

## LOCAL INTELLECTUALS

# The narrative of Zaga Christ (Şägga Krəstos): the first published African autobiography (1635)

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### Abstract

In the 1630s, a young traveller by the name of Şägga Krəstos (1616–38) crisscrossed Italy and France, claiming to be the heir of the late Ethiopian Emperor Ya‘əqob and pledging to return to Ethiopia at the helm of a Catholic mission. While in Rome, intent on convincing the papacy of his identity, he authored a lengthy autobiographical statement that included a precise dynastic claim, an account of his father’s rise and demise, and an itinerary of his own journey from Ethiopia to Rome. Later, as he continued his journey, Şägga Krəstos shared his statement with his European acquaintances; once in Paris, he published it, dedicating it to Anne of Austria, Queen of France. This article sketches the contours of Şägga Krəstos’s journey and identity and offers a comprehensive genealogy of the autobiographical statement’s many extant versions. It also discusses the transfiguration that both his reputation and statement underwent after his death. Şägga Krəstos’s is the earliest known autobiography voluntarily written and published in Europe by an African-born author. Following this article is a complete annotated translation – the first in the English language – of what is likely to be the earliest extant version of the statement, followed by excerpts from later versions. A complete transcription of the source is available with the online supplementary materials published with this article.

### Résumé

Dans les années 1630, un jeune voyageur du nom de Şägga Krəstos (1616–1638) sillonna l’Italie et la France en se disant être l’héritier de l’empereur défunt d’Éthiopie Ya‘əqob et en jurant de retourner en Éthiopie à la tête d’une mission catholique. Lors de son passage à Rome, résolu à convaincre la papauté de son identité, il écrivit une longue déclaration autobiographique dans laquelle figuraient une revendication dynastique précise, un récit de l’ascension et de la chute de son père, ainsi qu’une description de son voyage depuis l’Éthiopie jusqu’à Rome. Şägga Krəstos se mit ensuite en route vers Paris et parla de sa déclaration au hasard de ses rencontres européennes. Une fois à Paris, il la publia en la dédiant à Anne d’Autriche, reine de France. Cet article esquisse les contours du voyage et de l’identité de Şägga Krəstos, et propose une généalogie détaillée des nombreuses versions subsistantes de cette déclaration autobiographique. Il traite également de la transfiguration qu’ont subi sa réputation et sa déclaration après sa mort. La déclaration de Şägga Krəstos est l’autobiographie la plus ancienne connue qui ait été volontairement écrite et publiée en Europe par un auteur né en Afrique. Cet article est suivi d’une traduction annotée complète (la première en

langue anglaise) de ce qui est probablement la plus ancienne version subsistante de la déclaration, suivie d'extraits de versions ultérieures. Une transcription complète de la source figure parmi les textes supplémentaires publiés en ligne avec cet article.

On 22 April 1638, Şägga Krəstos, an Ethiopian traveller in his early twenties, died in Rueil near Paris, guest of Cardinal Richelieu, First Minister of France (Renaudot 1639: 196).<sup>1</sup> His documented history begins in Cairo in 1632, when he introduced himself to Father Paolo da Lodi, prefect of the Franciscan mission in Egypt and chaplain of Cairo's Venetian consulate. Şägga Krəstos claimed to be the son of the Ethiopian Emperor Ya'əqob (1597–1603 and 1605–07)<sup>2</sup> and to have fled his country after the new Emperor Susənyos (1607–32) had killed his father in battle and usurped the throne. After some hesitation because of Şägga Krəstos's lack of credentials, Father Paolo supported him with a letter of introduction to the Franciscans in Jerusalem, where Şägga Krəstos converted to Catholicism and pledged to return to Ethiopia as a Catholic king.

Following Father Paolo's advice, in autumn 1632, Şägga Krəstos travelled to Rome with the friar's letter,<sup>3</sup> under the aegis of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, which had been created in 1622 to supervise Rome's global missionary effort, ostensibly to seek the pontiff's endorsement for his plan. Both the congregation and the Franciscans were eager to turn Şägga Krəstos into an instrument of Catholic proselytism, but they were also cautious, as supporting an impostor would result in embarrassment. Francesco Ingoli, Propaganda Fide's secretary, vetted Şägga Krəstos and reported his findings to his superior, the Congregation's prefect Cardinal Antonio Barberini the Younger (1607–71), one of the cardinal nephews in the service of Pope Urban VIII (1623–44, born Maffeo Barberini).<sup>4</sup>

As part of the vetting process, Şägga Krəstos produced a 5,000-word autobiographical statement that consists of an exposition of his dynastic claim, the events leading to Emperor Ya'əqob's ascension and demise, his escape through the Nile Valley and his sojourn in Cairo and the Holy Land, a summary of his transit to Rome, and, in some versions, his experiences in Latin Europe (see Figure 2). Şägga Krəstos carried his own copy of the statement and, over the course of his journey through Italy and France, shared it with a variety of individuals who produced distinct versions by copying it, more or less accurately, and adding their own comments. Shortly after reaching Paris in the summer of 1635, Şägga Krəstos then published a heavily revised French version of his original statement, with the title *Les estranges evenemens du voyage de Son Altesse, le Serenissime Prince Zaga-Christ d'Ethiopie* (Zaga Christ [Şägga Krəstos] 1635). The small volume is the earliest known autobiography voluntarily written and published in Europe by an African-born author. It predates *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah*

<sup>1</sup> Another bulletin had him die at age twenty-four (Renaudot 1646: 254).

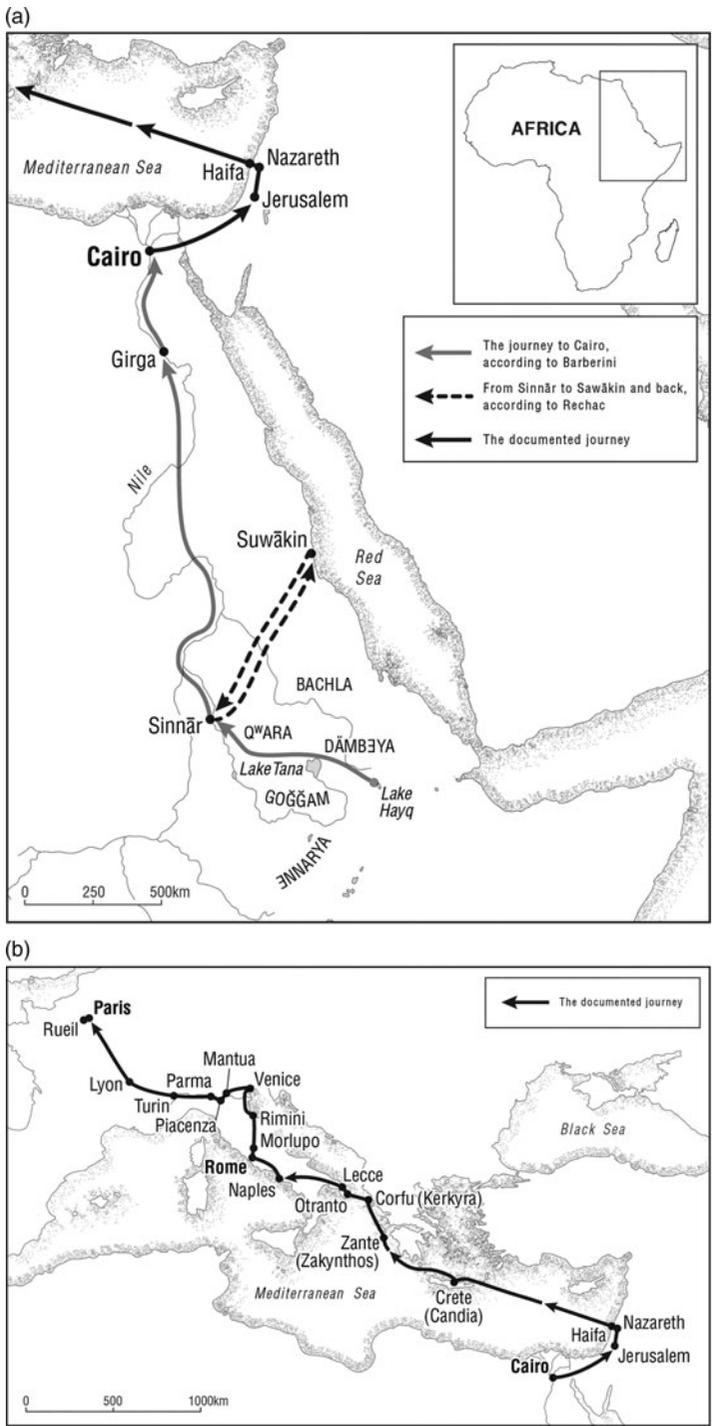
<sup>2</sup> Dates in parentheses correspond to birth and death, except for heads of churches and states, in which case the dates delimit time in office. Ethiopian emperors are identified by baptismal name and their regnal names are provided in parentheses.

<sup>3</sup> Paolo da Lodi, Jerusalem, 4 September 1632, Archivio di Propaganda Fide (APF), Scritture riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali (SOCG) 211, 154–5.

<sup>4</sup> Ingoli's concerns for the Church's reputation were articulated in numerous memoranda: for example, Ingoli to Antonio Barberini, [winter 1633], Rome, APF, SOCG 211, 158r–164r.



Figure 1. Portrait of Zaga Christ by Giovanna Garzoni, 1635. Reproduced by permission from the Allen Memorial Art Museum.



Figures 2a and 2b. Šägga Krastos's journeys.

*Equiano* (Equiano 1789), long regarded as the first African autobiography, by a century and a half.<sup>5</sup>

This article offers an overview of Šägga Krəstos's journey and its context, discusses his dynastic claim, and maps the genealogy of his statement's versions (Table 1). Following this, I present an annotated translation of what appears to be the earliest extant version of the statement, 'Narratione del viaggio fatto dall'Altezza Serenissima del Signor Sagra Cristos figliolo dell'Imperator d'Ethiopia'<sup>6</sup> ('Narration of the journey made by the Most Serene Highness Lord Sagra Cristos [Šägga Krəstos], son of the Emperor of Ethiopia'), hereafter referred to as *Barberini*, followed by excerpts from four other versions of the narrative. As supplementary material with the online version of the article, I present the original Italian text of *Barberini*. A more thorough overview of Šägga Krəstos's journey and its context can be found in Salvatore (2021).

### Šägga Krəstos's journey

Šägga Krəstos met Father Paolo at a delicate time for the Catholic Church's aspirations in Ethiopia. The Christian kingdom had attracted European interest since at least the early fifteenth century, when Ethiopian pilgrims and ambassadors travelling to the Italian peninsula drew the attention of their hosts, unfamiliar with the African continent but eager to recruit fellow Christians in the fight against the Muslim world. Ethiopians were identified as the subjects of Prester John, the legendary Christian king of European imagination who, throughout the Middle Ages, had mostly been associated with various locales in Asia (Beckingham and Hamilton 1996). In the fifteenth century, Prester John became increasingly associated with Africa, and a growing number of European explorers, in particular the Atlantic-bound Portuguese, scouted first West and later East Africa for his kingdom. Finally, in 1520, a Portuguese mission made it to the court of Emperor Löbnä Dəngəl (1508–40), allowing King Manuel I of Portugal to proudly declare that at last the pious Christian sovereign had been found (Krebs 2021: 142–53; Salvatore 2017b: 123–53; 2018).

<sup>5</sup> There are older texts that can be regarded as autobiographical statements, but they either remained unpublished or are very brief. For example, the Ethiopian pilgrim Tomas Wäldä Samu'él included one line about himself in the volume he helped produce (Potken and Wäldä Samu'él 1513: unpaginated leaf). The Ethiopian monk and scholar Täsfa Šəyon briefly referred to himself in his edition of the Ethiopian New Testament (Petrus Etyhops [Täsfa Šəyon] 1548–49; Salvatore and De Lorenzi 2021). Much longer autobiographical statements are those of the Cyprus-born Ethiopian priest and later bishop Yohännəs, also known as Giovanni Battista Abissino, and the Ethiopian slave Gabriel, recorded by the Roman and Goan Inquisitions, respectively. However, unlike Šägga Krəstos, these statements were produced as part of an institutionalized process, were not meant for publication, and, in Gabriel's case, were produced in captivity: 'Processus super statu ecclesiae S. Salvatoris nationis Ethiopum in regno Cypri et civitate Nicosien. et qualitatibus Iohannis Baptistae Habascini electi episcopi dictae ecclesiae 1564', Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Arm. I–XVIII, n. 2953; 'Processo de Gabriel casta abexim que veio de Chaul remetido a esta mesa' (Goa, 1595), Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Inquisição de Lisboa, proc. 4937, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo. On Gabriel, see Chakravarti (2019) and Salvatore (2020). On Yohännəs, see Kelly and Nosnitsin (2017) and Salvatore (2017a). Also worth noting are the autobiographical references that two sixteenth-century Andalusians of African descent included in their published works. One is Muḥammad al-Wazzān al-Fāsi, better known as Leo Africanus (Ramusio 1550: 1–95); the other is Juan Latino, who included autobiographical references in his poetry (Wright 2016: 185–9).

<sup>6</sup> Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), Barb. Lat. 5142, 25r–37v.

Table 1. Known versions of Šägga Krastos's autobiographical statement

Version name	Scribe	Place	Year written	Language	Extant manuscript	Pub. date	Source	Šägga Krastos's role
Šägga Krastos's own copy [SK]	Anonymous	Rome	1633	Italian	No	Unpublished	Original version	Source
<i>Barberini</i>	Anonymous	Rome	1633	Italian	Yes	Unpublished	Original version	Source
<i>Bonhams</i>	Anonymous	Rome	1633?	Italian	Yes	Unpublished	Original version	Source
<i>Gualdi</i>	Anonymous	Rome	1633	Italian	Yes	Unpublished	SK	Provided statement and additions
<i>Collamato</i>	Anonymous	Rome or Morlupo	1633? Inserted in Collamato's manuscript in the 1660s	Italian	Yes	1939	SK or another original version	Provided statement?
<i>Bisaccioni</i>	Maiolino Bisaccioni*	Venice	1634	Italian	No	1634	SK	Provided statement and additions

(Continued)

**Table I.** (Continued)

Version name	Scribe	Place	Year written	Language	Extant manuscript	Pub. date	Source	Sägga Krastos's role
<i>Rechac</i>	Jean Giffre de Rechac, pen name of Jean de Sainte-Marie*	Paris	1635	French	No	1635	<i>SK</i>	Provided statement and additions
<i>Verniero</i>	Pietro Verniero di Montepeloso*	Rome	1640s	Italian	Yes	1930	One of the original versions other than <i>SK</i>	None
<i>Roger</i>	Eugene Roger*	Paris	Unknown	French	No	1646	<i>Rechac</i>	None
<i>Mercuré</i>	Anonymous	Paris	Unknown	French	No	1646	<i>Rechac</i>	None
<i>Avity–Rocoles</i>	Jean-Baptiste de Rocoles and Pierre d'Avity	Paris	Unknown	French	No	1660	<i>Roger</i>	None
<i>Rocoles</i>	Jean-Baptiste de Rocoles	Paris	Unknown	French	No	1683	<i>Roger</i>	None
<i>Calahorra</i>	Juan de Calahorra	Jerusalem	1684	Spanish and Italian	No	1684 and 1694	<i>Verniero</i>	None
<i>Del Puerto</i>	Francisco Jesus Maria de San Juan del Puerto	Madrid	Unknown	Spanish	No	1724	<i>Verniero</i> or <i>Calahorra</i>	None

Note: \*Editors who included eyewitness additions to their version.

