulation (Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Institute, 2012), 15.
Ethiopian mission with the support of the Portuguese king João III (1502–1557, r. 1521–1557), and oversaw the details of its planning. Two of the three directives Loyola issued between 1553 and 1556 explicitly described the kinds and uses of books preferred for the mission, including Pontificals, explanations of church rites, decrees, and councils, saints’ lives, and feast calendars, among other “buenos libros.” Though the priests’ letters permit a general reconstruction of how books were procured, they do not provide “want lists” of books, illuminate why particular books were chosen, or answer whether procurators’ lists of curia-approved books impacted their selection. Instead, epistolary references establish what books the priests had: small, practical books on religion or history (cartilhas, evangelhos, missas, psalmos, breviários, etc.) by primarily Jesuit authors (including Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, Juan de Maldonado, Francisco Suárez, and Francisco de Ribera). Rare illustrated
luxury volumes, such as a large Gospel bound in scarlet velvet and ornamented with richly worked gold and silver roses, were likely imported for courtly displays or gifts. Illustrated books—including Jerónimo Nadal’s *Evangelicae historiae imagines* and the *Biblia Complutense*—drew special attention from Ethiopian nobility, as most Ethiopian manuscripts at this time were not illustrated.

Neither the *annuae* nor letters from individuals identify book owners, other than Páez and Mendes. While we can assume all Jesuits accessed both the college libraries and their personal devotional books, only these exceptional accounts provide glimpses into what these titles were.

**Pedro Páez’s *História da Etiópia***

Around 1614, the curia designated Páez to address the Dominican friar Luis de Urreta’s *Historia eclesiástica*. Urreta fancifully blended the Prester John myth with inter-order religious politics to theorize that the Jesuit mission was irrelevant, because Ethiopians were already subordinate to the Roman pope. By 1615, Páez was writing a polemical refutation of Urreta, in the form of a two-volume compendium of Ethiopian historiography and ethnography. Páez systematically translates, then bitingly refutes each passage by comparing it to an authoritative source.

A close reading of Pedro Páez’s *História da Etiópia* permits a partial reconstruction of the books he kept at Gorgora Velha, those he likely read or saw before the mission, and the *ə̀ğə̀z* books he encountered in Ethiopia. Together, these form an intertextual network unique in Jesuit accounts, in which European and Ethiopian texts are considered equally authoritative sources on

---

34 *arsi*, *Goan*, 39, f. 303*: “hũ livro grande do Evang.os forrado de Velludo carmesim, echa-peado todo de ouro, e prata lavrada excellentemente cõ rosas por cima do Velludo, obra riquissima.”

35 Bosc-Tiessé, “The Use of Occidental Engravings,” 97; *raesoI*, 11:423. The volumes referenced in the text are: Nadal, *Evangelicae historiae imagines, ex ordine evangeliorum, quae toto anno in missae sacrificio recitantur, in ordinem temporis vitae Christi digestae* (Antwerp: Martinus Nutius, 1593); *Biblia polyglotta*, eds. Diego Lopez de Zuñiga et al. (Alcala de Henares: Arnaldo Guillén de Brocar, 1522).

36 Luis de Urreta, *Historia eclesiástica, política, natural y moral de los grandes y remotos reynos de la Etiopia, monarquía del emperador, llamado Preste Juan de las Indias* (Valencia: Pedro Patricio Mey, 1610).

37 *raesoI*, 11:468–501. Páez’s manuscript remained unpublished until the twentieth century.
the region's natural, religious, cultural, and political history. An analysis of these sources follows:

*Manuscript & Print Texts Used as Source Material for Pedro Páez's História da Etiópia.*

* = Works noted by Páez as having read or owned in Ethiopia.

