

I. AFRICA 1450-1600

A. ANCIENT AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

108. Leo Africanus on Africa and Ethiopia

The early church counted northern Africa as one of the centers of the Christian world. Christianity expanded south of Egypt into Nubian land (Sudan), as well into Aksum (which was to become Ethiopia) during the fourth and fifth centuries. The church's influence remained steady, even after the Muslim expansion during the seventh century. In Europe, the Ethiopian ruler was identified with the legendary "Prester John." This is evident in the report of Leo Africanus (1494?-1552), who was born in Granada as Al-Hassan ibn-Muhammad al Wezzani, and who was active as a jurist in Moroccan Fez. During one of his many trips he was captured by Christian pirates and, on account of his erudition, was not sold into slavery, but presented to Pope Leo X (1513-1521), who enabled his release. After his conversion and baptism he composed in 1526 an account of both of his trips to Africa in 1509 and 1516.

This land of Negroes had a mighty ruler, which taking his name of the region, is called Niger [. . .] Our Cosmographers affirm that the said river of Niger is derived out of Nilus, which they imagine for some certain space to be swallowed up by the earth [. . .] And here is to be noted, that . . . that land of Negroes by which Nilus is said to run . . . is not to be called any member of portion of Africa [. . .]: The said country is called by the Latines Aethiopia. From thence come certain religious friars seared or branded on the face with an hot iron, who are to be seen almost ouer Europe, and especially at Rome. These people have an Emperor, which they call Prete Gianni, the greater part of that land being inhabited by Christians. However, there is also a certain Mohamedan among them, which is said to possess a great dominion.

Source: Leo Africanus, *The History and Description of Africa* (translated into English by John Pory, edited by Robert Brown (London, 1896), pp. 124, 125, slightly modernized. — Further Reading: Pekka Masonen, *Leo Africanus: The Man with Many Names* (in *Al-Andalus-Magreb. Revista de estudios árabes e islámicos*, vol. VII-IX, fasc. 1, 2002, 115-143; <http://www.uta.fi/~hipema/leo.htm>); D. Rauchenberger, *Johannes Leo der Afrikaner. Seine Beschreibung des Raumes zwischen Nil und Niger nach dem Urtext* (Wiesbaden, 1999).

109. Ethiopia according to the Kebra Nagast

Christianity in Ethiopia can be traced back to the early fourth century with the missionary activities of Frumentius. Most Ethiopians, however, refer to Biblical texts such as Acts 8 (Philip and the Eunuch) or 1 Kings 10:1-13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1-11 upon which the *Kebra*

Nogast ("Glory of Kings") is based. The *Kebra Nagast* originated in the ninth or tenth century and was used as a mythical justification for the Salomonic dynasty which came to power in 1270.

a. *The Conversion of the Queen of Sheba*

And the Queen . . . said: "[. . .] We worship the sun according to what our fathers have taught us to do. [. . .] We call him 'Our King' and we call him 'Our Creator' and we worship him as our god, for no man hath told us that besides him there is another god. But we have heard that there is with you, Israel, another God whom we do not know, and men have told us that He hath sent down to you from heaven a Tabernacle and have given unto you a Tablet of the ordering of the angels, by the hand of Moses the Prophet. This also we have heard — that He Himself cometh down to you and talketh to you, and informeth you concerning his ordinances and commandments."

And the King [King Solomon] answered and said unto Her: "Verily, it is right that they (i.e., men) should worship God, Who created the universe, the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, the sun and the moon . . . , the trees and the stones . . . , the wild beasts and the crocodiles . . . , the fish and the whales. . . , the clouds and the thunders, and the good and the evil [. . .] For He is the Lord of the Universe, the Creator of angels and men. And it is he Who killeth and maketh to live, it is He Who inflicteth punishment and showeth compassion, Who raiseth up from the ground him that is in misery, Who exalteth the poor from the dust, Who makes to be sorrowful and Who maketh to rejoice, Who raiseth up and who bringeth down. [. . .]. And as concerning what thou sayest, that 'He hath given unto you the Tabernacle of the Law', verily there hath been given unto us the Tabernacle of the God of Israel, which was created before all creation by his glorious counsel. [. . .]"

