

# ‘Dicono li Ethiopi’: Ethiopian contributions to Francisco Álvares’s travel account to Ethiopia (c.1540)

MATHILDE ALAIN

*University of Warwick*

*Abstract.* From 1520 to 1526, the Portuguese chaplain Francisco Álvares accompanied a diplomatic embassy to Ethiopia. Following his journey, he wrote the travel account *Ho Preste Joam das Indias*, published in Portugal in 1540. The original manuscript, presumably in Portuguese, has been lost but five Italian manuscripts survive, several of which were composed posthumously to Álvares. These manuscripts bear differences to the Portuguese publication. The 1542 revision by the Italian humanist Ludovico Beccadelli, *La historia d’Ethiopia*, is particularly interesting because it includes forty-two *addizioni* based on exchanges with Ethiopian scholars in Rome, together with additional information disseminated across the account. These Ethiopian *addizioni* and contributions, mainly about religious and royal customs and geographical information, are the focus of this article. The *addizioni* open a window onto the presence and contributions of Ethiopian scholars to contemporary intellectual life in Renaissance Europe. They concern details about which Europeans would have been ignorant, even those who had travelled to Ethiopia like Álvares. They show that African as well as European scholars contributed to knowledge of African countries like Ethiopia in Europe — in this case by correcting Álvares’s text during the process of its reception and transmission amongst other European scholars like Beccadelli. These clarifications sought out by Beccadelli for an Italian revision of a text written in Portuguese about a journey through Ethiopia demonstrate the multiplicity of actors involved in a text’s voyage from its composition to its dissemination.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1520 and 1526, Francisco Álvares visited the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia as part of an embassy sent by Portugal’s King Manuel I to establish diplomatic relations with the Ethiopian king, Ləbnä Dəngəl. Álvares’s travel account, *Ho Preste Joam das Indias*, printed in Portugal in 1540, recounts the embassy.<sup>2</sup> The title, referring to the Ethiopian sovereign, means ‘The

<sup>1</sup> I thank Pierre Botcherby, Paul Botley, Nathalie Bouloux and Natalya Din-Kariuki for proofreading drafts of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Francisco Álvares, *Ho Preste Joam das Indias: Verdadera informação das terras do Preste Joam / segundo vio & escreveu ho padre Francisco Aluarez, capellão del rey nosso senhor. Agora novamente*

Prester John of the Indies'. The mythical Prester John was thought to rule a powerful Christian kingdom in Asia, the 'Indies', or — since the fourteenth century — Africa, specifically Ethiopia.<sup>3</sup> The embassy brought back Mateus, an Ethiopian ambassador sent to Portugal in 1514, and also hoped to conclude a military alliance to fight off Muslims in the Red Sea.<sup>4</sup> This eventually led to an Ethiopian-Portuguese rapprochement and the sending of Portuguese troops to help Ethiopia defeat the sultanate of Barr Sa'd ad-Din's army in 1542.<sup>5</sup>

The textual history of Álvares's account is challenging. Versions exist in several languages, but there is no known Portuguese manuscript; the original is presumed lost. The Portuguese printed edition aside, five known Italian manuscripts contain slightly different versions.<sup>6</sup> Three manuscripts are held in the Vatican Library. The oldest, the anonymous Ott.lat.1104, includes a preface by Álvares and four additional chapters absent from the Portuguese edition, describing the beginning of the journey before the embassy reached Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup> Ott.lat.2202, dated 6 October 1540, is an unfinished revision, likely of Ott. lat.1104, by the Italian scholar, Archbishop Ludovico Beccadelli.<sup>8</sup> Ott.lat.2789 has likewise been revised by Beccadelli, with forty-two additions in Italian at the end by Ethiopian scholars living in Rome.<sup>9</sup> It is dated 1542 but Beccadelli does not seem to have known the 1540 Portuguese edition, as he mentions only Italian translations.<sup>10</sup>

*impresso por mandado do dito senhor* (Lisbon: Luís Rodrigues, 22 October 1540).

