The Black St Maurice of Magdeburg and the African Christian Kingdoms in Nubia and Ethiopia in the Thirteenth Century

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This study examines the connections between the black St Maurice of Magdeburg and the Christian kingdoms in Nubia and Ethiopia. The depiction of St Maurice signifies a new approach to the concept of blackness in medieval imagery. Is this related to the familiarity that started developing between the Latins and the eastern Christians in the 13th century? By analysing the relations between the papacy and Nubia's church, the legends of Prester John, and the struggle between the pope and Frederick of Hohenstaufen, the study concludes that St Maurice of Magdeburg is indirectly associated with Christian Nubia. The black St Maurice evidently underlined Frederick's aspirations to present himself as the only protector of the Christian world. The eastern Christians were integrated in this world without the stigma of heresy that the pope had imputed to them. The same stigma was attributed to Frederick: the black St Maurice was his provocative response to the Papal See.

In the 1240s in the refurbished cathedral of Magdeburg a sculpture of St Maurice was erected (Figure 1). The depiction of St Maurice in this sculpture was unique, marking an important change in his iconography. While up to the mid-13th century St Maurice was always depicted as a white Roman soldier, in this sculpture of Magdeburg the saint is portrayed as a black African knight.[1] Since the reasons for

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[1] J. Devisse, 'A Sanctified Black Maurice', in D. Bindman and H. L. Gates, Jr, eds, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, Vol. 2: *From the Early Christian Era to the 'Age of*

Figure 1. Saint Maurice, Cathedral of Magdeburg. (This Wikipedia and Wikimedia Commons image is from the user Chris 73 under the Creative Commons cc-by-sa 3.0 licence.)

The cathedral was built in 937 with donations from the Emperor Otto I, who came from Saxony. After the fire in 1207, the Archbishop of Magdeburg, Albert of Käfenburg (1205–1232) waged a long fight to rebuild the cathedral. His efforts were continued by his successor Wilbrand of Kasernberg (1235–1254). See Henry Mayr-Harting, 'The church of Magdeburg: its trade and its town in the tenth and early eleventh centuries', in *Church and City, 1000–1500: Essays in Honour of Christopher Brooke*, ed. D. Abulafia, M. J. Franklin and Rubin Miri (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 129–50, and Audrey Elisabeth Rooney, 'An Altered Presence: The Cathedral of St Mauritius, Magdeburg in Political and Artistic Context' (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 1997).

this change in St Maurice's racial identity are unknown, this study examines whether there are any correlations between the black St Maurice and the growing attention that the Latins paid to Nubia and Ethiopia in the 13th century. Is there any connection between the statue of St Maurice of Magdeburg and the legend of Prester John, the mysterious priest-king of Ethiopia? Moreover, what political connotations concerning the struggle for power between Empire and papacy does the black saint disclose and in what way could African Christians be related to this?

Firstly, we have to examine the statue itself.[2] St Maurice was the patron saint of the Saxonian dynasty of German emperors, established by Otto I the Great, and hence he was also the patron saint of the cathedral of Magdeburg, which was built by Otto I and was the site of his tomb as well.[3] The statue of the black St Maurice was placed close to the grave of Otto I in the new cathedral of Magdeburg, which was rebuilt in the 13th century. St Maurice is depicted as a 13th century knight, clad in chain-mail and cloak. In his hands he held a shield and lance (now missing).[4] On his face the African features are very distinctive. His expression reveals the virtues of strength, resolution and faith, which were attributed to Christian knights.[5]

Figure 2: Egypt, Nubia and Ethiopia.

Discovery', Pt 1: From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood, New edn (Cambridge, 2010), 139–94 (pp. 141, 147, 148, 150); Gude Suckale-Redlefsen and R. Suckale, *Mauritius: Der heilige Mohr/The Black Saint Maurice* (Houston, 1987), pp. 24–25.

[2] R. Grimm, 'Two African Saints in Medieval Germany', *Die Unterrichtspraxis* 25 (1992): 127–133 (127–28); Suckale-Redlefsen and Suckale, *Mauritius,* 18–19; W.S. Seiferth, 'Saint Mauritius, African', *Plylon (1940–1956)* 2 (1941): 321, 370–376 (pp. 372–73).

[3] E. Breitinger, 'African Presences and Representations in the Principality/ Markgrafschaft of Bayreuth', in Stefan Helgesson (ed.), *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* (Amsterdam/New York, 2011), 107–146 (pp. 114–15); Devisse, 'A Sanctified Black Maurice', 142–46; Grimm, 'Two African Saints in Medieval Germany', 127, 129; P. H. D. Kaplan, 'Black Africans in Hohenstaufen Iconography', *Gesta* 26 (1987): 29–36 (p. 33); Suckale-Redlefsen and Suckale, *Mauritius*, 32–33, 40–41.

[4] St Maurice's lance is related to the "Holy Lance", which was one of the most sacred Christian relics in the Middle Ages. See Breitinger, 'African Presences and Representations', 116–17; Devisse, 'A Sanctified Black Maurice', 150.

[5] Breitinger, 'African Presences and Representations', 115; Grimm, 'Two African

This representation of the black saint was in sharp contrast to any pejorative connotation of blackness, which in medieval imagery was often connected with sinfulness.[6] Despite the stylised form of a knight's spirituality, which is characteristic of Romanesque art, the statue is a work of Gothic art, as is known from the statues of Eckard and Uta in the cathedral of Naumburg, and also from the Magdeburg Rider, in which the individual features are captured in a realistic manner.[7] Could it be said, then, that the black St Maurice is a realistic portrayal of St Maurice's facial traits?

According to his hagiographies,[8] St Maurice was a martyr of the Christian faith during the reign of the Roman Emperor Maximianus in the third century. He was a commander of the Theban Legion which was stationed in Upper Egypt, and from where its soldiers were

mainly recruited. This legion was dispatched to Gaul by Maximianus in order to suppress an uprising. There, at Agaunum,[9] near the shores of Lake Geneva, the Theban Legion, which consisted of Christians, refused to participate in sacrifices to the "heathen" and to massacre other Christians. For their disobedience the soldiers were disciplined by decimation until all of them were executed. Although the historicity of these events is questionable,[10] the fact is that in the medieval thought of the 13th century St Maurice was from Upper Egypt.[11] But neither his name[12] nor his place of origin reveal his racial identity, since the inhabitants of Upper Egypt in the third century could be either Egyptians or Nubians or Sudanese,[13] or even Greeks and Romans. Therefore, the explanation of the transfer of St Maurice's depiction from a white man to a black man has to be sought on the one hand in the contemporary socio-political conditions and, on the other hand, in the relations that both the Holy See and the Holy Roman Empire developed with the Christians in Africa, especially with the Nubians and Ethiopians.

Saints in Medieval Germany', 128; Seiferth, 'Saint Mauritius, African', 372.

