

The Jesuits Politico-Religious Strategy to Catholicize Ethiopia from Top to Bottom Approach: Opportunities and Challenges, 1557 to 1632

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Abstract

The Catholic Missionaries in Ethiopia was encouraged since the beginning of the Portuguese assistance against the Muslims in the war of Ahmed Grañ. The successive Ethiopian monarchal authority was engaged to defend a full-scale war between the Muslim Sultanates of Adal, led by Ibin Ibrāhīm al-Ġāzī usually known by many writers as Ahmed Grañ. The Portuguese expansion with the succeeding Jesuit mission in Ethiopia was a turning point in the history of Ethiopia. Moreover, the Portuguese and Spanish Jesuit missionaries were more attracted by the strategic location of the country. This, in fact, enabled them to monitor the expansion of Islamic power in the Red Sea and the long experienced Christian faith in the country that had further consolidated the Ethiopian and Portuguese alliance. Initially, a Jesuit undertaking led by Father Andrés D. Oviedo first entered the country in 1557 to have started the top-down conversion process. This research aims to assess the opportunities and challenges of the Jesuits missionary strategy for the Catholicization of Ethiopia from top to down Approach. To achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher used qualitative research approach to investigate the issue and used historical research design for this study as well. Historical research requires access to the original events or records that took place in the past as distinct procedure for the investigation. Thus, the primary sources that were produced at the time under study as well as secondary sources were used. Primary data sources such as Royal chronicles, Tarike Nagast, Diaries of eye witness, Jesuit texts and European travel accounts by travelers who visited the northern part of the country by the time have been used. Published and unpublished secondary sources such as books, articles, journals and internet

sources were utilized. More significantly, the researcher verified the authenticity and credibility of the acquired historical source through accuracy, occurrence, relevance and authority. The findings of the research revealed that the Jesuits missionary ambition to implant Catholicism remained in vain with bloody wars that claim thousands of human lives. Ultimately, the Jesuit missionaries expelled from the country. However, they left behind a theological controversy that gave it to local theme to Catholicism in Ethiopia that finally resulted in the doctrinal debate particularly centered on the teaching of the two natures of Christ. The intense doctrinal debate which was held during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Ethiopia hastens to the absence of strong centralized monarchial authority that eventually led to the era of the princes.

Keywords: Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Gondarine Period, Jesuits, Catholic Missionaries

1. Introduction

The image of remote Ethiopia persisted long after the world had been mapped and the sources of the Nile discovered. Many visitors described themselves as being transported into a biblical era. Others called Ethiopia a gate into the medieval world (Levine, 1974, P.4). Before the medieval period Ethiopia went through foreign affairs relations. However, it was evident that, in many instances the Ethiopian monarchal authorities used to make official letter correspondences especially with Europe. However, the fifteenth century can understandably be described as the first age of Ethiopian and European diplomacy (Kelly S., 2016). It seems that, the Ethiopians first succeeded in establishing official contact with European powers. The earliest records of such contact come from the Venetian Senate in 1402, in response to the arrival of representatives of Emperor Dawit II (Kelly S., 2016). His successor Ishaq (r.1414-1430) sent a mission to Alfonso of Aragon in 1428, with instructions to journey on for a meeting with the pope, while a third delegation, also destined for the Papal and Alfonso, arrived in Naples on behalf of Zara Yaqob in 1450. While the Portuguese were working in Ethiopia, exploring the country and people, the study of Ethiopia had begun in Europe (Ullendorff, 1965, P.6).

We have already heard of Ethiopian delegates to the council of Florence in 1441 and others followed these first envoys and the centre was Rome. Consequently, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw a steady presence of Ethiopian pilgrims to the Holy See (Ullendorff, 1965, P.7). They often settled in Rome and provided Europe with information about their country. At first most of these European pilgrims came from Jerusalem, where an Ethiopian community had long been settled, but later we encounter others who had undertaken the arduous journey from their mountain fastness in Africa. Plausibly, the Ethiopian monarchs were very interested for technology transfer from Europe (Ibid, 1965, P.7). An interest in military alliance against Muslim powers, which Europeans certainly sought and the Mamluk feared, may have been one drive to these Ethiopian initiatives (Kelly S., 2016). Religious dialogue with the bishop of Rome, who was sought out by at least two of these embassies, was probably another and again mirrored European hopes. Relations with the Portuguese had already started towards the end of the fifteenth century, and reciprocal envoys had been exchanged between Lisbon and the Ethiopian court. The Ethiopians were impressed by

reports of the technical advances in Europe and wanted to share in this material civilization. From the earliest stages of their contacts with Europe, it was quite clear that, the Ethiopians expressed their desire to receive European technicians and artisans, and the monarchical authority were especially interested in firearms. For instance, Emperor Ləbnä Dəngəl requested statue makers, handicrafts, book publishers, architectures, physicians, gold and silver manufacturers and gun makers (Alvarez, The Prester John, vol.2, p502-506). The Jesuit missionary activity in Ethiopia had its roots, according to Merid description, in the Portuguese search for Prester John, a Christian ally against Egypt and the Muslim world in the attempt to establish trade links with India (Merid,1984). Moreover, Abir notified that, in 1535 in hour of his greatest distress, Ləbnä Dəngəl, despatched Joao Bermudez, the surgeon of da lima's embassy to the Portuguese king to request aid, promising to accept Catholicism if such aid would be forthcoming (Abir,1980, P.97). It was evident that the Portuguese armed support with the Ethiopian monarchical authority paved the way for the Portuguese deliberate interests in their regional competition with the Ottoman Turks for control of the trade routes in the Red Sea and the north-western quarter of the Indian Ocean (Girma and Merid ,1964).