** = Works belonging to specific Orthodox churches or monasteries.

**European printed sources:**

- Álvares, Francisco – 1557 – *Verdadeira informação das terras do Preste João das Indias*.
- Baronio, Cesare – 1609 – *Annales ecclesiastici*.
- Botero, Giovanni – 1603 – *Relaciones universales del mundo*.
- de Cabedo, Jorge et al – 1603 – *Ordenações, e leis do Reino de Portugal, recopiladas per mandado do muito alto catholico e poderoso Rei Dom Philippe o Primero*.
- Chrysostom, John – 1525 – *Opera Omnia*.
- de Castanhoso, Miguel – 1548 – *Historia das cousas que Christovão da Gama fez no reynos do Preste João*.
- de Castro, M. Mendes – 1604 – *Repertório das ordenações do Reino de Portugal*.
- de Maldonado, Juan – 1598 – *Gospels of Saint Matthew and Saint John* (possibly in the *Commentarii in quatuor Evangelistas*).
- de Ribera, Francisco – 1598 – *Epistolam B. Pauli Apostoli ad Hebraeos commentarij: cum quinque indicibus, quorum primus continet quaestiones Scripturae, secundus regulas, tertius eiusdem Scripturae locos explicatos, quartus, est rerum atque verborum, quintus Evangeliorum totius anni, in usum concionatorum.*
- de Toledo, Francisco – 1602 – *Commentarii, & annotationes in epistolam beati Pauli apostoli ad Romanos*.
- de Urreeta, Luis – 1610 – *Historia eclesiástica, política, natural y moral de los grandes y remotos reynos de la Etiopia, monarchía del emperador, llamado Preste Juan de las Indias.*
- de Urreeta, Luis – 1611 – *Historia de la sagrada Orden de Predicadores, en los remotos reynos de la Etiopia: trata de los prodigiosos sa[n]tos, martires, y co[n]fessores, inquisidores apostólicos*.
- Guerreiro, Fernão – 1611 – *Relaçam annal das cousas que fizeram os padres da Companhia de Iesus, nas partes da India Oriental & em algu[n]as outras da conquista deste Reyno nos annos de 607. & 608.: & do processo da*

---

38 All data sourced from my analysis of Páez's text as found in Pedro Páez's *History of Ethiopia*. 
conversaõ & Christandade daquellas partes, com mais hũa addiçam á relaçam de Ethiopia*

- Viegas, Brás – 1601 – Commentarii exegetici in Apocalypsim*

European printed sources with unclear dating:

- Aquinas, Thomas – Summa theologica
- Augustine of Hippo – Liber de haeresibus ad quadvultdeus
- Cicero, Marcus Tullius – Orationes
- Florentine and Tridentine councils
- Hilary of Poitiers – De Trinitate libri duodecim
- Justiniano, Benedito – Gospels of Saint Luke and Saint Paul*
- Lucian – Quo modo est scribenda historia
- Martyrologium Romanum
- Pereira, Benedito – beginning of Genesis*
- Vulgate Bible* (?)

European manuscripts:

- Copies of annuae and other letters held in the residences*
- Fernandes, António – started 1604 – Tratado sobre todos os erros de Etiópia*

Ethiopian manuscripts (all unknown author, before 1622; unless noted otherwise, Páez does not state their titles)

- book describing appropriate behavior and prayers for monks and nuns
- book detailing the architecture and history of Maryam Søyon (St. Mary of Zion) church at Axum**
- book detailing the mass/songs (missal? Prayer book?)*39
- book including the death of Onâg Çaguêd on Debre Damo, where Cristovão da Gama found the empress*
- book on the origin and progress of Christianity in Ethiopia*
- book that deals with the emperor’s officials*
- book with information about Queen Azèb/Saba’s capital**
- Haymänot Abäw [Faith of the Fathers]*
- imperial account book
- Kebra Nagäst [The Glory of the Kings]**
- letters held in the Ethiopian royal archives, including Ethio-European royal correspondence

39 Páez noted this work as being in his personal collection.
list of Ethiopian provinces and kingdoms

*Mashafa geddasé* [Ethiopian Orthodox missal]**

*Mazaquèbt Haimanòt* [Treasury of the Faith]*

royal chronicles, including those of Zar’a Yâeqob*Åmda Ṣeyon,* Minäs,* LabnÄ Dangol*Šarṣa Dengel,* Susänyos,* and Gälawdewos*

saints’ lives (gâdîl), including *Gadla Takla Häymänòt, Gadla Sämû‘él of Dabra Hallèlûyà and Gadla Päntäléwôn*

