

Africa Collecting Europe? Thoughts on Patronage and Power in Christian Ethiopia, 1470–1530

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This presentation will present a book project that seeks to centre long-neglected material culture sources from Christian Ethiopia at the turn of the 16th century to tell a larger story about the assertion of power in a pre-colonial African kingdom. Focussing on the material culture production of the Christian kingdom between the years 1470–1530 CE, the project mines the object histories of dozens of religious works — ranging from locally painted blonde Madonnas and pseudo-Flemish crucifixion scenes to imported icons with elaborate modifications from Crete to Flanders and custom-made French enamels — for their context of production acquisition modification and utilisation by the Ethiopian nobility, and assumes that a dispersal of political power led to a period of artistic innovation and cultural efflorescence.