After having praised Prester John's power and piety from a distance, once in the kingdom, the Portuguese observed a different reality: in the 1530s, the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia barely survived an invasion by the Sultanate of Adal, while Ethiopian Christianity, once observed up close, appeared increasingly problematic to counter-Reformation Catholics (Natta 2015: 288–90; Salvatore 2017a: 72–4; Salvatore and De Lorenzi 2021: 26–30). In an ironic twist, what Europeans knew as the kingdom of Prester John, and had once idealized for the piety of its sovereign and inhabitants, was among the first extra-European locales the newly founded Society of Jesus identified as a land of heresy in need of a mission. In the early 1550s, Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) drafted instructions for a mission and the first fathers reached the Ethiopian court in 1555 (Salvatore 2013).

After half a century of lacklustre activities, in the early seventeenth century the Jesuits converted a growing number of Ethiopian grandees, and in 1626 they secured Emperor Susānyos's vow of obedience to Rome. However, the project faltered rapidly because of widespread resistance by commoners, the traditionalist clergy, and much of the Ethiopian nobility. On 24 June 1632, an embattled Susānyos declared religious freedom and facilitated the ascension of his son Fasilādās (1632–67) shortly before dying on 16 September 1632. After refusing any compromise with the traditionalists, the Jesuits were first expelled from court and later from the country.<sup>7</sup> When Şägga Krastos met Father Paolo in Cairo in March 1632, both the Franciscans and Propaganda Fide were aware of Jesuit difficulties and eager to lay the ground for an alternative mission by a different order. They were also increasingly weary of excessive Jesuit power overseas, their methods, and their autonomy from Propaganda Fide: Father Paolo and Ingoli saw in their young guest a unique opportunity to salvage Catholicism in Ethiopia, carve out a role for the Franciscans, and assert the congregation's primacy.

Şägga Krastos proved no less shrewd than his hosts, and within weeks of his first encounter with Father Paolo, he seized the day. Once in Jerusalem, he converted to Catholicism, then agreed to travel to Rome to pledge his obedience to the pontiff. In the ensuing weeks, he sailed to Italy on Venetian ships: he transited through Venetian Zante and landed in Otranto in October 1632; from there he travelled first to Naples and later to Rome, which he reached in early January 1633.<sup>8</sup> Despite Propaganda Fide's efforts to keep him isolated, Şägga Krastos met with a variety of Roman notables and diplomats stationed in the city. While Ingoli wanted him to return to Ethiopia under the aegis of a Catholic monarchy, his guest appeared determined to travel under English and Dutch patronage, causing grave concerns about potential Protestant meddling.<sup>9</sup> In November 1633, with his identity still unproven, Şägga Krastos left Rome in the company of four Franciscans, who were assigned to support but also monitor him.

In December 1633, Şägga Krastos reached Venice, where he spent six fruitless months attempting without success to obtain support from Republican authorities,

<sup>7</sup> On the Portuguese in Ethiopia, see Belcher (2017), Cohen (2009), Galawdewos (2015), Martínez d'Alòs-Moner (2015), Merid Wolde (1998), Pennec (2003) and Salvatore (2010).

<sup>8</sup> The journey to Rome is mentioned, to different degrees, in all the versions of the statement. It is also documented in a few letters of the papal nuncio in Naples to Rome. For example, Niccolò Enriquez de Herrera to Francesco Barberini, Naples, 28 December 1632, BAV, Barb. Lat. 7496, 101.

<sup>9</sup> Francesco Ingoli to Antonio Barberini, [autumn 1633], Rome, APF, SOCG 211, 164r.

while ostensibly negotiating a passage with English and other representatives.<sup>10</sup> Next, between July 1634 and April 1635, he was generously hosted, in order, by the dukes of Mantua, Parma and Piacenza, and Turin.<sup>11</sup> As the months went by, his Franciscan companions grew impatient, his plans kept changing, and the journey to Ethiopia became an increasingly distant mirage. The letters they sent to Ingoli exuded frustration with their delayed departure for Ethiopia and Şägga Krəstos's unsettling hesitation.<sup>12</sup> While residing in Turin for nine months and confronting a long bout of illness, Şägga Krəstos was immortalized by the accomplished Giovanna Garzoni (1600–70) in the earliest known European portrait miniature of an African (Letvin 2021) (see Figure 1). In May 1635, he crossed the Alps and found his way to Paris, followed only by two of his Franciscan companions.<sup>13</sup> Within months of his arrival in August 1635, they too abandoned him, after obtaining their long-sought leave from Propaganda Fide.

In the meantime, Şägga Krəstos petitioned the French monarchy for support and secured a generous royal pension, presumably because of his potential value to France's expansionist project in the Red Sea and French Capuchin plans for Ethiopia.<sup>14</sup> Two years later, in November 1637, Şägga Krəstos became a sensation when he attempted to flee Paris with Magdalene Alamant, wife of François Saulnier, a Parisian notable.<sup>15</sup> Apprehended and jailed, he defiantly refused to acknowledge the authority of his French prosecutors until Cardinal Richelieu had him released and hosted him at his estate in Rueil, where Şägga Krəstos died four months later on 22 April 1638.<sup>16</sup>

### Şägga Krəstos's dynastic claim

During Şägga Krəstos's sojourn in Rome, Ingoli strove to gather intelligence on his guest and his claim to be royalty. He attempted to find and invite to Rome some of Şägga Krəstos's Ethiopian companions, but his agents failed. They could only collect the testimony of Dilaver Agha, an Ethiopian eunuch responsible for Cairo's *seraglio*, who vouched for Şägga Krəstos but provided no evidence other than hearsay.<sup>17</sup> Ingoli also received an anonymous statement that identified Şägga Krəstos as a rogue monk, based on the authority of three Ethiopian monks from the monastery of Deir el-Muharraq.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Antonio da Virgoletta to Ingoli, 29 April 1634, Paris, APF, SOCG 10, 228r.

<sup>11</sup> Simone da Sezze to Ingoli, 30 June 1634, Mantua, APF, SOCG 9, 313r; Ignatio da Perugia to Ingoli, 12 July 1634, APF, SOCG 104, 179; Antonio da Virgoletta to Ingoli, 31 August 1634, Piacenza, APF, SOCG 9, 256r; Alessandro Castracani to Francesco Barberini, 26 August 1634, Turin, BAV, Barb. Lat. 7168, 120r.

<sup>12</sup> Antonio da Virgoletta to Ingoli, 18 March 1635, Turin, APF, SOCG 135, 23r; Antonio da Virgoletta to Ingoli, 25 March 1635, Turin, APF, SOCG 135, 19r.

<sup>13</sup> Antonio da Virgoletta to Ingoli, 28 August 1635, Paris, APF, SOCG 135, 12r.

<sup>14</sup> Şägga Krəstos to Cardinal Richelieu, 5 December 1635, Paris, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Indes Orientales, Tome 2, 1, 6rv; Giorgio Bolognetti to Ingoli, 7 March 1636, Paris, APF, SOCG 135, 35rv. On the French Capuchins, see Carobbio da Nembro (1971) and Meinardus (1987).

<sup>15</sup> News of the arrest made it to Rome through multiple channels: Giorgio Bolognetti to Francesco Barberini, 17 November 1637, Paris, Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), Segr. Stato, Francia, b.84, f. 154v; Gabriel Naudé to Cassiano dal Pozzo, 8 February 1638, Paris, Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniani, Ms Cassiano dal Pozzo XXXVIII (35), 66v.

<sup>16</sup> 'Reply of His Highness the Prince of Ethiopia', Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), Rés Z Thoisy 48: *Recueils historiques 1625-1638*, 352r-356v. See also note 1.

<sup>17</sup> Francesco Boni, 'Fede di Zagachristo Principe d'Etiopia', 15 October 1633, Cairo, APF, SOCG 104, 158r. The eunuch is mentioned in *Barberini*, 30r.

<sup>18</sup> Anonymous document, 1633, BAV, Barb. Lat. 4605, 90v.

Additionally, he received two more anonymous memoranda that explained away the naming discrepancies found in the statement and the absence of any reference to Šägga Krəstos in the well-known Jesuits' letters sent from Ethiopia.<sup>19</sup> Like the eunuch's affidavit, they were supportive, but also based on impressions and speculation. The same is true for two additional affidavits that Šägga Krəstos appears to have solicited from two Maronite Christians he had befriended while in Jerusalem; while supportive, they were also based on impressions and hearsay.<sup>20</sup>

All in all, Ingoli had little to go on in the way of testimonies and opted instead for a thorough analysis of Šägga Krəstos's own statement. In a table format, he compared, year by year, the timelines of Emperor Ya'əqob's rise and fall and Šägga Krəstos's upbringing, either sensing or having been told that something was not quite right. His diligent reconstruction did not bear fruit, however. He could only admit to his superior Cardinal Barberini that there was no way to know whether Šägga Krəstos was telling the truth, and that, while an official endorsement was out of the question, their young guest, whom he liked very much, had to be supported out of Christian decency and, more pragmatically, because he could turn out to be a legitimate heir.<sup>21</sup>

Had Ingoli been familiar with recent Ethiopian history, he would have realized that Šägga Krəstos's claim to be Ya'əqob's heir did not hold up. In his statement, Šägga Krəstos claimed that his father had died in 1627, after ruling for twenty-three years; Emperor Ya'əqob, however, reigned only from 1597 to 1603 and again from 1605 to 1607, when he was killed in his last battle against Emperor Susənyos, after feuding with him for a few years. This must have been deliberate. In his narrative, otherwise impressively consistent with the Ethiopian royal chronicles, Šägga Krəstos had to stretch Ya'əqob's lifespan by two decades until the late 1620s to justify his own royal birth and the entire chronology of his journey.<sup>22</sup>

Aside from his lack of written credentials and this stunning chronological impossibility, Šägga Krəstos's behaviour is also telling. According to the friars who followed him throughout Italy and France, he had several opportunities to sail back to Ethiopia, either from Venice or Genoa, or even to travel through Persia, but he turned them all down, in spite of his professed desire to do the utmost for the Catholic faith.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, once in Paris, he did not seek support to repatriate; instead, he successfully petitioned Cardinal Richelieu for a pension that would allow him to stay. As one keen observer told Ingoli from Paris, Šägga Krəstos had no intention of leaving.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The two memoranda can be found attached to *Barberini*: 'Notatione prima per concordare quello che dice Saga Cristos con quello che si trova scritto nelle lettere annue d'Ethiopia scritte al Reverendissimo Padre Generale de Gesuiti' and 'Notatione s(econ)da per la variatione de nomi di Saga Cristos e di suo Padre', BAV, Barb. Lat. 5142, 35r–37r.

<sup>20</sup> Valentin Conrart, 'Lettres et piéces touchant Zagachrist, soy-disant prince d'Éthiopie', *Recueil de piéces historiques, Tome II: 1629–1638*, BNF, Ms 3447, 211v–214v.

<sup>21</sup> Francesco Ingoli to Antonio Barberini, [winter 1633], Rome, APF, SOCG 211, 158r–164r.

<sup>22</sup> *Barberini*, 27r. On Ya'əqob and the evidence from the Chronicles, see 'Ya'əqob', *Encyclopedia Aethiopica* (EA), 5: 6.

<sup>23</sup> Antonio da Virgoletta to Mattia della Porta, 2 September 1634, Turin, APF, SOCG 9, 124r.

<sup>24</sup> Among Šägga Krəstos's acquaintances was the Dominican philosopher Tommaso Campanella. The two met in Rome and reconnected in France, where the heretical Campanella lived in exile. Campanella confirmed to Ingoli that Šägga Krəstos had no intention of returning to Ethiopia. Tommaso Campanella to Ingoli, 11 September 1635, Paris (in Amabile 1887: 284).

If Šägga Krastos's royal pedigree is to be dismissed, then who was he? His statement and experience leave no doubt that he was Ethiopian. A privileged or noble upbringing seems likely, as many of his interlocutors remarked on his exceptional manners and religious education, along with his impressive command of Ethiopia's dynastic history. Because of his young age, Šägga Krastos could not have been an eyewitness to the events he summarized in this statement, but must have had access to oral accounts or even the written accounts of the Ethiopian royal chronicles. Šägga Krastos is likely to have been the son of a noble, caught in the violence and dislocation of the religious conflict that engulfed Ethiopia throughout the 1620s and 1630s: if so, he must have had some resources to flee Ethiopia and make it to Cairo, albeit not in the fantastic circumstances described in the statement. Alternatively, he could have been a rogue Ethiopian monk, as alleged by the anonymous report Ingoli received. In that way, he would have received an education that allowed him to play the part of a nobleman.<sup>25</sup>

Neither Ingoli nor Šägga Krastos's many other European interlocutors were familiar with the Ethiopian chronology. Some suspected his imposture, but, overall, they opted for caution and afforded him the benefit of the doubt. As the different versions of his autobiographical statement and a diverse body of sources show, Šägga Krastos was generously hosted at multiple courts. He went far by projecting royalty through a well-crafted demeanour, expressing religious and political ideas that impressed his hosts, and sharing a compelling story of exile. His success is in line with what Miriam Eliav-Feldon (2012: 101) has argued in her seminal *Renaissance Impostors and Proofs of Identity*: whenever 'exotic' visitors to early modern Europe 'arrived appropriately dressed for the part, offering alliances and promoting riches and secret knowledge, they were never dismissed out of hand, no matter how far-fetched their claims, but treated with cautious respect'. Like other early modern impostors, Šägga Krastos took advantage of the ignorance, anxiety and hopes of his European interlocutors looking for a foothold in the Horn of Africa (Davis 1997; Groebner 2007; Snyder 2012; Zagorin 2014). He used his Ethiopian identity and education to tell his interlocutors what they wanted to hear: that after renouncing his native religious practices and accepting Catholic truth, he was ready to lead his people to salvation.

### Šägga Krastos's statements

The version of Šägga Krastos's statement presented here – what I call *Barberini*, based on its archival location and likely recipient – can be dated with certainty to Šägga Krastos's Roman sojourn (see Figure 3). An earlier composition can be excluded because *Barberini*, along with all the other manuscript versions, was written in Italian, which strongly suggests that it was composed in Italy. Composition by the Franciscans in Cairo or Jerusalem can be excluded because, like all the early versions, *Barberini* refers to Šägga Krastos's arrival in Rome, and also because none of the individuals he met before arriving in Rome mentioned the existence of a biographical statement. It is only during and after his Roman sojourn that Šägga Krastos shared the statement with his acquaintances and allowed them to copy it. Of all the extant versions of the statement, *Barberini* appears to be the oldest; it barely mentions the

<sup>25</sup> Anonymous document, 1633, BAV, Barb. Lat. 4605, 90v.