<sup>3</sup> Adam Knobler, 'Contacts with Ethiopia — Prester John Found (to 1559)', in *Mythology and Diplomacy in the Age of Exploration*, ed. by Adam Knobler (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 30–56; Camille Rouxpetel, 'La figure du Prêtre Jean: les mutations d'une prophétie. Souverain chrétien idéal, figure providentielle ou paradigme de l'orientalisme médiéval?', *Questes. Revue pluridisciplinaire d'études médiévales*, 28 (2014), 99–120; Marco Giardini, 'The Quest for the Ethiopian Prester John and its Eschatological Implications', *Medievalia*, 22 (2019), 55–87.

<sup>4</sup> On this, see: Verena Krebs, *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy with Latin Europe* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2021), pp. 149–52.

<sup>5</sup> The Barr Sa'd ad-Din is named kingdom of Adal/Adel in Ethiopian Christian sources and in Portuguese sources, including by Álvares. See Amélie Chekroun, *La conquête de l'Éthiopie. Un jihad au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> For a study of these manuscripts, see Roberto Almagià, *Contributi alla storia della conoscenza dell'Etiopia* (Padua: La Garangola, 1941); Charles Beckingham, 'Notes on an unpublished manuscript of Francisco Álvares: Verdadera informaçam das terras do Preste Joam das Indias', *Annales d'Éthiopie*, 4.1 (1961), 139–54. Beckingham focuses on the differences between the Italian manuscript Ott.lat.1104, the Portuguese version of 1540, and Ramusio's version (1550).

<sup>7</sup> Vatican City, Vatican Apostolic Library, Ott.lat.1104. Available online: <[https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Ott.lat.1104](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Ott.lat.1104)> [accessed 31 July 2023].

<sup>8</sup> Almagià, pp. 17–18. Alongside his scholarly activities, Beccadelli (1501–1572) was an important figure in ecclesiastical circles. See Gigliola Fragnito, 'Ludovico Beccadelli. Identité ecclésiastique et identité municipale chez un prélat bolonais du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle', trans. by Anaïs Bokobza and Guy Le Thiec, in *Érudits collectionneurs et amateurs. France méridionale et Italie, XVI<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. by Emmanuelle Chapron, Isabelle Luciani and Guy Le Thiec (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 2017), pp. 29–40.

<sup>9</sup> Vatican City, Vatican Apostolic Library, Ott.lat.2789. Available online: <[https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Ott.lat.2789](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Ott.lat.2789)> [accessed 31 July 2023].

<sup>10</sup> Osvaldo Raineri, *La historia d'Ethiopia di Francesco Alvarez ridotta in italiano da Ludovico Beccadelli* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2007), p. 27.

Two other manuscripts — Fondo Palatino 977 volumes I and II, held in Parma's Biblioteca Palatina — contain Beccadelli's revision of Álvares's text. Volume II is a later copy of volume I; in both, the Ethiopian additions appear as marginalia.<sup>11</sup> Ott.lat.2789 was copied from an early stage of volume I, as the latter was still used after.<sup>12</sup> The first draft with the Ethiopian additions was probably written around the time the Ethiopians were consulted about Álvares's account, sometime between 1540 and 1542.

This article focuses on the Ethiopian contributions to Álvares's travel account, specifically the forty-two 'addizioni' or notes at the end of Beccadelli's Ott.lat.2789, edited by Osvaldo Raineri in 2007, also found in Fondo Palatino 977 volumes I and II. These 'addizioni' were made after Beccadelli consulted Ethiopians living in Rome at the time. They include geographical information and details about religious and royal customs. They constitute an interesting case-study, opening a window onto the presence and contributions of Ethiopian scholars to contemporary intellectual life in Renaissance Europe. The Ethiopians' notes concern details about which Europeans would have been ignorant, even those who had travelled to Ethiopia like Álvares. They show that African as well as European scholars contributed to knowledge of African countries like Ethiopia in Europe. Not just passive and observational, they were as active informants as travellers like Álvares.<sup>13</sup> These clarifications, sought out by Beccadelli for an Italian revision of a text written in Portuguese about a journey through Ethiopia, demonstrate the multiplicity of agents involved in a text's voyage from its composition to its dissemination. They highlight the many intermediary steps in the journeys taken by texts like travel accounts in Renaissance Europe.