*Senkessar* (synaxarium, aka the *Flos Sanctorum*)**

*Ser’àta Qwerhat* [Ceremony of Royal Consecration]** (?)

synods, including a Synod of the Apostles*

*Ta’amra Maryam* [The Miracles of Mary/Miracles of Our Lady] **

text used during Mass*

two books with king lists and saintly histories lent by Susänýos*

Unsurprisingly, many of these texts are religious works by Jesuit authors. What is surprising is Páez’s near-equal reliance upon Ethiopian and European texts. As a caveat, books not directly indicated as in Páez’s possession could have been quoted from memory in the tradition of *artes commemorativae.*\(^{40}\)

This form of indirect testimony, where memorized passages supported arguments, characterized both Jesuit and humanist writing during this period.\(^{41}\)

However, Páez’s exacting use of citations allows readers to identify the books in his possession: European volumes generally have precise page citations, whereas the Ethiopian volumes he only viewed are indirectly summarized. Either way, the lengthy quotations and nuanced personal observations legitimized the author, a literary tactic recognizable to humanist readers.\(^{42}\)

This distinct appreciation for Ethiopian literary traditions vanished when Páez died of a fever at Gorgora Velha on May 10, 1622. In his absence, space was created for priests who believed that Ethiopia’s books were full not of truths, but of errors.

**Mendes’s Library**

Páez’s personal books were likely consolidated into the library at Gorgora Velha, and later Gorgora Nova. Once dead, he could not complain about the

---

\(^{40}\) Noël Golvers, *Libraries of Western Learning for China: Circulation of Western Books between Europe and China in the Jesuit Mission (ca. 1650–ca. 1750)*, vol. 2, *Formation of Jesuit Libraries* (Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Institute, 2013), 45.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 44–45.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 44.
presumed immolation of his collection during Fasilädäš’s auto-da-fé.43 Mendes, however, witnessed the confiscation of his beloved personal library, “todas minhas riquezas” [all my treasures], in Ethiopia.44 As early as 1622, he asked King Philip IV of Spain and Portugal whether to take a library to Ethiopia. He emphasized the appropriateness of Francisco Suárez’s library in a 1623 letter:

Your Majesty asked on September 28, to which I respond, if the library of the Father Francisco Soares [sic] has the books that were necessary for me, and for my associates [...] Thus if the Mesa da Consciência [e Ordens] would give us the entire library of the father Francisco Soares, we would take those books suited to us, and those remaining we would substitute for other ecclesiastics such as missals, breviaries, rituals, etc. These are especially necessary for the large number of boys, that we advise you are instructed in the Roman Catholic faith, and who know Latin well enough that they can soon be ordained.45

Mendes must have convinced the monarch that he needed the entire library: in a 1625 letter from Fəremona, he reported the receipt of the pontifical silver and most of the books. Typically, the remainder was detained at Diu, with hopes that it would be sent via Massawa or Suakin.46

Suárez, a Spanish Jesuit, taught Scholastic philosophy at the University of Coimbra in Portugal between 1597 and 1616, where Mendes had been a student.47 Mendes’s library incorporated Suárez’s personal library of manuscripts and printed religious texts, as well as the theologian’s scholastic works, including (in manuscript) De Verbo incarnato (1590), De mysteriis vitae Christi (1592), De vera intelligentia auxilii efficacis (1605), De necessitate gratia (1619), and De gratia habituali (1619); and (in print) Varia opuscula theologica, De virtute et