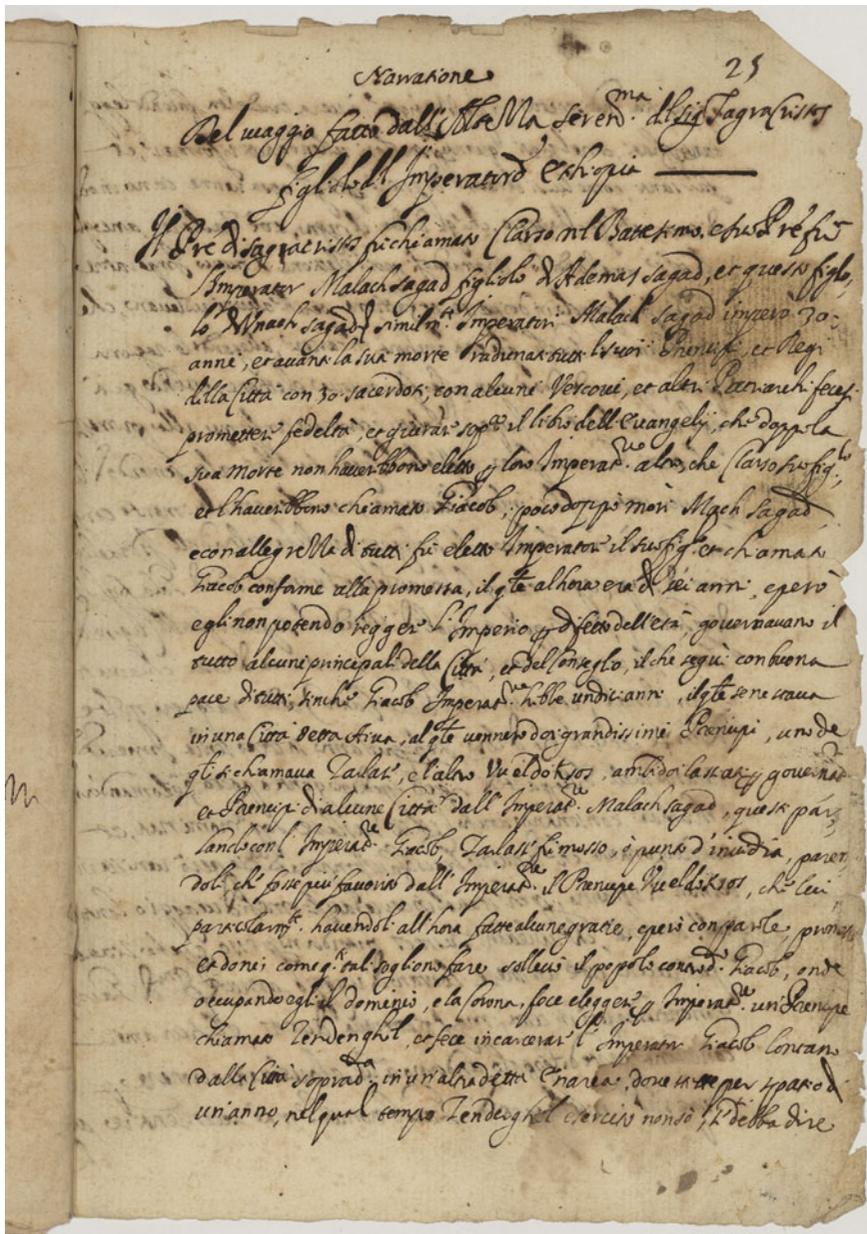


Figure 3. The first leaf of Barberini. Reproduced by permission from the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

transit through southern Italy and the sojourn in Rome, while other early versions dwell on both and also include references to his subsequent journey. Its archival location is also telling: bound in codex 5142 of the Vatican Library's Barberiniani Latini

collection, it must be the original or an immediate copy of the statement, filed with Cardinal Antonio Barberini during the vetting process.

*Barberini* appears to be one of a batch of quasi-identical copies that were possibly all written at once and distributed to concerned parties. At a minimum, an additional copy was produced for Šägga Krəstos, who carried it with him for the rest of his life, allowing his interlocutors to copy it and produce additional versions.<sup>26</sup> As its third-person voice underscores, Šägga Krəstos did not write the statement himself: after spending a few months among Franciscans in the Holy Land and travelling with them to Rome, he had become proficient in oral Italian, but his ability to write did not appear to go beyond signing his name in an uncertain Latin script, which can be observed in a few signed letters he left behind.<sup>27</sup> Like the letters, his autobiographical statement was probably dictated to a scribe, either directly or possibly through an interpreter, which explains why all but one version are written in the third person. Nevertheless, the document's content and the context of its production and its reproductions leave no doubt that Šägga Krəstos is the author.

One of the early manuscript versions – what I call *Gualdo*, based on the name of its recipient – is included in a letter that Šägga Krəstos wrote in November 1633 to one 'Lord Knight Fraci Gualdi', i.e. Francesco Gualdo (or Gualdi), secret chamberlain of Pope Urban VIII. In the introductory paragraph, Šägga Krəstos explains that he is about to depart for Venice, from where he hopes to return to Ethiopia, and that what follows in the letter is 'a brief narration of the genealogy of my imperial lineage' which he hopes will be a worthy addition to the addressee's 'museum'.<sup>28</sup> The reference points with certainty to Gualdo, and his famous *Wunderkammer* (Massimi 2003).

*Gualdo* can be identified as the first derivative version and the only one written in the first person. A few embellishments found only in this version, which I note in the *Barberini* translation, elucidate how Šägga Krəstos used his autobiographical statement to fashion himself. The most notable is a brief but significant reference to the narrative of the Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon – famously retold in the *Kəbrä Nägäšt* (The Glory of the Kings) – whose intercourse begot Menelik I, founder of the Solomonic dynasty.<sup>29</sup> Like the myth of Prester John, the narrative had much currency in Europe. Further, the letter speaks to Šägga Krəstos's ability to ingratiate his interlocutors and obtain support, in this case for the journey he was about to start: 'I will take the road to Loreto to visit the Most Holy House and I will continue my journey by land, I will reach Rimini, homeland of Your Lordship, where by your courtesy I will receive lodging in your home.'<sup>30</sup> Šägga Krəstos intended to travel to Venice

<sup>26</sup> Among them is a copy of the statement auctioned by Bonhams in 2008. Despite my inquiry, I was unable to access the document, but the first page of the manuscript, available on the auctioneer's website, read as an exact copy of *Barberini*. Foliated 420–7, this version (*Bonhams*) can be identified with that owned by Bent Juel-Jensen (1922–2006) and consulted by Munro-Hay (2006: 237).

<sup>27</sup> Šägga Krəstos to Cardinal Richelieu, 5 December 1635, Paris, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Indes Orientales, Tome 2, 1, 6rv.

<sup>28</sup> Šägga Krəstos to Francesco Gualdo, San Pietro in Montorio (Rome), 1 November 1633, Special Collections, University of Amsterdam, ET 124 (henceforth *Gualdo*), 1–22, 1r.

<sup>29</sup> See 'Kəbrä nägäšt', EA, 3: 364–8.

<sup>30</sup> *Gualdo*, 21r.

on the old Flaminian Way and stop in Loreto to visit the Basilica della Santa Casa,<sup>31</sup> then stop in Rimini, where he hoped to count on Gualdo's hospitality, whose family had properties in the city.

Another derivative version, almost identical to *Barberini* but ending abruptly with Šägga Krəstos's sojourn in Jerusalem, which I call *Collamato*, can be found inserted in 'Vicende del Tempo', a manuscript chronicle authored by the Franciscan Francesco Maria Niccolini da Collamato (1626–?) in the 1660s.<sup>32</sup> Father Francesco referred to Šägga Krəstos's arrival in the Holy Land directly in the chronicle – incorrectly dating it to 1630/31 – and inserted his copy of the statement in correspondence to year 1663 (probably the year of acquisition). *Collamato* could be considered one of the statement's early versions, but the circumstances of its retrieval suggest otherwise. The friar claimed to have found it in the library of a convent<sup>33</sup> in Morlupo, near Rome, which can be confidently identified with the town's Franciscan convent of Santa Maria Seconda, a convenient overnight stop for a party travelling north on the Flaminian Way. Given that throughout his journey Šägga Krəstos mostly boarded at Franciscan establishments, it could be speculated that *Collamato* was transcribed from Šägga Krəstos's own copy during an overnight stay in Morlupo.

Next in chronological order is the earliest *published* version, which I call *Bisaccioni* based on the name of its editor, Maiolino Bisaccioni (1582–1663). A mercenary, novelist and historian, Bisaccioni was in Venice writing his 1634 treatise on the ongoing Thirty Years' War when he met Šägga Krəstos. Having learned his story, he felt compelled to include it in his volume.<sup>34</sup> *Bisaccioni*<sup>35</sup> reads as an abridged version of *Barberini* with a few added elements: the historian added his own colourful considerations, along with a few details about Šägga Krəstos's sojourns in Naples, Rome and Venice, learned from his conversation with him. Despite being the first published

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<sup>31</sup> This was the house where the Holy Family lived, which, according to tradition, was flown to Loreto by four angels at the end of the Crusades (Vélez 2019).

<sup>32</sup> 'Origin and journey of Saga-Cristos, son of the Emperor of Ethiopia, from his homeland to Jerusalem in the year 1630' in Francesco Maria da Collamato, *Vicende del Tempo*, Vol. 2, 1672, Archivio di San Francesco a Ripa, Rome.

<sup>33</sup> Although in current usage *convent* usually refers to a residence for female monastics, the term has historically been used to refer to the dwellings of mendicant orders such as the Franciscans. The term is used with the latter meaning both in this article and to translate 'convento' in *Barberini*.

<sup>34</sup> 'This past 1st of December [1634] a young Ethiopian arrived in Venice, famed to be of the imperial lineage of that vast and big kingdom that controls multiple kingdoms. It is not my purpose to describe such remote things, already narrated by many others. I will only say what attracted my curiosity. I saw and learned from him happenings worthy of being recorded. I saw the youth, nineteen or twenty years old, of a colour between black and olivaster, of very beautiful appearance, with sparse facial hair, with very black and curly hair, and of medium height; I found him to be of good wit, well versed in the holy scriptures, very devout, affable, majestic, and melancholic because of his accidents, he made stunted sighs. He politely told me of his affairs: there is no bigger fall for a great prince than to go as a pilgrim, poor, wander and flee between accidents and disasters. Hence, I decided to honour my papers and, in the most succinct way possible, describe them [his affairs] here' (Bisaccioni 1634: 57–8).

<sup>35</sup> As for other versions of the autobiographical statement, the italicized name, in this case *Bisaccioni*, identifies exclusively the statement and not the entire document in which it appears.

version of the statement, *Bisaccioni* appears to have neither inspired an additional version nor been known by anyone with an interest in Šägga Krəstos.

Another version with a story somewhat similar to *Bisaccioni*'s is what I call *Verniero*, which can be found in Father Pietro Verniero di Montepeloso's *Croniche ovvero Annali di Terra Santa* (1930: Vol. 2, 277–301). The father was one of the Franciscans who met Šägga Krəstos at the convent of San Salvatore in Jerusalem. When he wrote the first version of his *Croniche* in 1636, he related Šägga Krəstos's sojourn in Cairo and Jerusalem, based on his own recollection.<sup>36</sup> Years later, upon his return to Italy, he wrote a second draft – now lost – and then a third, which included a mildly edited version of the statement, almost identical to *Barberini* (Verniero di Montepeloso 1930: Vol. I, lxxxiii–lxxxiv). Verniero must have accessed one of the early versions of the statement when he returned to Italy, to which he added his own considerations. His manuscript was not published until the 1930s, and *Verniero* does not appear to have led to additional versions except for an almost identical one – what I call *Calahorra* – which Father Francisco Calahorra included in his chronicle of the Holy Land, published first in Spanish (Calahorra 1684) and later in Italian (Calahorra and Angelico da Milano 1694). The friar, who was in Jerusalem long after Šägga Krəstos's transit, admitted to have lifted much of his manuscript from Verniero's *Croniche* and was not in a position to include any additional information, other than perhaps what he had heard from other pilgrims (Verniero di Montepeloso 1930: Vol. I, cii–ciii). Like *Bisaccioni*, *Calahorra* does not appear to have attracted much interest, despite appearing in print in the late seventeenth century. The same is true for what I call *Del Puerto*, which another Franciscan, Francisco Jesús María de San Juan del Puerto, lifted from one of the other three Franciscan versions and then included in his own chronicle of the Holy Land (Francisco Jesús María de San Juan del Puerto 1724: 374–87).

The opposite is true of another printed version – what I call *Rechac*, based on the name of its publisher – which accounts for the bulk of *Les estranges evenemens du voyage de Son Altesse, le Serenissime Prince Zaga-Christ d'Ethiopie*, a short book Šägga Krəstos published within weeks of his arrival in Paris (Zaga Christ [Šägga Krəstos] 1635). The publisher of record is Jean Giffre de Rechac, the pen name of Jean de Sainte-Marie (1604–60), an accomplished Dominican with a distinguished record of historical writing (Giffre de Rechac 1647), but Šägga Krəstos's authorship is confirmed in the dedicatory letter to the French Queen Anne of Austria (1601–66), which opens the volume. In it, Rechac explains that Šägga Krəstos 'wishes nothing else than offering the King his service and asks humbly Your Majesty to accept and receive personally this report written by himself about his painful travels' (Zaga Christ [Šägga Krəstos]

<sup>36</sup> This is how Verniero recollects his encounter with Šägga Krəstos and introduces the statement: 'While I was president of the Holy Land, a young Abyssinian came by, sent to me with recommendation letters from Cairo, by Father Paolo da Lodi, who was at the time there as prefect of the Egyptian mission and chaplain of the Venetian nation. Later I sent him to Nazareth, where after being well instructed in Catholic dogmas, he made his profession of faith and was brought into the womb of the Holy Mother Church by Father Paolo da Lodi himself, and sent to Rome to kiss the feet of our Lord Urban VIII; he claimed to be the son of Clarso [see note 50] Emperor of Ethiopia, commonly called Prester John. For the curious reader I will include his genealogy, the reason of his departure from Ethiopia, his journey to Jerusalem and Rome, his conversion to the Catholic faith and what happened' (Verniero di Montepeloso 1930: 275–6).

1635: unpaginated). Likewise, a contemporaneous collection of ceremonial memoirs reports Šägga Krəstos's attempts to obtain a hearing from Louis XIII and relates that Šägga Krəstos 'claimed to be the son of the King of Ethiopia. He said so in a book that he had got printed on this story' (Godefroy 1649: 797).