The Ethiopian presence in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Rome is well-attested.<sup>14</sup> Álvares mentions meeting Ethiopians who had visited Italy at the

<sup>11</sup> I refer to these additions as 'Ethiopian additions'. On the differences between the manuscripts in Parma, see Gabriele Natta, 'L'enigma dell'Etiopia nel Rinascimento italiano: Ludovico Beccadelli tra inquietudini religiose e orizzonti globali', *Rinascimento*, 55 (2015), 275–309.

<sup>12</sup> Natta, pp. 302–03.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Smethurst defines the notion of travellee, opposed to the traveller, as 'a person who is travelled to or [...] over, a passive rather than active entity, observed rather than observing'. This definition does not take into account the fact that travellers, in this case Ethiopians, were active informants and were observing as much as Álvares, both in Ethiopia and in Italy. The travellers' perception shaped travel accounts, although not as much as the traveller's. See Smethurst, '91. Traveller/travellee', in *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies*, ed. by Charles Forsdick, Zoë Kinsley, Kathryn Walchester (London-New York: Anthem Press, 2019), pp. 268–70.

<sup>14</sup> Samantha Kelly, 'Medieval Ethiopian diasporas' in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, ed. by Samantha Kelly (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2020), pp. 425–53; Sam Kennerley, 'Ethiopian Christians in Rome, c.1400-c.1700' in *A Companion to Religious Minorities in Early Modern Rome*, ed. by Emily Michelson and Matthew Coneys (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 142–68; Olivia Adankpo-Labadie, 'A faith between two worlds: Expressing Ethiopian devotion and crossing cultural boundaries at Santo Stefano dei Mori in early modern Rome', in *A Companion to Religious Minorities in Early Modern Rome*, ed. by Emily Michelson and Matthew Coneys (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 169–90.

Ethiopian royal court.<sup>15</sup> Most were pilgrims, although some were ambassadors.<sup>16</sup> In the late fifteenth century, a small Ethiopian community settled in Santo Stefano dei Mori, which became the Ethiopian residence in Rome.<sup>17</sup> Some actively participated in producing works about Ethiopia, both in collaboration with Italian humanists and independently.<sup>18</sup>

In Beccadelli's revision, these Ethiopian contributions are acknowledged several times. In his preface, he explains how he worked:

Finalmente dopo tre anni, quello che in uno mese fare doveva, vi mando la *Historia d'Ethiopia*, nata da Don Francesco Alvarez Portuguese, la quale non alterando in modo alcuno la sustantia di quanto scrisse molto semplicemente, ho ordinata, et divisa, et ridotta a quella maggior chiarezza, che per me s'è potuto, facendovi solamente alcune additioni in certi luochi, dove li nostri Ethiopi di Roma non s'accordano con quanto è scritto. Per che dovete sapere, che [...] io l'ho conferita col nostro da ben Ethiope, fra Pietro, et altri delli suoi.<sup>19</sup>

Beccadelli's revision consisted mainly of reordering, dividing (in three books), reducing, and adapting Álvares's account, but also adding information from the Ethiopians themselves.<sup>20</sup> Consulting Ethiopians to verify Álvares's information shows that Beccadelli intended to provide the most accurate and up-to-date information possible. The opening formula also suggests that these Ethiopians had read Beccadelli's account and identified minor errors. This shows that they were highly literate in Italian and that they were engaging in collaborative scholarly dialogue, with a view to promoting the dissemination of more accurate information about their culture.

