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## CHAPTER FOUR

### MISSIONARY KNOWLEDGE IN CONTEXT: GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE OF ETHIOPIA IN DIALOGUE DURING THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES

Hervé Pennec

Translated from the French by Sarah Townshend\*

#### *Introduction*

At the beginning of the 1990s, in his thesis, 'Knowledge and figures of Ethiopia in occidental cartography from the 14th century to the 16th century', Bertrand Hirsch proposed an inquiry into the history of cartographic representations of Ethiopia from the beginning of the 14th century to the end of the 17th century. Reconstructing genealogies from them, he proposed to inscribe these in the complex development of the relationship between the Ethiopians and the Occidentals. Much of this information had been assembled by Jesuit missionaries, who had committed themselves to the project of 'mapping by direct measurement on the ground'.

In seeking to reconstruct the stages of knowledge developed by the missionaries, Hirsch focused on two figures in particular, both associated with the remarkable breakthroughs in European cartography at the end of the 17th century: Pedro Paez, who lived in Ethiopia from 1603 to 1622; and Manuel de Almeida, active from 1624 to 1633 (the date on which he, like a good number of his co-religionists, was expelled by the new Ethiopian power). Hirsch emphasises:

The breakdown effected by Paez is essential. It concerns the complete separation of the Ethiopia which covered half the continent on the 16th century maps, from the historic Ethiopia which he travels over and which he wants to convert. [...] Paez was therefore the leader in the first revision

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\* Article edited in french version ("Savoirs missionnaires en contextes. Savoirs en dialogue (Éthiopie, XVIIe siècle), in *Missions d'évangélisation et circulation des savoirs, XVIe-XVIIIe siècle*, Charlotte de Castelnau-L'Estoile, Marie-Lucie Copete, Aliocha Maldavsky, Ines G. Zupanov (Eds), Collection de la Casa de Velázquez, 120, Madrid, Casa de Velázquez, 2011, pp. 191–207.

of the geography of Ethiopia, by an implicit critique of the geography and cartography of his time. De Almeida continues the enterprise by an explicit critique of the cartography and the construction of a new map.<sup>1</sup>

The point here is not to reflect on the breakthroughs brought about by this 'mapping of the ground', but rather to try to understand and to grasp more fully how these missionary writings were produced and elaborated in terms of terrain, and overall to analyse the contexts of their production, the reasons and the aims which governed their development. It is equally a matter of examining how, and by whom, this missionary knowledge was formed, and particularly to account for, over and above the authors, the role of local 'intermediaries' in the construction of this knowledge.<sup>2</sup> In this way, we can approach the end product itself, too often considered as an enormous 'database' on which the historian can draw, as it would concern information on the terrain; to use it finally to construct his own 'scientific' discourse, which in the end boils down to the delivery of a discourse very lightly superimposed on the scriptural activity of these missionaries.<sup>3</sup> In my opinion, the question of knowledge in the missionary context is closely related to writing. But why does one write? One writes as much about as for ... And these different perspectives lead one to question the different sources which produce knowledge, in two senses of the term: that which constructs and that which renders visible.

This is what I propose to do in examining several texts produced by missionaries in a particular geographic area: the realm of 'Prester John' (identified since the middle of the 14th century with the Ethiopian king). These texts do not strongly correspond, sometimes overlap and may or may not be borrowed. It is not a matter of combining one with the other, with the aim of sorting out 'true' from 'false', to tally for verification and to correct or to cross-check information,<sup>4</sup> but rather to consider them as social products.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Hirsch, *Connaissances et figures de l'Éthiopie dans la cartographie occidentale du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Paris, 1990), p. 524.

<sup>2</sup> I think, in particular, of the steps proposed by Kapil Raj in an article on the elaboration of Indian cartography: K. Raj, 'Connexions, croisements, circulations. Le détour de la cartographie britannique par l'Inde, XVIII<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles', in B. Zimmermann & M. Werner (eds), *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), pp. 73–98.

<sup>3</sup> A. Torre, "'Faire communauté". Confréries et localité dans une vallée du Piémont (XVII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)', in *Annales, Histoire et sciences sociales* (1–2007), pp. 101–35, in particular pp. 101–7, which suggest the strong methodological orientation around this question of the production of sources.

<sup>4</sup> A. Frugoni, *Arnaud de Brescia dans les sources du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, introduction and translation by Alain Boureau. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1993), in particular the introduction (IX–XVII), which insists on the method implemented by Frugoni as denouncing the method of *combination* in history.

I will focus on three documents, which draw up the list of the 'kingdoms' and 'provinces' ruled by 'Prester John'.<sup>5</sup> These documents have been provided by three Jesuits who lived in this missionary land: (1) Luis de Azevedo<sup>6</sup> (who arrived in Ethiopia in 1605 and was expelled in 1633) (2) Pedro Paez and (3) Manuel de Almeida respectively. The three men are not quite contemporaries. If, on the one hand, Azevedo clearly knew the others well, Paez, on the other hand, probably at least read Azevedo indirectly through Guerreiro, another Jesuit who never set foot in Ethiopia, and Almeida had direct knowledge of Paez's and Azevedo's texts through Guerreiro ... Their lists differ from one another, but neither Paez nor Almeida give reasons either for the modifications and additions that they have made from the lists which pre-dated theirs, or for the omissions to which they were party.<sup>7</sup>

### I. *Luis de Azevedo: from geopolitical knowledge to propaganda knowledge*

To draw up the list of 'kingdoms' and 'provinces' was a standard enough procedure on the part of missionaries in the areas that they opened up. The programme of the Jesuits included teachings relative to the 'physical world, cosmography and astronomy'.<sup>8</sup> This training enabled them to provide their hierarchy with geographical descriptions of the places and areas in which they were active. Azevedo was himself entrusted by the superior of the Ethiopian mission, Paez, with the responsibility of providing a 'spiritual and material state' for the mission for the years 1605–1607. He drafted the annual letter from Ethiopia on 22 July 1607; the letter contained a detailed description of the 'kingdoms' and 'provinces' dominated by the Ethiopian king on the one hand, and those in relationship with him on the other. Azevedo put forward a list of the names of twenty-seven 'kingdoms'.

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<sup>5</sup> I have re-used the formula of Fr Paez who, in his text of *História da Etiópia*, used this term for convenience in indicating that the king of Ethiopia was designated thus in Europe. P. Paez, *História da Etiópia*, I. Boavida, H. Pennec & M.J. Ramos (eds) (Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2008), p. 71.