And the Queen said: "From this moment I will not worship the sun, but will worship the Creator of the sun, the God of Israel. And that Tabernacle of the God of Israel shall be unto me my Lady, and unto my seed after me, and unto all my kingdoms that are under my dominion. [. . .]" Then she returned to [her] house. And the Queen used to go [to Solomon] and return continually, and hearken unto his wisdom, and keep it in her heart.

b. *Menyelek, the Son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*

And he (King Solomon) worked his will and they slept together. And after he slept there appeared unto King Solomon (in a dream) a brilliant sun, and it came down from heaven and shed exceedingly great splendour over Israel. And when it had tarried there for a time it suddenly withdrew itself, and it flew away

to the country of Ethiopia, and it shone there with exceedingly great brightness for ever, for it willed to dwell there. [. . .]

And the Queen departed and came into the country of Bala Zadisareya nine months and five days after she had separated from King Solomon. And the pains of childbirth laid hold upon her, and she brought forth a man child, and she gave it to the nurse with great pride and delight. And she tarried until the days of purification were ended, and then she came to her own country with great pomp and ceremony. [. . .] And the child grew and she called his name Bayna-Lehkem.

Source: E. W. Budge, *The Queen Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek* (London, etc., 1922), pp. 27-28. — Further Reading: M. F. Brooks, *A Modern Translation of the Kebra Nagast: The Glory of Kings* (Lawrenceville, 1996); G. Colin (ed.), *La Gloire des Rois (Kebra Nagast)* (Geneva, 2002); T. Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527* (Oxford, 1972); E. Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible* (London, 1968); E. Ullendorff, "The Queen of Sheba in Ethiopian Tradition," in: J. B. Pritchard/Gus W. Van Beek (eds.), *Solomon & Sheba* (London, 1974), pp. 104-114; E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians* (Wiesbaden, 2nd 1990).

110. Saga Za-àb: Ethiopian-Egyptian Contacts (1540)

From the beginning the congregations in Ethiopia were on good terms with Alexandria, and until the attainment of the autocephalous (independent) church in 1959 the Ethiopian Church recognized the Egyptian Coptic Metropolitan as its head. These relations are described by the Ethiopian Saga Za-àb who was sent to Portugal by the Ethiopian King Lebna Dengel in 1527. His descriptions were published in the work of the Portuguese humanist Damian/Damiao de Góis, "Fides, Religio Moresque Aethiopium" of 1540:

First, one must know that our Patriarch [Metropolitan] is chosen in a solemn rite by the vote of our monks in Jerusalem, who live there near the Holy Sepulcher of the Lord — that is in the following way: After the Patriarch [Metropolitan] has died, our king, the Beloved John, immediately sends someone unburdened with baggage to Jerusalem to those aforementioned monks living there, who, after receipt of the message and the alms which the king, our Lord, sends to the Holy Sepulcher as a gift, immediately choose by majority vote another Patriarch [Metropolitan]. It is also traditionally proper to elect only someone who is an Alexandrian and whose character is irreproachable. After he has been elected, they seal their votes and give them over by hand to the envoy that was sent for that purpose. He hurries quickly to Cairo. As soon as he has arrived, he hands over for reading the outcome of the election to the Alexandrian Patriarch, who has his permanent seat there. After it has become known, whom of the Alexandrians they have chosen, he sends back with the envoy to Ethiopia

the so greatly honored chosen man, who must be, according to ancient order, a monk of the Order of Holy Anthony the Eremite, with whom a courier promptly departs for Ethiopia, where he will be received by all with great joy and honor. At least one year and occasionally one more year elapses in this undertaking, and in the mean time the Beloved John, at the will of the order, meets according to the will of the orders regarding the income of the Patriarch [Metropolitan]. The most important task of the Patriarch [Metropolitan] is to consecrate [candidates] into the holy orders, which no one, excepting himself, can confer or deny. In other respects, he transfers to no one an office of bishop or a churchly benefice. That is the concern only of the Beloved John, who distributes all at his discretion.

Source: S. Uhlig/G. Bühring, *Damian de Góis' Schrift über Glaube und Sitten der Äthiopier* (Wiesbaden, 1994), pp. 88f, 269ff.

111. Francisco Alvarez: Traces of Nubian Christianity

The Portuguese traveler Francisco Alvarez visited Ethiopia between 1520 and 1540. In his account, first published in 1540, he also gives some information about Nubia. In this territory in today's Northern Sudan, various Christian empires had been founded since the sixth century. From the fifteenth century onward, they were conquered by Muslims.