Identifying the Ethiopians is difficult. Beccadelli refers to them as 'li Ethiopi', 'Ethiopi nostri in Roma', or 'da bene religiosi Ethiopi in Roma'.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Francisco Álvares, *Verdadeira informação das terras do Preste João das Índias*, ed. by Neves Águas (Mira-Sintra-Mem Martins: Publicações Europa-América, 1989), p. 154: 'Este frade andara em Itália e sabia algum tanto de latim'. 'This monk had been to Italy and knew a little Latin'.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Weber, 'Gli Etiopi a Roma nel Quattrocento: ambasciatori politici, negoziatori religiosi o pellegrini?', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome — Moyen Âge*, 125–31 (2013) <<https://journals.openedition.org/mefrm/1036>> [accessed 31 July 2023].

<sup>17</sup> On this, see Olivia Adankpo-Labadie, 'Accueillir et contrôler les pèlerins éthiopiens à Rome aux XVe et XVIe siècles', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome — Moyen Âge*, 131–32 (2019) <<https://journals.openedition.org/mefrm/5864>> [accessed 31 July 2023].

<sup>18</sup> See for instance the involvement of the Ethiopian scholar Täsfa Şeyon in Giovio's 'Description of Africa' or his *Testamentum novum*, a commented edition of the Ge'ez New Testament. James De Lorenzi and Matteo Salvatore, 'An Ethiopian scholar in tridentine Rome: Täsfa Şeyon and the birth of Orientalism', *Itinerario*, (2021), 17–46 (pp. 25–30).

<sup>19</sup> Raineri, p. 27. 'Finally, after three years, what I ought to have been able to complete in a month, I am sending you the *Historia d'Ethiopia*, from Don Francesco Alvarez Portuguese, which, without altering in any way the substance of what he wrote very simply, I have ordered, and divided, and reduced to the greatest clarity that was possible for me, making only a few additions in certain places, where our Ethiopians in Rome do not agree with what is written. Therefore you must know that [...] I have consulted about it with our good Ethiopians, Fra Pietro, and others of his countrymen'. Unless otherwise stated, the English translations are mine.

<sup>20</sup> Beccadelli also mentions the Ethiopian contributions in his prologue in Fondo Palatino 977 volumes I and II, absent from Ott.lat.2789. Raineri included the prologue in his edition. See Raineri, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> Raineri, p. 32: 'the Ethiopians', 'our Ethiopians of Rome', '[...] the good religious Ethiopians in

Only ‘fra Pietro’, better known as Täsfa Şeyon, a well-known Ethiopian scholar living in Rome at the time, is named.<sup>22</sup> A cleric, originally a monk in Däbrä Libanos, Täsfa Şeyon arrived in Rome in 1538, having fled Imam Aḥmad’s *jihād* in Christian Ethiopia.<sup>23</sup> He became an important figure of the small Ethiopian community: a multilingual scholar, he oversaw teaching in Santo Stefano, befriended Pope Paul III, and produced several works related to Ethiopia. Täsfa Şeyon is mentioned by Beccadelli several times: in his preface, in some *addizioni*, and in additional paragraphs on people mentioned in Álvares’s account. One of the most important Ethiopian scholars of the time living in Rome, Täsfa Şeyon’s knowledge was particularly valuable to Beccadelli and he was probably his main informant.

Ott.lat.1104 (c. 1539)	The oldest Italian version of Álvares’s account	No Ethiopian additions
Ott.lat.2202 (6 October 1540)	Beccadelli’s oldest revision	No Ethiopian additions
Fondo Palatino 977 Vol. I (c.1540 and up to after 1550)	Draft of Beccadelli’s revision	Ethiopian additions in the margins of the main text
Ott.lat.2789 (3 November 1542)	A copy of Fondo Palatino vol. I	Ethiopian additions at the end of the account, with the references in the text
Fondo Palatino 977 Vol. II (after 1550?)	Later copy of Fondo Palatino vol. I	Ethiopian additions in the margins of the main text
<i>Ho Preste Joam das Indias</i> (22 October 1540)	Portuguese printed edition	No Ethiopian additions

TABLE 1. The different versions of Álvares’s text and the Ethiopian additions

The ‘additions’ at the end of Ott.lat.2789 all follow the same pattern. First, a reference to the page of the account guides the reader to the corresponding location in the text, because each addition concerns a specific passage. Following this is the number of the note and then the note itself, which always opens with the expression ‘Dicono li Ethiopi’, meaning ‘the Ethiopians say’. In the margins of the text, a short reference refers to the corresponding endnote, providing the page number where the addition can be found (pp. 113–16 of the manuscript) as well as the number of the addition (addition number 1, 2, 3, etc.).<sup>24</sup>

Rome [...].

