



Hervé Pennec

**An Ethiopian *Mille-feuille*:
Unearthing the history of the Jesuit
mission to Ethiopia (21st - 16th centuries)**

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**Centro de Estudos
Internacionais**





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Portrait of Francisco Maria Esteves Pereira
Encyclopedia Aethiopica, 2, p. 389.

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Author

Hervé Pennec

Translation

Sarah Joksimovic

Manuel João Ramos

Revision

Manuel João Ramos

Paddy Greenleaf

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CEI-Iscte, Sala 2W06
Av.^a das Forças Armadas
1649-026 Lisboa PORTUGAL
+351 210 464 029
<http://cei.iscte-iul.pt>
cei@iscte-iul.pt

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I dedicate this book to Marie-Louise Gicquel.

PREFACE

A preliminary word is in order about the publication of this book in the E-Book'IS collection. When we received Hervé Pennec's proposal to publish his text, we welcomed it enthusiastically since it was not only an excellent opportunity to expand the scope of disciplines in the collection by embracing a critical and innovative problematisation of East African historiography, but also because it is the product of a personal research journey that was carried out over many years as part of a longstanding collaboration between IMAF¹ (previously CEMAF) members and a team from CEI-Iscte. This enduring cooperation has led to regular joint fieldwork in Ethiopia, the co-organisation of a stream of research seminars, workshops, exhibitions, and conferences, and to the publication of various academic books and scientific articles.

This is the first book in the E-Book'IS collection explicitly aimed at discussing the historiographical conundrums which are rich in studies of the Horn of Africa. Previous books have dealt critically with historical material about the region, but the decision to publish *The Ethiopian Millefeuilles* clearly marks an intention to open our collection to historical research (and researchers) as an integral part of international

¹ Institut des Mondes Africains, a CNRS research unit.

studies. As is clearly demonstrated in the final chapters of the book, contemporary research in regional studies is heir to and frequently an unwilling prisoner of earlier endeavours, and thus the inquiry into the conditionality of knowledge produced on a particular topic or region is an indispensable requirement for any sound scientific analysis.

This book is the outcome of prolonged time travel. It was in the mid-nineties that the author began working on the dense volumes of documentation produced by the members of the Jesuit mission in Ethiopia, from 1550 to 1630. This work has enabled him to dissect both European and Ethiopian materials and complement archival research with regular fieldwork inquiries in the areas where that mission established itself for almost a century. Years of immersion in these materials and collaboration with both students of the history of religious missions and researchers specialising in the region of Ethiopia, be they anthropologists, historians or archaeologists, paved the way for another type of quest: the questioning of the conditions and ways in which knowledge was produced by the missionaries themselves and by the historiographers and hagiographers who set about publishing that body of knowledge from the 19th to the 21st centuries.

A *millefeuilles* indeed. Hervé Pennec offers us the chance to taste the savoury labyrinth of texts, images, and references that, layer upon layer, century upon century, the West has produced, largely for its own consumption, on the Northern Ethiopian plateau. We, the editors of E-Book'IS are sure the reader will enjoy this gourmet experience to the full.

Manuel João Ramos