Apart from *Rechac*, *Les estranges evenemens* includes a richly adorned emblem presented as Šägga Krəstos's coat of arms (see Figure 4), but clearly of European inspiration, and meant to impress the French public: many of its elements, listed in a thorough description, are of Ethiopian derivation, but others are borrowed from the European discourse on Ethiopia and Prester John (Pankhurst 1973). All in all, the volume is Šägga Krəstos's ultimate self-fashioning effort: unlike *Bisaccioni*, *Rechac* is heavily restructured and incorporates a vast array of additional information. The introductory chapter cursorily summarizes the discussion of Šägga Krəstos's lineage and Emperor Ya'əqob's rise and fall, and the following six chapters (Chapters 2–7) narrate his adventurous transit through the Nile Valley. Chapter 8 discusses the sojourn in Cairo and the Holy Land along the same lines as *Barberini*, while Chapter 9 summarizes the Italian and French legs of the journey and provides a few additional details missing from previous versions.<sup>37</sup> *Rechac* includes several additions meant to tantalize the French reader: for example, the wounding of Šägga Krəstos in a confrontation with one of Susənyos's underlings, and the hunting of exotic animals in the Nile Valley (*Rechac*, 9–12, 24–5). However, mixed up with what appear to be editorial additions are bits of information about Šägga Krəstos that, regardless of their truthfulness, are unequivocally the latter's own additions. This is the case with multiple references to one of his companions, 'Trita Mascal', which is unmistakably a corrupted Ethiopian name, *mäsqäl* meaning cross in Amharic (*Rechac*, 8). Overall, *Les estranges evenemens* was clearly edited to present Šägga Krəstos as a wealthy heir and a peer to King Louis XIII, and to be marketed to a reading public with a growing penchant for the exotic. It is the only publication entirely dedicated to Šägga Krəstos to have ever been printed, and also the most consequential. While *Bisaccioni* is the first printed version of the statement, *Rechac* is the first published African autobiography, printed by Šägga Krəstos of his own volition.

Unlike *Bisaccioni*, *Rechac* inspired additional published versions of the statement that have defined Šägga Krəstos's legacy to this day. One can be found as a chapter in the Franciscan Eugene Roger's pilgrimage account, *La Terre Sainte* (Roger 1646: 349–60).<sup>38</sup> Roger was one of about fifteen French Franciscans dispatched to the Holy Land in the 1620s under the aegis of the French monarchy. He met Šägga Krəstos in Nazareth and was with him for 'five months'.<sup>39</sup> His version of the statement, *Roger*, appears to be a combination of a cursory summary of *Rechac* and the friar's own faded

<sup>37</sup> Following the statement is a list of Ethiopian kings, a brief geographical note about Šägga Krəstos's itinerary in the Nile Valley, and a page advertising other Africa-related publications.

<sup>38</sup> *Rechac* also appears to be the source of an additional version, which I call *Mercur*, found in the French gazette *Mercur* François (Renaudot 1646: 254–61).

<sup>39</sup> This is how Roger introduced the statement: 'What is left now is to satisfy the curiosity of those who have often desired to know the truth about the birth of this prince we have seen in France in recent years. I believe this to be the most convenient place to succinctly share what I saw and learned about those of this nation and religion, whom I encountered in Egypt and in other places of the Orient, where I lived together with the prince himself for five months. During this time, I did not see any Oriental who questioned his birth' (Roger 1646: 349). Roger was in the Holy Land until 1635, when he left for France (Thomas and Chesworth 2017: 447).



Figure 4. Šägga Krastos's coat of arms in *Rechac*.

recollection of his first-hand experience from the early 1630s.<sup>40</sup> The Franciscan also included a discussion of Ethiopian religious practices and institutions and of the

<sup>40</sup> The toponyms are evidence of *Roger's* derivation from *Rechac* – in particular, the claim that, in Ethiopia, Šägga Krastos was in hiding in 'the Isle of Maroüe, in the city of Aich' (*Roger*, 401). This exact expression appears in *Rechac*, 4, whereas previous versions of the statements refer to the 'Isle of Haik' (*Barberini*, 27v). On the location, see note 78.

Solomonic myth. Following the introduction are the accounts of Šägga Krəstos's genealogy, journey to Cairo and residence in the Holy Land. The first two read as abridgements of *Rechac*, while the last is, expectedly, extensive. It includes events Roger had direct knowledge of, such as Šägga Krəstos's difficult stay in Jerusalem and his tense relation with its Orthodox community. The concluding paragraph reads as a summary of *Rechac*'s already brief overview of Šägga Krəstos's journey in Europe, but it also refers to his death in Rueil. Although *Roger* accounts for only twelve of the volume's 500-odd pages, the inclusion was prominently advertised on the front page as 'a true relation about Šägga Krəstos, Prince of Ethiopia, who died in Rouel near Paris in 1638'. The choice was probably an editorial calculation to attract readers and capitalize on Šägga Krəstos's posthumous fame among the Parisian reading public.

### Šägga Krəstos's legacy

Having been praised for his devotion by many of his acquaintances, in the years and decades after his death Šägga Krəstos was transfigured into a paragon of African sexual prowess and licentiousness, with a 'great talent for gallantry', as someone who 'had made an infinite number of conquests' (Vanel and Sauval 1738: 147). A variety of commentators more interested in his nightlife than his birthright characterized his death as an unprecedented loss for women, and included in their prose and poetry more or less explicit references to the size of his penis, in line with the emerging trope of the hypersexualized African (Nederveen Pieterse 1992: 175; Toulalan and Fisher 2013: 505).<sup>41</sup> The erudite Valentin Conrart (1603–75), founder of the Academy of France, collected in one of his famous *recueils* (compilations) a variety of more or less scurrilous poems and epitaphs mockingly celebrating Šägga Krəstos's sexual feats.<sup>42</sup> Another, more pedestrian *recueil*, by Gédéon Tallemant des Réaux (1619–92), includes an account of his affair with Magdalene Alamant, peppered with sexual innuendos.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, in 1662, a plagiarized version of Molière's *Sganarelle*, printed with the title *La Cocue imaginaire* (*The Imaginary Cuckold*), referenced the attraction women felt for the 'King of Ethiopia' (Doneau 1662: 6). In this body of writings, one can find ironic references to Šägga Krəstos's uncertain identity, including the famous line 'the Prince of Ethiopia, the original or the copy', which was widely quoted throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>44</sup> However, the posthumous discourse that came to define the public memory of Šägga Krəstos was only tangentially concerned with his royal claim and instead was dedicated to his

<sup>41</sup> 'Sur la mort du prince d'Ethiopia' in Conrart, Ms 4126, 959; 'Poeme su Zaga Christ, roi d'Ethiopia' in Conrart, Ms 4127, 875.

<sup>42</sup> Conrart's selection of documents about Šägga Krəstos also includes French versions of Father Paolo's letter patent and the Ethiopian eunuch's affidavit. 'Epitaphe du roy d'Ethiopia. Sonnet' and 'Les Amours du prince d'Ethiopia (par Tristan L'Hermite)' in Conrart, *Recueil*, Ms 4124, 407–15.

<sup>43</sup> Compiled in the 1650s, it circulated as a manuscript, but because of its racy content it was published in the nineteenth century only in a bowdlerized form (Tallemant des Réaux 1863: 71–5).

<sup>44</sup> The line appears to have been first written as an epitaph: 'Here lies the King of Ethiopia, the original or the copy [Cy gist du Roy d'Ethiopia/L'original ou la Copie]': 'Epitaphe de Zaga Christ qui se disoit Roy d'Ethiopia' in Conrart, *Recueil*, Ms 4129, 647. The Ethiopia/Copie line can first be found printed in Desmarets' play *Les Visionnaires*, first staged in 1637, in which one of the female characters declares 'also of my portrait everyone wants the copy/It was for me that the king of Ethiopia came [aussi de mon pourtrait chacun veut la copie/C'est pour moy qu'est venu le roy d'Ethiopia]' (Desmarets 1639: 17).

sexuality: in the aftermath of Šägga Krəstos's scandalous arrest, his claim became secondary to his emerging identity as an exotic womanizer.

While a comprehensive discussion of the long-term trajectory of the European discourse on Šägga Krəstos and its context is beyond the scope of this article, a modicum of contextualization is in order. His years in Paris coincided with the early days of French overseas expansion, in particular with the first steps in the Senegal Basin and what would become the French Caribbean. France's expansion in Africa and its involvement in the Atlantic slave trade led to a growing interest in Africa and Africans, and to the emergence of a francophone Africanist library and a racist French discourse on Africans (Cohen 2003: xxi–xxii, 6).

In 1655, Isaac La Peyrère published *Prae-Adamitae*, in which he argued that Africans were not the descendants of Adam, laying the foundation for what would later become the racial theory of polygenesis (Gossett 1963: 15). In 1684, the French traveller François Bernier published what has been regarded as the earliest post-classical classification of humankind and a precursor of modern theories of race (Stuurman 2000: 3). While French intellectuals were taking their first steps towards the elaboration of what would eventually become biological racism, the 'negative image of blackness reached a climax in French literature' (Cohen 2003: 14), and Africans came to epitomize depravity, wickedness and treachery. This derogatory discourse on blackness was not a novelty in France or elsewhere in Europe, but, in the era, it appears to have reached new heights because of France's rapidly growing engagement with Africa and Africans. In seventeenth-century France, notions of African sexual incontinence, lust and licentiousness, which had already been elaborated by scholars of the calibre of Jean Bodin and André Thevet in the mid-sixteenth century, became commonplace (Jordan 1977: 31; Leskinen 2008; Lowe 2005: 31–2).

Epitomizing this posthumous discourse on Šägga Krəstos is a heavily revised version of the statement I call *Rocoles*, found in *Les Imposteurs insignes* (Rocoles 1683a: 387–403), a collection of essays on individuals accused of both dynastic and religious imposture throughout history. Its author, Jean-Baptiste de Rocoles (1620–96) plagiarized *Roger* but added his own scathing assessment, claiming that Šägga Krəstos feigned his intention of returning to Ethiopia and instead pursued a life of privilege and pleasure in Europe. Rocoles' conclusion was in part correct, but hardly based on any evidence: he admitted that he considered Šägga Krəstos an impostor because, except for Roger, 'everyone believed he was one', and because of what he had learned in Paris in the 1640s.<sup>45</sup> This appears to be a disingenuous contention because although *Bisaccioni* was probably out of reach, Rocoles could hardly have been unfamiliar with *Les estranges evenemens* and Rechac's supportive introduction.

Arguably, it was not evidence but his own prejudice and the posthumous discursive disparagement of Šägga Krəstos that persuaded Rocoles of his imposture. Tellingly, he characterized him as a 'champion in the Games of Venus', about which '[o]ut of decency, I will not say more on this here' (Rocoles 1683a: 401). Rocoles' reasoning,

<sup>45</sup> Rocoles had in fact edited *Roger* into his revised and expanded edition of Pierre d'Avity's (1573–1635) global encyclopedia (Avity 1637), the *Description générale de l'Afrique, seconde partie du monde* (Avity and Rocoles 1660: 558–62), thereby producing an additional version, which can be called *Avity-Rocoles*.

grounded in this demeaning posthumous discourse, epitomizes the general involution of the European perception of Africa and Africans between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries: Šägga Krəstos was included in *Les Imposteurs* because, as an African, he ought not to be trusted.

Rocoles was not the first author to call Šägga Krəstos an impostor in print: the German orientalist Hiob Ludolf had already done that in his *Historia Aethiopica* (1681), based on chronological reasoning and an advanced understanding of the Ethiopian historical record (Ludolf 1691: 243–4). However, his was a text meant for a specialist reading public, which does not seem to have had much impact on Šägga Krəstos's legacy, whereas Rocoles' became a popular bestseller. *Les Imposteurs* went through numerous editions and became a foundational text for the early modern European discourse on imposture, marking the emergence of a new literary genre.<sup>46</sup> Because of its vast diffusion, it became one of the most cited texts on Šägga Krəstos: it was one of two sources mentioned in the entry dedicated to him in Moreri's ubiquitous *Dictionnaire Historique* (Morero 1689: 1231). As late as 1886, the English biographer John H. Ingram plagiarized most of *Les Imposteurs* as his own *Claimants to Royalty*, and called Šägga Krəstos's claim 'pure fiction' (Ingram 1882: 149).

Until the late nineteenth century, the few authors who concerned themselves with Šägga Krəstos did so based on one or more revised versions of his own statement and various derivative accounts of his escapades. It was only in the interwar period that some scholars approached Šägga Krəstos based on archival sources: Verniero's *Chroniche* and Ingoli's correspondence. This newfound perspective, however, produced short accounts mostly concerned with specific aspects of Šägga Krəstos's journey (Cerulli 1943: Vol. 2, 106–11; Crawford 1950; Kammerer 1947: Vol. 1, 412–16). His overall experience remained surprisingly understudied and misunderstood: in 1985, an otherwise seminal analysis of the European discourse on Africa, *Blank Darkness*, argued that *Rechac* and *Roger* were the product of European imagination and Šägga Krəstos – featured on the cover according to the plate found in *Roger*'s volume – was a 'mythical foreigner' and a 'creature of French discourse' (Miller 1985: 36–9). Three hundred-odd years after having impressed, albeit mendaciously, his European interlocutors and having been extended a treatment reserved, if not for a prince, then for a welcomed guest, Šägga Krəstos was turned into a figment of the European imagination and his statement, which is authentically Ethiopian, into a European text.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> It was also published in an abridged English translation, which, however, did not include the chapter on Šägga Krəstos (Rocoles 1683b). On the importance of Rocoles' volume for the genre, see Davis (1997: 12) and Eliav-Feldon (2012: 14).

<sup>47</sup> In more recent years, Martínez d'Alòs-Moner (2014) and Lothar Stork (2005) authored summaries of Šägga Krəstos's journey based on published sources, while Serge Aroles uncovered a few previously unknown sources but, seemingly unaware of any modern scholarship on Šägga Krəstos, advanced a variety of unsubstantiated claims (Aroles 2013). He argues that Šägga Krəstos was the son of Arzo – a theory long disproved (Cerulli 1943: 108) – and that he converted to Islam while in Sinnär, which is unfounded and contradicts Šägga Krəstos's own statement to the contrary (Barberini, 28r). He also claims that *Gualdo* is part of a letter addressed to Šägga Krəstos's love interest Catarina Angelica Massimi (Salvadore 2021: 204), whereas the letter was clearly addressed to *Gualdo*, and that Šägga Krəstos probably died by suicide, a speculation that ignores his precarious health. Simone da Sezze to Francesco Ingoli, 18 November 1634, Turin, APF, SOCG 9, 149R; Alessandro Castracani to Francesco Ingoli, 28 October 1634, Turin, APF, SOCG 9 126r; Alessandro Castracani to Francesco Barberini, 26 August 1634, Turin, BAV, Barb. Lat. 7168, 120r.