The northern Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, under Ləbnä Dəngəl, eagerly embraced a European Christian military alliance to protect itself from the Muslim sultanates as well as to benefit from the technological advances of Europe (Merid,1984). However, by taking this advantage, the Portuguese in collaboration with the Pope in Rome and the Jesuits had an additional intention of establishing an extensive mission in Ethiopia to encourage the population to change from their Orthodox faith to Catholicism (Cohen, 2009). Initially, a Jesuit undertaking led by Father Andrés D. Oviedo first entered the country in 1557 to have started the conversion process (Merid and Girma, 1964; Caraman, 1980; Cohen, 2009). However, the first mission failed to succeed in the conversion of either the monarch or his subjects. Consequently, the second mission came in 1602 after four decades (Merid, 1984). The initial challenge the Ethiopian Orthodox Church faced, during this time, was the Jesuit missionaries attempt to re-christainize the already Christain people of Ethiopia. Because, by the time the missionaries arrived in Ethiopia, Christianity was more than ten century old and very well entrenched to the Christain society of the time. Thus, it appears to be a strange attempt to re-evangelize the already evangelized people of Ethiopia and the cradle of the Ethiopian Christianity. In this regard, according Merid and Girma, 1964; Caraman,1985; Cohen,2009 and Andreu,2015 the Jesuits were unsuccessful in their attempt to catholicize the monarchical authority and some of the ranks of the nobility through their strategy from top to down political approach until the coming of Pedro Páez in 1603.

2. Methods

The study employs a qualitative study based on primary and secondary sources. In studying this period of Jesuit intervention, the researcher employed variety of sources, such as a Royal Chronicles, Hagiographies, *Tarike Nagast*, written at the time of the event, Artifacts such as paintings and pictures were employed as a primary source of the study. Likewise, evidences obtained from travelers account were used as secondary sources of information. This study thus, critically examined available literature and tries to re-interpret existing evidence to investigate the effect of the Jesuit interlude in the Gondarine period with particular reference

to the Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Christian society of the time.

3. Results and Discussion

This period was a chaotic and momentous era in Ethiopian history. The successive Ethiopian monarchial authority was engaged to defend a full-scale war between the Muslim Sultanate of Adal, led by Ibin Ibrāhīm al-Ġāzī usually known by many writers as Ahmed Grañ, and the Christian Kingdom. This invasion brought the state to the verge of devastation, and it saw the apparently dangerous situation retrieved at the critical hour by the support of Portuguese soldiers (Buxton, 1957). As a matter of fact, the Catholic Missionaries in Ethiopia was encouraged since the beginning of the Portuguese assistance against the Muslims in the war of Ahmed Grañ (Caraman, 1985). It has been well recorded that the selfless and heroic sacrifice of Christopher da Gama, the son of the famous navigator Vasco da Gama, was a wonderful chapter in the history of the Ethiopian and Portuguese military and political relations (Merid and Girma, 1964). Moreover, the Portuguese and Spanish Jesuit missionaries were more attracted by the strategic location of the country (Buxton, 1957). This, in fact, enabled them to monitor the expansion of Islamic power in the Red Sea and the long experienced Christian faith in the country that had further consolidated the Ethiopian and Portuguese alliance.

Initially, the Jesuit missionaries aspired to overtake the Ethiopian ecclesiastical hierarchy to suspend the traditional connection to the Alexandrian Coptic Church and replace it with ties to the Roman Catholic Church. However, the Jesuits were unsuccessful to replace the leadership of the powerful Churches and monasteries in favor of Catholicism which are influential in internal ecclesiastical politics. Following the arrival of Catholic Patriarch Afonso Mendes in 1624 to Ethiopia, local Catholic clergy began to be appointed in order to disseminate the new religion more effectively (Caraman, 1985). It was evident that a contingent of missionaries had arrived in Ethiopia successively in the hope of converting the Orthodox Ethiopians to Roman Catholicism. As stated underneath, the Jesuits believed that gaining control over key position of power was the right *modus operandi* for success particularly by collaborating monarchial authority and local governors (Cohen, 2009). It appears that the Portuguese came with the aim of converting Ethiopia to Catholicism and with the subsequent spread of the culture of Latinization by controlling Ethiopia under the Portuguese spheres of influence. Regardless of their tireless attempts, the Jesuit missionaries were eventually compelled to leave the country following the coming to power of Emperor Fasilādās. Although the Jesuit missionaries were expelled from the country and prohibited not to undertake any more preaching; they however, left behind a theological controversy that gave it to local theme to Catholicism in Ethiopia that finally resulted in the doctrinal debate particularly centered on the teaching of the two natures of Christ.