<sup>22</sup> Raineri, p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> De Lorenzi and Salvatore, p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> See Ott.lat.2789, view 8 for the first mention to an addition in the margin and views 117–21 for the corresponding endnotes. Available online: <[https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Ott.lat.2789](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Ott.lat.2789)> [accessed 31 July 2023].

The Italian word to describe them, ‘addizioni’, reflects the miscellaneous nature of the Ethiopian notes, concerned with small details in Álvares’s account. These additions consist mainly of comments on religious customs (twenty-seven), politics and royal customs (eight), but also cultural customs (three), geography (two), narration (one), and animals (one). They reflect the identity of Beccadelli’s Ethiopian informants, as Täsfa Şeyon was a cleric, part of the intellectual elite and close to the Ethiopian monarchy.<sup>25</sup> Beccadelli also reported details about Däbrä Libanos, likely given by Täsfa Şeyon as he had lived there as a monk.<sup>26</sup> The high number of Ethiopian comments on religious practices reflects the era’s complicated religious backdrop. Revisions clarifying aspects of Ethiopian Orthodox doctrine sought to pre-empt and assuage critics of Ethiopian Christianity.<sup>27</sup>

Looking closely at a few additions gives an idea of the multiple stages of writing and editing which Álvares’s account underwent. The seventh, for example, focuses on geography:

A car: 35: a.n.<sup>o</sup>7. dicono li Ethiopi che quel lago non è il maggiore del Regno di Amara, ma un’altro detto, Saf, il quale contiene isole, o, scogli XXXIII.<sup>28</sup>

Saf is a sixteenth-century Ethiopian name for Lake Ṭana.<sup>29</sup> In Beccadelli’s revision, the reference comes before the following sentence:

Questo lago è molto habitato intorno, et dicono che vi stanno XV. sumat, cio è capitani, et è questo laco il maggior di tutti li laghi del Regno d’Amara, nel quale ne vedemmo molti [...].<sup>30</sup>

According to Osvaldo Raineri, who edited Beccadelli’s Ott.lat.2789 in 2007, ‘Sumat’ comes from the Amharic word *šumat*, meaning dignitary. The manuscript Ott.lat.1104, the 1540 Portuguese version and a later Italian edition by Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1550) all add ‘questo è il maggiore che ancora habbiamo visto; [...] e este é o maior **que lá vi**’; ‘[...] ma questo è il maggiore di tutti quelli che **io abbia veduto**’.<sup>31</sup> Beccadelli had reduced parts of the text, apparently for clarity. However, without the inclusion of this phrase, the

<sup>25</sup> De Lorenzi and Salvatore, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> De Lorenzi and Salvatore, p. 27.

<sup>27</sup> De Lorenzi and Salvatore, p. 26.

<sup>28</sup> Raineri, p. 179. ‘At page 35: addition n<sup>o</sup>7: the Ethiopians say that this lake is not the largest of the Kingdom of *Amara*, but another one named ‘Saf’, which contains thirty-three islands or rocks’.

<sup>29</sup> Maxime Lachal and Alain Gascon, ‘Ṭana’, in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica Volume 4 O-X*, ed. by Siegbert Uhlig in cooperation with Alessandro Bausi (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 855–57 (p. 856).

<sup>30</sup> Raineri, p. 77. ‘This lake is very inhabited around, and they say that fifteen *Sumat* live there, that is captains, and this lake is the largest of all the lakes of the Kingdom of *Amara*, in which we saw many [...]’.