## Introduction to the translation of Šägga Krəstos's statement

The version of the statement presented here in translation is *Barberini*, integrated in the footnotes with significant alternative text from the other versions. Following are the concluding sections of *Gualdo*, *Bisaccioni*, *Rechac* and *Rocoles*. The first three are significant because they represent Šägga Krəstos's own updates of his statement, relating to his experience in Europe. Šägga Krəstos did not contribute to *Rocoles*, but its conclusion is presented here because of its significant legacy. In the online version of the article, the reader will find the original Italian text of *Barberini*.<sup>48</sup>

Care has been taken to keep the English translation as faithful as possible to the original Italian text; for the sake of clarity and readability, run-on sentences were split and necessary clarifications were added in square brackets. Names and toponyms are spelled according to *Barberini*, and their standard transliterations, in square brackets, according to the *Encyclopedia Aethiopica* (EA) (Uhlig and Bausi 2003–14). Parentheses and their contents are from the original manuscript.

## Narration of the journey made by the Most Serene Highness, Lord Sagra Cristos [Šägga Krəstos], son of the Emperor of Ethiopia

Translated by Matteo Salvatore and Elia Italo Salvatore

### [Šägga Krəstos's lineage and Ya'əqob's rise and fall]<sup>49</sup>

The father of Sagra Cristos [Šägga Krəstos] was baptized Clarso [Ya'əqob],<sup>50</sup> and his father<sup>51</sup> was Emperor Malach Sagad [Mäläk Sägäd, baptized Šäršä Dəngəl],<sup>52</sup> son of Adema Sagad [Admas Sägäd, baptized Minas], and this was son of Unach Sagad [Wänag Sägäd, baptized Ləbnä Dəngəl], all emperors. Malach Sagad [Mäläk Sägäd] ruled for thirty years and before his death he gathered all the city's princes and kings,<sup>53</sup> together with thirty<sup>54</sup> priests, some bishops, and other patriarchs. He had them pledge allegiance by swearing on the book of the Gospels, that after his death, they would appoint as their emperor no one but Clarso his son, and call him Giacob [Ya'əqob].<sup>55</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Most published versions of the statement can be accessed on Google Books: see *Rechac* (<<https://books.google.ae/books?id=V1hOAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>>), *Rocoles* (<<https://books.google.ae/books?id=KJlybo5cfqsC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>>) and *Roger* (<<https://books.google.ae/books?id=a4w3nkimL-sC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>>).

<sup>49</sup> This section is broadly consistent with the different versions of Ethiopia's general dynastic history, the so-called Short Chronicle (Béguinot 1901; Conti Rossini 1893: 814; Guidi 1893: 593; 1926: 376–7; Perruchon 1896; 1897: 75–6), and with the Chronicle of Susānyos (Pereira 1900: 206–25).

<sup>50</sup> In his statement and throughout his journey, Šägga Krəstos wrongly claimed that 'Clarso' was the baptismal name of Emperor Ya'əqob, his father. Instead, Ya'əqob was the baptismal name of Mälkä'a Sägäd, also known as Mäläk Sägäd II.

<sup>51</sup> 'Auolo' (grandfather) in *Collamato*.

<sup>52</sup> The manuscript identifies Ethiopian emperors by their throne name; baptismal names have been provided for clarity.

<sup>53</sup> 'Regno' (kingdom) in *Gualdo*.

<sup>54</sup> 'Alcuni' (some) in *Collamato*.

<sup>55</sup> Šägga Krəstos correctly traced Ya'əqob's genealogy by identifying him as the son of Šäršä Dəngəl (1550–97, crowned Mäläk Sägäd in 1563), son of Minas (1526/29–63, crowned Admas Sägäd in 1559), son of Ləbnä Dəngəl (1496/97–1540, crowned Wänag Sägäd or Dawit in 1508).

A while later, Malach Sagad [Mäläk Sägäd] died and, to everyone's delight, his son, who at the time was six,<sup>56</sup> was elected emperor Giacob [Ya'əqob] according to the promise. As he could not rule the Empire because of his age, some princes of the city and of his council ruled over all, and all were at peace, until Emperor Giacob [Ya'əqob] turned eleven.<sup>57</sup>

He [Ya'əqob] was in a city called Aina [Ayna]<sup>58</sup> when two great princes came to him, one called Zarlase [Zäsällase]<sup>59</sup> and the other one Vueldoksos [Wäldä Krəstos],<sup>60</sup> who had both been appointed as governors of some cities by Emperor Malach Sagad [Mäläk Sägäd]. As the latter [Wäldä Krəstos] was talking to Emperor Giacob [Ya'əqob], Zarlase [Zäsällase] became envious, as it appeared to him that Prince Vueldoksos [Wäldä Krəstos] was favoured, and raised the people against Giacob [Ya'əqob]. He [Zäsällase] took over his [Ya'əqob's] domain and his crown, had a prince called Zendenghil [Zädəngəl] elected emperor [as Aṣnaf Sägäd II, 1603–04], and had Emperor Giacob [Ya'əqob] incarcerated away from the abovementioned town [Ayna], in another town called Enarea [Ənnarya]<sup>61</sup> where he lived for a year.

During this time Zendenghil [Zädəngəl] exercised what one can call either absolute justice, unreasonable severity, or perhaps real cruelty, issuing laws for monks, priests and laymen alike, seeking to reform them all and make them into saints, as he believed himself to be. For this, he became hated by everyone, even by the one who had given him the kingdom, which is to say Zarlase [Zäsällase] who took it away from him by killing him.

For the election of a new emperor, the people were divided in two parts, or two factions: some wanted to recall Giacob [Ya'əqob], who was still in prison, advancing reasons for it, arguing that a new election was not necessary given that he already was the true and legitimate emperor, elected and crowned in conformity to the promise that everyone had made to Malach Sagad [Mäläk Sägäd], his father. Others, fearful of him after having been accomplices to his incarceration, did not want to agree to this, but wanted someone else among the Israelites, i.e. of the royal dynasty, elected. Among them was Susneos [Susənyos] King of the Galla<sup>62</sup> and son<sup>63</sup> of Fasiladas [Fasilädäs] and natural nephew of Malach Sagad [Šäršä Dəngəl], and brother cousin of Giacob [Ya'əqob],<sup>64</sup> whose mother was not the queen but a house servant called Hamelmal [Ḥamälmal Wärq]<sup>65</sup> (this [Susənyos] is now Prester John).

<sup>56</sup> '15' in *Gualdo*.

<sup>57</sup> '12' in *Collamato*; 'sin che Giacob hebbe undici anni d'Imperio' (once Ya'əqob had been emperor for eleven years) in *Gualdo*.

<sup>58</sup> 'In Nazrit, in una citta' detta Aina' (in Nazrit, a city called Aina, in *Gualdo*. 'Aina' is a rendering of 'Ayna', which in Amharic means 'eye' and is a relatively common toponymic term. It could refer to the city in Lasta that became imperial capital in the late seventeenth century; see 'Ayne', EA, 1: 410.

<sup>59</sup> See 'Zäsällase', EA, 5: 153.

<sup>60</sup> Pereira *et al.* (1892: Vol. 2, 337).

<sup>61</sup> Ənnarya was not a city but a wealthy kingdom south of the Blue Nile; see 'Ənnarya', EA, 2: 310.

<sup>62</sup> Derogatory Ethiopian exonym for Oromo.

<sup>63</sup> 'Figliolo naturale' (natural son) in *Gualdo*, which refers to his birth out of wedlock.

<sup>64</sup> In this passage, Emperor Susənyos is correctly identified as the son of Fasilädäs, i.e. Fasil Gāram, grandson of Emperor Ləbnä Dəngəl. He is referred to as a nephew of Emperor Mäläk Sägäd because the latter and his father were cousins. Susənyos's identification as Emperor Ya'əqob's 'fratello cugino' (brother cousin) is also to be intended as that of a removed cousin.

<sup>65</sup> This passage is to be interpreted to mean that Emperor Susənyos was the out-of-wedlock child of 'Hamelmal' – that is, Ḥamälmal Wärq – of lower noble birth, but not a house servant. Šägga Krəstos's characterization was meant to disparage Susənyos.

There were many quarrels and fights and for a year they were without an emperor, until those siding with Giacob [Ya'əqob] sent for him, with the consent of the mentioned Zarlase [Zäsəllase] himself, now happy with Giacob [Ya'əqob] being emperor again; as he [Ya'əqob] was [in a place that was] six months away, he [Zäsəllase] asked him to come by the end of the year. Those who still wanted Susneos [Susənyos] sent for him and given that he was closer, a month's distance away, he arrived earlier than Giacob [Ya'əqob], but did not enter the city. Instead, he stopped nearby and his friends and many among the people went to him as they wanted to crown him emperor, but those who supported Giacob [Ya'əqob] did not agree.

Once the year was over, they waited three additional months, as he [Ya'əqob] was late because of the difficult journey. In order to keep the [support of] the people and to avoid crowning Susneos [Susənyos] emperor, the princes supporting Giacob [Ya'əqob] kept saying that he would arrive tomorrow, would arrive tonight, and they kept hope alive not only with words but also with actions and schemes: every night they sent out of the city many carriages, and during the day they had them come back claiming that they were Giacob's [Ya'əqob's] carriages and precious things, and that he was near and such. But seeing that he was too late and understanding the trickery, all the people went out to get Susneos [Susənyos], who entered the city, and after celebrating for ten days and on the tenth day he was crowned [as Səltan Sägäd or Mäläk Sägäd III].

Five days after the crowning, Giacob [Ya'əqob] arrived, and half of the people turned against Susneos [Susənyos] and went to get Giacob [Ya'əqob], crowning him emperor once again. Susneos [Susənyos], realizing he could not resist Giacob [Ya'əqob], fled and went to Galla, kingdom of gentiles,<sup>66</sup> where he had three children, two daughters and one son called Fasilidas [Fasilädäs].<sup>67</sup> Giacob [Ya'əqob] entered in his Imperial City of Goghiam [Goğğam], where he took a wife and with her in five years he had three sons, the first called Cosmos [Cosmas], the second Damianos [Dəmyanos] or Theodoro [Tewodros], the third, whom is being discussed here, Sagra Cristos [Şägga Krəstos], also known as Lexanaos Cristos [Ləssanä Krəstos], Mammo,<sup>68</sup> and with a servant he had one son called Claudios [Gälawdewos].<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Throughout the document, the term 'gentile' (gentile) is used with the meaning of non-Christian.

<sup>67</sup> The son of Susənyos, Fasilädäs (1603–67) succeeded his father as Emperor 'Aläm Sägäd or Səltan Sägäd II in 1632.

<sup>68</sup> In Amharic, *mammo* is a diminutive term of address for a small boy.

<sup>69</sup> *Collamato* and *Verniero* are almost identical to *Barberini*, but *Gualdo* is significantly different: 'where he took a wife from whom he had six children, five of which, three males and two females, are alive. The first is called Cosmos, the second Demianos [Dəmyanos], the third Theodoros [Tewodros] died young. I am the fourth, my name is Zaga Christos [Şägga Krəstos], but I am also called Mammo [Mammo] which is to say child and Lexanaxos Christos [Ləssanä Krəstos], which means Tongue of Christ. The two female children are called one Christosawit [Krəstosawit] and the other Volatachristos [Wälättä Krəstos], i.e. servant of Christ. And with a servant he [Ya'əqob] had a natural son called Claudios [Gälawdewos].' Additionally, next to 'took wife' is the note 'Nazarena Aetiopie Regin' (Nazarena Ethiopian queen). In *Bisaccioni*, Ya'əqob is also said to have married one Nazarena and to have had five children, three sons ('Cosmo, Damiano e Zaga Christo') and two unnamed daughters. In *Rechac*, Ya'əqob had three male children with Nazarena: 'Damien', who died young, Şägga Krəstos, and 'Cosme'. *Roger* seems to have summarized *Rechac* further as he related only that when Ya'əqob died he had two sons: Şägga Krəstos and 'Cosme'. Intriguingly, as noted in Aroles (2013: 4), the names of Şägga Krəstos's surviving brothers correspond to the name of the convent where one of his love interests resided, the Convent of San Cosimato in Trastevere, originally dedicated to 'San Cosma e Damiano'.

At this time, Susneos [Susānyos] gathered a big army and started to wage war and take over Ethiopia. Giacob [Ya‘əqob] sent the kingdom’s princes against him to fight, but the army of gentiles, being more powerful, little by little took over more and more of the country and arrived close to Goghiam [Goḡḡam]. Giacob [Ya‘əqob], who was in the countryside, was told, and mocked him by saying that, had Susneos [Susānyos] reached him, he would have made him his stable boy. However, he was delaying [preparations] and he was happily celebrating the day before Easter, without acquiring neither weapons nor rations for the fight, until Susneos [Susānyos] arrived within half a mile of the imperial pavilions. Seeing this, those in the countryside took arms, but being too late, they could not put up any resistance.

Hence in the twentieth year of his reign, Susneos [Susānyos] entered Emperor Giacob’s [Ya‘əqob’s] encampment and pavilions, making a great slaughter and killing. [He did so] with his entire army of gentiles, a few Christians, some Jesuits – through whom Susneos [Susānyos] and others in Ethiopia had left the Jacobite sect<sup>70</sup> and become Catholic – and Zelachristos [Šə‘älä Krəstos],<sup>71</sup> his brother-in-law prince and general of his army.<sup>72</sup> Some fled, among them Emperor Giacob [Ya‘əqob] with six others on horseback, to the land of gentiles called Boram [Boorana],<sup>73</sup> about three month’s distance by foot. Susneos [Susānyos] enchained all the princes and great lords he could grab and imprisoned them, and he had himself forcibly crowned emperor of Ethiopia, with all the things [i.e. celebrations] that are commonly done for an emperor. Then he had them all decapitated, with the exception of a few who are now in great misery. Then he divided the principalities among his soldiers, who were poor because they had followed him from Galla to Ethiopia. A year later, Giacob [Ya‘əqob] left Boram [Boorana] for Ethiopia, taking with him a large army, and entered [the region of] Amara [Amhara].<sup>74</sup>

Upon learning this, Susneos [Susānyos] sent thousands of people against him and the two armies fought near said Amara [Amhara]. However, Giacob’s [Ya‘əqob’s] army, having fewer weapons than its adversaries, fled before Susneos’s [Susānyos’s] arrival, and Giacob [Ya‘əqob] also fled to the land of gentiles called Curage [Gurage]<sup>75</sup> to raise another army. One year later, he returned to Amara [Amhara] with a larger army, fought Susneos’s [Susānyos’s] army again and won. He left from there because he wanted to complete his victory and went to Dambea [Dämbəya], near where Susneos [Susānyos] was<sup>76</sup> [camped], and again waged a very fierce war. In the fight,

<sup>70</sup> In early modern Europe, Ethiopians were often referred to as Jacobites after Jacob Baradaeus, miaphysite bishop of Edessa, who was a key figure in the early history of non-Chalcedonian churches (Bundy 1978).

<sup>71</sup> Ras Šə‘älä Krəstos (c.1570–c.1636), half-brother of Emperor Susānyos as son of Ḥamālmal Wārq and a different father, was a relentless supporter of the Jesuit cause (see Martínez d’Alòs-Moner 2015: 111–16).