<sup>6</sup> See L. Cohen Shabot, 'Azevedo, Luis de', in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), p. 418.

<sup>7</sup> These differences between the three documents had been noticed but little commented upon regarding the question of missionary knowledge; see C.F. Beckingham & G.W. Huntingford (trans. & eds), *Some records of Ethiopia (1593–1646). Being extracts from the history of high Ethiopia or Abassia by Manoel de Almeida, together with Bahrey's History of the Galla* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1954), p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> F. Dainville, *La géographie des humanistes. Les jésuites et l'éducation de la société française* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1940), p. 165.

For each, he indicated the religious persuasion of the inhabitants (Christians, Moors or 'gentiles') and the nature of the relationship of each 'kingdom' with the Ethiopian power, based on whether they were dependent on the latter or not.<sup>9</sup> There followed an outline of fourteen 'provinces', which conformed to the same categories of classification.<sup>10</sup> The whole territory presented by the missionaries was contained in a circular, north–south geography, starting with the most northern 'kingdom' (Tigre and its port, Suakin) situated on 18° North latitude, passing through 12° (the latitude of Zeyla) to reach Mombasa (here, with no indication of latitude), and finally taking a westerly direction to rise towards the north in the direction of Cairo.<sup>11</sup> After presenting the 'geopolitical' situation of this zone, Azevedo drew attention to the time in which he was writing: the area dominated by the 'emperor' was reduced to six 'kingdoms' from the preceding list: 'Tigre, [Tigré], Abagamedrî [Bägemder], Dambeâ [Dämbya], Goiâma [Godjam], Xoaâ [Choa] and Amarâ [Amhara]'.<sup>12</sup>

Azevedo, who had arrived in Ethiopia two years earlier, was unable to provide this information on his own, and indicates that he gathered it together with a 'local' intermediary, João Gabriel, 'who was for some years captain of the Portuguese of Tigres'.<sup>13</sup> This character (circa 1554–1626) is interesting in more than name. He was the son of an Ethiopian woman and an 'Italian' soldier who entered Ethiopia in 1541, under the guidance of D. Cristóvão da Gama, as commander of the military force which came to bring help to the Ethiopian king Galawdéwos (1540–59) against the imam Ahmed ibn Ibrahim (nicknamed *Grañ*, 'the left-handed', by the Ethiopians). João Gabriel settled in Ethiopia after the military campaign, and received a double education, both religious and military, from the Jesuit priests of the first mission (1557–97) and at the Ethiopian monastery of Däbrä Libanos, where he learned the Gueze language (the liturgical language of the church and the clerics). He was then chosen by the Ethiopian power as 'captain of the Portuguese', succeeding António de Góis, and accompanied the different kings in their travels either to wage war or to collect tribute, a responsibility that he fulfilled from 1606 to 1607.<sup>14</sup> It was precisely this

<sup>9</sup> 'Relationes et Epistolæ variorum tempore missionis Lusitanæ (1589–1623). Pars prima — Liber II', in C. Beccari (ed.), *Rerum Aethiopicarum scriptores Occidentales inediti a saeculo XVI ad XIX*, vol. 11 (Rome: excudebat C. de Luigi, 1911), pp. 130–32.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132–33.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130–32.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>14</sup> I. Boavida, 'Gabriel, João', in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 2 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), pp. 632–33.

military experience, from the association with territories to be preserved and to be conquered, on which Azevedo relied to draw up his lists. And in order to produce what type of knowledge?

It is not my intention here to judge the validity of the information but rather to illuminate and to emphasise the nature of the knowledge that the Jesuit transmitted in his annual letter. This description is a synthetic and impressionistic presentation of the religious geopolitics of this region of Africa, that of a military alongside a royal power, able to designate the 'kingdoms' and 'provinces' subject to the 'emperor' — those which paid a tribute or those which did not — and the presentation is that of a man sensitive to religious matters and able to distinguish the religious identities present in each one of the 'kingdoms'. This knowledge was useful to the Jesuit hierarchy (both in Goa and in Rome), which wanted to know the conditions of the missions in which their people were engaged. Thus Azevedo's description, which is almost geostrategic, had an internal value only, that is, within the limited frame of the Society of Jesus; in Goa, for the Provincial (to whom the letter is addressed);<sup>15</sup> then in Rome, in order to allow for the evaluation of the risks and the potential of this missionary field.

And to be precise, the time of writing of the letter is inscribed in the context of the second Jesuit mission in Ethiopia, at the beginning of the 17th century. An earlier mission, from 1557, involved six Jesuits, who were confronted first with the opposition of the royal court and then suffered persecution during the reign of Minas (1559–63) and, with less intensity, under his successor, Sársä Dengel (1563–1597). Until the end of the 16th century, the missionaries were isolated from the court and had to stay in the north of the country, in Tigre province, at May Gwagwa (Fremona). Their isolation was accentuated when the Ottoman Turks occupied the Red Sea port of Massawa, which meant that no European could take this route into Ethiopia and missionary relief could not arrive.<sup>16</sup>

The impetus for the reactivation of the Ethiopian mission in the last decades of the 16th century came from Philip II, king of Spain and Portugal. The reasons were partly of a diplomatic nature, and envisioned the renewal of relationships with Christian Ethiopia so as to unite against the Ottoman presence in the Red Sea. Equally, they were of a commercial and religious nature: the descendants of the Catholic

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<sup>15</sup> 'Relationes et Epistolæ', vol. 11, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> H. Pennec, *Des jésuites au royaume du prêtre Jean (Éthiopie). Stratégies, rencontres et tentatives d'implantation (1495–1633)* (Paris: Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian, 2003), p. 15.