4. The Jesuit Missionary Attempt to Catholicize Ethiopia from Above: The Conversion of Some of the Monarchal Authority

The Jesuits have tried to instill and preferred to disseminate Catholicism from top to bottom. To achieve that purpose, the Jesuits worked intensively amongst the Ethiopian nobility, attempting to form alliances with emperors and governors (Kiptoo, 2016, P.114). They

provided them with religious services and served as mediators and messengers in negotiations during conflicts and rebellion. In the early seventeenth century, Pedro Páez and his successors Afonso Mendes, concentrated on winning acceptance of their religion at the royal court, hoping thereafter to win over the Orthodox establishment to Catholicism (Berry,1976). This effort proved to be productive when Emperor Susənyos publicly announced his conversion to Catholicism in 1622 (1991, P.10). It appears that the Jesuit missionaries aspired to overtake the Ethiopian ecclesiastical hierarchy as well. It was evident that the Jesuits tried to dissolve the traditional connection to the Alexandrian Coptic Church and replace it with ties to the Roman Catholic Church. In this case, their approach included seeking to always replace the leadership of the powerful monasteries, influential in internal ecclesiastical politics, with leaders who acted in favor of Catholicism (Kiptoo, 2016). A significant number of historical evidences have shown that initially the Jesuits aimed to convert the Ethiopian monarchial authority. The Jesuit missionary Pedro Páez aimed at converting three monarchs such as Yaqob (r.1597-1603), Za Dengil (r.1603-1604), and Susənyos (r.1608-1632) and finally succeeded with the conversion of Emperor Susənyos (Merid and Girma,1964). It appears that Páez did this by exploiting the insecurity of the emperors and by promising them military assistance against the growing power of the nobility and the Church, which was siding with the emergent nobles by the time (Merid,1984). One of the more outstanding is the leading advisor to the emperor, Śə'ələ Krəstos; was along with Emperor Susənyos, to accept Catholicism in Ethiopia (Cohen,2009). Ras Śə'ələ Krəstos appears throughout the Jesuit correspondence and maintained a privileged place in Jesuit literature. According to the Jesuit missionaries Śə'ələ Krəstos was extremely fond of Catholic literature and doctrinal debates, however, the Jesuits did realize that the nobles' reasons for converting were not all spiritual but military gain rather (Laura, 2015).

Until 1629, the Jesuit correspondence is marked by a triumphal tone denoting broad satisfaction with the progress and achievements despite the failure to note the significant obstacles that loomed on the journey. However, the tide began to turn in the third decade of the seventeenth century as Susənyos became disheartened about killing so many of his own people (Cohen,2009). Similarly, in his correspondence, Almeida referred to a battle on 7 June 1632 in which opposition noblemen led a force comprised of thousands of Lasta peasants. When Susənyos died in September 1632, and his son Fasilādās ascended the throne, the collaboration of the Society of Jesus with the sovereign a staple of the Jesuits' missionary strategy fell apart and the order was soon banished from the country. Mendes had occupied the position of representative of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia for close to nine years. On 29 March 1633, accompanied by a retinue of Jesuit fathers and local Catholics, Mendes left his home under orders of Emperor Fasilādās, and they began their journey into exile. Accordingly, the missionaries first went to Fremona in northern Ethiopia and then on the long journey across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean to Goa. It marked the end of the dream of Ignatius of Loyola of reconciling the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia with the Catholic Church under the authority of the Roman pope. The Jesuit missionaries were also involved in various religious services and also served as mediators and messengers in negotiations with the rebellions against the monarchal authority (Cohen, 2009). It appears that the Jesuit role as mediators of religious peacemaking was significant. As mediators the Jesuits intercede

conflicts acting as judge among warring parties. Perhaps this might have been often drew them into delicate political and military situations to their conversion process strategies (Caraman, 1985). It seems that the Jesuit missionaries expected to overtake the Ethiopian ecclesiastical hierarchy Furthermore, as of 1624, upon the arrival of Catholic patriarch Afonso Mendes to Ethiopia, local Catholic clergy began to be appointed in order to propagate the new religion more effectively (Craman,1985). The Jesuits believed that gaining control over key positions of power, from above by wining acceptance of the monarchical authority, was the right formula for success (Merid,1984). Particularly this effort was escorted by the wise progress of the missionary Páez. However, the peaceful missionary converting strategy rapidly changed when the missionary Pedro Páez replaced by the more militant missionary pope, Afonso Mendes, who arrived at Dambia the following year (Merid and Girma, 1964).