<sup>72</sup> According to *Gualdo*, Susānyos did not have ‘with him Christians, if not for a few Greeks and Jesuits and Prince Zelachristos, his brother-in-law, general of his army. Through him, Susneos and others had left the sect of the Jacobites – so called from Giacob, Patriarch elected by the Roman Pontiff and not Jacob the heretic [i.e. a second-century heretic] – and lived as Latin Catholics converted under Urban VIII’.

<sup>73</sup> One of two major Oromo divisions (see ‘Boorana’, EA 1: 605).

<sup>74</sup> Amhara denoted different regions throughout Ethiopian history. Here it is used to convey that Ya‘əqob returned to Christian Ethiopia after having been in Oromo territory (see ‘Amhara’, EA, 1: 230–2).

<sup>75</sup> While conversion efforts had already been made in the Middle Ages, in the seventeenth century most Gurage were not Christians (see ‘Gurage ethno-historical survey’, EA, 2: 929–35).

<sup>76</sup> *Gualdo* specifies the place as ‘Quara’, which should be Qwara, north-west of Lake Tana (see ‘Qwara’, EA, 4: 312).

almost all of Giacob's [Ya'əqob's] princes were killed together with the Emperor Giacob [Ya'əqob] himself. [Ya'əqob's] aforementioned son Claudio [Gälawdewos] had been caught alive; after going to confession and receiving communion as a Catholic, he [Susənyos] had him beheaded. Then, after twenty-three years of rule, Susneos [Susənyos] achieved full control of the entire Ethiopian empire. And now [as of this writing], it has been five years and a half since this happened.<sup>77</sup>

### **[Šägga Krəstos's escape from Ethiopia]**

While war was being waged, the three sons of Emperor Giacob [Ya'əqob], which is to say Cosmos [Cosmas], Damanos [Dəmyanos] and Saga Christos [Šägga Krəstos], were on various small islands – and Saga Christos [Šägga Krəstos] was on the island called Haik [Ḥayq].<sup>78</sup> There, they received letters from their mother who gave them notice of what had happened and instructed them to flee because their lives were in danger. Having learned as much, they soon left. Cosmos [Cosmas] left towards the east, Damanos [Dəmyanos] towards other parts, and Saga Christos [Šägga Krəstos] towards the west;<sup>79</sup> the latter, departing from the said island, was accompanied by his godfather, who had been chosen by his father, and brought along many soldiers, two hunting lions, half a million in gold and a great quantity of jewellery.<sup>80</sup> Once landed on the mainland, he took 300 horses from his subjects, bought forty camels and, upon loading them, he left with 500 soldiers towards the west [out of Ethiopia], as it has been said.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>77</sup> 'Five years' in *Gualdo*.

<sup>78</sup> In *Gualdo*, 'Haych'. This location can readily be identified with a small island on Lake Hayq, site of the Däbrä Ḥayq ʾĪstifanos monastery (see 'Däbrä Ḥayq ʾĪstifanos', EA, 2: 23–4). Instead, *Rechac* and its derivative *Roger* identify the location as the 'city of Aich' on the 'Isle of Maroue'. This is most likely the result of a practical editorial choice, as Maroue (Meroë) was a much more familiar toponym for the European reading public.

<sup>79</sup> *Rechac* and *Roger* mention only Cosmos and Šägga Krəstos, given that in their version 'Damanos' had died in his youth. In *Rechac*, this section is enriched with toponyms familiar to Europeans: Cosmos is said to have taken the road of 'the Cape of Good Hope' towards the 'Kingdom of Monomotapa', i.e. the Kingdom of Mutapa, successor state of Great Zimbabwe. The kingdom was well known by the European reading public because of Portuguese exploration in the Zambezi Valley. *Rechac* also gives a time of departure: 'in the year 1629 towards the end of summer'. *Roger* refers only to the Cape of Good Hope.

<sup>80</sup> According to *Rechac*, Šägga Krəstos left with 'many Princes and Knights numbering three hundred, and of two hundred others, Soldiers and Officers, and forty Camels, charged with *viures* [sic], baggages, precious stones, and other necessities of his voyage. His Master, named Father Trita Mascas, great Religious of the Order of the Preaching Fathers, and a son of his Secretary, named Alexis.' Trita Mascas probably corresponds with the 'godfather' mentioned in *Barberini*. In *Rechac*, 'Alexis' is the subject of a long section that describes how he was killed and dismembered by a lion. At this point, *Gualdo* features the following reference to the Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon: 'One is not to be surprised that so much gold is available in Ethiopia, given that since ancient times, the Bible's 3 Kings 10 tells of the Queen of Sheba coming from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to honour Solomon (from whom Sagachristos's lineage descends) and brought gifts of very large quantities of gold and valuable gems that Solomon used to build the famous temple described in the Holy Scripture.' The reference is to Jerome's Vulgate, whose 3 Kings 10 corresponds to 1 Kings 10 in the New Revised Standard Edition. Šägga Krəstos must have added it to twice impress his benefactor by showing his biblical knowledge while also justifying his wealth on the basis of the biblical story of Solomon and Sheba. Like the myth of Prester John, the biblical story afforded Šägga Krəstos political capital among learned Europeans.

<sup>81</sup> '500 soldiers' in *Gualdo* and *Verniero*.

The next day, which was a Monday, a great prince called Nagase [nāgaš]<sup>82</sup> sent by Susneos [Susənyos] arrived on the islands to catch them. However, unable to find them, he unleashed his anger on the islands' inhabitants: beating, killing, plundering, breaking and burning everything. And he looted a priceless amount of gold and precious stones, in particular from the convent of some Jacobites<sup>83</sup> on said island, where they took altarpieces, books and solid gold vases.

### [*Šägga Krəstos in the kingdom of Sinnār*]

Saga Christos [Šägga Krəstos] fled from the aforementioned place with great difficulty, and travelled for a month until he arrived in the land of gentiles known as Sennar [Sinnār] with his travel companions. All were exhausted and almost dead from the great difficulties they faced in finding food and water. Those gentiles, hearing that so many people were coming, came together to prevent them from passing through. They [Šägga Krəstos and his companions], unable to fight and find a way through, stopped for a while.

Their king [of Sinnār], called Herbat [Rubat I],<sup>84</sup> son of Gavon, sent someone to tell Saga Christos [Šägga Krəstos] that if he turned gentile, he [Rubat I] would have given him his sister<sup>85</sup> as a wife and he [Šägga Krəstos] could have established a close friendship and kinship with him. He [Rubat I] did so many times and with great insistence, but Saga Christos [Šägga Krəstos] answered that he would never abandon the faith of Christians to become gentile and that he did not want his [Rubat I's] sister as his wife because she was gentile. If he ever did marry her, he would require that she become a Christian and learn Christian ways and the worship of the true God. He [Šägga Krəstos] could not find any way to come to an agreement, given that he did not want to become gentile and the king of the gentiles did not want her to become Christian: therefore, he could not find any way to pass through.<sup>86</sup>

It so happened that with said king there was someone who, despite being a gentile, was the son of Christians: his name was Salem<sup>87</sup> and his country was Bachla.<sup>88</sup> He covertly took council with Saga Cristos [Šägga Krəstos] and his people and, given that he knew the roads of the country, he decided to join them and to leave at night, covertly. He did so, after stealing from the gentiles and his master 5,000 camels and other things, with 5,000 soldiers on the camels, so that he had gathered an army

<sup>82</sup> The word is hard to decipher in *Barberini*, but it is clearly spelled 'Nagasce' in *Collamato* and *Gualdo*. It is a rendering of *nəguš*, which translates as 'king' and identifies regional Ethiopian rulers whose authority was second only to that of the Ethiopian emperor, the king of kings (*nəgušä nəgäšt*).

<sup>83</sup> See note 70.

<sup>84</sup> 'Herbat' can be identified with Rubat I (1616–44), ruler of the sultanate of Sinnār (Crawford 1950: 287). *Rechac* and *Roger* identify 'Orbat' as the 'King of Fungī' (Funḡ), which is correct: the kingdom was also known as the Funḡ sultanate after its dominant ethnic group.

<sup>85</sup> 'Figlia' (daughter) in *Gualdo*.

<sup>86</sup> This last sentence is significantly different in *Gualdo*: 'They live in the countryside, without houses and only with tents, as the gatherings of people are never settled. They call the gatherings cities, and in the same places they find pastures for the animals, they stop, and once they [the pastures] are exhausted, they leave to find other pastures. We could not find any way to travel past them.'

<sup>87</sup> Salem is identified as a 'vice-roy' in *Rechac*.

<sup>88</sup> Bachla or Bachela or Bagala was located somewhere in today's south-eastern Sudan or northern Eritrea. It is mentioned in numerous sources (Crawford 1958: xii, 59, 69; Huntingford and Pankhurst 1989: 167, 244).

of 5,500 people. They agreed to travel back towards Ethiopia and arrived at one of its provinces called Abicini.<sup>89</sup> When one of Susneos's [Susənyos's] grand captains, known as Sciumsyre,<sup>90</sup> learned this, he prepared a great army and moved towards him to wage war. They did not seek to avoid the fight but, enlivened, they readied their weapons with great courage and started to fight. In the fray, fifty<sup>91</sup> died on Saga Cristos's [Šägga Krəstos's] side and thirty on the other side.

Once again, Saga Cristos [Šägga Krəstos] and his people were forced to turn back to the land of the gentiles. When they crossed the Bachla region, Salem and all the people he had taken along with him stayed there. When they [Šägga Krəstos and his people] arrived near the city of Sennar [Sinnār], they camped outside it. The king, upon learning of [their presence] and seeing them, prepared his soldiers to wage war against them and sent a servant to see if Salem was there, but did not find him because he had stayed in Bachla as it has been said. Saga Cristos [Šägga Krəstos] took counsel with his [people] on what to do and saw that they could not fight without losing everything, given that they were only a few and all exhausted, almost dead. Nor was there any possibility to go through a different way and they definitely could not go back towards Ethiopia because of Susneos [Susənyos]. All together, they pleaded with said king of the gentiles to let them pass in exchange for twenty camels loaded with gold, clothing and rough gemstones.<sup>92</sup>

### [Šägga Krəstos in the Nile Valley]

The king [of Sinnār] agreed and once they had bought this passage through, they headed towards Turkey,<sup>93</sup> and after walking for twenty days, they arrived in Arabia<sup>94</sup> where they were met by an Arab prince<sup>95</sup> who prevented them from passing. He sent word that he knew they had given to the king of Senar [Sinnār] twenty loaded camels and that he would not let them through unless they gave him twenty camels as well. They apologized that they could not give as much, because only a few [camels] were left – some having died, some having been eaten, some having been given away. Finally, he [the Arab prince] agreed to take only ten loaded camels and the two hunting lions Saga Cristos [Šägga Krəstos] had with him.

Hence, he [Šägga Krəstos] travelled forth with only 300 of his soldiers – because his godfather had abandoned him and turned back with 100 soldiers – and fifty gentiles, who had taught him the way and started to serve the king of Sennar [Sinnār]. Another 100<sup>96</sup> of his company stayed in the city with the Arab prince. He gave Saga Cristos [Šägga Krəstos]

<sup>89</sup> 'Tegre or Abicini' in *Gualdo*. It could be Abbasini, mentioned in Zorzi's itineraries, in today's northern Eritrea (Crawford 1958: 166).

<sup>90</sup> 'Prince Sumpsir' in *Rechac*. This ought to be a reference to the šum of Šire, the governor of Šire, as argued by Crawford (1950: 291; see 'šum', EA, 4: 761–3).

<sup>91</sup> '40' in *Gualdo*.

<sup>92</sup> According to *Rechac*, Šägga Krəstos, upon failing to secure passage through Sinnār-Funğ, headed for Sawākin. Here the 'pasha received him with unique affection, and gave him all the kindness his quality demanded', but declined to offer Šägga Krəstos safe passage to Cairo, presumably by sea, out of concern for his safety; he advised him to return to Funğ to seek a passage through the Nile Valley.

<sup>93</sup> 'Turchia' (Turkey) is to be intended as Ottoman-controlled Egypt.

<sup>94</sup> 'Arabia' is to be understood as a reference to the Nile Valley north of Sinnār.

<sup>95</sup> According to *Rechac*, this unnamed Arab prince also offered his daughter 'Ambra' in marriage to Šägga Krəstos and asked him to convert.

<sup>96</sup> '200' according to *Collamato*, *Gualdo* and *Verniero*.

a guide to lead him to another place with Arabs, where he had to pay a huge sum of money in order to pass through. But only 200 passed through with him because fifty stayed in that place and fifty left him to cross the Red Sea and went towards Turkey.<sup>97</sup>

Once past that place, having to cross a vast Arabian desert,<sup>98</sup> he [Šägga Krəstos] was burdened with infinite troubles, pain, and nothing to eat or drink – neither for themselves nor for the animals. The place was so sandy that the camels sank into the sand halfway up their legs and could hardly move. Even though they did nothing but walk day and night, they could hardly cover ten miles in twenty-four hours. The heat was so excessive that whenever even a little breeze blew, it was as if a flame of fire scorched one's face and almost prevented one from breathing. They were all so thirsty and burned that they could not open their mouths to say a word. The [need to] sleep so oppressed them that at times some could be seen falling from their camels. They walked for months, without ever encountering other people, nor stones, grass, trees, or anything else – only sand and a scorching sky. Their food was a little bit of raw camel or horse meat, or that of some other animal, and they drank the milk of such animals when they could. For a while, they carried water in skins on the camels and, to avoid running out quickly, they rationed it: that is, each got little more than a cup per day. Once they ran out, they resorted to wetting their mouth with camel excrements [urine], and whenever they could have a cup of water, they purchased it with gold jewellery. The food given to the camels consisted of powdered dry camel meat which was fed to them by force. Once, after walking for twenty days without having found anything, they found a big tree with leaves and yellow fruit. Everyone, man and animal, ate some, without even noticing whether it was sweet, bitter, or some other flavour. It would take too long to tell of all the afflictions they suffered throughout Arabia;<sup>99</sup> it is enough to have mentioned them in general terms. In addition, Saga Cristos [Šägga Krəstos] did not eat for two entire years neither bread nor salt. Although he found bread in some places, he could not eat it because it was not made of wheat, but he settled for animal milk.

With all these afflictions, of the 200 soldiers and servants he had with him, only thirty were left, with only fifteen camels, and so rode two per camel. All the others had been left behind – either because they died, were crippled or, no longer having a camel, were unable to keep walking through the sandy desert. Some left looking for food and fell behind; some found some Arab [to stay with] or farmhouse to stay at; others stayed behind for one reason or another.

### [Šägga Krəstos in Cairo]

Once Saga Cristos [Šägga Krəstos] arrived in Cairo<sup>100</sup> with thirty men and fifteen camels, all the Turks<sup>101</sup> were amazed and alarmed. An Armenian, who had been to Saga

<sup>97</sup> See note 93.