Portuguese community, in fact, would soon lack 'spiritual guidance', since the fathers who had arrived in 1557 were either dead or comparatively elderly. Philip II entrusted the responsibility of executing his wishes to his representative in the territory of *Estado da Índia*, the viceroy Manuel de Sousa Coutinho, who himself applied to the Provincial of the Jesuits to send some missionaries to Ethiopia. Several attempts were made, the first of which took place in 1589: the two missionaries, Antonio de Monserrate and Pedro Paez, were shipwrecked off Dhafur (south of Arabia). They were captured by a Turkish boat and put on land, only to be taken prisoner again. Their detention ended in the month of September 1596, after the payment of a large ransom. In 1595, a second attempt was undertaken by sending another Jesuit, Abraham de Giorgii. He was captured at Massawa and decapitated later that year.<sup>17</sup>

It is effectively within this context of geopolitical tension that Azevedo's letter must be read. The information that he communicates tended to give his superiors the measure of a regional geopolitical situation, which could have consequences for the physical situation of his personnel. In consequence, it seems to me that the 'knowledge' elaborated in this context did not completely answer the questions that the cartographers then asked in their offices in Europe. On the contrary, as emphasised by Hirsch,

that which remained constant in the geographic literature of Ethiopia throughout the 16th century was the immensity of the Ethiopian area. The belief that the pagan regions which extend to the south of the Christian kingdom are close to the Cape of Good Hope remain deep-rooted in the geographic literature of Ethiopia throughout the 16th and to the beginning of the 17th century, in perfect harmony with that which was showed by the cartography.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, whether this letter was published or not was not the concern of the author. In fact, it was, as we shall see, out of 'the control' of the missionary.

*To write in order to stimulate the zeal of young recruits*

Azevedo's letter was probably drafted in three copies in order to be sent by three different routes,<sup>19</sup> as were other letters from Ethiopia and those from missionaries in the rest of the Indies (India, Japan and Brazil), which reached Rome and Lisbon via Goa. It became the object of publication

<sup>17</sup> Pennec, *Des jésuites au royaume du prêtre John (Éthiopie)*, pp. 100–11.

<sup>18</sup> Hirsch, *Connaissances et figures de l'Éthiopie*, p. 425.

<sup>19</sup> I. Loyola, *Écrits*, M. Giuliani (ed.) (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), pp. 711–16.

under the auspices of the Jesuit Fernão Guerreiro, who since 1603 had specialised in publishing the annual reports of the missionary fields in an abridged and revised form. In 1611, with the authorisation of the general of the Order, Claudio Aquaviva, he published the letters sent in 1607 and 1608, under the title ‘Annual report of things that the fathers of the Society did in the oriental Indian regions [...]’.<sup>20</sup>

Essentially, Guerreiro takes the geographic information from Azevedo’s letter, distorting certain names of the Ethiopian ‘kingdoms’ — like ‘Goroma’ for ‘Goiâma [Godjam]’ — eliminating the twenty-seventh ‘kingdom’ and interpreting ‘Moçambique’ (the oriental African coast) as ‘Manomotapa’ (Monomotapa, interior kingdom of southeast Africa).<sup>21</sup> The fundamental point on which I wish to insist is the elaborate contextualisation of this letter, and some others, and how and in what perspective Guerreiro presented them. The Jesuit outlines in seven chapters ‘some Ethiopian matters’,<sup>22</sup> tackling ‘the temporal state of this Ethiopian empire’, and the manner in which ‘the king aligned himself with the priests and concerns about the depletion of the holy Roman church’.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Azevedo’s letter is integrated into the previous chapters, and Guerreiro relates the circumstances of the Ethiopian king’s conversion to the Roman faith — though it would only take place much later, at the end of 1621. Seen from Europe and from Goa, the submission of the ‘great Ethiopian empire’ to the Church was equivalent to the conversion of her king.<sup>24</sup>

According to this perspective, the information concerning the twenty-six ‘kingdoms’ and the religious practices of the inhabitants had the effect of accentuating the immense work that remained to be accomplished. In spite of the Ethiopian king’s conversion to Catholicism, the five missionaries found themselves faced with a considerable area in which

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<sup>20</sup> Guerreiro F., *Relação anual das coisas que fizeram os padres da companhia nas partes da Índia oriental, et em algumas outras da conquista deste Reyno nos annos de 607 et 608 et do processo de conversão et Christandade daquellas partes, com mais hua addiçam à relação de Ethiopia... Tirado tudo das cartas dos mesmos padres que de lá vierão, & ordenado pello Padre Fernão Guerreiro... Vai dividida em sinco livros...*, (Lisbon: P. Crasbeeck, 1611; revised ed. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1942). In 1614, some Spanish and German translations were published, *Historia y anal relacion de las cosas que fizieron los padres de la Compañia de Jesus por las partes de Oriente*; *Indianische neue relation: erster theil was sich in der Goanischen Provintz*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64–66. Regarding the distortion of the names found in the 1942 edition (consulted edition), perhaps the errors are attributable to the printer. It would therefore be fairer to return to the manuscripts.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> Pennec, *Des jésuites au royaume du prêtre Jean (Éthiopie)*, p. 277.



to exercise their mission. In my opinion, the reasons for the publication of these texts on Ethiopia were, firstly, to stimulate the apostolic zeal of young recruits in the Jesuit colleges in Europe. The desire to leave for foreign lands was fostered by the letters that came from the missions, and by this type of publication, which would have been read aloud during meals.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, in the 1550s<sup>26</sup> the Society put in place the system of distribution of the letters of its missionaries, scattered to the four corners of the earth, so as to acquire 'a flattering notoriety and reputation in the opinion of the European powers'.<sup>27</sup> This philosophy is probably one of the reasons why these documents were 'prepared for their sake',<sup>28</sup> apart from being a testament to Guerreiro's *Relation* and the knowledge it contained about Ethiopia.

Nevertheless, the public would also have been 'partial to these 'curious letters' describing the savage cannibals or the mysteries of Prester John's kingdom',<sup>29</sup> as described by Jean-Claude Laborie. They would have been anxious to re-examine the geographical information, hitherto sparse, concerning the river system of the Nile and the extent of the 'empire' of Prester John.

## II. *Pedro Paez: Knowledge in order to refute*

The second list of 'kingdoms' and 'provinces' is that of Pedro Paez. The list appears in Chapter One of book I of his *Historia da Etiopia*. Paez's catalogue is different from that of Azevedo, since he puts forward a list of thirty-five 'kingdoms' and eighteen 'provinces'.<sup>30</sup> Paez explains that he does not entirely withdraw the totality of information in Azevedo's letter, although, as we shall see, according to Guerreiro's version, he had access to Azevedo's letter. Chapter One aimed at putting into context the polemic which underlined the competition between the Jesuits and

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<sup>25</sup> J. Masson, 'La perspective missionnaire dans la spiritualité des jésuites', in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 8 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), pp. 1030–104; J.C. Laborie, *La mission jésuite au Brésil. Lettres et autres documents (1549–1570)* (Paris: Éditions Chandeigne, 1998), pp. 10–11.