Moreover, behind the monarchs, the missionaries were not realized the power of the monks. The primary obstacle to the Jesuit missionary movement and the root of its ultimate failure was the Jesuit methods that sought to create a unified Catholic position in Ethiopia resulting from their attempt to homogenize Christianity and centralize a Church that was dominated by significant similar ecclesiastical position (Kiptoo, 2016). Moreover, the process of religious dissemination and conversion in Ethiopia in the sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries within the context of the intricate relationship between Catholic and Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity make the missionary mission very complicated. It seems that the Jesuits embrace an important place in the wide area of Church history and they served as the most powerful instrument of Catholic expansion in different parts of the world (Caraman, 1985).

The missionary strategy left its own positive impact regarding the Ethiopian historiography (Cohen, 2009). It seemed that the missionary brings together both Jesuit and Ethiopian sources and sheds light on which both the Ethiopians and the Jesuits questioned to what extent the other was a brother or a stranger since the Jesuits tried to re-evangelize the Orthodox Christian adherents or a mission addressed at Christians (Caraman,1985). It seems that, initially, the Jesuit didn't realize the role monastic clergy possess for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. However, when they began to realize that the monastic clergy are nerve centers of the Church then they tried to reform monastic life (Cohen, 2009). They have started nominate Catholic monks as heads of the most important monasteries of the country in order to consolidate their power base and neutralize one of the most anti-Catholic sectors of Ethiopian society. Whenever doctrinal debate occurred, it was not free from intimidation, threats and violence (Caraman, 1985). However, the emperor appears that, he was not impartial observer, and he possessed the power to intimidate the Ethiopian Orthodox side (Merid and Girma, 1964). When the emperor converted, disputations took place in circumstances increasingly unfavorable to the Ethiopian monks. The monks were often brought before the emperor as prisoners, having been arrested for inciting the population against the emperor's faith and authority (Cohen, 2009). As a matter of fact, the Jesuits undertook their mission by seeking to convert the Orthodox faith adherents to Roman Catholicism through their calculated approach mission of evangelizing from top to bottom.

Initially, they were successful to the conversion of the royal monarchs like Emperor Za Dengil and Emperor Susənyos. The abbots of important monasteries were also converted and

it appears that the Jesuit themselves becoming important land holders in their dwellings. However, the monks outstandingly resisted the Jesuit missionaries at this time. Furthermore, “a more serious rebellion broke out in Gojjam and the people of *Damot* rose in arms to resist Ras Śə‘ələ Krəstos’s attempts to make them work on Saturdays (Caraman, 1985). Despite all the efforts, the Roman Catholic Church ambition to convert the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity through the Jesuit missionary mission remained in ineffective that will be discussed in the last sub-topic. Ultimately the Jesuit missionaries expelled from the country, or prohibited not to undertake any more preaching (Berry, 1976, P.19).

5. The Relationships of the Monarchy and the Catholic Missionaries vs. the Ethiopian Monastic Clergy

The arrival of Pedro Páez in Ethiopia in 1603 brought with it a substantial change to the position the Jesuit missionaries (Cohen, 2009). It seemed that Páez quickly noticed the central role of the emperor within the Ethiopian ecclesiastical structure and his strong influence upon it. Cohen further illustrated the above historical circumstances as quoted directly from works of Páez himself, “the emperor controlled not only the temporal wellbeing of the Jesuit Catholic missionaries but the spiritual welfare of the whole empire”. Consequently, from the time of Páez arrival in Ethiopia, the Jesuit tried to place themselves in key positions within the political arena, both in central government and in the regional governments in order to re-orientate the Empire of Ethiopia to ward Catholicism (Cohen, 2009, P.19). It seems that many Jesuits also worked as royal counselors to the monarch and to the local governors on their military expeditions. The Jesuits adapted themselves very easily to the role fulfilled by Ethiopian monastic holy men in the relationship between the emperor and local rulers throughout the empire (Matteo, 2010). The monastic holy men occupied an active role, accompanying military and political leaders in their campaigns throughout the period. Like the monastic leaders of this period the Jesuits too received precious rewards for their services (Niecko M., 2011). The closeness and good relationship felt by Emperor *Za Dengil* was evident and expressed by Páez himself.

The same was true of *Susənyos*, who became very cordial with the Jesuit father like one of his brothers, the governor of Gojjam, Ras Śə‘ələ Krəstos who expressed his ambition to learn the Portuguese language from the missionaries. The Jesuit missionary, De Angeles, spent long periods with Ras Śə‘ələ Krəstos when he was governor of Gojjam, answering questions and debating (Girma and Merid, 1964). Ras Se’ela’ Krestos received communion from the hands of the father, in exchange for which the Jesuit father received good and rich lands where he established the order’s regional residence and fed many needy widows and sons of Portuguese who were living in dispersion (Cohen, 2009). The Jesuit missionaries were also given land and bestowed as *Bala-Gult* as well. Besides, Emperor *Za Dengil* offered Father Pedro Páez abundant land where he could establish his Church (Markakis, 1976).

