



# Aethiopica 21 (2018)

International Journal of Ethiopian and  
Eritrean Studies

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## Review

VÍCTOR M. FERNÁNDEZ, JORGE DE TORRES, ANDREU MARTÍNEZ D'ALÒS-MONER, and CARLOS CAÑETE, *The Archaeology of the Jesuit Missions in Ethiopia (1557–1632)*

Aethiopica 21 (2018), 250–254

ISSN: 1430-1938

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Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut  
Hiob-Ludolf-Zentrum für Äthiopistik  
der Universität Hamburg  
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

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VÍCTOR M. FERNÁNDEZ, JORGE DE TORRES, ANDREU MARTÍNEZ D'ALÒS-MONER, and CARLOS CAÑETE, *The Archaeology of the Jesuit Missions in Ethiopia (1557–1632)*, Jesuit Studies, 10 (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2017). xxxviii, 563 pp., 465 figs. Price: €165.00. ISBN: 978-90-04-28232-2.

The first Catholic priest to leave an account of his visit to Ethiopia was Francisco Alvares,<sup>1</sup> chaplain to an embassy from the king of Portugal (1520–1526); this understandably receives little attention in the closely-focused book under review. The Society of Jesus was established in 1534;<sup>2</sup> it received papal approval in 1540. The founder, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, had recognized an opportunity for missionary endeavour in Ethiopia and, from 1555, this became an early focus for the Jesuits, who established missions in the lake Tana region during the subsequent decade. Following an abortive attempt to impose Catholicism in place of Ethiopian Orthodoxy, the Jesuits were expelled in 1633.

There is documentary evidence that a total of eighteen Jesuit mission sites were established in sixteenth/seventeenth-century Ethiopia. All, other than their headquarters at Fremona near Adwa in Təgray, were apparently in the lake Tana region, although the precise locations for eight of them remain to be determined. The ten identified mission sites were investigated in the field between 2006 and 2014, with results that are presented in the book under review. The urgency of this fieldwork was emphasized by the perilous condition of several sites, where major collapses of standing structures, some caused by natural factors and others by human intervention, had taken place during the previous decade. The ambitious research plans originally drawn up, and strongly supported by Spanish diplomats in Ethiopia, were unfortunately curtailed because of financial stringency in Spain that was exacerbated by administrative difficulties within Ethiopia. Readers of

<sup>1</sup> See F. Alvares, *Ho Preste Joam das Indias. Verdadera informaçam das terras do Preste Joam, segundo vio & escreueo ho padre Francisco Aluarez capellã del Rey nosso senhor* ([Lisboa]: Luis Rodriguez, 1540); and the annotated translation C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford, *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. The translation of Stanley of Alderley (1881) revised and edited with additional material*, I–II, Hakluyt Society, Second Series, 114–115 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> L. Cohen and A. Martínez, 'Jesuits: Jesuits in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> cent.', in S. Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopedia Aethiopia*, III: *He–N* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 277a–281b.

*Aethiopica* will be familiar with some of the results from preliminary reports published in 2012 and 2015.

The book is published in a monograph series of Jesuit Studies, and must be evaluated on that basis. It is, however, the first book in that series to specifically address an African topic, and the ‘Jesuit interlude’ has received considerable emphasis in recent semi-popular syntheses of Ethiopian history. It is thus at first sight rather surprising that Fernández and his co-authors do not devote greater attention to the overall significance of Jesuit missions in the religious and political history of Ethiopia. Contextual considerations, both for Ethiopianist specialists and for those interested in missionary history more generally, are disappointingly slight, being largely restricted to an introductory chapter. Lack of familiarity with Ethiopian Christianity is further demonstrated by the gratuitous assertion (pp. 44, 553) that Frumentius was a monk.<sup>3</sup> Architectural comparisons between Jesuit and related buildings in Goa and those surviving in Ethiopia are, on the other hand, clear and convincing.