43 Uhlig, Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, 2:854.
44 ARSI, Goa n. 40, f. 67r.
45 “Mandou V. Mag.de em 28 de setembro, se lhe respondesse, se na libraria que ficou do padre Francisco Soares aveiro os livros que eram necessarios pera mim, e pera meus companheiros [...]. Com isto assentou a Mesa da Consciência que se nos desse a livraria do padre Francisco Soares por enteiro, per a della tomarmos os livros que nos servissem, e que os demais se trocariam por outros ecclesiasticos como são missaes, breviarios, ritu aes, etc. Que sam precisamentes necessarios pera grande quantidade de mancebos, que temos aviso que estam instruidos no fé catholica e romana, e sabem latim de maneira que logo em chegando se podem ordenar.” RAESOI, 12:4, 11.
46 RAESOI, 12:160–61
47 Siegbert Uhlig, Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, vol. 3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 915.
statu religionis, De legibus, and Defensio fidei. Mendes packed the extensive library, along with large quantities of fine clothing and liturgical goods, in part to impress the Ethiopians through sheer quantity. Though not explicitly stated, the books were presumably stored at the patriarch’s compound at Debsan (Figure 3). The walls of the ruined main residence include niches that may have held books. While Mendes brought a desk with him, it is unknown if he also brought bookcases or cabinets.

Mendes was stripped of his court privileges and his treasured library when the Jesuits were expelled from Ethiopia. In the Consulta do conselho da fazenda, the Portuguese officials Tomás (de Ybio?) Calderón and Francisco de Carvalho considered Mendes’s report that “heretics” robbed him of all he has and seized his library. Unfortunately for the mission, the 1640 letter’s tone implies

---

48 Adrian Hastings, The Church in Africa, 1450–1950 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 24. Francisco Suárez, Varia opuscula theologica (Madrid: Ex typographia regia, 1599); Suárez, De virtute et statu religionis (Coimbra: Petrus Crasbeecck, 1608–1609); Suárez, De legibus (Coimbra: Gomez de Loureyro, 1612); Suárez, Defensio fidei (Coimbra: Gomez de Loureyro, 1613).
49 RAESOI 12:149.
50 BA, Documentos sobre a Etiópia, 51-V1-21, ff. 318–319.
that Mendes’s request for an *esmola* (alms) to replace the “fermosa livraria” [beautiful library] with new books for the “bem e doutrina de suas ovelhas” [the good and the instruction of his flock] was fruitless. The loss of these crucial volumes severely hampered the missionaries’ ability to inspire conversion.

**Books as Tools of Conversion**

Guided by Jesuit Humanist teaching strategies, the missionaries used books and the visual arts to inspire conversion.\(^\text{51}\) Even before the Jesuit mission, European priests attached to embassies noted how Ethiopians esteemed the aesthetic and historical value of books. On Christmas Eve 1520, the Portuguese chaplain-priest Francisco Alvares (c.1465–1541) prepared for mass: “I took as many books as I had got, although they were nothing to do with the feast, but only to make up a number, because they [the Ethiopians] are much given to asking for books; and I opened them all upon the altar.”\(^\text{52}\) The Jesuit missionaries continued these impressive displays, but emphasized the slow revelation and explanation of the books’ contents. Ethiopia’s Christian literary tradition was likewise exploited in these efforts. Simultaneous presentations of books formed dramatic finales to liturgical debates between Orthodox and Catholic priests.

Jesuit methods were easily implemented in missions where literate scholarly and elite classes revered books, including China and Ethiopia. Missionaries in both territories used books to introduce individual “letrados” [educated elites] to Christianity, whom they hoped would impact the masses through mandate or example.\(^\text{53}\) For Susənyos’s brother *ras* Šəʾəlä Krəstos, a combination of reading and translation inspired conversion, and the eventual creation of sizable personal library.\(^\text{54}\) Šəʾəlä Krəstos studied Portuguese to read the *cartilha*, a children’s reader, becoming competent enough to translate Maldonado’s commentaries on the four evangelists into Amharic or *gəʿəz* around 1613.\(^\text{55}\) To the missionaries, this ‘conversion’ of words proved the genuineness of his 1612

---

\(^\text{51}\) Golvers, *Libraries of Western Learning for China*, 116.