The Jesuit tried to place themselves in key positions within the political arena, and at the same time, the local leaders and governors tried to strengthen their relationship with the Jesuits. One of the traditional ways for the governors to reinforce their relationships with monastic leaders was to give them land (Cohen, 2009). The owner of land or *Bala-Gult* had

no right over the land itself, but only over the peasants living and working on the land. He also served as the emperor's local representative and because of the insecure nature of his tenure, was greatly dependent upon him. Such a situation allowed the emperor effective control over the activities of the provincial officers and Churches. Given the character of the *Gult system*, Kaplan states that, "local rulers and soldiers were in direct competition with the monastic holy men for royal favors and donations. By the first decade of the seventeenth century, the Jesuit fathers and their Churches also received many of land grant privileges. The missionaries as mediators of conflict were characterized by another aspect of the Jesuit relations with the political leaders, which can be compared to those of Ethiopian holy men, is their role as mediators (Markakis, 1965). Jesuit historian John O' Malley (1927) pointed out how religious peacemaking was one of the most important works of mercy among the first generation of Jesuits. St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier and St. Peter Faber, were the three of the founding members of the Society of Jesus (Joseph O'Conner, 1900). As a matter of fact, the Jesuit missionaries accomplished reconciliations among warring factions especially inaccessible remote villages.

6. The Expulsion of the Jesuit Missionaries and the Restoration of the Ethiopian Orthodox Religion

The reign of Susənyos and his subsequent approval of Catholicism were characterized by a period for a successful peasant uprising that resulted in the restoration of the Orthodox religion. The political instability had been worse for the lives of the peasants. Their lands were plundered by rebellious lords and pretenders, by the Oromo expansions and by the imperial forces (Merid and Girma, 1964). It seems that the swift reformation movement through which the emperor and the missionaries tried to deracinate the Orthodox Church contributed to the failure of Catholicism. In *Dambia, Wogera, and Gojjam* parts of the lands belonging to the Churches and monasteries were given to the missionaries (Merid and girma,1964) However, the Jesuits also feared that the acquisition of farms on which had lived priests, monks, and other Church attendants would cause bitterness on the part of the people (Cohen,2009).

When a larger part of the Church land was confiscated by the nobility, the clergy fled to the nearby provinces of Begemdir, Amhara, Angot, and Tigre and hence, these provinces had been Centers of rebellion. Some of the nobility as well as the governors were sympathizers of the Orthodox cause. As a result, peasants, clergy, and nobility now joined forces against the emperor and from 1624 onwards the opposition against the central authority became strong and frequent (Merid and Girma, 1964). The peasants and the priests found refuge in the mountains of *Lasta, Bugena, and Semien* (Merid and Girma,1964). Susənyos was disappointed by his failure to re-establish central authority and to bring peace and order to the empire. Instead of the unity that he had hoped for, Catholicism had made the country more divided than it was in 1607 (Laura, 2013). The monarchal authority forced to engulf in a continuous civil war. It appears that the emperor begun to listen to the advice of his relatives and advisors. At the end of the day, more than eight thousand people were dead in the course of the battle (Laura, 2013). As his own son, Fasilādās, pointed out these were Christians and the Emperor's own subjects and countrymen, and some of them his relatives. Mendes, in a

letter to the Pope, places the blame for the aftermath of the battle squarely on the disturbers of the peace who took the emperor aside and showed him the fields strewn with corpses. The pressure continued in the forms of how the war was senseless until Susənyos abdicate political power to his son Fusillades (Caraman, 1985). Susənyos lived on another three months, dying on 7 September 1632 at the age of sixty-one in the twenty-fifth year of his reign (Caraman, 1985). In his last days, he declared that he had granted his people freedom to choose their religion in order to prevent further bloodshed and yet more risings provoked by monks (Caraman, 1985). It seems that his conversion to Catholicism had led him to put his trust in Mendes rather than in his own political good sense (Budge, 1965). The emperor abdicated when he found that he had ceased to be the king desired by his people, show that he was a man who possessed high ideals (Budge, 1965).

In 1627 an official of Ras Šə'ələ Krəstos named Lessane Krəstos was found guilty of trying to bring Ras Šə'ələ Krəstos and the emperor into open conflict. Despite the defendants' appeal to the court at *Dancaz*, Ras Šə'ələ Krəstos carried out the sentence. Susənyos relieved his brother of his responsibilities as first minister and governor of Gojjam (Caraman, 1985). Ras Šə'ələ Krəstos then withdrew to Enarya in southern Ethiopia. On October 26, 1621 the army of Ras Šə'ələ Krəstos was active in *Damot*, the province of his father, quelling a rebellion (Andreu, 2015). The uprising might have been motivated by economic and political factors. Fearing the consequences of a division in the camp of the monarch, the Jesuits and Qəb'a Krəstos arranged a reconciliation between Fasilädäs and Šə'ələ Krəstos and then between the emperor and his brother (Andreu, 2015).