[6] D. Higgs-Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton, 2003), pp. 81–94; P. H. D. Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, Studies in the Fine Arts Iconography 9 (Ann Arbor, MI, 1985), p. 7; idem, 'Black Africans in Hohenstaufen Iconography', 29; idem, 'Introduction to the New Edition', in Bindman and Gates (eds), *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, II.1, 1–30, 218–27 (pp. 5–9, 15 and 222 notes 68, 70); M. Salvadore, 'The Ethiopian Age of Exploration: Prester John's Discovery of Europe, 1306–1458', *Journal of World History* 21 (2010): 593–627 (pp. 595–96); J. Devisse, 'Christians and Black', in Bindman and Gates (eds), The Image of the Black in Western Art, II.1, 31–72 (pp. 37–72); G. K. Hunter, 'Othello and Colour Prejudice', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 53 (1967): 139–163.

[7] Breitinger, 'African Presences and Representations', 115; Devisse, 'A Sanctified Black Maurice', 155; Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 15; Grimm, 'Two African Saints in Medieval Germany', 128; Suckale-Redlefsen and Suckale, *Mauritius*, 42–43; esp. for the Magdeburg Rider see V. R. Kaufmann, 'The Magdeburg Rider: An Aspect of the Reception of Frederick II's Roman Revival North of the Alps', in William Tronzo (ed.), *Intellectual Life at the Court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen,* Studies in the History of Art 44 (Washington, DC, 1994), 62–88 (pp. 63–82); Seiferth, 'Saint Mauritius, African', 373.

[8] Hagiographies of St Maurice are derived from a letter written by Eucherius, Bishop of Lyons, about 450 AD. See Eucherius of Lyon, *Opera Omnia Pars I*, ed. C. Wotke, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 31 (Vienna, 1894), pp. 163–73; *Passio Agaunensium martyrum,* ed. B. Krusch, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptorum rerum Merovingicarum 3 (Hanover, 1896), 20–41. For more editions, see Devisse, 'A Sanctified Black Maurice', 268 n. 5; J. Pepino, 'St. Eucherius of Lyons: Rhetorical Adaptation of Message to Intended Audience in Fifth Century Provence' (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2009), pp. 232–60; Suckale-Redlefsen and Suckale, *Mauritius*, 28–29.

[9] Today's Saint Maurice-en-Valais.

[10] Devisse, 'A Sanctified Black Maurice', 139–40; D. Woods, 'The Origin of the Legend of Maurice and the Theban Legion', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 45 (1994): 385–95; D. F. O'Reilly, 'The Theban Legion of St. Maurice', *Vigiliae Christianae* 32 (1978): 195–207; D. Van Berchem, *Le martyre de la Légion Thébaine : essai sur la formation d'une legend* (Basel, 1956); Seiferth, 'Saint Mauritius, African', 371. L. Dupraz, *Les passions de S. Maurice d'Agaune: essai sur l'historicite de la tradition et contribution a l'etude de l'armee pre-diocletienne et des canonisations tardives de la fin du IVe siecle* (Fribourg, 1961), argues for the veracity of Eucherius' account.

[11] Until the 10th century St Maurice was considered to be white and not a Theban. See Devisse, 'A Sanctified Black Maurice', 141; See also Suckale-Redlefsen and Suckale, *Mauritius*, 52–53, where it is mentioned that only after 1160 was Maurice described as a leader of Moors.

[12] The name "Maurice" is probably derived from the Greek μαύρος, meaning not only "black", but also "dark", and the Latin *morus*, meaning blackberry. The word μαύρος, when it is employed to designate a person, can refer to either a dark-complexioned or dark-haired man. About St Maurice's racial identity see Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 15 and 222 note 66.

[13] "Sudan" in Arabic means "black" and in Arabic texts the term "Bilad-as-Sudan" is equivalent to the modern term "Africa".

The image of Christian Africans in 13th century Europe

But let us now examine the image that their co-religionists in the West had of Christians in Africa, as expressed in texts of that time. The terms *Ethiopia* (more frequently) and *Nubia* (less often) known since Graeco-Roman antiquity,[14] started to re-emerge in texts of the 12th and 13th century.[15] What is more, their content did no longer tread exclusively in the realm of myth and fantasy, but some clerics and monks had initially a vague image of the countries in question as being located south of Egypt.[16] To a great extent, this knowledge came from the Frankish Outremer and the translations of maps and astronomic works from Arabic into Latin.[17] It was there, in the Latin states of the East, that the westerners came into contact with monks and pilgrims from Ethiopia and Nubia. In this way, they started to notice the existence of Christians who lived in African kingdoms that were independent from Islam. Thus, the image of African people, prevalent at that time in the West, gradually began to transform as a result of their encounters with the Sudanese soldiers of the Egyptian army, many of whom were converts to Islam.[18] Progressively, throughout the 13th century, the knowledge of the West about the East and its Christian population seems to have become more concrete.[19] This knowledge was disseminated through the works of crusaders and pilgrims who visited the Holy Land. In addition, after the loss of Jerusalem, and as a consequence of the shock inflicted on western Christendom, the spirit of the crusades was reinforced and new crusades were organised, targeting Egypt. So, interest in the region increased.

The African Christians, whenever mentioned in 13th century texts, are almost indistinctly classified into the same group as that of the "Jacobites", a term which encompasses all anti-Chalcedonians (or

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[14] For Nubia in ancient authors, see Strabo, *Geographica,* XVII.i, 53–54; Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* vi.35. For a more detailed account see Effrosyni Zacharopoulou, *Byzantium and the Kingdom of Axum: Political Economic and Military Relations and Influences (ca 324–565 A.D.)* (Thessaloniki, 2010), pp. 159–61.

[15] A. Łajtar and T. Plociennik, 'A Man from Provence on the Middle Nile: A Graffito in the Upper Church at Banganarti', in Łajtar and Jacques van der Vliet (eds), *Nubian Voices: Studies in Christian Nubian Culture, Journal of Juristic Papyrology* Supplements 15 (Warsaw, 2011), 95–119 (p. 110). For references to Nubia see R. Seignobos, 'Nubia and Nubians in Medieval Latin Culture: The Evidence of Maps (12th–14th Century)', in J. R. Anderson and D. A. Welsby (eds), *The Fourth Cataract and Beyond,* Proceedings of the International Conference for Nubian Studies (Leuven, Paris and Walpole, MA, 2014), 989–1004 (p. 989); idem, 'L'autre Éthiopie: La Nubie et la croisade (XIIe–XIVe siècle)', *Annales D' Éthiopie* 27 (2012): 49–69 (pp. 50–58); G. Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan* (Bologna, 1981), pp. 164–68; for Ethiopia, see H. Kifle-Egzi, 'Western Relation with Ethiopia during the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period' (MA diss., McGill University, Montreal, 1962), pp. 36–66.