<sup>31</sup> Ott.lat.1104, view 101. Available online: <[https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Ott.lat.1104](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Ott.lat.1104)> [accessed 8 November 2023]; Álvares, *Verdadeira informação*, pp. 127–28; Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, II, ed. by Marica Milanese (Turin, Giulio Einaudi editore, 1979), p. 203. ‘this is the largest [of the lakes] that I [Álvares] have seen’.

Ethiopians consulted by Beccadelli could not have known that Álvares meant the largest of the lakes he had seen, hence their correction.

Another addition similarly focuses on information which appears in other versions of the account:

‘A car: 29 a n.º 5 Dicono li Ethiopi che il Re che fece fare dette chiese si chiamava Lalibelà, et ch’è sepolto nella chiesa detta Golgotà.’<sup>32</sup>

There is no information about King Lalibäla in Beccadelli’s version, but this information can be found in the Portuguese version, the earliest Italian manuscript (Ott.lat.1104), and in Ramusio’s version.<sup>33</sup> This raises questions about the version Beccadelli used for his revision. Beccadelli’s preface mentions that he relied on ‘quella scrittura così confusa che noi vedemmo in Roma [...]’.<sup>34</sup> According to scholars Roberto Almagià and Gabriele Natta, this is a reference to Ott.lat.1104.<sup>35</sup> If Beccadelli had access to the information in Ott.lat.1104, why was it missing from his revision? Another explanation could be that in the draft of his revision, Beccadelli or a scribe chose not to keep the passage on King Lalibäla or did not copy it carefully enough. As with *addizione* seven, the Ethiopians, finding this information missing, could have provided it. Either way, this example shows that studying the Ethiopian additions helps to better understand the history of this text. This is especially important given some versions are missing. The Ethiopians likely commented directly on Beccadelli’s revision, so either Ott.lat.2202 or Fondo Palatino 977 vol. I, where the additions first appear.

Other additions aim to correct information given by Álvares on the political situation in Ethiopia, such as the following:

A car: 78: a n° 26 dicono li Ethiopi che il Manfudi non entro mai nelli regni d’Amara et Scioa, i quali sono lontanissimi da Mori ma entro nel Regno di Fatigar, Adigò, Doarò, Sciağura, Ifat, Ghedem, et Coali.<sup>36</sup>

This refers to the passage where Álvares describes the relations between the Bar Sa’ad ad-dīn and the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, and mentions the ‘Mafudi’ raids in Christian Ethiopia, relying mainly on Pêro de Covilhã, a Portuguese who had been living in Ethiopia since 1494.<sup>37</sup> ‘Manfudi’ (also spelt ‘Mafudi’) probably refers to Maḥfūz, Emir of the Barr Sa’d ad-Dīn, who had died long before (c.1515) the Ethiopians were consulted by Beccadelli.<sup>38</sup> Not only

<sup>32</sup> Raineri, p. 178. ‘At page 29, addition n°5. The Ethiopians say that the King who ordered the building of this church is named Lalibelà, and that he is buried in the church named Golgotà’.

<sup>33</sup> Álvares, *Verdadeira informação*, p. 110; Ramusio, II, pp. 177–78; Ott.lat.1104, views 78–79 <[https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Ott.lat.1104](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Ott.lat.1104)> [accessed 31 July 2023].

<sup>34</sup> Raineri, p. 27. ‘[...] this confused manuscript that we saw in Rome [...]’.

<sup>35</sup> Almagià, p. 19; Natta, p. 277; Raineri, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> Raineri, p. 181. ‘At page 78: addition n°26 the Ethiopians say that the *Manfudi* never entered in the kingdoms of *Amara* and *Scioa*, which are very far from the Moors, but he entered in the kingdoms of *Fatigar*, *Adigò*, *Doarò*, *Sciağura*, *Ifat*, *Ghedem*, and *Coali*’.