In 1626 the Jesuits had planned to start on *Tigre's* second mission at *Debaroa* and Susənyos was warned by his advisers that if the king of Portugal sent him any soldiers, these could easily fortify themselves in *Debaroa* (Cohen, 2009). The emperor was told how invincible the fortification of *Fremona* had proved to bandits and rebels (Cohen, 2009). It seems that in the year 1629 Susənyos and Fasilädäs were convinced of the need to make some concessions to the clergy. However, Mendes was unable to see the reason for making any concession to the clergy and he explained that the forces of the emperor had dispersed all opposition and would continue to do so until all traces of revolt had disappeared (Cohen, 2009). The emperor in the end withdrew his demand for concessions but was deeply disappointed by the lack of understanding on the part of the Jesuits. Meanwhile the emperor's peace of mind was disturbed by the rebellion of his son-in-law and governor of *Tigre*, *Täklä Giyorgis*. Many of the Tigre nobility including *Za Wolde Maryam*, grandson of *Šärş'ä Dəngəl*, were involved in it (Cohen, 2009). Susənyos sent his nephew, *Qəb'a Krəstos*, at the head of a large force. In *Lasta* and *Angot* the peasants found an able leader in *Mälkä'ä Krəstos*. In spite of his imperial descent, *Mälkä'ä Krəstos* made known that his ambition was not the crown but the restoration of the old Ethiopian Orthodox religion, and he established contact with all the supporters of the Orthodox Church in *Tigre*, *Begemdir*, and *Amhara* (Cohen, 2009). The emperor's advisers urged Susənyos to allow the people the freedom of religion. This time the patriarch found it wiser to concede the changes he had previously opposed. It seems that the services in the Churches followed the Orthodox liturgy but all the features not in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church were corrected. Fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays was

instituted. These concessions, however, widened the gap between the emperor and the patriarch (Cohen, 2009).

Knowing the zeal of *Šə'älä Krəstos* for Catholicism the emperor and the crown prince feared that he would rebel. That year the province of *Gojjam* was taken from *Šə'älä Krəstos* and given to *Šärs'ä Krəstos*, another nephew of the emperor. In 1631 the new governor of *Gojjam* rebelled, and declared that he would support *Fasilädäs* and the Orthodox religion. *Šärs'ä Krəstos* was a close friend of *Fasilädäs* and the prince was suspected of instigating the rebellion in *Gojjam*. To solve this mistrust *Fasilädäs* marched to *Gojjam* and brought *Šärs'ä Krəstos* to *Dancaz*. Events in *Gojjam* and the uprising of the peasants in *Begemdir* made the emperor realize that only freedom of religion could bring peace to the empire (Cohen, 2009). *Susənyos* was looking for an excuse to make the law more tolerant without giving the rebels the impression that they had forced him to make concessions. Following the death of emperor *Susənyos*, in September 1632, and the restoration of the Orthodox religion did not bring an end to the religious conflict. As ras *Šə'älä Krəstos* was Pro-Catholics, emperor *Fasilädäs* brought his uncle to the court and tried to make him renounce Catholicism (Merid and Girma, 1964). To prevent the possibility of Portuguese military intervention, *Fasilädäs* decided to expel the missionaries from the country (Merid and Girma, 1964). Some of the Tigre nobility who sympathized with the patriarch were first won over by the emperor and then punished severely. Eventually the patriarch and many of the priests were forced to leave and take ship for India to Goa.

7. The Jesuits Missionary Contributions and Impediments

Despite the failure of the mission, there are aspects of the Jesuit experience in Ethiopia that some members of the Jesuits produced knowledge that redefined the European discourse about Ethiopia and effectively determined the death of *Presser John* in European imagination. (Salvadore M.) The Jesuits used catechism manual to educate children. Its original objectives were to impress the older generation in the process of Catholicization and Latinization of the country (Salvadore M.) According to Jesuit correspondence, the text was used to educate the new generations as directed by Ignatius Loyola (Caraman, 1985). However, by the time under discussion, Ethiopia has been prosperous in written literature with its own indigenous alphabets and unique script. When the Jesuits first arrived at the court of the royal authority, they encountered a very well-organized system of writing. The Jesuit did contribute to the historiography of Ethiopia as well mainly during this period. Most importantly, Paez used to write letter back home to his closest compatriots, at this time, was Fr. Thomas Ituren, who preserved the letters Paez sent him every year; these letters have now become an important source for the history of the seventeenth century Ethiopia (Caraman, 1985).

In Ethiopia the Jesuit missionaries found a language which had developed a rich Christian literary tradition throughout its history known as Ge'ez or classical Ethiopic was a literary language into which the missionaries translated the scriptures after the Christianization of Ethiopia in the fourth century (Cohen, 2009). It is interesting to note that the Jesuit translation contribution was from Latin and Portuguese to Ge'ez and from Geez to Portuguese as well. Francisco Antonio de Angeles and Luis de Azevedo, both of the achieved proficiency in

Ge'ez translated Catholic exegetical works and more specifically Jesuit works into the Ethiopian language (Cohen, 2009). Antonio Fernandes, well versed in Geez, revised many books bringing it into line with the tenets of the Catholic Church in 1621 that went until 1624. Fernandes also began translating the Mass to replace the liturgy of the Ethiopian Church and the translations from Ge'ez to Portuguese attributed to Páez are perhaps the best-known translated texts (Merid and Girma, 1964).