[16] Theodericus of Wurzburg, *Description of the Holy Places*, trans. Aubrey Stewart, Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society (hereinafter PPTS) 5.4 (London, 1891), p. 14; Burchard of Strasbourg, quoted by Arnold de Lübeck, *Chronica Slavorum,* ed. J. M. Lappenberg (Hanover, 1868), p. 271; Richard de Poitiers, in *Notice sur Divers Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Vaticane: Richard le Poitevin, moine de Cluny, historien et poète,* ed. Élie Berger, Bibl. des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, Fasc. 6 (Toulouse, 1879), Appendix, 45–140 (p. 137).

[17] Seignobos, 'Nubia and Nubians in Medieval Latin Culture'; idem, 'L'autre Éthiopie', 50–52.

[18] Albert of Aix, '*Historia Hierosolymitanae Expeditionis*', in *Liber Christianae Expeditionis pro ereptione, emundatione, restitutione Sanctae Hierosolymitanae Ecclesiae,* ed. Paul Meyer, *Recueil des historiens des Croisades: historiens occidentaux,* 5 vols (Paris, 1841–1906), IV, 267–713 (vi. 41, 45, 46, 50); Breitinger, 'African Presences and Representations', 119; J. Devisse, 'The Black and His Color: From Symbols to Realities', in Bindman and Gates (eds), *The Image of the Black in Western Art, II.*1, 73–138 (pp. 73–74); Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, 48–51; S. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1951), III, 168. For the Nubians and the Sudanese in the Fatimids army, see P. L. Shinnie, 'Christian Nubia and the Crusades', *Nubica* 1 (1990): 603–609 (pp. 604–05); Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan,* pp. 129–31; Ivan Hrbek, 'Egypt, Nubia and the Eastern Deserts', in Roland Oliver (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, *vol. 3: From c. 1050 to c. 1600* (Cambridge, 1977), 10–97 (p. 70); Y. F. Hasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan from the Seventh to the Early Sixteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1967), pp. 42–50; idem, 'Main Aspects of the Arab Migration to the Sudan', *Arabica* 14 (1967): 14–31 (pp. 21–22). African soldiers were among the Almovarid armies in Spain, which was another area where the westerners met Africans.

[19] Alberic de Trois Fontaines, *Chronica Albrici Monachi Trium Fontium*, ed. Paulus Scheffer-Boichorst, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptorum* 23 (Hanover, 1874), 631–950 (p. 886, p. 935); Jacques de Vitry, *History of Jerusalem*, trans. Aubrey Stewart, PPTS 11.2 (London, 1896), pp. 58, 73–77; Matthew of Paris and Roger de Wendover, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H.R. Luard, 7 vols (London, 1872), III, 397–403, 460, 600; Burchard of Mount Sion, 'Descriptio Terrae Sanctae', in *Peregrinatores Medii Aevi quatuor,* ed. Johann C. M. Laurent (Leipzig, 1873), 1–100 (pp. 5–8), trans. Aubrey Stuart as *A Description of the Holy Land*, PPTS 12.1 (London, 1896), pp. 2–3, 104.

Monophysite) Christians of the East.[20] References to them are often accompanied by their characterisation as "heretics", and "schismatics".[21] We may thus say that the approach to the Christians of the East, and, by inclusion, those of Africa, took shape under the influence of the prejudice generated in the West by the non-acceptance on their part of the pope's spiritual authority and primacy. Moreover, the animosity that progressively grew between the crusaders of the first Crusade and the Byzantines clearly played a crucial role within this context,[22] since the Christians of the East were regarded as being within the domain of Byzantium. We observe, therefore, quite a few cases in which the crusaders treated both Christian and Muslim residents of conquered cities with equal cruelty. A case in point is the indiscriminate massacre

in the city of Bilbais by Amalric I of Jerusalem in 1168, a deed that turned the Copts of Egypt against the crusaders, thereby hindering any future collaboration between them.[23] Such collaboration, despite being one of the Egyptian sultans' permanent fears,[24] was not pursued by the Latins and the Holy See, which was at the head of the crusades, either during the 12th or during the 13th centuries. Only in Muslim authors do we trace references to conspiracies against Saladin, in which Nubians/Sudanese, Armenians and the crusaders were involved,[25] but there is no reference whatsoever to an actual collaboration between Christians of the East and of the West in order to prevent the conquest of Jerusalem by Saladin. Even when the crusaders were active on the Red Sea coast, such as, for instance, in 1182/83, when Renaud de Châtillon assaulted ports of the region that geographically pertained

[20]   Scott C. Parker, 'The Indigenous Christians of the Arabic Middle East in an Age of Crusaders, Mongols, and Mamluks (1244–1366)' (PhD diss., Royal Holloway College, University of London, 2012), pp. 29–42; Seignobos, 'L'autre Éthiopie', 6; for definitions of these terms, see Effrosyni Zacharopoulou, 'Nubia and Byzantium (6th Century–ca. 1500): Christianity and Nubian culture and its evolution in the light of the development of the Byzantine Empire' (PhD diss., University of Johannesburg, 2011), pp. 59–60.

[21]   Fulcher of Chartres, 'Historia Hierosolymitana (1095–1127)', trans. M.E. McGinty, in *The First Crusade: 'The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres' and Other Source Materials*, ed. E. M. Peters, 2nd edn (Philadelphia, 1998), pp. 47–101 (83–84); Burchard of Mount Sion, *Description of the Holy Land,* 103–04; Jacques de Vitry, *History of Jerusalem,* 73–76; *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants, e*d. A.C. Krey (London, 1921), pp. 63, 265. See also Parker, 'The Indigenous Christians of the Arabic Middle East', 81; C. MacEvitt, *The Crusades and the Christian World of the East: Rough Tolerance* (Philadelphia, 2008), pp. 13, 100–06; D. Nicolle, *Essential Histories: The Crusades* (Chicago, 2001), p. 12; Shinnie, 'Christian Nubia and the Crusades', 606–07; P. W. Edbury and J. G. Rowe, *William of Tyre. Historian of the Latin East (*Cambridge, 1988), pp. 132–34; P. K. Hitti, 'The Impact of the Crusades on Moslem Lands', in N. P. Zacour and H. W. Hazard (eds), *A History of the Crusades, Vol. 5: The Impact of the Crusades on the Near East* (Madison, WI, 1985), 33–58 (p. 50); Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, I, 256; III, 477–79.

[22]   J. M. Powell, 'The Crusades: An Introduction', in A. V. Murray (ed.), *The Crusades: An Encyclopedia*, 4 vols (Santa Barbara, CA, 2006), I, xliii–lx (pp. xlviii–xlix); Nicolle, *The Crusades*, 25; R.J. Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States 1096–1204,* trans. J. C. Morris and Jean E. Ridings (Oxford, 1993), pp. 61–141; A. S. Atiya, *Crusade, Commerce & Culture* (Bloomington, IN, 1962), pp. 65, 71. See Edbury & Rowe, *William of Tyre,* 130–50, on the relations between the Byzantines and the Crusaders, as these are related in the history of William of Tyre. For this work, see also William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, ed. and trans. Emily H. Babcock and A.C. Krey (New York, 1943).

