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Dissertation Abstract

*Building Faith: Ethiopian Art and Architecture during the Jesuit Interlude,
1557–1632*

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KRISTEN WINDMULLER-LUNA, *Building Faith: Ethiopian Art and Architecture during the Jesuit Interlude, 1557–1632*, PhD Dissertation in Art and Archaeology, Department of Art & Archaeology, Princeton University, defended on 30 September 2016.

This dissertation examines the relationship between royally-sponsored Roman Catholic and Ethiopian Orthodox art and architecture during the 1557 to 1632 Jesuit Ethiopian mission. The first part of the dissertation examines key religious and secular sites, demonstrating how these structures combined elements drawn from classicizing architectural treatises, the Portuguese *estilo chão*, and Ethiopian architecture. The second part of the project assesses the role of books, prints, and religious art as tools of conversion and as artistic models. In contrast to studies that posit that European visual culture supplanted the Ethiopian during the mission era, the dissertation argues that the period's art and architecture demonstrates the Jesuit strategy of cultural accommodation, and that far from being apart from Ethiopian art history, it shares stylistic and iconographic hallmarks with the so-called 'Gondarine style'.

The Jesuits arrived in the Ethiopian Christian kingdom in 1557; after brief success in the 1620s, they were expelled following the 1632 restoration of Ethiopian Orthodoxy. Eleven major mission-linked sites were built during this period, incorporating structures ranging from palaces to Catholic churches to missionary residences. Of these sites, Gorgora, Azäzo, Dänqäz, Särka, Märṭulä Maryam, and Fəremona constitute the major locations of inquiry. While it is said that the Jesuits exported their signature Baroque corporate style in their missions, this was hardly accurate in Ethiopia, where the Jesuits encountered a vibrant indigenous Christianity and relied heavily on local royal patronage. Though the Jesuits believed Ethiopian Orthodoxy was heretical, they embraced aspects of Ethiopian art and architecture throughout their mission, blending it with the classicizing aesthetics favoured by their Order and by much of Counter-Reformation Europe. Equally, pro-Catholic Ethiopian rulers welcomed novel European forms, integrating them with elements of local art and rites.

By studying the period's two-way cultural exchange, this project develops the intersection between African art history, Jesuit studies, and early modern European art history. Current art historical and archaeological scholarship prioritizes the influence of 'Jesuit' and 'Baroque' styles on the structures at the core of this project's inquiry. Rejecting this position of cultural dominance, this dissertation argues that the visual culture of the Ethiopian Jesuit interlude must be considered both within the greater Jesuit enterprise and Ethiopian art and architectural history.

Employing comparative art and architectural history, the project draws upon field, object- and archival-based research. Primary research was conducted in Ethiopia, Italy, and Portugal, along with additional work in France, England, and the United States. The examination of African and European primary sources (including Ethiopian royal chronicles and unpublished missionary letters) elucidated the mechanics of the period's material, spiritual, and artistic exchange, while schematic reconstructions of key sites (based upon site visits, archaeological data, and historic descriptions and photographs) permitted stylistic analysis. This research demonstrates the parallel usage of the Ethiopian architectural vernacular alongside a hybrid Ethio-European style. To designate this style, the project proposes the working concept of *modo etiope*, a distinct Ethiopian Catholic style drawn from both European and African sources which has heretofore gone unacknowledged.

The dissertation's five chapters cover the missionary period and its later impact in Ethiopia. Chapter 1 analyses the tenuous early years (1557–1613), when the missionaries' architecture was built only in the Ethiopian mode, its religious objects solely imported, and its relationships with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church characterized by mutual curiosity. Its revelation of the Jesuits' adoption of Ethiopian round stone churches moves back the *terminus post quem* of stone construction in the mission from the 1610s to at least the 1570s, decades before the use of European forms.

Chapter 2 considers the advent of European-style stone construction between 1614 and 1623 at Färemona, Gorgora Velha, and Gännätä Iyäsus/Azäzo. Contrasting Ethiopian precedents for built-stone churches, royal foundations, and fortifications with possible Portuguese inspirations, it suggests that the personal and financial support of Catholic devotees *Aše Susənyos* and his half-brother *Ras Šə'älä Krəstos* spurred the period's increase in Catholic churches and European-influenced secular buildings. Chapter 2 also considers Jesuit preparations to convert Orthodox churches, and their tolerance towards blended Christian practice.

Chapter 3 moves on to the years 1624 to 1632, when the Ethiopian kingdom briefly became Catholic following *Susənyos*' 1626 conversion. During this period, the introduction of lime mortar revolutionized architecture and the *modo etiope* was spectacularly embodied in the form and ornament of Gorgora Nova and Märṭulä Maryam's churches. Continued royal support bolstered both this Catholic building boom and encouraged the iconoclastic conversion of Orthodox churches. Both Chapters 2 and 3 consider the roles and identities of these buildings' creators.

Chapter 4 assesses the role of books, prints, and religious art both as instruments of conversion and as objects of cultural common ground. Taking

images of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ as case studies, the chapter demonstrates how the Jesuits used shared Christian symbols to entice potential converts before introducing new doctrinal ideas. It also considers the ways in which objects were imported, adapted from the Orthodox Church, or locally commissioned from Ethiopian artists in the absence of a local Catholic art workshop.

Finally, Chapter 5 examines the post-expulsion impact of Catholic-era art and architecture, including the reintegration of Catholic buildings into Orthodoxy via reconsecration and iconoclastic modification. Rare mission-era prints establish how Ethiopian artists subsequently modified and adopted selected European prints, favouring the Virgin of Santa Maria Maggiore. The chapter concludes by comparing examples of Jesuit-era and 'Gondärine style' art and architecture, arguing that many elements of the latter style emerged before Gondär's foundation.

By reframing Jesuit-era art and architecture as a unique Ethio-European fusion, the project discards models of unidirectional Afro-European cultural influence. Its approach considers the effects of an African culture on Europeans, and foregrounds how early modern Africans chose, reused, or adapted elements of European culture. A careful reading of primary sources clarifies the period's architectural style and the contributions of the Jesuits, further proving that Ethiopians, Indians, and Egyptians also designed and built the era's constructions. Equally, it establishes Ethiopian royals as the primary funders—and thus influencers of—Catholic churches. Ultimately, it demonstrates the period's integral place within Ethiopian art and architectural history.