The missionaries in general translated books from the European language into Ge'ez in order to replace Ethiopian theology with the Catholic message. The translated materials include hagiographic works, the chronicles of the Ethiopian emperors, liturgical texts, and theological tracts, letters between Ethiopian dignitaries and the king of Spain, Portugal and the Pope (Merid and Girma, 1964). It seems that some of the Ethiopian saints in the history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church especially attracted the attention of the Jesuit missionaries. That's why Páez translated the life of *Abune Teklehaymanot* and de Almeida prepared an abbreviated version of the same saint's life, as taken from a manuscript of *Dabra Libanos*. Pedro Páez translated fragments of Abba Samuel's life and wrote about the life of *Abba Ewostatewos*, although he never actually obtained the original version. The Jesuit missionaries also tried to translate works of chronicles (Merid and Girma, 1964). Pedro Páez translated a fragment of Emperor Amde Tseyon's story (r.1313-1344) into Portuguese and Manuel de Almeida also preserved, in his *Historia de Ethiopia*, a translated summary of the text of *Las Victoria de Amda Tseyon* (Cohen, 2009).

Páez translated portion of the history of *Ləbnä Dəngəl* (r.1508-1540), *Gälawdewos* (r.1540-1559), *Šārṣ'ā Dəngəl* (r.1553-1596), and of *Susényos's* (r.1607-1632), whom he converted to Catholicism. Páez also translated passages about the lives of other emperors, of whom there are no chronicles in the strict sense of the word, and of whom we know mainly from texts in other genres specifically hagiographies (Cohen, 2009). Such was the case of the life of Emperor *Zara Yacob*, extracted from a book belonging to an ancient Axum monastery. In addition, Pedro Páez also translated fragments of *Mezgebe Haymanot* or the treasure of the faith (Cohen, 2009). The Jesuits certainly sought to bring the Ethiopian Orthodox Church into the Roman Catholic Church; they were equally motivated by indisputable interest to uncover the history of powerful Ethiopian medieval Christian Emperors (Cohen, 2009).

The Jesuits promoted the construction of new sacred places in order to produce greater devotion among the faithful. It was clear that commercial and other innovative culture of construction dated back through medieval to ancient times and was to continue indeed long after the departure of the Jesuits (Caraman, 1985). The importance of the Jesuits in Ethiopia architectural development of this period was visible in the seventeenth century. The Jesuits was later to be instrumental in restoring something of the old grandeur to Ethiopian architecture, both ecclesiastical and domestic, and perhaps their work as an architect was the inspiration of the later palaces built at Gondar, the first capital of Ethiopia, founded shortly after their withdrawal from the country (Caraman, 1985). However, many beautiful Churches were erected in many parts of the country even before the coming of the Jesuits (Pankhurst, 1980). However, some of these constructions encouraged the already existed architectural culture in Ethiopia. Some of the construction was new spaces with different architectural

features to those usually used in Ethiopia.



Figure 1. Gorgora Maryam Ginb situated on a small peninsula on the Northern side of Lake Tana, district of Gondar Zuria in the region of Dembiya. Between 1611 to 1618, Gorgora Nova became the royal camp (*Ketema*) of king Susenyos who had decided to abandon Dankaz due to epidemic caused by the places poor health condition

Source: Authors own photograph, Gorgora, April, 2022

From 1619, the Jesuits began building Churches made of stone. As to Cohen, the Jesuit missionary Páez was the first of the innovative builders who came to Ethiopia, erecting a white stone Church in Gorgora, carved with arches and columns (Getachew,1983). On the other hand, *Danqaz* or *Gomenge* rose to prominence as Emperor Susenyos's capital immediately after *Gorgora*. According to the sources from the royal chronicle, the monarch first established his residence at *Danqaz* in the twelve years of his reign in 1618 (Beckingham and Huntingford, 1998). This was confirmed by Almeida the best contemporary description of early seventeenth century that *Danqaz* as a multi-mansion metropolis situated on a stretch of highland, reached only by a long, very steep ascent, which required a three- or four-hour climb (Beckingham and Huntingford, 1998). The site of the capital was something like a platform about five kilometers long, and a little less wide, with a circumference of perhaps three leagues which is about twenty-eight kilometers (R.Basset). It appears that the palace of Susenyos was a building of remarkable architecture. Its ground floor was by then covered with debris from the roof and walls, but along the latter at main height were large cut stone with representations of elephants and horses carrying soldiers each armed with a lance at the end of which was attached a banner as displayed in the relics below.