[23]   Matthew of Edessa, A*rmenia and the Crusades: Tenth to Twelfth Centuries: The Cronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, trans. Ara Edmond Dostourian (Lanham, MD and London, 1993), pp. 197–98. See also Parker, 'The Indigenous Christians of the Arabic Middle East', 18; Powell, 'The Crusades: An Introduction', lx; J. Phillips, *The Crusades, 1095–1197* (London, 2002), p. 99; A. Boas, *Jerusalem in the Time of the Crusades: Society, Landscape, and Art in the Holy City under Frankish Rule* (London, 2001), pp. 37–38; A. Raymond, *Cairo*, trans. W. Wood (Cambridge, MA, 2000), pp. 74–75; Y. Lev, *Saladin in Egypt (*Leiden, 1999), pp. 59–60; G. Regan, *Saladin and the Fall of Jerusalem* (London, 1987), pp. 21–22; H. E. Mayer, 'Latins, Muslims and Greeks in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem', *History* 63 (1978): 175–92 (pp. 175–177); J. L. Cate, 'The Crusade of 1101', in M. W. Baldwin (ed.), *A History of the Crusades, Vol. 1: The First Hundred Years* (Madison, WI, 1969), 343–67 (p. 356); Baldwin, 'The Latin States under Baldwin III and Almaric I, 1143–1174', ibid., 528–62; Atiya, *Crusade, Commerce & Culture*, 65–66; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades,* II, 381.

[24]   Effrosyni Zacharopoulou, 'Μια ερμηνευτική προσέγγιση της σχέσης της χριστιανικής Νουβίας με τους σταυροφόρους κατά τον πρώτο αιώνα των σταυροφοριών', *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 95, n.s. 24 (2013): 107–30 (pp. 116–17, 126); Hassan B. Abdelwahab, *Influence: (Supremacy) of Religion on Sudan's Foreign Policy Decision-making* (Bloomington, IN, 2012), pp. 60–62; Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan*, 161, 171; H. Gibb, 'The Rise of Saladin', in Baldwin (ed.), *A History of the Crusades, Vol. 1: The First Hundred Years*, 563–89 (p. 566).

[25]   Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia, ed. and trans. Giovanni Vantini (Heidelberg and Warsaw, 1975), hereinafter *OS*: specifically, Qadi Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, pp. 306–07; al-Qadi al-Fadil, p. 308; Ibn al-Athir, pp. 355–57; Ibn Khallikan, pp. 398–99; Abu-l-Fida, pp. 465–66; Abu Shama, pp. 364–67; Maqrizi, pp. 662–66; Ibn Wasil, pp. 433–36; Ibn Khaldun, pp. 556–58. For further discussion and bibliography, see Zacharopoulou, 'Μια ερμηνευτική προσέγγιση της σχέσης της χριστιανικής Νουβίας'.

to Nubia, no reference is made to any collaboration with the Nubians.[26]

Among the works of the 13th century, the *Historia Orientalis* by Jacques of Vitry, Bishop of Acre, achieved widespread appeal.[27] In it, thorough reference is made to the Christians of the East, as the aim of this work was the preparation of missions and crusades.[28] However, within the socio-political context of the time, crusades were organised and carried out under the pope's auspices, and in reality those Christians were considered "heretics".[29] It is, therefore, during this period that the first moves were made to bring them within the ambit of the Roman Catholic Church. Hence, in 1237, Dominican monks approached the Coptic patriarch of Egypt with the proposal that he join Rome.[30] These efforts were intensified while the papal throne was occupied by Innocent IV. In 1245 he convened the Council of Lyons with the aim of unifying the churches as well as launching a new crusade under the command of Louis IX of France.[31] The following

year, by the bull *Cum hora undecima*, he set up Franciscan missions to pagan peoples and Christians from outside the papal domain.[32] The latter included the Nubians. He invited them to acknowledge the papal primacy and unite with Rome. This invitation by Innocent IV demonstrates that, for the West, Nubians were not considered fully integrated into the *orbis Christianus*, since they had not accepted the pope's primacy. As a result, to our knowledge, no efforts were made to use them for the benefit of the crusades.[33]

Was there, from a practical point of view, any possibility of collaboration with the Nubians and Ethiopians that might be useful for the crusaders?

The facts indicate that the Nubians had, primarily during the 12th and 13th centuries, the ability to mobilise military forces, causing serious problems to Egypt. By way of example, we can cite their incursion at the southern border of Egypt in 1172, an event that provoked the reaction of Saladin; he dispatched his army, seizing part of Nobatia which remained under his rule for the following two years.[34] This assault was well known in the West, since it is mentioned by Richard de Cluny, who had visited Africa, in his work written in 1172.[35] In 1272 and 1275 further raids were carried out by Nubia along

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[26] In *OS*: Ibn Jubayr, p. 293; Ibn al-Athir, pp. 361–63. See also Zacharopoulou, 'Μια ερμηνευτική προσέγγιση της σχέσης της χριστιανικής Νουβίας', 126–27; B. Hamilton, 'Reynald of Châtillon (d. 1187)', in Murray (ed.), *The Crusades: An Encyclopedia,* IV, 1027–28; idem, 'The Elephant of Christ: Reynald of Chatillon', *Studies in Church History* 15 (1978): 97–108; Shinnie, 'Christian Nubia and the Crusades', 605; Hasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan,* 72–73; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades,* II, 436–37; D. Newbold, 'The Crusaders in the Red Sea and the Sudan', *Sudan Notes & Records* 26 (1945): 213–27.

[27] Jacques De Vitry, *History of Jerusalem;* Seignobos, 'L'autre Éthiopie', 56; Jessalyn Lee Bird, 'The Historia Orientalis of Jacques de Vitry: Visual and Written Commentaries as Evidence of a Text's Audience, Reception, and Utilization', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 20 (2003): 56–74.

[28] Bird, 'The Historia Orientalis of Jacques de Vitry'; idem, 'Crusade and Conversion after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215): Oliver of Paderborn's and James of Vitry's Missions to Muslims Reconsidered', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 21 (2004): 23–47.

[29] *Anonymous Pilgrims,* trans. Aubrey Stewart, PPTS 6.1 (London, 1894), pp. 28–29.

[30] Matthew of Paris, *Chronica Majora*, III, 397–99; Seignobos, 'L'autre Éthiopie', 57; Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art,* 50.