Both text and illustrations, particularly the latter, give the impression of having been hastily compiled, with inadequate consideration to the form and user-friendliness of the volume as a whole. The text is clearly written, perhaps not so concisely as might be wished, and the intended meaning is almost invariably clear, although the distinction (if any) implied by use of the terms ‘church’ and ‘temple’ is not readily apparent. The transliteration of Ethiopian names follows a system that is consistently applied to the text, but not invariably to the figures or their captions. The captions, indeed, appear to have escaped the attention of a copy-editor, and some are almost cryptically brief. The illustrations themselves are considered in greater detail below.

The title and organization of the book imply a primary focus on archaeological evidence. Indeed, Chapter 3, entitled ‘The Mission Sites’, occupies 72 per cent of the book (404 pages). This statistic is, however, misleading in that the chapter contains extensive treatment of information derived from documentary sources, much of which relates to more than one site. As a result, the presentation seems rather disorganized and not always easy to follow. This long chapter is divided into sections devoted to individual sites, but neither running heads nor captions to illustrations indicate which site is under consideration in a particular passage; the confused reader must either

<sup>3</sup> See D. W. Phillipson, *Foundations of an African Civilisation: Aksum and the Northern Horn, 1000 BC–AD 1300*, Eastern Africa Series (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2012), 93–99.

refer to the list of contents at the beginning of the book or turn back as many as 130 pages to find the relevant heading. Chapter 3 is thus excessively long and repetitive, and much of its content relating to individual sites could have been more clearly and concisely regrouped in a synthesis.

The conduct of ‘archaeological’ research, with the presentation and interpretation of its results, is evaluated in a later section of this review; here, it may be noted that the interrelationship of data derived from archaeology and from documentary sources is not always made clear. A questionable tendency may be discerned to regard the latter as primary and the former as an illustrative adjunct.

Despite a sixteen-page bibliography, there are surprising lacunae in the range and citation of supporting evidence. Writings included in the fundamentally important compilation edited by the Jesuit Camillo Beccari are cited only as ‘RASO’ without always indicating their original authorship or date.<sup>4</sup> It is surprising to see no specific mention to the published versions of Pedro Páez’s *História da Etiópia* which, despite its focus on a controversy, contains a wealth of important background information on the Jesuits in Ethiopia (see, however, pp. 18–23).<sup>5</sup>

Your reviewer must admit to concerns about the methodology employed in the archaeological research and the consequent presentation of results in this book. The treatment is essentially descriptive, rather than interpretive, and emphasizes architecture. It is disappointing that the sites are considered with remarkably little reference to their Ethiopian context. Excavation was apparently on a substantial scale, but seems to have focused on clearing vegetation and fallen debris; virtually no mention is made of stratigraphy. Such evidence as is cited for sequential use of sites and buildings appears to be based almost exclusively on documentary sources. This problem has particular impact on the treatment of excavated artefacts, which are discussed on a site-by-site basis with very little attempt to relate them to a sequence or to spatial distribution. Statements such as that on p. 182, that few if any of the metal artefacts recovered at Gännätä Iyäsus belong to the period of Jesuit occupation, are made with no reference to their stratigraph-

<sup>4</sup> C. Beccari, ed., *Rerum aethiopicarum scriptores occidentales inediti a saeculo XVI ad XIX*, I–XV (Romae: Excudebat C. de Luigi, 1903–1917).

<sup>5</sup> P. Páez, *História da Etiópia* (1622), edited in I. Boavida, H. Pennec, and M. J. Ramos, eds, *História da Etiópia de Pedro Páez*, Obras clássicas da literatura portuguesa, Sete-Estrela (Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 2008); and with English translation and additional annotation by Tribe in I. Boavida, H. Pennec, and M. J. Ramos, eds, C. J. Tribe, tr., *Pedro Páez’s History of Ethiopia, 1622*, I–II, Hakluyt Society, Series III, 23–24 (London: Ashgate, 2011).

ic provenances, being apparently based on their assumed functions. Imported pottery is often used as a chronological indicator by excavators of African archaeological sites where it is found; only one such sherd is recorded in this book (from Särka in Goğgam, pp. 388–389), an opinion as to its date and origin was obtained, but its implications are not considered further.