<sup>98</sup> Most likely a desert in today's Upper Egypt (see note 94).

<sup>99</sup> See note 94.

<sup>100</sup> *Rechac* relates that, upon exiting the desert, Šägga Krəstos reached the city of 'Grigia', possibly referring to the Egyptian city of Girga, whose pasha tried to persuade him to travel to Constantinople. Šägga Krəstos, 'knowing the hate the Turks have for Christians, and that one must never trust the perfidious Muslim traitors, pretended to find this a good idea, but that he wanted to first visit the Holy Sepulchre'. Accordingly, he continued his journey and 'with this pomp he was received in all of Egypt all the way to Cairo'.

<sup>101</sup> 'Turks' (Turchi) is used with the meaning of Muslim.

Cristos's [Šägga Krastos's] home in Ethiopia, immediately recognized him and said so to a Grand Turk, the Emperor of Constantinople's eunuch [Dilaver Agha] charged with the Grand Turk's seraglio.<sup>102</sup> By sheer chance, this eunuch was Ethiopian and he immediately sent a servant to bring Saga Cristos [Šägga Krastos] to his home. Unable to host all thirty people, he told Saga Cristos [Šägga Krastos] to retain only fifteen, spreading the others across Cairo in the houses of Christians, so that in some there was one [Ethiopian], in some two, in some more. Of the fifteen that remained with Saga Cristos [Šägga Krastos], three dined in the house of the Turk [Dilaver Agha], and the others with one Christian or another. They stayed in Cairo for an entire month. They sold all their camels and provided for themselves with the proceeds. Once depleted, two of Saga Cristos's [Šägga Krastos's] servants made themselves Turks,<sup>103</sup> five converted to the Greek [Orthodox] faith, three fell ill, and others went out to various places looking for things to do to support themselves and their master. Only eight stayed with him in Cairo.

During the day he [Šägga Krastos] ate at the house of the mentioned Turk [Dilaver Agha] and at night he went to sleep in the house of the Armenian, who knew him from before and knew of his travails and escape. He [Šägga Krastos] was afraid to sleep in the house of the Turk [Dilaver Agha], knowing that at night they might invite a Turkish priest or preacher to force him to renege on his Christian faith and turn Turk.<sup>104</sup>

It so happened that one day during Carnival<sup>105</sup> Saga Cristos [Šägga Krastos], while in the Armenian's house, drank a bit of date liquor.<sup>106</sup> It caused him great pain and dizziness and at night, while he was sleeping, he felt blood seeping out of his ear. He woke up and informed the Armenian, who sent for the consul of Venice's physician. Being Catholic he [the physician] did not want to go to Saga Cristos [Šägga Krastos], who was a Jacobite, but said that he [Šägga Krastos] would give him medicine if he came to him. In the morning, he [Šägga Krastos] went and [found himself] in the company of many, and through the consul's interpreter, he [the physician] told him what to do.

In the meantime, the consul learned from his interpreter that the Ethiopian emperor's son was there. He invited Saga Cristos [Šägga Krastos] into his house and through the interpreter asked him who he was, where he was coming from, and why. Having been briefed on everything by the Armenian, the consul brought him [Šägga Krastos] into the presence of Father Paolo da Lodi, Observant Friar Minor of the Province of San Francesco, who was in Cairo as an apostolic missionary.<sup>107</sup> They all urged him [Šägga Krastos], for the well-being of his body and soul,

<sup>102</sup> 'Emperor of Constantinople' refers to the Ottoman sultan, as in European parlance Istanbul was still called by its old name. 'Grand Turk' (Gran Turco) normally referred to the Ottoman sultan or to the Ottoman Empire, but in this sentence, it seems to refer also to the Ottoman eunuch who befriended Šägga Krastos. *Rechac* includes the eunuch's name, 'Deleorava', which corresponds to Dilaver Agha, the eunuch interviewed by Cairo's Venetian authorities at the behest of Propaganda Fide, whose testimony was consistent with Šägga Krastos's statement (see note 17).

<sup>103</sup> They converted to Islam.

<sup>104</sup> 'Turkish priest or preacher', meaning an imam.

<sup>105</sup> Meaning the celebration that marks the beginning of Catholic Lent.

<sup>106</sup> 'Aquavite di dattoli', i.e. arak.

<sup>107</sup> 'Province of San Francesco' is an archaic way to refer to the Franciscan Order. Father Paolo da Lodi was on his way to Jerusalem to assume the post of Custodian of the Holy Land, the highest Franciscan authority in the Middle East, based in Jerusalem.

and because it was an easy journey, to go to Rome, introduce himself to the pontiff, kiss his feet, and pledge obedience to him, like almost all kings and Christian princes did. As a boat to Venice<sup>108</sup> was available, they advised him to leave immediately. The consul promised to give him provisions for the trip, letters of recommendation that would identify him to the [Venetian] Republic.<sup>109</sup>

But he [Šägga Krəstos] refused to do so because he wanted to see Jerusalem, and because he had been travelling for almost four years, with much suffering. The aforementioned Father Paolo da Lodi told him that if he wanted to go to Jerusalem, he would help by giving him letters of recommendation for the convent of Italian friars there.<sup>110</sup>

As he [Šägga Krəstos] was very determined to go, he [Father Paolo] told him to come back the following day for the letter [of safe conduct], but to be cautious and not tell anyone. Not only would it have been dangerous for all the friars, but had it [the plan] reached Turkish ears, they would have cut his [Šägga Krəstos's] head [off] and sent it to the [Ottoman] Emperor of Constantinople. Taking along only one [trusted] servant for fear of being discovered, he [Šägga Krəstos] visited Father Paolo many times until, after three days, he gave him the letter without his servant knowing.

But he [Father Paolo] made a mistake because he gave him [Šägga Krəstos] the one [letter] for the [Venetian] consul, which recommended him [Šägga Krəstos] to Venice. The next morning, [unknowingly] he [Šägga Krəstos] went with that [the wrong letter] to Jerusalem, with fifteen servants. When they were already two or three miles away from Cairo, the consul's servant caught up with him, carrying Father Paolo's right letter. He gave it to Saga Cristos [Šägga Krəstos] and told him that earlier he [Father Paolo] had made a mistake – and then the two servants [who were with Šägga Krəstos] saw and understood. After fifteen days, he reached Jerusalem, but with only eight of his servants because the others had remained behind, held by the Turks because he [Šägga Krəstos] could not pay the custom duties in some places.

### [Šägga Krəstos in Jerusalem]

Once in Jerusalem they all went to the hospice of the Ethiopians, or Abyssinians, where they all welcomed Saga Cristos [Šägga Krəstos] as son of their emperor, the best way they could.<sup>111</sup> But one of the two servants called Statios<sup>112</sup> [Ewošatewos], who had seen when the consul's servant had given [Šägga Krəstos] Father Paolo's letters, went to the patriarch of the Greeks, to the bishop of Armenians and to the Egyptian superior. He accused him [Šägga Krəstos] of being an Italian Christian,<sup>113</sup> who had letters for the *farenj* [färäng] friars,<sup>114</sup> which is to say the Italian friars. He told them not to believe he [Šägga Krəstos] was really a Jacobite in light of the

<sup>108</sup> 'Turkey' in *Gualdo*.

<sup>109</sup> 'The Most Serene Venetian Republic' in *Gualdo*.

<sup>110</sup> The Monastery of Saint Saviour in Jerusalem.

<sup>111</sup> The reference is to Dayr as-Sulṭān, the Ethiopian monastery located on the roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Pedersen 1987; Tedeschi 1964).

<sup>112</sup> Spelled inconsistently in the document as 'Estateis', 'Statios' and 'Estatios'.

<sup>113</sup> That is, a Catholic, as reported in *Verniero*.

<sup>114</sup> In Ethiopia, the term *färäng*, a corruption of Frank, was a blanket term for Latin Christians (see 'Färäng', EA, 2: 492).

letters he was carrying from Cairo and other bad things that an infidel can and is used to say against one who had the courage to abandon perfidy and embrace the faith. Upon hearing this, they were very displeased, but they did not have much time to talk to [Şägga Krəstos] because in the morning, with four servants, he went to the Jordan River to wash in that holy water as it is the custom of those people.

Saga Cristos [Şägga Krəstos] did not dare go in person to the friars' convent [in Jerusalem] for fear of the Turks and to avoid anyone suspecting his change of heart. [Instead] he took his letters [and hid them] inside a book carried by the animal they were leading, to show them stealthily to the Italian friars near the Jordan. [However], his servant Statios [Ewoşatewos] furtively took them and hid them under a rock to later make them public. Saga Cristos [Şägga Krəstos] looked for them to give them to the friars before the arrival of the pasha of the Turks, who was not far. He did not find them, and being certain that Statios [Ewoşatewos] had taken them, as it were, he started to argue with him and threatened to have his head cut off by the pasha like a thief. He [Ewoşatewos] denied it [stealing the letters] and he [Şägga Krəstos] ran to the pasha with his servant [Ewoşatewos], who told him to stop and wait until the pasha's arrival. Once he [the pasha] arrived, he first spoke to Statios [Ewoşatewos] having been the first accuser. He [Ewoşatewos] said that Saga Cristos [Şägga Krəstos] was taking letters to the Italians and that he wanted to go to Rome and lead soldiers to Jerusalem, and that his head had to be cut off and similar things. But as he could not speak Arabic and express himself well, the pasha did not understand well, but became suspicious, after hearing minced words such as Italians, Jerusalem, taking, cutting his head off and similar things.

Then Saga Cristos [Şägga Krəstos], who knew how to explain himself in Arabic better, started to talk and said that his rogue servant had stolen the letters and did not want to return them. The pasha asked for the letters and threatened to have his [Ewoşatewos's] head cut off immediately if he did not return them. He returned them, and the pasha asked what kind of letters they were and what they said. Again, with his evil tongue, he [Ewoşatewos] said that they were by Italians who wanted to take Jerusalem. Having heard this again, the pasha became very suspicious, but seeing that Saga Cristos [Şägga Krəstos] had letters of recommendation from the Armenians and others that were similar to the Italian ones, he returned them to him. However, to dispel any suspicion, he ordered that they both be chained at the neck, until they could find a good interpreter who could understand them.

A Turkish prince, seeing this and moved to compassion for Saga Cristos [Şägga Krəstos], who appeared to be what he claimed, told the pasha that it was not right to treat the master like the servant by keeping them bound to the same chain. But he barbarously answered that in their land all those who do not believe in Maomet [Mohammed] are slaves and that they would be treated in the same way. While they were chained together, that bad servant started to insult and threaten his master Saga Cristos [Şägga Krəstos] by saying that as soon as they reached Jerusalem, the pasha would find an interpreter and have him [Şägga Krəstos] killed. He [Ewoşatewos] again reproached him for his change of faith, for having left their teacher Dioscorus<sup>115</sup> to become Italian<sup>116</sup> Catholic and other countless insults. He [Şägga Krəstos], despite

<sup>115</sup> Pope Dioscorus I of Alexandria, who rejected the Council of Chalcedon in favour of miaphysitism, which resulted in the Chalcedonian Schism in AD 451.

<sup>116</sup> 'Latin' in *Gualdo*.

fearing the pasha, replied that Dioscorus was a blind teacher and his followers were also blind and that they would all fall into the pit of hell with him. Finally, after having crossed themselves with holy water, Saga Cristos [Šägga Krastos] managed to dispatch his letters while the two were being taken to Jerusalem, chained on the same camel.

Once arrived two hours after dawn, they were taken in front of the house of the pasha's servant. An Egyptian approached them and asked them what they had done to be chained, having realized that one was clearly master and the other servant. Saga Cristos [Šägga Krastos] told the entire story; Statios [Ewostatewos] wanted to do the same but was not understood by the Egyptian, who made a deal with Saga Cristos [Šägga Krastos]. He told him in the ear, [‘Tell me] what you want to give me and I will make the pasha free you.[’] Without saying much, he [Šägga Krastos] secretly took off from his finger a ring with a very valuable diamond, and gave it to him. He [the Egyptian] went to the pasha, who summoned both. The pasha instructed the Egyptian, who claimed to understand their language, to be the interpreter as he did not have a better one. He [the Egyptian] started to speak and negotiate on Saga Cristos's [Šägga Krastos's] behalf, saying that the servant was a sad person, a thief and that he deserved to be punished. So he was sentenced to prison and Saga Cristos [Šägga Krastos] was freed, and the pasha took his [Šägga Krastos's] camel as payment as he had nothing else to give.

Hence, God had freed Saga Cristos [Šägga Krastos] from the hands of Cairo's pasha, who wanted him to become Turkish [i.e. Muslim] and he ordered to seek him out so that he could send him to Constantinople as a gift for the Grand Turk. However, he could not find him because he had already left for Jerusalem. Now again he [God] freed him through an Egyptian, from the hands of the pasha of Jerusalem and from his bad servant's accusations. The latter, after three days in prison, was asked if he wanted to bail himself out, but having nothing and unwilling to become Turk, as the pasha wanted, he was given thirty-three beatings and after thirteen days in prison was set free. He went again to the patriarch of the Greeks, the bishop of the Armenians and the Egyptian superior, to whom Saga Cristos [Šägga Krastos] had already given the letters of recommendation given to him in Cairo. And [the servant] again whispered and spoke ill of him, telling them all what had happened and that they should not believe that he was a Jacobite because he had made himself Italian.

Hence, they all turned against him [Šägga Krastos] and persuaded his servants to abandon him. Together with the patriarch, they conspired against him while he was [staying] in a very ugly room in the house of the Ethiopians in the city,<sup>117</sup> mistreated by everyone, whereas his servants were very well treated by the patriarch and the others. They all tried to persuade Saga Cristos [Šägga Krastos] not to be *fring* [färänġ] – that is, Italian – but Jacobite.<sup>118</sup> However, as he was firm in his resolution, they tried to have his head cut off. As he was persecuted by everyone, not even the Italians dared to greet him for fear that something bad would happen to them; only their interpreter sometimes consoled him.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>117</sup> In Jerusalem, Šägga Krastos was hosted at the Ethiopian monastery of Dayr as-Sulṭān, located on the roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Tedeschi 1964).

<sup>118</sup> The term *faranġ*, which today identifies foreigners, historically referred only to European Catholics.

<sup>119</sup> Most likely one of the Maronite clerics who befriended Šägga Krastos and recorded affidavits on his behalf (see above).