<sup>26</sup> *Avisi particolari delle Indie di Portogallo* (Rome: 1552); *Novi avisi di piu de l'India et massime de Brasil* (Rome: 1553).

<sup>27</sup> Laborie, *La mission jésuite au Brésil*, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Paez, *História da Etiópia*, p. 72.

Dominicans over the Ethiopian missionary field at the beginning of the 17th century.

*An aim: to refute*

In 1610 and 1611, Luis de Urreta, a Dominican who taught theology in Valencia, published two works on the kingdom of Prester John.<sup>31</sup> Urreta's books defended two essential ideas: the first was that the Ethiopians were 'good Catholics', and had been so for a long time, and the second that the Dominicans had been present in Ethiopia before the Jesuits.

The publication of Urreta's first book, *Historia eclesiastica y politica ...*, did not go unnoticed by the Society of Jesus. Indeed, since the middle of the 16th century, the Jesuits had been engaged in an attempt to reconquer spiritually this kingdom. Ethiopia was known to be Christian, but its Christianity presented major differences from that of Rome. In particular, the unification of the Ethiopian church with the Patriarchate of Alexandria and its adherence to the Monophysite doctrine (a doctrine centred on the divinity of Christ incarnate) were the two principal points on which the first Superior General of the Order, Ignatius of Loyola, insisted, as is shown by the letter he addressed to the Ethiopian sovereign, Claude (Gälawdewos, 1540–59).<sup>32</sup> At the beginning of the 17th century, the Jesuit missionaries sent to Ethiopia were far from being upstarts who aimed to convert the Ethiopian sovereign and his people to the Roman faith. The assertions of the Dominican would lead the members of the Society of Jesus to different responses.

*Counter-production in Europe and Ethiopia*

The first reactive text was that of Father Fernão Guerreiro himself, who published an appendix to the relevant volume of annual reports of the

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<sup>31</sup> L. Urreta, *Historia eclesiastica y politica, natural y moral, de los grandes y remotos Reynos de la Etiopia, monarchia del Emperador, llamado Preste Juan de las Indias, con la historia de predicadores en los remotos Reynos de la Etiopia por Fray Luis de Urreta* (Valencia: 1610); L. Urreta, *Historia de la sagrada orden de Predicadores en los remotos reynos de la Etiopia. Trata de los prodigiosos Santos, Martyres y Confesores, Inquisidores apostolicos, de los conventos de Plurimanos, donde viven nueve mil frayles, del Alleluya con siete mil, y de Bedenagli de cinco mil monjas, con otras grandezas de la religion del Padre Domingo* (Valencia: 1611).

<sup>32</sup> Loyola, *Écrits*, pp. 918–22. Letter from Ignatius of Loyola to King Claude (Gälawdewos), Rome, 23 February 1555.

missionaries in the Orient for 1607–08,<sup>33</sup> entitled ‘Addition to the reports on Ethiopian matters, with much more information, more reliable and very different to those which Father Frei Luis de Urreta follows in the book which he published on the History of the empire of Prester John’.<sup>34</sup>

Guerreiro returns, point by point, to the affirmations of Urreta, and sets himself in opposition to the information contained in the letters from the Ethiopian missionaries written between 1560 and 1608. The polemic does not support the question of geographical knowledge but rather the affirmations of Urreta relative to the ‘catholic faith of the Ethiopians and to the Dominican presence before that of the Jesuits in Ethiopia’. In this way began the series of critiques of Urreta’s production which continued until the middle of the 17th century. Originating in Europe, this process was also carried on in Ethiopia.

Concomitantly, the Jesuit Provincial in Goa took steps so that a refutation could be made by an Ethiopian missionary, as intimated by Paez’s prologue to the *Historia da Ethiopia*, to which one attributes this controversy.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Methods for a refutation*

The two works of Urreta and that of Guerreiro reached Ethiopia at the earliest in 1613, and at the latest in 1614, as Paez himself suggested in two letters addressed to two different destinations.<sup>36</sup> Paez determined the approach to his refutation by effectively altering the order of the chapters of Urreta’s books and responding to them point by point. So much so that the organisation of his ‘book I’<sup>37</sup> is identical to that of Urreta: he maintained this ordering in books II and III, but not in book IV, which attempted to

<sup>33</sup> Guerreiro, *Relação anual das coisas que fizeram os padres da companhia nas partes da India oriental*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 287–380: ‘Adição à Relação das coisas de Etiópia, com mais larga informação delas, mui certa e mui diferente das que seguiu o Padre Frei Luis de Urreta, no livro que imprimiu da Historia daquele império do Preste-João.’

<sup>35</sup> Paez, *História da Ethiopia*, p. 63.

<sup>36</sup> Biblioteca Pública de Braga (BPB), hereafter BPB, *Cartas annais das missões da Etiópia*, Ms. 779, doc. XIb, f° 154, letter addressed to the provincial of Goa, Francisco Vieira (4 July 1615); ‘Relationes et Epistolæ’, vol. 11, pp. 359–60, letter to Thomas de Ituren (20 June 1615); see Pennec, *Des jésuits au royaume du prêtre Jean (Éthiopie)*, pp. 249–51, for a more developed argument.

<sup>37</sup> The manuscripts of the *Historia* begin directly with chapter 1, after the dedication and the prologue to the reader (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu [ARSI], hereafter ARSI; P. Paez, *História da Etiópia*, Goa 42, f° 3; BPB, Ms 778, f° 3). It is thus convenient to call this first part (composed of 37 chapters) ‘book 1’. On the other hand, books II, III and IV have titles.

blend the history of the 17th-century Jesuits with that of Ethiopia, and allowed for no reference to Urreta, since Paez placed himself outside the chronological period reached by the Dominican.