When we were in the country of Prester Johannes (i.e., Ethiopia) six men from that country (Nubia) came as messengers to the Prester. They asked him to send them priests and monks in order to teach them. He decided not to send them to them. They said that these people had received everything from Rome (maybe meaning Constantinople which was the "Rome of the East"), and that it is a very long time since a Bishop dies whom they had received from Rome. And because of the wars of the Moors (Muslims), they could not get another one, and so they lost all their clergy and their Christianity and thus the Christian faith was forgotten.

Source: F. Alvares, *Ho Pereste Joam das indias. Verdadera informacam das terras do Preste Joam* (Lisbon, 1540); quoted in: R. Werner/W. Anderson/A. Wheeler, *The History of the Sudanese Church Across 2000 Years* (Nairobi, 2000), p. 109. — Further Reading: G. Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan* (Bologna, 1981), T. Hägg, *Nubian Culture Past and Present* (Stockholm, 1986); Sundkler/Steed, *History*, pp. 30-34; W. B. Anderson & O. U. Kalu, *Christianity in Sudan and Ethiopia*, in: Kalu, *African Christianity*, pp. 75-116.

B. EUROPEAN EXPANSION AND NEW DISCOVERIES

112. The Rise of Portugal: Schedels World Chronicle (1493)

The World Chronicle of the Nuremberg humanist Hartmann Schedel (1440-1514) was published in 1493. It documented not only the rise of Portugal under Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460), but also the relationships of the then largest German imperial city to the first European overseas expeditions. The text mentions Martin Behaim, who made the first globe in 1493 (still omitting the Americas).

In the following years Henry noticed that the territory of the kingdom of Portugal was too small. Thus a burning desire arose in him to expand the kingdom. Accordingly he traveled the Spanish sea with a great force and discovered there — advised and instructed by the same ones who themselves knew their way in the world and on the sea — countless uninhabited islands. Among other things, via ship he reached an uninhabited inland which nonetheless was rich with water and was fertile and wooded, so that it was suitable for colonization and human habitation. So he sent countless families there for settlement. Besides other fruits so much sugar was found there that all of Europe could be supplied thereby. This island is called Madeira, and the sugar from there is called Madeira-sugar. Thereafter, Henry discovered many other islands. . . . Then in 1483 AD, King John of Portugal — a lord with far-reaching plans — supplied more galleons with all the necessities of life and sent them out to travel to the south behind the Columns of Hercules¹ and to explore Ethiopia. And for these galleons he appointed two commanders, namely Jacob Canus, a Portuguese, and Martin Behaim, a German from Nuremberg [. . .].

Source: H. Schedel, *Liber chronicarum* (Nuremberg, 1493), p. CCLXXXV; translated and published into German by W. Spiewok, "Der Beitrag der deutschen Humanisten für die Entdeckungsfahrten portugiesische Seefahrer im späten Mittelalter," in D. Buschiner/W. Spiewok (eds.), *Das große Abenteuer der Entdeckung der Welt im Mittelalter* (Greifswald, 1995), pp. 95-104. — Further Reading: The German National Museum (ed.), *Focus Behaim Globus* (Nuremberg, 1992); C. R. Boxer, *Four Centuries of Portuguese Expansion* (Berkeley, 1961); C. R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825* (London, 1969); P. E. Russell, *Prince Henry "the Navigator": A Life* (New Haven, 2000).

1. The Columns of Hercules: classical term for different points on the edge of the world, especially for the rocks on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar.

113. The Papal Privileges of Portugal

After Portugal had launched its European expansion overseas, it acquired papal rights for colonial territories. Of decisive significance was the bull of January 8, 1455, *Romanus Pontifex*, with which Pope Nicholas V (1447-1455) sanctioned the earlier advances of the Portuguese on the African coast. He transferred to the Portuguese King Afonso V and Prince Henry the lands, harbors, islands and seas of Africa, together with patronage over the churches, a trade monopoly and the right to sell "infidels" into slavery. But even his predecessors, Martin V (1417-1431) and Eugene IV (1431-1447) had supported the undertaking of the colonial expansion: Sixtus IV (1471-1484) had discharged a corresponding papal bull (cf. document 8a). The Portuguese traveler and historian Joao de Barros (1496-1579) summarized this development.