With Easter approaching, he entered with the friars in the Holy Sepulchre and gave a fright to the astonished guardian who was out of his mind. On this occasion Saga Cristos [Şägga Krastos] managed to talk to the friars, who, seeing his good soul, advised him to go secretly to Nazareth, where he would have been safer with the friars and hidden from the Turks, because certainly had his dealings been discovered, his and the friars' heads would be gone. He accepted the good advice and, with three companions who seemed less ungrateful, he left stealthily while the others stayed.<sup>120</sup>

### **[Şägga Krastos in Nazareth]**

A few days after arriving in Nazareth, those three servants, having to toil a bit there, left. Saga Cristos [Şägga Krastos] was inconsolable: he found himself all alone, not knowing how to speak Italian with the friars, and the friars unable to speak Arabic or any other language with him. Day and night, he was always crying over his misfortunes. Two months after he [Şägga Krastos] had arrived in Nazareth, the abovementioned Father Paolo arrived from Cairo, having been appointed Guardian of Jerusalem.<sup>121</sup> He [Father Paolo] was overjoyed to see him [Şägga Krastos] there and asked him about his servants, and he [Şägga Krastos] explained everything to him the best he could. The father exhorted him to be a true Catholic<sup>122</sup> to be able to gain paradise, and not do like his servants, who, because of their perfidy, would go to hell. To better ascertain his true faith and give him a better foundation in it, he [Father Paolo] took him along to Mount Tabor and other holy places. Once returned to Nazareth, he had him swear on the Gospel that he would always be Catholic<sup>123</sup> and never return to the faith of the Jacobites,<sup>124</sup> even at the cost of his life. He did so gladly. As Father Paolo wanted to leave for Jerusalem, he told him [Şägga Krastos] to stay there, telling him that he would send him a letter proving that he was Catholic. And he would send two friars with whom he would embark for Rome to go and kiss the feet of the most Holy Pope. Once he received the letter, he did what he had been persuaded to do and left with the Guardian of Nazareth<sup>125</sup> and arrived in Rome in the house of the Reformed Observant Minors of Saint Francis.<sup>126</sup>

### **[Şägga Krastos in Italy according to Gualdi]**

... I [Şägga Krastos] left with the Guardian of Nazareth, taking the route of Zante [Zakynthos]. I arrived in Otranto and later in Naples, and in a few days, I arrived in Rome at the convent of the Observant Reformed Friars Minor on 7 January 1633 in San Francesco in Trastevere otherwise known as di Ripa.<sup>127</sup> After a few days

<sup>120</sup> According to Roger, Şägga Krastos was advised to go to Nazareth as a safer option because the city was controlled by the Druze Emir Fakhr al-Din (1572–1635), who was on excellent terms with Latin Catholics. Roger served the emir as physician (Gorton 2013: 11).

<sup>121</sup> Paolo da Lodi travelled to Jerusalem upon being appointed Custodian of the Holy Land (1632–35).

<sup>122</sup> 'Catolico latino' (Latin Catholic) in *Gualdo*.

<sup>123</sup> 'Latino' (Latin) in *Gualdo*.

<sup>124</sup> See note 70.

<sup>125</sup> Father Bartolomeo da Pettorano, Guardian of Nazareth.

<sup>126</sup> *Barberini* ends here. Following, on the same folio, is a short paragraph that introduces the two memoranda (see note 19).

<sup>127</sup> San Francesco a Ripa, a Franciscan monastery in Trastevere.

I went to live in San Pietro Montorio, also known as Monte Aureo in the convent of the abovementioned fathers,<sup>128</sup> where I stayed until the present day . . .

**[*Şägga Krastos in Italy according to Bisaccioni*]**

. . . [*Şägga Krastos*] landed in Zante [*Zakynthos*] and upon changing boat he went to Corfu [*Kerkyra*], from there he landed in Otranto and transferred to Naples. He entered the city on Saturday night and lodged in the convent of the Cross of the Observant Fathers.<sup>129</sup> A journey so long that could have turned Midas into a beggar had made this prince spend all the gold and jewellery except for two trunks full of Ethiopian clothes and in particular two turbans – one of spun gold with some jewels and the other one of red cloth laced in gold, also with jewels – and two royal mantles or capes, decorated with pearls and small diamonds [and] small rubies. [These were] enough to uplift the unhappiness he was fleeing for some time. In the morning, while he was looking for a room where he could say his prayers, the trunks were not found: the stable boy said he had unloaded them at the door of the monastery, and the fathers [said] that they had not received them. Everyone flocks to see novelties; the foreigner is the first to be besieged with visits and distracted from taking care of his home, so the thief can easily reach for its loot. He resorted to justice, but found nothing; this was the last of the goods of his father and country. Here he is: naked, unknown, pilgrim, king banned from his kingdom, and victim of calamities.

As much as the plebeians of Naples is friendly to theft, its nobility is liberal and courteous: he received clothes and gifts and stayed only thirteen days. He moved on to Rome, where he arrived on 6 January 1633 and lodged at San Francesco a Ripa, then in San Pietro Montorio<sup>130</sup> . . . He left from Rome in November, and thanks to pontifical orders he was hosted throughout the state of the Church, and provided with board and transport by governors, bishops and ministers . . .

He came to Venice, where he still is today as I am writing, on 17 June [1634]. He is lodged at the monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore of the Benedictine Fathers, who are revering and entertaining him a great deal, because of a simple letter of the Father Abbot of San Paolo in Rome,<sup>131</sup> who recommended him. He is about to leave for France and England, or Holland, having sent things by sea, while he will go by land to France, to avoid the danger of the Turk he already had past problems with. Then he will go towards Congo on this side of the Cape of Good Hope. Four Reformed Observant Fathers<sup>132</sup> are following him to assist in the interests of faith and to cultivate the vineyard of the Lord . . .

<sup>128</sup> San Pietro in Montorio, a Franciscan monastery in the area known as Monte Auro, in Trastevere.

<sup>129</sup> 'Padri Zoccolanti'.

<sup>130</sup> See note 128.

<sup>131</sup> In Venice, *Şägga Krastos* was hosted at the Benedictine monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore, reportedly thanks to the recommendation he received from the superior of the Abbey of San Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome.

<sup>132</sup> 'Padri Zoccolanti'.

### [Šägga Krəstos in Italy and France according to Rechac]

He [Šägga Krəstos] embarked together with the monks and was so lucky to meet on board a Venetian nobleman who once had visited Ethiopia and, thus, had known him in his magnificent glory.<sup>133</sup> The conversation with this nobleman helped him overcome a little the miseries of his journeys, and he arrived in Zantes [Zakynthos] with fewer regrets. From there, they sailed to Corfu [Kerkyra], where they met Jerosme Moresimo, the most famous commander of the Venetian warships and vessels.<sup>134</sup> Moresimo received the prince with all kinds of honours and regards and armed a small boat specifically for him that took him to Otranto.

There, the governor and ruler of the city, prompted by rumours of plague, refused to let him in and to talk to him for eight days. Only then was he received and treated at the palace of the governor, who quickly informed the viceroy of Lechy en l'Ampouille [Lecce in Apulia]. The prince then went there and was received with all imaginable magnificence: the archbishop<sup>135</sup> came personally to meet him, followed by numerous lords and a huge crowd of ordinary people, all curious about him. The viceroy, lying sick in bed, could not attend. However, four days later, when he got better, he came to greet him at the archbishop's, where the prince was residing, and brought him a lot of presents in recognition of his noble status.

The prince appreciated these attentions very much and asked him the favour of an escort to Naples, which the viceroy gave immediately, by sending messengers in all directions to inform the governors of the places the prince would cross on his way to Naples. These governors were required to show the prince the best regards suitable for his high status. The prince then left Lechy [Lecce] with many noblemen accompanying him as ordered by the viceroy. He met the Prince of Avetrana,<sup>136</sup> who gave him a very warm welcome. This prince gave him a very expensive and luxuriously harnessed horse as a gift.<sup>137</sup> He [Šägga Krəstos] rode the horse to Naples, where the local viceroy<sup>138</sup> welcomed him, just like others before, with great honours and the kindest regards. The viceroy treated him

<sup>133</sup> The reference is to one Marco Lombardo, who is referred to much more extensively in Roger and also in Paolo da Lodi's patent letter. Paolo da Lodi, Jerusalem, 4 September 1632, APF, SOCG 211, 154–5. To Eugene Roger and Paolo da Lodi, Lombardo claimed to have been taken by Muslim slavers somewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean and to have been forced to convert to Islam. He also claimed to have visited Ethiopia at his master's behest and met Šägga Krəstos before his escape. The same story is related with more details and fantastic elements in an affidavit that Marco Lombardo wrote for Šägga Krəstos when the latter was in Venice. Valentin Conrart, 'Lettres et pièces', 209r–210v. Part of Lombardo's story is documented: he was enslaved in 1626 while in Alexandria and lived in captivity somewhere in the region until he appeared in Nazareth as a free man. He recounted his misfortunes in front of the Venetian Inquisition upon returning home in 1632, shortly after his dealings with Šägga Krəstos. Tellingly, his deposition in front of the Inquisition, part of the standard procedure renegades underwent to be reconciled with the Catholic faith, does not mention any experience in Ethiopia. Marco Lombardo, 8 November 1632, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Santo Ufficio, Processi, b. 88. On Lombardo, see Rothman (2012: 106).

<sup>134</sup> This must have been a member of the powerful Venetian family Morosini. He is identified as 'Sea Lord Hieronymo Morosini' on p. 22 of the anonymous *Der venetianische Phoebeus* (1688).

<sup>135</sup> Bishop Scipione Spina (1542–1639) (Pellegrino 2018).

<sup>136</sup> Giovanni Antonio III Abrizzi (1607–36), Prince of Avetrana (Paviolo 2015).

<sup>137</sup> While there is no other source confirming this gift, it is believable: Šägga Krəstos received similar donations throughout his journey.

<sup>138</sup> Manuel de Acevedo y Zúñiga (1586–1653), Hapsburg Viceroy (1631–37) (Dodero 2019).

wonderfully for many days,<sup>139</sup> and when he [Šägga Krāstos] wished to go to Rome, the viceroy had him escorted by his lieutenant-general and Monseigneur Gafrarely, archbishop of Saint Severin.<sup>140</sup>

When he [Šägga Krāstos] arrived in Rome, the most prestigious city of the world, the Holy Father wished to see him and received him with distinguished honours. He extended him [Šägga Krāstos] the honour of letting him kiss his feet, as was the tradition. After spending a couple of months in Rome, he [Šägga Krāstos] wished to see more of Italy before heading to France and the pope sent orders to all regional authorities to welcome and honour him with all the regards due to his noble status.<sup>141</sup> He went first to Venice, then to Parma, Piacenza and Mantua,<sup>142</sup> where his highness treated him in his palace while he was sick for fifteen days. Then he went to Turin, where the Duke of Savoy,<sup>143</sup> having given him adequate honours, demonstrated his deep affection for him. He had him [Šägga Krāstos] treated for eight months, while he was bedridden by some great disease. After which, he yearned for France, to throw himself into the arms of His Most Christian Majesty.<sup>144</sup> He left Savoy and came finally to Paris, where he presently is: awaiting the occasion to make himself known by his Majesty.<sup>145</sup>

### **[Šägga Krāstos in Italy and France according to Rocoles]**

When he [Šägga Krāstos] arrived there [Rome], the pope lodged him in a palace and hosted him for two years. At that time, the Duke of Crequy<sup>146</sup> was ambassador in Rome and met often with the prince, and persuaded him to see France and come to Paris, which the prince did by spending roughly three years there. He died there very young from pleurisy in Rueil, where he was trying to win Cardinal de Richelieu's friendship.

The imposture of this luckless prince did not aim to be restored to the throne of his father Hasse Jacob [aše Ya'əqob].<sup>147</sup> This was not his intention, considering how far away he went from his country, coming to the other side of the world. He knew very well that the Christian princes were not able to assist him back to power simply because of the great distance between his home and their countries. His only goal

<sup>139</sup> The hospitality Šägga Krāstos enjoyed in Naples is confirmed in the local nuncio's letters. For example, Niccolò Enriquez de Herrera to Francesco Barberini, Naples, 28 December 1632, BAV, Barb. Lat. 7496, 101.

<sup>140</sup> This is Bishop Fausto Caffarelli (1595–1651), who hailed from one of Rome's most powerful families and was returning to Rome to be appointed nuncio to Savoy (Becker 1973). Šägga Krāstos travelled with him from Naples to Rome, and encountered him again later in Turin. Fausto Caffarelli to Francesco Barberini, 1 April 1635, Turin, BAV, Barb. Lat. 7169, 71r; Fausto Caffarelli to Ingoli, 27 August 1635, Turin, APF, SOCG 135, 25rv.

<sup>141</sup> The characterization of Šägga Krāstos's reception in Rome is greatly exaggerated, as is much of *Rechac*. Šägga Krāstos was never officially endorsed by the papacy and he is unlikely to have been granted an official hearing.

<sup>142</sup> Šägga Krāstos's transit through these locales is well documented by multiple archival documents, which confirm that he was generously supported by the rulers of Parma, Piacenza and Mantua. The same is true for his long sojourn in Turin, due to his deteriorating health.

<sup>143</sup> Vittorio Amedeo I di Savoia (1587–1637).

<sup>144</sup> Louis XIII (1610–43).

<sup>145</sup> Šägga Krāstos reached Paris in August 1635. His transit through France was rapid and mostly undocumented.

<sup>146</sup> Charles I de Blanchefort, Marquis de Créquy (1578–1638).

<sup>147</sup> From *aše*, the title reserved for Ethiopian emperors (see 'Aše', EA, 1: 364–5).

was to be accredited with a title of extraordinary greatness and power (which his father Jacob [Ya‘əqob] possessed and was due to him by birth). He wanted to persuade the pope and the crowned heads of Europe to show some special kind of compassion for his misfortune, and arouse their magnificence to provide good upkeep for a prince.

The fact that the princes (at whose courts he spent some time) made little mention of him makes me think that they did not believe him to be who he claimed to be, thinking he must be a boaster, if not an impostor. I do see a difference between boasters, impudent people and impostors. Boasters want to get attention by telling lies, stories and gossip. We may then believe them or not; they only harm themselves. The impudent people and the impostors, however, not only also lie and gossip, but they mostly claim things that are not theirs. They use ruses to get other people’s belongings (currently the term used is conjurer) even through the use of violence and criminal means. This impostor, who had not distinguished himself at the head of armies in his country, caused a lot of talk in Paris as a champion in the games of Venus.

Out of decency, I will not say more on this here. He was responsible for many feats that people told me about when I came to Paris for the first time two or three years after his death. In one particular case, he is said to have used acid against his mistress in irreversible and permanent retaliation for embarrassing him. The principle of the law by *Barbarius Philippus*, Roman slave and praetor, is that *error communis facit jus*, meaning a public mistake becomes a law.<sup>148</sup> I have put this Zaga-Christ [Şägga Krastos] among the impostors only because everyone believed he was one, except some friars from Palestine, like brother Eugene Roger, a lay Recollect,<sup>149</sup> who, as I reported, wrote about him in his ‘Livre des Relations ou Histoire de la Terre Sainte’.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> The reference is to a legal principle associated with the Roman praetorship of Barbarius Philippus, a runaway slave who became praetor under false pretences, and whose rulings were held valid after his imposture was discovered, on the grounds that he had long believed himself to be a rightful praetor. Rocoles implies that he considers Şägga Krastos an impostor because most people did (Codrea 2015: 150).

<sup>149</sup> The Recollects were a French branch of the Franciscan Order.

<sup>150</sup> See Roger (1646).

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