Thus the object of Chapter One of 'book I' is the question of the lands dominated by Prester John. The major argument in this venture, conducted by Paez from 1614 until his death, was the systematic review and re-editing of what he considered as Urreta's fabrications, bearing in mind the fact that he was there, in the place itself, to see, to question, to listen and to note, which accorded him more legitimacy. His refutation was founded on analysis by the construction of 'real' knowledge, because he 'was actually there', a stance reminiscent of the method of social anthropology defended by Lévi-Strauss.<sup>38</sup>

To the 'myths and the great confusion'<sup>39</sup> of the Dominican, Paez opposed some information gathered *in situ*, originating from local intermediaries, whom he names. Paez was a confidant of the Susneyos king (1607–32), whom he followed in his military campaigns, and established precious links with the literati of the court, notably the historiographer Tino and the 'great people of the royal camp', from the men of war regularly travelling through the reconquered territories and those to be defended. Thus when he gives the list of kingdoms and provinces that comprised the land dominated by Prester John, he is able to specify: 'the chief secretary of the emperor tells me all that. Then in order to consolidate myself more I interrogated, in the presence of the emperor, one of his brothers, Eraz [ras] Çela Christos, and he told me the same thing.'<sup>40</sup>

The knowledge deployed by Paez was constructed without the aid of measuring instruments, which he did not have at his disposal as he wrote,<sup>41</sup> but he was supported by the experience of his informants, who were used to calculating distances from one point to another in terms of a day's march; so much so that when the results varied from one person to another, Paez took note for the sake of precision. He thus presents three measurement suggestions to go from north to south: two months, fifty days and forty-five days. And Paez, estimating the distances travelled over at eight places per day, reaches a total of four hundred places from north to south to keep the median measurement. The same operation

<sup>38</sup> C. Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale deux* (Paris: Plon, 1973), p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> Paez, *História da Ethiópia*, p. 71.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Tudo isto me deu por rol o principal dos secretários do imperador e, depois, para me certificar mais, perguntei diante do mesmo imperador a um seu irmão, que se chama Eráz Cela Christôs, e me disse da mesma maneira.'

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

was effected to calculate the distances from east to west, and the result that he puts forward oscillates between two hundred and forty and three hundred places. But this desire to define the Ethiopian field, or more precisely where he had been, was aimed at deconstructing Urreta's data, which he later cites, in order to indicate its falsity:<sup>42</sup> from north to south, six hundred and eighty, and from east to west, four hundred and seventy.

The Jesuit called for local participation because he needed 'proof'; without his local informants, it would have been impossible for Paez to give these measurement estimates, never having set foot himself in the ancient territory ruled by Prester John. He did not wish to concern himself with the area ruled by the Ethiopian king because of his preoccupation with demonstrating the falsity of Urreta's affirmations, as even at the time that the Ethiopian kings exercised dominion over a much larger territory (Ethiopian assertions which were arguable, but which he had no intention of calling into question). The information he received reduced the range to practically half of that considered by Urreta.

The knowledge that Paez presented was brought forward to the time of writing, a fact of which he was perfectly conscious; he did not omit to point out the political changes that the 'empire of Prester John' had experienced in the middle of the 16th century under the oppression of the Oromos ('Gallas'), which had considerably reduced the Ethiopian territorial area. This contextualisation of Paez's writings allows us to understand that he did not make use of the 'geographical' information contained in Azevedo's letter.

But something in the analysis would be missing if I did not tackle the question of the distribution of this 'knowledge'. The *História da Etiópia*, which was only published at the beginning of the 20th century — and we shall see the reasons for this — was destined to nourish a Jesuit 'library'. The ethnographical material (habits and customs; modes of life and religious practices; customs pertaining to table, dressing, birth, life, and death ...) geographical material (streams, rivers, lakes, mountains ...) and historical material (chronicles and royal lists ...) constituted a weighty argument for the competition between the missionary orders, but without bringing absolute finality to the publication of the texts thus produced. These texts developed in the missionary field could at least, if need be, help the Jesuit decision-makers to manage their personnel efficiently.

In consequence, it was without realising it that Paez proposed a new reading of the Ethiopian field and suggested attributing to it the wish for an

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<sup>42</sup> Paez, *História da Etiópia*, pp. 71–72.

epistemological rupture. Once again, this brings forth a reading contrary to the sources, exempt from contextualisation and puts these stakes at the moment of writing into perspective. But for all that, Paez is certainly one of the links in this scientific chain that was subsequently completed. The situation in which Manuel de Almeida found himself seems to me, on the contrary, to raise again a completely different logic of production, which I now intend to develop.

### III. *Manuel de Almeida: Knowledge to justify a failed mission*

The third list of the 'kingdoms' and 'provinces' of Ethiopia is that of Manuel de Almeida, who proposed, contrary to his predecessors, a cartographic translation of the considered data. This map was published for the first time in 1660<sup>43</sup> in *Historia geral de Ethiopia ...*<sup>44</sup> by Father Baltasar Teles (an adaptation of *Historia de Ethiopia e alta ou Abassia ...* by Almeida). The general boundaries of the graphic production are the coastal contours of the Horn of Africa, copied from a Portuguese nautical map. The Ethiopian area with its regions, the frontiers of which are indicated by dotted lines, is bordered in the east by the coast of the Red Sea, in the west by the Nile (*Rio Nilo*), in the north by the confluence between the Mareb (*Rio Mareb*) and Takkäzé (*Rio Tacaze*) rivers and in the south by the areas occupied by the Galla (Oromo) populations settled in the regions of the Christian kingdom, in Bali, Däwaro (*Reino Doaro galas*) and Fätägar (*Reino Tategar galas*). In the southeast are found the kingdoms of Ädäl (*Adel*) or Zeila and the *Bantu* of the Somalian coast. Finally, the toponyms are indicated by number (61 or 62 according to the version) and hark back to a table of places. A significant characteristic is that the main point of the toponyms indicated on the map are at the interior of a diagonal going from the northeast (from Tigre) to the southwest (to Godjam [*Goiam*]), which corresponds with the zone of the Catholic occupation of the Ethiopian area. We shall return to this. The map was created from facts gathered in Ethiopia by means of an astrolabe, from information contained in Paez's

<sup>43</sup> Hirsch pointed out the existence of four manuscript versions of this map, in which the differences are minor (Hirsch, *Connaissances et figures de l'Éthiopie*, p. 527).