Figure 2. The ruin of an elaborate Palace built by Emperor Susenyos at *Danqaz* near Lake Tana around 1604

Source: Authors own photograph, Denqaz, April, 2022

The emperor moved his capital to Gondar and built his own new palace there. There were also the remains of inscriptions in Ethiopian characters by then largely affected by the rain and indications that the room had all once all been painted. The founder of the Society of Jesus considered the education of children as an effective means for the evangelization of adults as Niccolò Lancilotto expressed in a letter sent to Ignatius in 1553 (Kiptoo,2016]. It appears that the Jesuits tried to establish schools to instruct children Latin in Ethiopia as they did in India and Brazil. As Cohen (2009) quoted directly from *Polanco* stated, “if in Ethiopia they would establish many schools of reading, writing and other letters, and schools to instruct the youth in Christian customs and doctrine will be the best way to conquer the hearts of the followers”. Predominantly, in Ethiopia, the Jesuits considered the instruction of children important so that adults would become impressed with and accept Catholicism (Cohen, 2009). However, it will be a hasty generalization to conclude that the Jesuit Catholic missionaries experience in the Gondarine Kingdom during the seventeenth Century brought, to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Christian Society of the time purely good experience. Since the Jesuit missionary mission evidently led to the creation of very strong antipathies towards the missionaries for a long time (Girma and Merid, 1964). The conversion of Emperor Susenyos and the consequent civil war resulted in the death of more than ten thousand people (Girma and Merid, 1964). The country remained without a metropolitan bishop for over two decades that aggravated perpetual Christological dispute on the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Girma and Merid,1964). The centre of excellence, the

Churches and the monasteries with their respective libraries were altered and burned. For instance, the Jesuits corrupted '*Haymanote Abew*' (the faith of the fathers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church) and '*Ged'le Tekle Haymanot*' (the miraculous accomplishments of Saint Tekle Haymanot) (Girma and Merid, 1964). The mistaken interpretation and evaluation of ancient Ethiopian Christianity by which they condemned the culture and traditions of the Ethiopian Christians, and provoked the anti-Catholic feeling of the Ethiopians (Girma and Merid, 1964). By religious intolerance and narrow-mindedness; the Jesuits implanted in the people a deep seated suspicion of Europeans through which they disturbed the spiritual stability of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church that led to regional disintegration in the country (Laura, 2013). Moreover, following the coming power of Fasilädäs and the missionaries' expulsion from the country, a closed-door policy was maintained. Hence, foreign relations were characterized by political deterioration and declination. As a matter of fact, this alienation continued until the eve of modernization during the period of Emperor Tewodros II (r. 1855-68), Yohannes IV (r. 1872-1889), and Menilik II (r. 1889-1913).

8. Conclusion

Ethiopia had become one of the early targets of the Society of Jesus founded in 1557. The Jesuits sometimes known as the Society of Jesus embraced an important place in the wide area of Church history. Saint Ignatius Loyola's letter to the Ethiopian monarchal authority at the time was one of the crucial objectives Loyola prepared the first Jesuit mission to Ethiopia whom he referred these mission required to kill two birds with one stone. The consequent military assistance to the Ethiopians to defend the war of Ahmed Gragñ, the Portuguese tried to use this as a good opportunity to impose Catholicism on the country, more or less by converting the monarchial authority from above. The Jesuit missionaries entered Ethiopia and it was evident that they were well received by monarchial authority. Initially the Jesuit missionaries tried to attain their goal quite directly by converting the rulers from the top. The secret conversion of Emperor Za Dengel (r. 1603-1604) was an initial Jesuit success, but it ended badly when its discovery provoked a violent rebellion which ended with the death of the royal convert. His successor, Susenyos (r. 1607-1632) persuaded by the Jesuit missionaries and makes a public profession of his conversion to Catholicism and proceeding to convert his subjects forcefully. The patriarch, Mendez, in particular and the Jesuit missionaries in general, were criticized for the failure of Catholicism in Ethiopia. Particularly, Mendez regarded the Ethiopian clerical and secular dignitaries as obsolete, and he entirely ignored the age-old traditions and customs and offended the dignity of the Ethiopian clergy. As Fasilädäs, the son of the emperor, explained to Afonso, Catholicism was a religion that Susenyos imposed upon the very people who wanted to obey him. In that case, the miscalculation made by the Jesuits was to believe that centuries old beliefs, customs, and traditions could be uprooted in a few years. It seemed that the Jesuit experience was very bitter for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church that led to the creation of very strong antipathies for a long time. In fact, the Jesuit missionary intervention resulted in civil war and led to the death of thousands of people as well. Moreover, during their stay in Ethiopia, the Jesuits had seriously disturbed the spiritual stability of the Ethiopian Church. This was also accompanied by the long intensive doctrinal controversy that lasted for over two centuries within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

following the official expulsion of the Jesuit Missionaries. However, it will be a speedy generalization to conclude that the Jesuit brought merely political instability and civil war regarding to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Christian Society of the time mainly in the seventeenth century Gondarine kingdom. Many of the Jesuit missionaries in Ethiopian were well versed in the large and ancient body of written literature of the Ethiopian *Ge'ez* language and devoted themselves to translation. It is interesting to note that translation was from Latin and Portuguese to *Ge'ez* and from *Ge'ez* to Portuguese as well. While the Jesuits certainly sought to bring the Ethiopian Orthodox Church into the Roman Catholic Church, they were equally motivated by indisputable interest to uncover the history of powerful Ethiopian medieval Christian Emperors. Moreover, the missionaries involved in schools and seminars in Ethiopia through which the Jesuits considered the instruction of children important so that adults would become impressed to accept Catholicism.

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