\(^\text{52}\) Francisco Alvares, *Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Abyssinia during the Years 1520–1527*, trans. Henry Edward Stanley (London: Hakluyt Society, 1881), 220.

\(^\text{53}\) Golvers, *Libraries of Western Learning for China*, 115, 18.

\(^\text{54}\) *Ras* is the title of a noble provincial ruler. *AC*, Série Azul 533, f. 198v.

\(^\text{55}\) Hervé Penne, “La mission jésuite en Éthiopie au temps de Pedro Paez (1583–1622) et ses rapports avec le pouvoir éthiopien. Troisième partie: Le temps de la ‘victoire’ (1612–1622),” *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* 38 (1994): 139–81, here 142. The commentary in question was likely Juan de Maldonado, *Commentarii in quatuor Evangelistas* (Lyon: Giunti, 1598).
religious conversion. Given the success of this and other book-guided conversions, the Jesuits hoped to print books for wider distribution.

The Elusive, and Illusive, Printing Press

From the mid-sixteenth century until the end of the Jesuit mission, multiple attempts failed to bring European printing presses to Ethiopia. From the onset of Ethio-Portuguese diplomatic relations, Ethiopian rulers asked the Portuguese crown to send craftsmen to their kingdom. Aße Labnä Dangal (r. 1508–1540) appealed to Dom Manuel I for “craftsmen in type-founding,” but the Portuguese monarch’s 1514 and 1515 directives to locate a printer for Ethiopia went unfulfilled.56 Later, Labnä Dangal implored Dom João III to send “artificers to make images and printed books.”57 Instead of artisans, the Ethiopian rulers received Jesuit priests, whose requests for a press also went unfilled.

At first, it appeared likely that a press would accompany the missionaries. In 1556, a Spanish coadjutor brother, Juan de Bustamente, left Lisbon with movable type and materials for a press.58 Assigned by Dom João III to the office of printer to Prester John, he traveled in the entourage of Patriarch Barreto. Like the patriarch, both Bustamente and the press succumbed to local politics, and after their 1567 arrival at the College of São Paulo in Goa remained in India indefinitely.59 Bustamente and his colleagues printed works for the eastern missions, including Francis Xavier’s Doctrina Christâa and other religious texts in Portuguese, Indian vernaculars, Syriac, and “Ethiopic” (likely əˈɡəːz).60 Earlier, in Rome, Johannes Potken printed a əˈɡəːz Psalter of David and Song of Solomon in consultation with the Ethiopian abba Thomas Wälda, while the printer-priest Tesfa Ṣəyon printed a əˈɡəːz Novum Testamentum between 1548 and 1549.61 Jesuit references to

56 Alvarez, Verdadeira informação, 501; Cecelio Gómez Rodeles, “Earliest Jesuit Printing in India,” ed. Henry Hosten, trans. Louis Cardon, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal 9 (1913): 149–68, here 154.
57 Alvarez, Verdadeira informação, 505.
58 raesoi, 10:53–61. Uhlig, Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, 2:815; Hervé Pennec, Des jésuites au royaume du Prêtre Jean (Éthiopie): stratégies, rencontres et tentatives d’implantation, 1495–1633 (Paris-Lisbon: Centre culturel Calouste Gulbenkian-Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2003), 123.
59 Francis Xavier, Tradadou ou Catecismo da Doutrina Christa (Doutrina Christãa) (Goa: Collegio de São Paulo, 1557); Gómez Rodeles, “Earliest Jesuit Printing in India,” 149–50; raesoi, 10:634; ARSi, Goant. 39, f. 439r.
60 Psalterium Chaldaicum, sive potius Aethopicum (Rome: Marcellus Silber for Johannes Potken, 1513). For more on early modern Ethiopic printing, see Bent Juel-Jensen, “Potken’s
Ethiopian-language Bibles or psalters of David may refer both to locally produced manuscripts and to these printed editions: in 1607, Luis de Azevedo, S.J. reported seeing a few copies of the 1548 *Novum Testamentum* at the Orthodox monastery of Abba Gärima, which was frequented by the priests of the first mission.62