<sup>44</sup> B. Tellez, *Historia geral de Ethiopia a Alta ou Abassia do Preste Ioam, e do que nella obraram os Padres da Companhia de Jesus: composta na mesma Ethiopia, pelo Padre Manoel d'Almeyda, natural de Viseu, Provincial, e Visitador, que foy na India. Abreviada com nova releyçam, e methodo pelo Padre Balthazar Tellez, natural de Lisboa, Provincial da Provincia Lusitania, ambos da mesma Companhia* (Coimbra: 1660).

manuscript which Almeida had in his possession, as we shall see, and from the accounts of local intermediaries.<sup>45</sup>

The Jesuit partly re-uses the lists of the 'kingdoms' and 'provinces' of his predecessor, keeping the same number, but replacing certain of them by others.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, he does not forget to indicate that these kingdoms and provinces were those that 'Prester John ruled in the past'.<sup>47</sup> This is a thought that drives him to devote an ensuing chapter (Chapter Three of book I)<sup>48</sup> to the 'kingdoms' and 'provinces' ruled by the Ethiopian emperor in the 17th century. The Ethiopian area is thus reduced in size to a point of comparison with a kingdom of Europe, in particular Spain, which is more limited still.<sup>49</sup>

But the knowledge that Almeida presented at the time, through these different lists and by means of this map, cannot be understood without a re-contextualisation of the writing of his text.

*Manuel de Almeida: to rewrite in order to write better ...*

In January 1624, as Almeida arrived in Ethiopia,<sup>50</sup> the manuscript of *Historia da Ethiopia* had not yet been sent to the Jesuits of Goa. António Fernandes, at that time the Superior of the mission, does not seem to have done what was necessary to dispatch the text, even though this last had logically been accomplished before the death of its author, Paez, in 1622. It was rather Almeida who took it upon himself to highlight the interest therein. For him, this work constituted an excellent argument for the defence of the Jesuit enterprise in Ethiopia in the face of the competing claims of the Dominicans. Moreover, this evaluation largely transcends the least explicit agreements effectively existing between the Jesuits of different 'nationalities' in the missionary field. Indeed, the argument that Paez was Castilian, according to which he would have written a partisan work with regards to the Portuguese, does not explain anything about the esteem in which Almeida held him. From this point of view, Paez's manuscript had to be published, and the fact that he had proposed its

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<sup>45</sup> M. Almeida, 'Historia de Ethiopia a alta ou Abassia, imperio do Abexim, cujo Rey vulgarmente he chamado Preste Joam', in C. Beccari (ed.), *Rerum Aethiopicarum scriptores occidentales inediti a saeculo XVI ad XIX*, vols. 5-7, (Rome: excudebat C. de Luigi, 1907-08), vol. 5, p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9: 'Marrâbet, Maúz, Bizamô'.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

Latin translation reinforces the idea that he considered that this work would have a large distribution.<sup>51</sup>

At the end of 1624, the manuscript was in India, as is attested by a note which appears at the end of the document.<sup>52</sup> This note, dated 4 December 1624 from Baçaim (Bassein),<sup>53</sup> was from the patriarch Afonso Mendes, who was sent to India with the authority of the Ethiopian patriarch and whose sojourn in India lasted just until the beginning of April 1625.<sup>54</sup> The patriarch's annotation, which has little connection with the content of the text, testifies all the same to the manuscript's presence in India. What is more, a letter from the same patriarch written in Bandorá on 26 December 1624, confirms that Mendes made use of Paez's manuscript, extracting information with regard to the surest route to take to get to Ethiopia.<sup>55</sup>

But Almeida's enthusiastic letter does not appear to have had the anticipated response, as not one copy reached Europe.<sup>56</sup> The *Historia da Ethiopia* was left in India until the departure of the missionary contingent

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<sup>51</sup> Here is what he wrote in his letter of 8 May 1624, from the Jesuit residence of Gorgora, to the employed general Mutio Vittelleschi ('Relationes et Epistolæ variorum tempore missionis Lusitanæ (1622–1635). Pars prima — Liber III', in C. Beccari (ed.), *Rerum Aethiopicarum scriptores occidentales inediti a saeculo XVI ad XIX*, vol. 12, (Rome: excudebat C. de Luigi, 1912), p. 51): 'The book of Ethiopian things made by Fr Pero Paez, who is in heaven, goes this year [to leave] from there [Ethiopia]. I ask the superior fathers of India that they would make copies of it and leave a copy at Goa, and that he send the others to V.P., and I ask V.P. that as it is done by the father in Portuguese, that it were published, because I believe that it has much authority, as it was done by a father of the Castilian nation and that equally it refutes the brother Luis de Urreta and treats in the way they deserve, the things of the Portuguese which came there a long time ago and the things of Ethiopia and said what he saw with his own eyes for nearly twenty years that he lived here. After such an impression that the father made, if that is possible, if that seems to be a good thing to V.P. to translate and to print in Latin so that it reaches all parts of Europe.'

<sup>52</sup> ARSI, *Goa 42*, f<sup>o</sup> 537.

<sup>53</sup> One of the Portuguese trading posts on the Indian occidental coast, to the north of Goa, where the Jesuits had a residence.

<sup>54</sup> 'Relationes et Epistolæ', vol. 12, p. 143.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>56</sup> Evidently there is the BPB manuscript, *Ms 778*, which is a copy of the ARSI manuscript (*Goa 42*), a copy of which can only be subsequent to 4 December 1624, since the copyist took *in extenso* Mendes's annotation without marking a difference between the end of the *Histoire* and Mendes's letter. Of course, the copy could very well have been made in India between December 1624 and March 1625 and the sent to Europe. Without being absolutely categorical, however, a similarity exists between the writing of book II of the *Goa 42* manuscript and that of BPB (*Ms 778*), which leads one to think that the copy was made in Ethiopia.



for Ethiopia, at the beginning of April 1625.<sup>57</sup> Then it was returned to Ethiopia instead of being sent to Europe to be published.<sup>58</sup>

In consequence, the area of distribution of this text did not include Europe, but it remained at the centre of the region which constituted the province of Goa, limiting it to internal distribution only to the members of the Society. The fact that the *Historia da Ethiopia* appeared in Ethiopia in 1625 is the sign of a decision to which the name of Mendes can be connected, as Beccari has already pointed out, indicating 'that the Patriarch Mendez himself probably carried Paez's codex with him as he was sailing from India towards Ethiopia so that it could be used for the profound knowledge of the missionary situation'.<sup>59</sup>

I return to my hypothesis concerning Paez's *Historia da Ethiopia*, in which I emphasise the censure, or rather the repeated obstructions, to which the manuscript was subjected.<sup>60</sup> It seems to me, and in the light of this inquiry on the re-contextualised missionary knowledge, that the conjecture concerning repeated obstructions should be re-evaluated. I prefer to emphasise that Paez's text received different evaluations, the point of view of Almeida with regard to his publication in Europe being only one. The numerous bits of information that figure in Paez's manuscript were probably judged more useful to the missionaries who, from 1635, were disembarking for their new missionary field, in order to return to that which Beccari defended.