[31] For the Council of Lyons, see A. E. Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 133–150; J. A. Watt, 'The Papacy', in D. Abulafia (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History, vol. 5: c. 1198–c. 1300* (Cambridge, 1999), 107–163 (pp. 137–42); K. M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204–1571), Vol. 1: The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1976), pp. 110–21; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades,* III, 341–42. One of the decisions of this council

was the excommunication and deposition of the emperor Frederick II, which was a culmination of the dispute between him and the pope.

[32] Seignobos, 'L'autre Éthiopie', 57–58; Łajtar and Plociennik, 'A Man from Provence on the Middle Nile', 112; Felicitas Schmieder, '*Cum hora undecima*: The incorporation of Asia into the *orbis Christianus*', in Guyda Armstrong and I. A. Wood (eds.), *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals,* International Medieval Research 7 (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 259–65; Vantini, 'Sur l' éventualité de rapports entre le concile de Lyon [1274] et la Nubie', 337–45.

[33] See also Siegnobos, 'L'autre Éthiopie', 58; Shinnie, 'Christian Nubia and the Crusades', 603–07.

[34] Accounts of these events can be found in Arabic sources; see in *OS: A*bu Salih, pp. 327–28; Ibn al-Athir, pp. 357–58; Abu Shama pp. 367–70; Barhebraeus, pp. 422–23; Ibn Wasil, pp. 436–38; Abu-l-Fida, pp. 466–67; Maqrizi, pp. 673-4; Abu Salih, pp. 327-28; Al-Qalqashandi, pp. 571-72. For a more detailed presentation of these events, see Zacharopoulou, 'Nubia and Byzantium', 216–18; idem, 'Μια ερμηνευτική προσέγγιση της σχέσης της χριστιανικής Νουβίας', 114–26.

[35] Richard de Poitiers, 137; Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan*, 165; Kifle-Egzi, 'Western Relation with Ethiopia during the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period', 31.

the Red Sea coastline as well as in Aswan.[36] Again, the reaction of the Mamluks was immediate and had detrimental consequences for Nubia. The fear of a potential alliance between Nubia, Ethiopia and the crusaders, the Frankish Outremer and, later, the Mongols was a constant concern of the sultans of Egypt. For this reason, they tried to control the moves of the patriarchs of Egypt and hinder their contact with Christians outside Egypt.[37] The same fear led the Mamluks to subjugate Nubia, which resulted, after the end of the 15th century, in the extirpation of Christians from the area.[38] Nevertheless, the collaboration so much feared by the sultans of Egypt never came into being.

During the same period, in the late 13th century, the work of Abu al-Makarim, *The History of Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*,

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[36] Ibn Abd al-Zahir, in A. Al-Khowayter, 'A critical edition of an unknown source for the life of al-Malik al-Zahir Baibars: With introduction, translation and notes', 3 vols (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London 1960), III, 1011, 1070, 1219, 1145, I, 285–6, and in *OS*, p. 427–28; Nuwayri, in *OS*, pp. 470–75; Mufaddal, 'An-nahj as-sadid wa-d-durr al-farid fi ma ba'd ta'rich Ibn al-'Amid', in *Histoires des Sultans Mamlouks*, ed. E. Blochet, 3 vols, Patrologia Orientalis 12, 14, 20 (Paris, 1919–28), II, 211, 234–39, and in *OS,* pp. 497–502; Ibn al-Furat, pp. 530–39; Ibn Khaldun, pp. 558–59; Al-Qalqashandi, pp. 572–73; Maqrizi, pp. 648–50, 680–82; Abu-l-Fida, p. 467; Ibn Iyas, p. 779. See also Effrosyni Zacharopoulou, 'The sultan Baybars and Nubia in the light of the Crusades: a critical approach', in W. J. Henderson and E. Zacharopoulou (eds.), *Festschrift for Prof. Benjamin Hendrickx* (Athens, 2015), 653–90, in which these events are critically approached.

[37] In *OS:* Abu Salih, p. 340; al-Qalqashandi, pp. 580–82.

[38] In *OS*: Ibn Abd az- Zahir, pp. 425–33; ad- Dawadari, p. 452; Abu-l-fida, p. 467; an- Nuwayri, pp. 470–75, 478–92; al- Mufaddal, pp. 497–502; al- Umari, pp. 511–12, 515; Ibn al- Furat, pp. 530–47; Ibn Khaldun, pp. 558–62; al- Qalqashandi, pp. 572–75, 582–84; Maqrizi, pp. 648–50, 680–82, 683–97. See also Zacharopoulou, 'Nubia and Byzantium', 222–32; D. A. Welsby, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia: Pagans, Christians and Muslims along the Middle Nile* (London, 2002), pp. 242–55; W. Y. Adams, *Nubia: Corridor to Africa,* 2 (London & Princeton, 1984), pp. 508, 522–31; idem, 'The United Kingdom of Makouria and Nobadia: A Medieval Nubian Anomaly', in W. V. Davies (ed.), *Egypt and Africa, Nubia from Prehistory to Islam* (London, 1991), 257–263 (p. 259); Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan,* 171–83, 186–90; Shinnie, 'Christian Nubia', 584–86; H. MacMichael, *A History of the Arabs in the Sudan and Some Account of the People Who Preceded Them and of the Tribes Inhabiting Darfur,* 2nd edn, 2 vols , (London, 1967), I, 178–87; A. J. Arkell, *A History of the Sudan: From the Earliest Times to 1821* (London, 1955), pp. 192–98.

written in Arabic, was in circulation.[39] In it, the churches of Egypt as well as those of Nubia and Ethiopia were highly esteemed. However, as the study of the relationships between East and West in the High Middle Ages reveals, even during the 13th century the West largely ignored the East. Even in Jacques de Vitry's work, we see that he refers to the Christians of the East in a critical manner.[40] The attitude towards the eastern populations seemed to derive from a feeling of superiority, nurtured by the spirit of the crusades. The Christians of the West were the true warriors of the Christian religion, who, under the pope's command, were fighting for the cross in the Holy Land. The East was rife with infidels, Muslims and Jews, as well as heretic Christians who had been punished for their sinfulness.[41] Even the Levantines were subject to reproof, for they adopted the ways and customs of the local residents in their territories.[42] Beyond the regions known to the crusaders, lay the exotic and dreadful kingdoms of the East, the "Three Indies" with their legendary inhabitants. In the vein of the moral superiority fostered by the crusades, all these populations had to accept the spiritual guidance of the Catholic Church.[43]

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[39] The work was erroneously attributed to Abu Salih the Armenian by B. T. A. Evetts in his edition (Oxford, 1895); see Dorothea Weltecke, 'Emperor Frederick II, "Sultan of Lucera", "Friend of the Muslims", Promoter of Cultural Transfer: Controversies and Suggestions', in Jörg Feuchter, Friedhelm Hoffmann & Bee Yun (eds), Cultural Transfers in Dispute. Representations in Asia, Europe and the Arab World since the Middle Ages (Frankfurt-on-Main, 2011), pp. 85–106 (99); A.S. Atiya, 'Abu al-Makarim', in idem (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, 8 vols (New York, 1991), I, 23; J. Doresse, *Ethiopia: Ancient Cities and Temples*, trans. Elsa Coult, 2nd edn (London, 1967), p. 94.