<sup>37</sup> Raineri, pp. 129–30; Álvares, *Verdadeira informação*, pp. 225–26.

<sup>38</sup> Chekroun, *La conquête*, pp. 99–110. It is worth noting that on p. 104, Chekroun indicates that

did the Ethiopians correct Álvares but they provided further information as the Portuguese traveller only mentions the kingdoms of Amara, Scioa (Šāwa) and Faṭagar (Faṭagār). According to them, the kingdoms of Adigò (maybe Hadiya), Doarò (Dawāro), Sciagura (Šagurā), Ifat (Ifāt), Ghedem (Gedem), and Coali (maybe Bāli) were also raided by Emir Maḥfūz.<sup>39</sup> In her study of the Barr Sa'd ad-Dīn's *jihad* in mid-sixteenth century Ethiopia, historian Amélie Chekroun mentions 'at least' three raids in Christian Ethiopia, namely in the Bāli, the Dawāro and the Faṭagār, between 1495 and 1517.<sup>40</sup> The other kingdoms mentioned were neighbouring the Barr Sa'd ad-Dīn, which could explain why raids happened there, too, according to the Ethiopians of Rome.<sup>41</sup> This shows that the Ethiopians were careful to rectify Álvares's information as they were better informed than the Portuguese traveller.<sup>42</sup>

The Ethiopians in Rome may also have contributed in terms of the names of places and people, and words from Ethiopian languages. According to Almagià, Ott.lat.2789 is 'more correct' than Ott.lat.2202, the 1540 Portuguese version, and Ramusio's version, especially for the transcription of Ethiopian names and words, which are closer to modern Ethiopian forms, facilitating their identification.<sup>43</sup> Charles Beckingham, meanwhile, compared the place names and Ethiopian words and titles between Ott.lat.1104 and the Portuguese edition and showed that these are in general more accurate in Ott.lat.1104.<sup>44</sup> The Ethiopian title 'abeto', for instance, reads as 'aalto' in the Portuguese text, 'abetu' in Ott.lat.1104, and 'abeto' in Ott.lat.2789.<sup>45</sup> This suggests Ott.lat.1104 was amended with the help of someone who was familiar with Ethiopian terms, likely the Ethiopians in Rome. However, elsewhere in the Portuguese version, the word 'abeto' does appear, likely used to refer to the same Ethiopian

'Mafudi' might refer to the sultan Muḥammad b. Azar: there was confusion between Maḥfūz and Muḥammad in Álvares's account, and the Muslim sources of that time talk of the sultan Muḥammad b. Azar's raids rather than Maḥfūz's. Moreover, the sources do not make clear whether 'emir' is the appropriate title: *jarād*, *vizir* and *capitaine* are also used.

<sup>39</sup> For the identification, I relied on Charles F. Beckingham and George 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*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1961), p. 411 and Raineri, p. 181.

<sup>40</sup> Chekroun, *La conquête*, p. 106.

<sup>41</sup> Chekroun, *La conquête*, p. 258.

<sup>42</sup> At other instances, however, they seem to provide inaccurate information, such as about the bears and rabbits found everywhere in Ethiopia (addition number 7). See Raineri, p. 178. This could be because of a misunderstanding in the transmission of information. A close study of every addition in relation to all the versions of Álvares's text might help to clarify them.

<sup>43</sup> Almagià, pp. 23–24.

<sup>44</sup> Beckingham, 'Notes', pp. 143–44. No systematic comparison between the place names in all versions has been made; such work would permit a better understanding of the relations between the different versions of the text.

<sup>45</sup> Beckingham, 'Notes', p. 144; Raineri, *La historia d'Ethiopia*, p. 90; Álvares, *Ho Preste Joam das Indias*, p. 108. For the proper nouns, I refer to the 1540 Portuguese edition because Neve Águas changed 'aalto' to 'alto'. Beckingham does not specify if he means the modern Ethiopian form or a sixteenth-century form.



title as Álvares explains that it means 'Senhor'.<sup>46</sup> The form 'aalto' could be a typographical error in the Portuguese edition, or an error in an earlier draft of Álvares's which he failed to correct. The translator of Ott.lat.1104 could therefore have corrected it based on Álvares's later spelling.