Given that the re-evaluation of a hypothesis frequently entails other ideas, I suggest that the request, made some years later to Almeida in Ethiopia, to rewrite Paez's *Historia da Ethiopia*, as we shall see, tends to confirm the interest in the contents of this text, as well as the research to which the missionary was dedicated.<sup>61</sup>

Whereas the Ethiopian fathers had gathered together at the end of 1625, in order to practise the *Spiritual Exercises* in plenary session,<sup>62</sup> the Superior of the mission, Antonio Fernandes, entrusted to Almeida the task of rewriting Paez's *Historia*. He acknowledged several times in his text

<sup>57</sup> 'Relationes et Epistolæ', vol. 12, p. 143.

<sup>58</sup> A hypothesis which Beccari had already pointed out at the time of the publication of Paez's manuscript, see P. Paez, 'Historia Æthiopiæ', in C. Beccari (ed.), *Rerum Aethiopicarum scriptores occidentales inediti a saeculo XVI ad XIX*, vols. 2–3, (Rome: excudebat C. de Luigi, 1905–06) vol. 3, p. 508.

<sup>59</sup> Paez, 'Historia Æthiopiæ' vol. 3, p. 508.

<sup>60</sup> Pennec, *Des jésuites au royaume du prêtre Jean (Éthiopie)*, pp. 257–67.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 264–67.

<sup>62</sup> With the exception of those in the northern province (Tigre) because of the distance, ARSI, *Goa 39 II, Hist. Æthiopiæ*, doc. 52, f<sup>o</sup> 312 (extract from the annual letter from 1625 to 1626, written by Gaspar Paes).

that Paez's text was originally his own, but Almeida's *Historia da Ethiopia a alta ou Abassia* is in reality a complete rewriting of that of his predecessor, with Almeida taking care to suppress the polemical aspect relating to Urreta.

*Context of the production of the Historia and its map*

Unlike Paez's manuscript, which was written completely in Ethiopia and for the reasons described above, that of Almeida is inscribed in a totally different context. The chronological signs that punctuate his narrative allow the reader to know the time of his writing and indicate that certain parts of the manuscript were compiled on missionary ground (Ethiopia), and that other parts were written after the Jesuits had been expelled by the new royal Ethiopian power in 1633 (1643 is the last date contained in the *Historia*).<sup>63</sup> In fact, two thirds of it were written up in Goa, and this in a context extremely different from that which Paez had known. The mood was one of bitterness linked to the failure of the mission; the Goanese context obliged him to revisit, to interpret the Jesuit mission in its entirety and to draw up a first assessment of this enterprise.<sup>64</sup>

The geographical map that he completed, without any doubt in Goa, is certainly, as emphasised by Hirsch,

new in the themes it introduced, since it is no longer about a vast unbounded area but a reduced area showing the historic places of a religious confrontation: the places taken by the Catholic mission with their martyrs, their stone churches and the large Ethiopian monasteries testify to the traditional religion and to the resistance to Catholicism, and about the Muslim regions (the coast, the kingdom of Ādāl, the Funj (Funchos) kingdom or pagans (Oromo regions)).<sup>65</sup>

But it signifies, particularly for the Society of Jesus and the missionaries evicted from Ethiopia, the desire to inscribe the Jesuit presence, after the

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<sup>63</sup> He started to write in 1628 while he was in Ethiopia, attesting certain passages, notably from book I, Almeida, 'Historia de Ethiopia a alta ou Abassia', vol. 5, p. 22. Book II would have been written in part in Ethiopia as for VII others they were in Goa; see Beckingham & Huntingford (eds), *Some Records*, intro.

<sup>64</sup> See, Almeida, 'Historia de Ethiopia a alta ou Abassia', vol. 5, pp. 333–40, ch. 1, book IV, where the author translates accurately enough the disappointment engendered by the failure of the mission. In this chapter, he pays particular attention to the 'human resources' deployed, in emphasising the energy spent, 'firstly by the Venetian kings of Portugal and the entire Portuguese nation and secondly by St Ignatius and his sons'. He completes his quantitative analysis with the Jesuits remaining in Ethiopia and the martyred dead in 1639, inviting the putative reader to reflection.

<sup>65</sup> Hirsch, *Connaissances et figures de l'Éthiopie*, pp. 530–31. See the author's pages concerning the principles of construction of this map, pp. 531–35.

event, in the terrain and in Ethiopian history. The body of residences, stone churches and places of the Jesuit martyrs who remained after most had been evicted, are associated with the high places of the memory of Ethiopian religious identity (Däbrä Bizan [n° 1], Axum [n° 16], Däbrä Libanos [n° 53]).

Up until the middle of the 17th century, the province of Goa continued to have an interest in the Ethiopian mission, certainly diminishing since the Jesuits who remained in place would die one after the other as martyrs,<sup>66</sup> sending new missionaries, of which the trace of at least one was conserved in the catalogues of the province.<sup>67</sup>

Thus Almeida's geographic map, published for the first time in Teles's work in 1660, is to be considered, in my opinion, as the justification for the Jesuit mission in Ethiopia and is likewise inscribed in the debate that started at the beginning of the century between Dominicans and Jesuits.

For if Almeida's *Historia* eliminated the polemical challenge to Urreta, it did not prevent Almeida from including an appendix entitled 'Appendix to the History of Ethiopia in which the principal errors which were written in one [History] printed in Valencia in 1610, are refuted'.<sup>68</sup> But this competition between the orders became more complex with the presence, from 1622, of the *Propaganda Fide*, claiming responsibility for, and criticising within the papacy, the action of the Jesuits in Ethiopia.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, the map published by Teles, with a compendium by Almeida, helped to legitimise an Ethiopian mission in which the 'Portuguese'

<sup>66</sup> ARSI, *Goa 25, Catalogi triennales Goan. & Malab.*, 1614–99 (year 1641, ff° 72v-73; 79).