[40] Jacques de Vitry, *History of Jerusalem*, 67–84

[41] Fulcher of Chartres, in *The First Crusade,* ed. Peters, 83–84; 'Anonymi Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum', in *The First Crusade,* ed. Krey, 63, 265; Jacques de Vitry, *History of Jerusalem*, 73–76 ; MacEvitt, *The Crusades and the Christian World of the East*, 13, 100–06; Nicolle, *The Crusades*, 12; Edbury and Rowe, *William of Tyre,* 132–34; Hitti, 'The Impact of the Crusades on Moslem Lands', 50; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades,* I, 256.

[42] Jacques de Vitry, *History of Jerusalem,* 64–6; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades,* III, 479.

[43] Jordanus of Severac, *Mirabilia Descripta: The Wonders of the East,* trans. H. C. B. Yule (London, 1863), pp. 5–8, 55–56; C. R. Beazley, *The Dawn of Modern Geography,* 3 vols (Oxford, 1905–06), III, 219–20 (citing Jordanus), 174–75 (citing John of Monte Corvino); Seignobos, 'L'autre Éthiopie', 57–58; Devisse, 'The Black and

Within this framework, the African Christians were considered as candidates to be nurtured within Rome's bosom rather than as warriors of the cross. How then can the presence of the black Saint Maurice as a knight of the crusade at Magdeburg be interpreted?

The black St Maurice and the legend of Prester John

Before we attempt to answer this question, we need to refer to the myth of the legendary Prester John and look at the extent to which it may be connected to the black Saint Maurice of Magdeburg.[44]

The legend of Prester John was widespread among the lower classes and the crusaders' army during the time under consideration and continued throughout the following centuries. This legend started to spread around Europe after 1145. The first reference to it can be traced in the chronicle of Otto, Bishop of Freising,[45] which mentions a Christian leader who was both a priest and a king at the same time. From his remote kingdom, situated beyond the Islamic countries, he would attack them from the rear. This is also the time in which a prophecy about the Nubians was spread in the Middle East. According to this prophecy, the Muslims would conquer Jerusalem and the crusaders would take over Damietta; and a Nubian king would seize Islam's holy lands in Hejaz. The supposed prophecy was recorded in the 13th century by Oliver of Paderborn in *Historia Damiatana* and was widely circulated in the West until the 15th century.[46] Such legends and prophecies most certainly resulted from the awareness, by then already existing in the West, that South of Egypt there were Christians who were outside the control of Islam. The legends are also connected, however, to the period in which the Frankish states of the East were facing serious problems due to the attacks of Zengi, emir of Mosul and Aleppo, and his son, Nureddin.[47] And they grew even stronger after the conquest of Jerusalem by Saladin. The more reality laid bare the inability of the Romans to supplant the Muslims in the Holy Land, the greater the propagation of the Prester John legend. It became a symbol of hope that these regions would pass again into the hands of Christians, with the aid of this powerful Christian ally.

Prester John's remote kingdom was thought to be located somewhere in distant Asia. However, when the first information reached the West about the attacks that the Seljuk Turks suffered at the hands of the Mongols in the East, along with rumours that some of the great Khans had converted to Christianity, it gave Prester John a Mongolian identity.[48] In 1165 the Byzantine emperor Manuel

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His Color: From Symbols to Realities', 74–77, 105–110; M.W. Baldwin, 'Missions to the East in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries', in Zacour and Hazard (eds), *A History of the Crusades*, 452–518 (pp. 457–59, p. 513).

[44] For the legendary figure of Prester John, I have mainly relied on A. Kurt, 'The Search for Prester John, a Projected Crusade and the Eroding Prestige of Ethiopian Kings, c.1200–c.1540', *Journal of Medieval History* 39 (2013): 297–302; Salvadore, 'The Ethiopian Age of Exploration'; Devisse, 'The Black and His Color: From Symbols to Realities', 119–120; Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art,* 43–62; H.M. Jones and Elizabeth Monroe, *A History of Ethiopia (*London, 1960), pp. 59–63; Kifle-Egzi, 'Western Relation with Ethiopia during the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period', 5–36; J. Doresse, *L'Empire du Prete-Jean,* 2 vols (Paris, 1959); V. Slessarev, *Prester John: The Letter and the Legend (*Minneapolis, 1959); C.E. Nowell, 'The Historical Prester John', *Speculum* 28 (1953): 435–45; M. Letts, 'Prester John: A Fourteenth-Century Manuscript at Cambridge', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 29 (1947): 19–26; idem, 'Prester John: Sources and Illustrations', *Notes and Queries* 188 (1945): 178–80, 204–7, 246–48, 266–68) and 189 (1945): 4–7; and E.D. Ross, 'Prester John and the Empire of Ethiopia', in Arthur Newton (ed.), *Travel and Travellers of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1926), pp. 174–194.

[45] Otto of Freising, *Chronica sive Historia de Duabus Civitatibus*, ed. Adolfus Hofmeister (Hanover, 1912), 365–67 (vii. 33).

[46] Oliver of Paderborn, *Opera: I. Historia Damiatana; II. Epistolae,* ed. H. Hoogeweg (Tübingen, 1894), pp. 231–35; *Seignobos,* 'L'autre Éthiopie', 59 (n. 46 quotes and translates the prophecy); Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan,* 167; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, III, 163.

[47] The capture of Edessa by Zengi in 1144 explicitly indicated how seriously Frankish Outremer was threatened by the revival of Muslim power, and the grave impact of this event on West Europe. See Devisse, 'The Black and His Color: From Symbols to Realities', 111–15; J.B. Segal, *Edessa: 'The Blessed City',* 3rd edn (Piscataway, 2005), pp. 243–54.