The Jesuits in Ethiopia continued to request a press, fonts, and a printer to facilitate the distribution of otherwise handwritten texts. Once again, the necessity of shipping materials via India resulted in the retention of materials bound for Ethiopia. Mendes sent a written specimen of Ethiopian characters to Rome, where it was reproduced in triplicate as a lead font, with one copy of the font intended for Ethiopia. Pope Urban VIII (r. 1623–1644) sent the font to Ethiopia without printer or press, so it remained in Goa.63 Even so, few books were printed with this type: only Antonio Fernandes, S.J.’s 1642 *Magseph asse-tat* has been definitively documented.64 Despite repeated royal and missionary requests, a printing press did not arrive in Ethiopia until 1863.65 Lacking their own press and only nominally supported by that in Goa, the Jesuits instead collaborated with Ethiopians to produce manuscripts.

**Truth, Lies, and Translation at the Jesuit scriptoria**

Ethiopia was a unique mission territory for the Jesuits because it was already Christian and had a centuries-old religious literary tradition.66 The Ethiopian word for book—*temhert*—is itself reflective of religious education via translation. The word can also mean “education,” and originally referenced the first *gəˈæz* translations.67 Monks began translating Christian books into *gəˈæz*,...
an indigenous Semitic language, shortly after the Aksumite Emperor Ezana converted to Christianity around 330 CE (Figure 4); the first illuminated manuscripts were created in the fifth century or earlier. Translations of Greek, Latin, and Arabic religious texts continued until Aksum’s eighth century fall, with original Ethiopian works appearing five centuries later under the patronage of the “Solomonic dynasty” kings. After near-oblation during the 1529–1543 jihad of the Somali imam Ahmad bin Ibrāhīm al-Ġazi, Ethiopia’s book culture slowly revived as monks copied undamaged manuscripts and wrote new volumes. Under ase Gālawdewos (r. 1540–1559), the first known royal book collection was built and new translations began, sparking a literary renaissance that continued through the eighteenth century. As Adrian Hastings has remarked, this literary culture—which combined Ethiopian secular and spiritual elements with knowledge gained from foreign works in translation—was one of the foundations of the Christian kingdom.

The Jesuits had a dual engagement with Ethiopian books throughout the mission. Ethiopian texts were frequently sources of truths: gādlat [saints’ lives], king lists, and Tarikā Nägāst [royal chronicles] educated the missionaries about Ethiopian royal and religious values. By the second mission, the priests were reading and translating Ethiopian texts, with the intention of publishing works in Europe to educate their peers about the kingdom. Manoel Barradas, S.J.’s translations of the lives of saints Abba Gārima, Gābrä Krestos, and Gābrä Mānfaä Qeddeus also followed European trends in the same genre. Conveniently arriving during a manuscript renaissance, the Jesuits established their own Ethiopian scriptoria with local assistance. Translations occupied so much of the missionaries’ time that some feared it detracted from their spiritual and teaching duties. Even as they exaggerated their language skills to the

68 “Unearthed, the Ancient Texts That Tell Story of Christianity,” The Independent, Tuesday July 6, 2010, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/unearthed-the-ancient-texts-that-tell-story-of-christianity-2019188.html (accessed June 3, 2014).

69 Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʻAbd al-Qādir ʻArabfaqīh, Paul Stenhouse, and Richard Pankhurst, Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaša = The Conquest of Abyssinia (Hollywood, CA: Tsehai Publishers and Distributors, 2003), 249.

70 Ourgay, “Libraries in Ethiopia before 1900,” 394.

71 Hastings, The Church in Africa, 1450–1950, 6.

72 BA, Documentos sobre a Etiópia, 51-VI-21, ff. 394–400v.

73 Uhrig, Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, 1:483.

74 ADB, Ms. 779, f. 153v.
Figure 4  Priest at the church of Giyorgis, near Hawzen, Ethiopia, holding an undated Gospel manuscript written in go'az.