With the discovery of these lands, the prince's main objective was to bend the barbarian nations under the yoke of Christ, as well as to advance the honor and glory of these kingdoms along with enriching the imperial inheritance. And when he learned of the inhabitants of those lands from the prisoners which Antao Concalves and Nuno Tristao had taken, he wanted Pope Martin V, who then presided over the Church, to announce this news as though they were first fruits due him, because this work had been completed to the honor of God and for the furthering of Christian belief. And he also wanted to ask the Pope that since he had pursued this enterprise for so many years and thereby . . . had expended a great part of his wealth, that it might please him [the Pope] to make a perpetual gift to the crown of all the lands that would be discovered on this ocean beyond Cape Bojador up to and including India. And that for those who in the course of these conquests had found death, he should grant a plenary indulgence in perpetuity for their souls, since God had set him on the seat of St. Peter. [. . .] He entrusted this business that was of such great importance to a knight of the Order of Christ, named Fernao de Lopez do Azevedo who belonged to the council of the king. [. . .] And as a result of this mission which he carried out, the prince was granted not only his request, but also many other blessings and privileges, which are the property of the Order. [. . .] Later, at the requests of King Dom Alfonso and his son King Dom Joao, Pope Eugene IV and Pope Nicholas V as well as Pope Sixtus granted to them and their heirs through bulls the perpetual gift of all they discovered on the ocean from Cape Bojador (in present-day Mauritania) up to and including the east coast of India, together with all kingdoms, dominions, lands, conquests, harbors, islands, trading companies, exchanges and fisheries, amid countless harsh excommunications, prohibitions and interdicts should other kings, princes, rulers or communities penetrate or be able to penetrate these lands and neighboring seas, as contained in detail in their bulls.

Sources: João de Barros, *Die Fahrten entlang der Westküste Afrikas und die Entdeckung der Inseln Porto Santo und Madeira und des Cabo Verde*, in G. Pögl/R. Kroboth (eds.), *Heinrich der Seefahrer oder die Suche nach Indien* (Wien, 1989), pp. 282ff. Further Reading: V. Y. Mudimbe, "Romanus Pontifex and the Expansion of Europe," in: V. L. Hyatt/R. M. Nettleford (eds.), *Race, Discourse and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View* (Washington, 1995).

114. Mission and Violence

The majority of the capital necessary to push into West Africa came out of the treasury of the Order of the Knights of Christ. Henry the Navigator was the grandmaster of this order. At least indirectly, the idea to missionize was thus present during the ensuing expansion. A report by the court chronicler Gomes Eana de Zurana (ca. 1420-1472) published in 1481 shows that this religious and idealistic objective could go hand-in-hand with the enslavement of Africans. At this time it was taken for granted that Senegal was an outflow of the Nile River.

Having passed beyond the land of Sahara, as we have said, the Portuguese saw the two palms which Dini Dias had already reported, and they understood that here began the Land of the Negroes which filled them with great joy. [. . .] When the men in the caravels saw the first palms . . . they knew they were near the River Nile, where it casts itself into the sea of the Ponent, and which is called the River of Canaga. [. . .] They cast anchor, and sent a boat ashore with Estavam Affonso, a squire of the Infante's, and seven men. They found a hut, in which they captured a young man who was wholly naked, and who carried a short lance. [. . .] This young negro was afterwards educated according to the orders of the Infante, and he was taught all such things as a Christian should know — and many a Christian does not know them as well as this young Negro knew them. He was taught the Pater Noster and the Ave Maria, and the articles of the faith and the precepts of the law and the works of mercy, and many other things beside, for the purpose of the Infante was to give him such instruction as would enable him to become a priest, so that he might preach the faith of Jesus Christ in his own country.

Source: G. E. de Zurara, *Crónica dos Feitos da Guiné* (Lisbon, 1481) (= Lisbon 1949), English translation in "Chronicles of Azurara," in: Virginia de Castro e Almeida, *Conquests and Discoveries of Henry the Navigator* (London, 1936), pp. 195-197.

115. Explorations: Vasco da Gama in Mozambique

In 1487 the Portuguese rounded the Cape of Good Hope for the first time. On his way to India, Vasco da Gama also passed Mozambique. The account of an anonymous author

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not only indicates the European interest in Prester John, but also informs us about the trade and contact network along the East African coast.