[48] D.O. Morgan, 'Prester John and the Mongols', in Charles F. Beckingham and Bernard Hamilton (eds), *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 159–70. For the diplomatic relations between the Mongols and the Latins, see Jean de Joinville, in *Villeardouin and de Joinville: Memoirs of the Crusades,* ed. and trans. Frank Marzials (London, 1908), 168–71, 253–59; Parker, 'The Indigenous Christians of the Arabic Middle East', 54–73; W. Baum, 'The Age of the Mongols: Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', in W. Baum and D.W. Winkler (eds), *The Church of the East: A Concise History* (London, 2003), pp. 84–111; A. Ruotsala, *Europeans and Mongols in the Middle of the Thirteenth Century: Encountering the Other* (Helsinki, 2001); P. Jackson, 'The Mongols and Europe', in Abulafia (ed.), *New Cambridge Medieval History, vol. 5: c. 1198–c. 1300*, 703–19; R. Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols*

Komnenos received a letter – which subsequently turned out to be a forgery – from Prester John, in which oblique references that his kingdom was situated in "India", can be found.[49] Of course, the term "India" was quite vague, since it had already been employed by ancient Greek and Byzantine authors with confusion between Africa and Asia.[50] Thus, in the 14th century, when the Mongols of Persia had

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and Mamluks: The Mamluk–Ilkhanid War, 1260–1281 (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 94–105; idem, 'Mamluk perceptions of the Mongol–Frankish rapprochement', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 7 (1992): 50–65; P. M. Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy (1260–1290): Treaties of Baybars & Qalawun with Christian Rulers* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 11–12; Baldwin, 'Missions to the East in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', 452–518; G. Guzman, 'Christian Europe and Mongol Asia: First Medieval Intercultural Contact Between East and West', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 2 (1985): 227–244 (pp. 229-41); D. Sinor, 'The Mongols and Western Europe', in H. W. Hazard (ed.), *A History of the Crusades, Vol. 3: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Madison, WI, 1975), pp. 513–544; C. Dawson, *The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (New York, 1955); Nowell, 'The Historical Prester John', 440–44; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades,* III, 259–60, 280, 296–97, 331–32, 346–47; Atiya, *The Crusade in the Later Middle Ages,* 233–59.

[49] Latin Text in *Der Priester Johannes: Abhandl*, ed. Z. K. T. Zarncke (Leipzig, 1879), 826–1030 (pp. 909–24). English translation of the letter by E. D. Ross, 'Prester John and the Empire of Ethiopia', in Arthur Newton (ed.), *Travel and Travellers of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1926), 174–194 (pp. 174–78), and M. Uebel, *Ecstatic Transformation: On the Uses of Alterity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2005), pp. 155–60 (Appendix). See also, Salvadore, 'The Ethiopian Age of Exploration', 596, K. F. Helleiner, 'Prester John's Letter: A Medieval Utopia', *Phoenix* 13 (1959): 47–57, and M. Letts, 'Prester John: A Fourteenth-Century Manuscript at Cambridge', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 29 (1947): 19–26.

[50] Ptolemy of Alexandria, Γεωγραφική Υφήγησις, ed. A. Aggelopoulos (Athens, 2001), pp. 124–25; Joannes Malalas, *Chronographia*: Χρονογραφία, Από τους απωτάτους χρόνους μέχρι την εποχή του Ιουστινιανού: Βασισμένη σε απωλεσθέντα συγγράμματα αρχαίων χρονογράφων και ιστορικών, ed. G. Lathyris (Athens, 2001), pp. 363–64; Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, Ανωνύμου, Αρριανού, ως φέρεται: Περίπλους της Ερυθράς Θαλάσσης, ed. K. Megalommatis (Athens, 1994), pp. 78–79, John of Nikiu, *The Chronicle*, trans. R. H. Charles (Oxford, 1916), pp. 11, 16, 20, 141; *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, ed. H. Yule, 2 vols (London, 1903), II, 425–32. See also Kurt, 'The search for Prester John', 300–01; Parker, 'The Indigenous Christians of the Arabic Middle East', 269; Zacharopoulou, *Byzantium and the Kingdom of Axum*, 57, 121, 130, 228; P. Mayerson, 'A Confusion of Indias: Asian India and African India in the Byzantine sources', J*ournal of African and Oriental Studies* 113 (1993): 169–74; D. G. Letsios, *Byzantium and the Red Sea: Relations with Nubia, Ethiopia and South Arabia until the Arab Conquest* (Athens, 1988), pp. 158–59; Kaplan, *The Rise of the*

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already converted to Islam and the missions into Asia had revealed the non-existence of Prester John's country, the legendary king was placed in Africa and the references thereafter linked him to Ethiopia.[51]

If we attempt to establish a connection between Prester John and the black African St Maurice of Magdeburg, then it appears that the statue of the black saint helped to consolidate the African identity of Prester John in the medieval imagination. St Maurice of Magdeburg thus marks a turning point in the European fantasy about Prester John. The Mongols' attacks in Central Europe in 1237 left westerners disillusioned about the marvellous Asian Christian ally. During the same period, in 1235, Frederick II travelled to Germany surrounded by his splendid entourage, in which Moors and Ethiopians had a distinct presence, and deeply impressed the Germanic people.[52] When, some years later, the African St Maurice, in full armour, was erected in the Magdeburg cathedral, the cherished hopes of a powerful ally for Christianity's cause might easily have been transferred to an African Prester John. We could probably say that the sight of an African saint in a European cathedral in the 13th century was far from paradoxical. Nevertheless, it was indeed an impressive innovation. Yet a question arises about the intention behind it: who decided to transform St Maurice's depiction and what might have been the purpose?

Black Magus in Western Art, 46; Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan*, 168–69; Helleiner, 'Prester John's Letter', 50; Nowell, 'The Historical Prester John', 437–48; J. K. Wright, *Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades* (New York, 1925), pp. 302–04.

[51] Beazley, *The Dawn of Modern Geography,* III, 219–20 citing Jordanus of Severac; Salvadore, 'The Ethiopian Age of Exploration', 598; T. Tamrat, 'The Horn of Africa: The Solomonids in Ethiopia and the States of the Horn of Africa', in D. T. Niane (ed.), *General History of Africa, vol. 4: Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA, 1984), 423–54 (pp. 451–52); Ross, 'Prester John and the Empire of Ethiopia', 192–94; Jones and Monroe, *A History of Ethiopia*, 61.

[52] Breitinger, 'African Presences and Representations', 119; Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 15 and 222 n. 71; idem, 'Black Africans in Hohenstaufen Iconography', 29–36 (p. 32); idem, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, 10 and n. 21; also p. 223, where he quotes the English translation of Latin text from *Continuatio Funiacensis et Eberbacensis*, ed. Georg Waitz (Hanover, 1896), p. 348; D. Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (New York and Oxford, 1988), p. 240; Suckale-Redlefsen and Suckale, *Mauritius*, 22–23; H. W. Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige: Africans in Europe: A History of Africans in Europe Before 1918* (Basel, 1979), p. 260; E. Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second 1194–1250*, trans. E. O. Lorimer, 2nd edn (New York, 1957), pp. 403–04.

The Black African St Maurice and the Hohenstaufen

Given that statues displayed in public spaces were neither mere works of art nor just objects of worship, but also vehicles of the official ideology of the ruling class from which their donors originated, could we see the African St Maurice as a means of propaganda in the agitated German society of the 13th century?[53] Does the African crusader bear any connection to the relationships established during the 13th century between the pope and Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, German emperor of the Holy Roman Empire? Were the Christians in Africa involved in any way in the confrontation between the two hegemonic poles of the Christian West?