Photograph by the Author, August 2013
Curia, the Jesuits relied heavily upon Ethiopian and Ethio-Portuguese collaborators like Akäla Christos and João Gabriel, captain of the Portuguese soldiers and their descendants at Fəremona, as well as Catholic seminarians and Orthodox clerics. The European works they translated increasingly addressed two audiences after 1612, and were handwritten in both the liturgical language of ga’az and the Amharic vernacular to broaden their reach.\(^{75}\) Polemical works and commentaries were used publicly to debate Orthodox priests, while children’s pedagogical texts were translated to introduce Ethiopians of all ages to Catholicism.\(^{76}\) \textit{The cartilha}, a catechism with syllabus and alphabet, was perhaps the most widely translated and copied book.\(^{77}\) Especially esteemed by Susənyos, it was copied \textit{en masse} at his request.\(^{78}\) Given the precedent of translating religious texts during the Aksumite Empire, and, more recently, during the reigns of Ləbnä Dəngäl and Gälawdewos, the Jesuit translation efforts can be integrated within Ethiopian religious tradition. Patronage previously directed towards Orthodox scriptoria now benefitted Jesuit efforts.

However, Ethiopian books also contained what the Catholic priests perceived as doctrinal errors. Notwithstanding Ignatius’s directive to keep the “books of the unbelievers” for educational purposes, the Jesuits of the first Ethiopian mission remained wary, and cautiously sought permission from Pope Julius II to read Orthodox books to better understand their faults.\(^{79}\) Those of the second mission, however, devoted most of their efforts to physically eradicating these perceived falsities. Offensive passages were physically removed or altered from Orthodox manuscripts; translated Catholic texts sometimes replaced entire Orthodox works.\(^{80}\) After Páez’s death, Ethiopian texts were translated primarily to refute errors, rather than gain knowledge. Previously considered reputable, works like the \textit{Haymanotä abäw} were decried as the “font from which Ethiopians drink errors, and from which they defend...
themselves in disputes."81 By the late 1620s, Mendes explicitly prioritized translation and error correction alongside doctrinal standardization.82 Both efforts increased dramatically towards the end of the mission. As recounted in the annuae, Luis de Azevedo and António Fernandes at Azäzo and Debsan were responsible for the majority of translations during this period, but Ethiopian aid was still vital.83

Mendes relied heavily upon ras Śəʿəlä Krəstos to translate an Orthodox doctrinal text known as the Bran Haymanot [Light of Faith].84 The manuscript that arrived at the Propaganda Fide in Rome in the mid-1640s was a twelve-chapter, multi-volume enumeration and refutation of the Orthodox Church’s errors (Figure 5). Mendes used long passages in translation and in the original gəʿəz, rebutting heterodox quotations in a manner reminiscent of Páez’s refutation of Urreta. Despite his professed opposition to Orthodoxy, he insisted that an Ethiopian living at Santo Stefano dei Mori in Rome edit the gəʿəz passages.85 The book was finally printed in 1692 in Rome as the Bran-Haymanot id est lux fidei in epithalamium Aethiopissae, sive in nuptias verbi et Ecclesiae. Fernandes, with Ethiopian collaborators, also translated and refuted an Ethiopian religious text. He targeted the Mäzğäbä haymanot [Treasure of Faith], a theological work that outlined the Orthodox sacraments and monophysite theology. Like Mendes, Fernandes finished his book in India: it was published on the Goa press in 1642 as Magseph Assetat (Mäqsäftä Häsetat [Whip of Lies]).86 While Mendes produced his mostly Latin text for European audiences, Fernandes published in gəʿəz for Ethiopian audiences. Even though the mission was essentially over by 1646, the creation of books for its potential resurgence was only possible with Ethiopian help.