<sup>67</sup> ARSI, *Goa 25, Catalogi triennales Goan. & Malab.*, 1614–99 (year 1647, f° 91v; year 1649, f° 110 'P. Torcato Parisiano natural da Marca de Ancono jdade 29, da Comp.a 11 theologo estudos acabados, leo latim 2 annos, esteve hum annos e meyo na Christandade de Salcete em cuja lingoa confessava, e pregava, vay este anno a Mocâ, q. he hum Porto de Arabia no Mar Roxo na contra costa de Ethiopia, aonde deve estar desfarçado acudindo aos neg.os daquela Missão, e entrando nella tendo occasião').

<sup>68</sup> School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), hereafter SOAS, *Historia de Ethiopia a alta, ou Abassia: Imperio do Abexim, cujo Rey vulgarmente he chamado Preste Joam ... Composta pelo Padre Manoel de Almeida da Companhia de Jesus, natural de Viseu, Ms 11966* [f° 9] 'Appendix à Historia de Ethiopia na qual se refutam os principaes erros q[ue] andão escritos em huã q[ue] se imprimio e[m] Valença no año de 1610'. This appendix occupies folios 9v to 48r after the *Historia de Ethiopia a alta e Abassia*. The manuscript, from the British Museum (*Add MS 9861*), which was used and published in its entirety by Beccari (Almeida, 'Historia de Ethiopia a alta ou Abassia', vols 5–7), does not contain this appendix.

<sup>69</sup> Archivo della Congregazione de Propaganda Fide, série Congressi Missioni Miscellanee, vol. 3, ff° 203–241 v (on Ethiopia ff° 236–239). J. Metzler, 'Orientation, programme et premières décisions (1622–1649)', in *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide memoria rerum, 350 ans au service des missions, 1622–1972*, vol. 1/1 1622–1700 (Rome, Freiburg & Vienna: Herder, 1971), pp. 146–96.

Jesuits had been involved. But it was equally a result of real geographical knowledge (substituting that of *Abassia* or *Etiopia alta*<sup>70</sup> for the notion of *Æthiopia*), knowledge which was assimilated by the Society itself, not only uniquely in terms of failures or successes, but in terms of 'geographic sciences', the issues being the use of that missionary library in the service of 'science in the process of being developed'. And this was at the heart of the Society, which had been able to protect the body of data concerning its missionary field so that it could operate more efficiently.

It was not by chance that the first author known to have used the map published by Almeida was a Roman Jesuit, Francesco Eschinardi (1623–1703). He was teaching astronomy, mathematics and physical sciences at the Jesuit colleges of Florence, Perugia and Rome, was the author of pedagogic works<sup>71</sup> and was a friend of Athanasius Kircher (1602–80), the German Jesuit scholar. As Hirsch emphasises, the object of Eschinardi's curiosity was probably 'the combination of a scientific interest for the Nile network and a desire to justify the Jesuit mission'.<sup>72</sup>

It is, moreover, in this period that a reversal took place in which the map became a means of legitimising the mission — of making it a properly scientific object. The body of data of the field translated into the map remained under the control of the Society, and Eschinardi broadened it beyond the 'Jesuit' sphere ....

### *Conclusion*

Throughout this inquiry, I have attempted to show that missionary knowledge is produced according to its own logic, responding to concerns that must be reconstructed in their social context and seen in terms of utterance *in situ*. The various presentations of knowledge are in dialogue, and it is this that should be circumscribed, and determined more precisely, before establishing the genealogical filiations between these various presentations of knowledge. So the reading that can be made of these sources, in this case the Jesuit library, is found to be modified, and with this the very consideration of what a particular 'knowledge' is and how it was developed.

<sup>70</sup> Tellez, *Historia geral de Ethiopia a Alta ou Abassia do Preste Ioam*, pp. 3–10.

<sup>71</sup> F. Eschinardi, *Cursus physicomathematicus ... Pars prima, de cosmographia. Tomus primus continens duplicem tractatum, primum de sphaera, secundum de astronomia* (Ex typographia J.-J. Komarek: 1689), p. 367.

<sup>72</sup> Hirsch, *Connaissances et figures de l'Éthiopie*, p. 538; and on Eschinardi, pp. 535–40.

To return to the concerns expressed at the beginning of this enquiry, the contextual analysis of this missionary knowledge has emphasised that this knowledge collected on the ground during the first half of the 17th century was not designed, in the first place, to be distributed to an erudite public but was kept for circulation inside the Order. In the case of Abyssinia, it was only much later, in the second half of the 17th century, that the knowledge gathered at the heart of the Society swung towards the 'scientific sphere'. The investigation of this knowledge, which was gathered by the missionaries from data in the field and which was ordered by the Society, would merit further investigation in other missionary fields, to estimate the extent of its achievement.

So what about the 'political' question tackled by each of the missionaries in a different manner? I would be inclined to insist on the fact that when the missionaries presented the different lists of 'kingdoms' and 'provinces', it showed at the least that by these designations they understood or appreciated very different things, just like the local intermediaries whom they questioned. This leaves one to think that this category, which could appear 'stable' to us, is, in fact, much more complex. Therefore, instead of wanting to determine what geopolitics or cartography was relative to the 17th century of Ethiopia,<sup>73</sup> it is desirable to weave again the dialogue with which each of these missionaries grappled. These documents, 'treated as products and not only as 'sources', no longer *tell* only the history, they *are* themselves a sedimentary history, like a monument wherein can be read the series of successive architectural modifications which result in its final structure', to quote the anthropologist Jean Bazin<sup>74</sup>.

This would be a way in which to re-evaluate not only the relevance of the documentation as social production, but also the objects of history, the history of men, ideas, situations, places and the relationships that they produce.

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<sup>73</sup> I return with this allusion to the analysis that Toubkis and I have conducted on the Ethiopian political system for the 17th century, asking ourselves about this category of empire, if it was operational for the period concerned, and how and in what way the Jesuits were able to play a role in the conception of an empire which spanned, it must be admitted, the entirety of the Ethiopian historiography; see H. Pennec and D. Toubkis, 'Reflections on the notions of "empire" and "kingdom" in seventeenth-century Ethiopia: royal power and local power', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 2004, vol. 8 (3-4), pp. 228-59.

<sup>74</sup> J. Bazin, 'La production d'un récit historique', in *Des clous dans la joconde. L'anthropologie autrement* (Toulouse: Anacharsis Éditions, 2008), p. 272.

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