



The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402-1555 (Transculturalisms, 1400-1700)

Matteo Salvatore

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From the 14th century onward, political and religious motives led Ethiopian travelers to Mediterranean Europe. For two centuries, their ancient Christian heritage and the myth of a fabled eastern king named Prester John allowed the Ethiopians to engage the continent's secular and religious elites as peers. Meanwhile, back home the Ethiopian nobility came to welcome European visitors and at times even co-opted them by arranging mixed marriages and bestowing land rights. The protagonists of this encounter sought and discovered each other in royal palaces, monasteries, and markets throughout the Mediterranean basin, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean littoral, from Lisbon to Jerusalem and from Venice to Goa. Matteo Salvatore's narrative takes the reader on a voyage of reciprocal discovery that climaxed with the Portuguese intervention on the side of the Christian monarchy in the Ethiopian-Adali War. Thereafter, the arrival of the Jesuits at the Horn of Africa turned the mutually beneficial Ethiopian-European encounter into a bitter confrontation over the souls of Ethiopian Christians.

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