**Destruction**

Despite their productivity, the Jesuits constantly feared crime and violence. During the first mission, the priests at Fəremona worried that non-Catholics...
Figure 5  Unknown artist, frontispiece to Branhaymanot id est lux fidei [...]  
MANUSCRIPT BY AFONSO MENDES, C.1640S. ROMA, BIBLIOTECA NAZIONALE CENTRALE, GES. 837, C. 4ª COURTESY OF BIBLIOTECA NAZIONALE CENTRAL, ROMA
would return to torch their straw-roofed houses and books again. While Susənyos and other nobles embraced Catholicism, elites who refused to convert were among the Jesuits’ most hostile enemies. Notable incidents include their near-immolation at the command of empress Wäld Śä”ala, and the “martyrdom” of their books by the renegade nobleman Tekla Giyorgis. The non-Christian Oromo also terrorized the Jesuits by burning their books. Those images and books not already ruined by the time the missionaries were banished to Faremona in 1633 were stolen on the road. Further destruction was threatened in a letter Fasilādās sent Mendes in 1634. Mendes summarized the letter, which described the seizure of the Jesuit houses and the fathers’ imminent deaths by sword, rapier, and fire. In actuality, Fasilādās only specified that books would be burned. Mendes’s conflation of the destruction of objects with the death of humans underscores the importance of books in the mission.

All this is not to say that the missionaries did not also brutalize Ethiopian religious texts and objects. Books had been altered since at least the onset of the second mission, if not earlier. The Jesuits escalated their reforms after Susənyos’s conversion, burning or otherwise destroying Orthodox paraphernalia and texts. Diogo de Mattos, S.J.’s twenty-day spree in the churches of Dek Island—a burial ground for generations of Ethiopian kings—is described as an exorcism of the devil. He made way for Roman Catholicism by knocking down altars and “exiling” books from churches he called beautiful, yet spiritually ruined. In the wake of his destruction, he erected adobe Catholic altars and baptized nearly 1,400 Ethiopians. Earlier, the Catholics were “comforted” when the tabot [altar stone] of the “enemies of the faith” was burned. Though the Jesuits lamented the destruction of their books as if they had lost a brother, these same acts were considered triumphs when directed against Ethiopian Orthodoxy. These acts of iconoclasm and biblioclasm were not petty destruction, but symbolic enactments of the destruction of two related faiths.

87 Pedro Páez’s History of Ethiopia, 2:69.
88 arsi, Goan, 39, f. 43; Mendes, Carta do patriarca de Ethiopia, ff. 8r, 16v; Lobo, The Itinerário of Jerónimo Lobo, 247–48; ADB, Ms. 779, f. 652v.
89 ADR, Ms. 779, f. 119v.
90 raesoi, 12:507; BA, Documentos sobre a Etiópia, 51-VI-18, ff. 143r–44v.
91 ADB, Ms. 779, f. 531r.
92 raesoi 12:440–41.
93 arsi, Goan, 39, f. 258v.
94 Céline Delavaux, The Impossible Museum: The Best Art You’ll Never See (Munich-London: Prestel, 2012), 3.
Fasilädäs and Yohannes I’s state-sanctioned ‘bibliocides’ can be understood within the larger context of a global rise in book burnings in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.95 The only examples of their kind on the African continent during this period, these acts were the culmination of decades of escalating violence against books metonymically representative of religion and its human advocates. Fasilädäs’s biblioclasm burned the Jesuits in effigy, a result of the empress’s unsuccessful attempt to contain and burn them. Book burning was especially significant in Ethiopia. Ethiopians conceive of priests and books as inseparable partners in the mystical knowledge of temhert.96 While murdering the Jesuits who remained after the expulsion rid the empire of the priests, burning their books rid it of their ghosts. The inheritors of a fractured kingdom, Fasilädäs and later Yohannes I relied upon bibliocide to relieve the tension brought by the Jesuits, and to create a space for a revival of a state-linked Ethiopian Orthodoxy, which was to last until the 1974 revolution.97

95 Haig Bosmajian, *Burning Books* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2006), 65–66, 95.
96 Matthew Fishburn, *Burning Books* (Basingstoke, Hampshire-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2; Wright, “Book and Manuscript Collections in Ethiopia,” 13–14.
97 Rebecca Knuth, *Burning Books and Leveling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006), 71; Bosmajian, *Burning Books*, 4.