Illustration of the archaeological materials, both artefactual and architectural, is disappointing. In part, this may be attributed to the octavo format of publication, perhaps dictated by the publishers' inclusion of the work in their Jesuit Studies series. Some of the very numerous figures are over-reduced, with corresponding loss in definition. In the case of photographs, significant improvement could have been achieved by more careful cleaning of the excavated remains and by judicious cropping of the images. Drawings, likewise, could have been improved by more appropriate arrangement and the omission of irrelevant information. Plans and maps proliferate unnecessarily and are remarkably unstandardized in presentation: Fig. 3.4.2, for example, presents no information additional to that in Fig. 3.4.1, and the plan of the south range of buildings at Gorgora Nova is shown in no fewer than six different figures, albeit at different scales and orientations (reduced to the point of illegibility in Fig. 3.4.54). Not only is this duplication confusing to the reader; it will also have added to the cost of producing this extremely expensive volume. Maps and plans show contours at vertical intervals, between one and five metres, that are not always stated or apparent. A disappointing number of site-photographs lack an adequate indication of scale, and neither text nor captions provide information that permits them to be correlated with the plans.

As often, use of lime-mortar by Jesuit builders in Ethiopia receives strong emphasis. It appears that the Jesuits themselves considered that they were introducing this technology into a region where it was previously unknown; there is no reason either to disbelieve their sincerity or to assume that they were necessarily correct. The authors note that the late Mārəd Wäldä Arägay (Merid Wolde Aregay) was among the first to point out in this connection that lime-mortar had been used in Aksumite times, but cite an architect (whose observations and records, based exclusively on sites in Təgray, have been shown to be not infallible), who argued more than four decades ago that such Aksumite use was on a small scale and that the practice may have been abandoned subsequently. The authors acknowledge (p. 313) that Ethiopian builders working for Jesuits may have followed local tradition in incorporating wooden beams, but they appear unaware that more recent research at Aksum has revealed significant use of lime-mortar

from at least the fourth century onwards;<sup>6</sup> late- and post-Aksumite churches also retain clear evidence for its use.<sup>7</sup> The book under review adopts the term ‘*chunambo*’ for lime-mortar; many readers will not be familiar with the word, and the authors do not indicate its origin. It is, in fact, Indo-Portuguese,<sup>8</sup> used by Páez (*História da Etiópia*, 1622), and was probably in common use by the Jesuits in Ethiopia. The overall treatment of evidence that builders of Indian origin were involved at the Ethiopian mission sites is, however, clear and convincing.

A valid and interesting point noted in several places but not fully considered is that the sites yielded remarkable few artefacts of Jesuit origin. No attempt is made, however, to quantify the artefacts or (as noted above) to record their spatial and stratigraphic provenances. The pottery, in particular, seems almost all to have been manufactured locally, its style and technology being loosely designated ‘Amhara’. This term is supported only by a very generalized comparison with material detailed by J. Dombrowski in her 1972 doctoral dissertation. This work was, however, based on field research conducted in a circumscribed area half a century ago, and it is potentially misleading for the authors of the book now under review to present it as indicative of ‘Amharic [*sic*] pottery’ made over a wide region ‘today’ (captions to Figs 3.3.79–80).

In conclusion, this is a welcome and valuable book. Within its intended parameters, it fulfills its purpose. Some reorganization would have expanded its appeal to wider readerships, while greater care in preparation of the illustrations would have increased their utility and perhaps reduced the overall price of the volume. The book demonstrates that the Jesuit sites in Ethiopia provide a classic opportunity for combining the evidence of archaeology and documentary history with other sources, and it provides a firm foundation for the more detailed studies that are needed.

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<sup>6</sup> See D. W. Phillipson, *op. cit.*, 123.

<sup>7</sup> D. W. Phillipson, *Ancient Churches of Ethiopia: Fourth-Fourteenth Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 48–49, 73–76.

<sup>8</sup> Hobson-Jobson; Tribe in Boavida et al., *op. cit.*, I, 201.