The Italian versions are not, however, always closer to the Ethiopian form. The Portuguese edition has 'Xoa' for the kingdom of Šäwa, whilst Ott.lat.1104 has 'Oxia' and Ott.lat.2202, 'Dixioa'; Ott.lat.2789, meanwhile, has various spellings including 'Scioa' 'Xioa', 'Xoa', 'Zooa', and 'Sceva'.<sup>47</sup> Here, the Portuguese version is closer to Ott.lat.2789 and, following Almagià and Beckingham's reasoning, could be considered as more correct. Overall, Beccadelli's version seems therefore more accurate, though not infallible, meaning it is easier to identify place names and Ethiopian words; this corresponds to Beccadelli's wish to provide a clarified text.

Perhaps the names and words from Ethiopian languages were corrected by Täsfa Šeyon.<sup>48</sup> Alternatively, Beccadelli could have had access to other information on Ethiopia. Ott.lat.2202 includes, among other documents, a copy of Poggio Bracciolini's fourth book of *De Varietate Fortunae*, in which he describes Ethiopia based on information provided by Ethiopian monks he met in Italy.<sup>49</sup> In his preface, Beccadelli also mentions Damião de Góis' *Religione Aethiopum*, based on Góis' interview with the Ethiopian ambassador Šägga Zä'ab.<sup>50</sup> Beccadelli could have completed his account with this information, in addition to that provided by the Ethiopians he consulted in Rome. Fondo Palatino 977 volumes I and II contain references to Ramusio's first volume of the *Navigazioni et Viaggi* in the margins, showing that Beccadelli at this time had access to Ramusio's version of Álvares's account.<sup>51</sup> However, this was not the case with Ott.lat.2789, therefore the spelling of names in Beccadelli's earliest revision had nothing to do with Ramusio's text.

Ethiopian contributions to Beccadelli's revision of Álvares's travel account show that Ethiopians were actively involved in the process of producing knowledge on their own country in Renaissance Europe. They highlight that a travel account's voyage involved many people from its composition to its dissemination. These included Álvares himself and his Ethiopian informants in Ethiopia, but also the people who participated in translating (Italian scribes), revising (Beccadelli), correcting (Täsfa Šeyon and other Ethiopians living in

<sup>46</sup> Álvares, *Ho Preste Joam das Indias*, p. 89 (misprinted '99'). 'Sir'. For the meaning of 'abeto', see Merid Wolde Aregay, 'Abetohun', in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica Volume 1 A-C*, ed. by Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), 40.

<sup>47</sup> Beckingham, 'Notes', p. 143; Almagià, p. 24; Raineri, p. 200.

<sup>48</sup> Almagià, p. 24.

<sup>49</sup> On this, see for instance Nathalie Bouloux, 'Du nouveau sur la géographie de l'Éthiopie. Poggio Bracciolini, Biondo Flavio et le témoignage de l'ambassade éthiopienne au concile de Ferrare-Florence', *Afriques, Varia* (2017) <<https://journals.openedition.org/afriques/2008>> [accessed 31 July 2023].

<sup>50</sup> Raineri, p. 29. Better known as Damião De Góis, *Fides, religio, moresque Aethiopum* (Leuven: Rutgeri Rescjj, 1540).

<sup>51</sup> On this, see Natta, p. 297.

Rome), printing, or editing the account (Ramusio). Texts were circulated and amended; there was never a final product.<sup>52</sup> This also demonstrates how the study of compositional and editorial voyages of a text can throw new light on transcultural and transnational encounters. It is thus crucial to look at all versions of and contributions to Álvares' account to understand its history. Beccadelli's revisions should be considered as texts in their own right, providing additional information.

<sup>52</sup> See for instance Rogier Chartier, *La main de l'auteur et l'esprit de l'imprimeur* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015).