The people of this country are of a ruddy complexion and well made. They are Mohammedans, and their language is the same as that of the Moors. Their dresses are of fine linen or cotton stuffs, with variously coloured stripes, and of rich and elaborate workmanship. They all wear toucas with borders of silk embroidered in gold. They are merchants, and have transactions with white Moors [i.e., Indians], four of whose vessels were at the time in port, laden with gold, silver, gloves, pepper, ginger and silver rings, as also with quantities of pearls, jewels and rubies, all of which articles are used by the people of this country. [...] These Moors, moreover, told us that along the route which we were about to follow we should meet with numerous shoals; that there were many cities along the coast, and also an island one half the population which consisted of Moors and the other half of Christians who were at war with each other. The island was said to be very wealthy.

We were told, moreover, that Prester John resided not far from the place, that he held many cities along the coast, and that the inhabitants of those cities were great merchants and owned big ships. The residence of Prester John was said to be far in the interior, and could be reached only on the back of camels. These Moors had also brought hither two Christian captives from India. This information, and many other things which we heard, rendered us so happy that we cried with joy, and prayed God to grant us health, so that we might behold what we so much desired.

Source: Vasco da Gama's Logbook, from the translation in: E. G. Ravenstein (ed.), A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama (London, 1898); extracts in: B. Davidson, The African Past (Boston, 1964), pp. 122-128, here: 124, 125. Further Reading: G. Bouchon, Vasco Da Gama (Lille, 1997).

116. Destruction of Eastern African City States (1505)

Da Gama also made an intermediate stop at Mombasa and Malindi. Both were independent city states. Malindi seems to have been the main rival of Mombasa at this time and took the side of the Portuguese invaders. Mombasa and Kilwa, however, resisted the invasion. These cities were attacked, plundered and burnt down by the Portuguese in 1505. The report of Francisco d'Aleida is probably based on an account of the German Hans Mayr, who was on board the *San Rafael* commanded by Captain Fernan Suarez.

On Tuesday, 22 July, they entered the harbour of Kilwa at noon, with a total of eight ships. [...] At dawn on Thursday, 24 July, the vigil of the feast of St. James

the Apostle, all went in their boats to the shore. The first to land was the Grand-Captain [Vasco da Gama], and he was followed by the others. They went straight to the royal palace, and on the way only those Moors who did not fight were granted their lives. At the palace there was a Moor leaning out of the window with a Portuguese flag in his hand, shouting: 'Portugal! Portugal!' This flag had been left behind by the admiral [Vasco da Gama] when he had arranged for Kilwa to pay a tribute of 1,500 ounces of gold a year. The Moor was asked to open the door, and, when he did not do so, the door was broken down with axes. They found neither the Moor nor anyone else in the Palace, which was deserted. [...]

As soon as the town had been taken without opposition, the Vicar-General and some of the Franciscan fathers came ashore carrying two crosses in procession and singing the Te Deum. They went to the palace, and there the cross was put down and the Grand-Captain prayed. Then everyone started to plunder the town of all its merchandise and provisions. [...] On 9 August the ships left Kilwa for Mombasa, sixty leagues up the coast. The ship Sam Rafael reached there on 14 August, but the Grand-Captain arrived with the other ten ships a day earlier. [...] The Grand-Captain met with the other captains and decided to burn the town that evening and to enter it the following morning. [...]

Source: Portuguese text in: E. Axelson, *South-East Africa, 1488-1530* (London, 1940), pp. 231-239; English translation in S. P. Freeman-Grenville, *The East African Coast* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 105-111. — Further Reading: M. N. Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India, and Portugal in the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore, 1998).

C. ENCOUNTERS

117. A Portuguese Ambassador in Benin (1516)

The Kingdom of Benin was one of the largest non-Muslim empires in black Africa. At its maximum it extended from Onitsha in the east into the present-day nation of Benin. Its capital was located at Benin City, in what is now southwestern Nigeria. In 1514, Oba (chief) Ozolua sent a mission to Lisbon to announce his interest in Christian instruction and to request weapons. Since the Portuguese had as little interest in this as the court of Benin had in Portugal's wish for the sale of slaves, there was no real basis for a trade agreement. The missionaries who arrived in 1515 were unsuccessful in the long run. However, the report of the Portuguese ambassador in Benin, Duarte Pires, to King Manuel of Portugal on December 20, 1516 shows that the prospects looked more positive under Ozolua's son, Esigie (who probably ruled from 1516-1547).

Most high and mighty king and prince, our lord. [...] Sir, ... the king of Benjm [Benin] is pleased with what I said in favour of your highness, and he desires to

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