It cannot go unnoticed that St Maurice's representations as an African are limited to Magdeburg and regions located within its sphere of influence, that is, northeastern Germany and adjoining regions.[54] Thus, in areas such as Halle and Halberstadt we come across similar representations of St Maurice, dating from this period of time until the 16th century.[55] In addition, as we have already mentioned, St Maurice was associated with the German monarchy. This connection, established by Otto I, continued to exist throughout the dynasty of the Hohenstaufen, who had strong bonds with the city of Magdeburg.[56] The veneration of St Maurice, patron saint of this city, was closely related to the expansion of German rule over Slavic tribes living in the East; the saint was particularly honoured by the military aristocracy of Germany.[57]

When, in the 1240s, the black St Maurice made his appearance in Magdeburg cathedral, the archbishop of the city of Magdeburg was Wilbrand who, in 1235, had succeeded his half-brother Albrecht of Kaffenburg to the bishop's throne. During the conflict that raged in Germany between the emperor and the pope, the city of Magdeburg had consistently taken sides with the emperor.[58] It would, therefore, be difficult to imagine that the innovation in the representation of St Maurice was initiated by the archbishop alone, without the approval of emperor Frederick II.[59] After all, the sympathy of the latter for the African inhabitants of his realm in Sicily, as well as his respect for Muslim visitors at his court, is well known.[60] As we have noted, texts from this period recount the sensation produced by his tour around Germany in 1235, since his retinue included black Africans as his personal guards.[61] His chamberlain, Johannes Maurus, was

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[53] For Hohenstaufen's war with the papacy during the 13th century see Baum, 'The Age of the Mongols', 90; T. Mastnak, *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and Western Political Order* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2002), pp. 148–52; Watt, 'The Papacy', 129–44; D. R. Sodders, 'Conrad the Fourth as German King, 1237–1250', 2 vols (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1996); C. Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 559–68; Abulafia, *Frederick II*, 164–74, 194–201; Kaplan, 'Black Africans in Hohenstaufen Iconography', 30; Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second*; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, III, 171–204.

[54] Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 4; Suckale-Redlefsen and Suckale, *Mauritius*, 16–17, 158–285; see also maps in Bindman and Gates, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, II.1, 298–99.

[55] In 1346 Charles of Bohemia became Holy Roman Emperor. To enhance his authority, he adopted the symbols and regalia of Hohenstaufen; among them the veneration of the black St Maurice: Devisse, 'A Sanctified Black Maurice', 150–94; Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 4; Suckale-Redlefsen and Suckale, *Mauritius*, 56–57. After the mid-sixteenth century, production of images of Maurice as a black saint ceased, probably as a consequence of the slave trade which began in this period. Hence, the early medieval prejudice against blackness as connected with sinfulness was restated.

[56] Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 15; Kaufmann, 'The Magdeburg Rider', 73–75.

[57] Breitinger, 'African Presences and Representations', 114–16; Devisse, 'A Sanctified Black Maurice', 141–48.

[58] Sodders, 'Conrad the Fourth as German King', 45, 350–51, 397; Kaufmann, 'The Magdeburg Rider', 73–74; Kaplan, 'Black Africans in Hohenstaufen Iconography', 33.

[59] Devisse, 'A Sanctified Black Maurice', 148–50; Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, 10.

[60] Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 13–15; idem, 'Black Africans in Hohenstaufen Iconography', 29–34; D. Abulafia, 'Ethnic Variety and Its Implications: Frederick II's Relations with Jews and Muslims', in Tronzo (ed.), I*ntellectual Life at the Court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen*, 213–24 (pp. 213, 220); Grimm, 'Two African Saints in Medieval Germany', 129–30; Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second*, 195–96; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, III, 176. For a critical approach to this isssue see Weltecke, 'Emperor Frederick II', 85–106;

[61] Breitinger, 'African Presences and Representations', 119; Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 15, 222 n. 71; idem, 'Black Africans in Hohenstaufen Iconography', 32; idem, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, 10, 223 n. 21; Suckale-Redlefsen and Suckale, 'Mauritius: Der heilige Mohr/The Black Saint Maurice', 22–23;

also African.[62] Already at this time, prior to his crusade to the Holy Land, this erudite leader had caused a scandal over the diplomatic contacts that he had developed with the sultan of Egypt. Furthermore, the agreement through which he achieved the cession of Jerusalem from Egypt became the grounds on which the pope accused him of exercising pro-Muslim politics.[63]

In the 1240s, when St Maurice underwent a transformation, that is, from white to black, in the Magdeburg cathedral, it was the time when relations between the German emperor and the pope had reached a critical point, since both parties were fighting to win over supporters in Germany. There, the pro-papal party gained strength and a powerful anti-imperial camp was formed which posed a threat to Hohenstaufen authority. In the same period, in 1239, Pope Gregory IX excommunicated Emperor Frederick once again, in an attempt to undermine his opponent's position. Temporarily, the risk of an imminent invasion by the Mongols united German noblemen around the German king, Conrad IV, son and regent of Frederick II, but even then he had to cope with a revolt against the Empire orchestrated by the papal party in Germany.[64] Frederick also had to fight another

struggle at Jerusalem, where Queen Alice of Cyprus was chosen by local nobility as the new regent.[65] The conflict between Frederick and the pope over territories in central Italy and Lombardy, efforts to impose the supremacy of their authority on the opponent's side, and the attitude of the new pope, Innocent IV, who was determined to eliminate the Hohenstaufen dynasty, intensified the struggle between emperor and papacy even more. We may thus assume that the presence of the black St Maurice in the cathedral of a city so closely related to the German emperor was also directly connected to the imperial policy against the attacks launched at him by the pope.

Following this line of thought, the black St Maurice most likely symbolised the universality of imperial power.[66] Frederick himself bore the title of "Roman Emperor, King of Sicily and King of Jerusalem" and, as an heir of the Normans, the title of "King of Africa" as well.[67] Thus, his power was presented as encompassing all three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa, a fact that supported Frederick's autocratic aspirations. In addition, the black saint presented Frederick as being closely related to the Christian world outside the boundaries of the pope's jurisdiction. In the period when Prester John was settling in Africa, the depiction of the imperial saint as an African evidently propagated the idea of a powerful and universal Empire. In this way, the emperor's power was not just secular but it also extended spiritual authority over the Christian Oekumene – which was effectively to challenge the pope.

St Maurice is depicted as a black African; yet he embodies all knightly virtues. This stands in stark opposition to the dominant perception that all Christians beyond the realm of papal authority were heretics and therefore incapable of being inspired by knightly ideals. The question arises, then, whether Frederick was using St Maurice to question the pope's exclusive right to assess the spiritual integrity of Christians – and consequently to cast doubt on his own excommunication. If

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Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige: Africans in Europe*, 260.

[62] Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 14, 221 n. 57; idem, 'Black Africans in Hohenstaufen Iconography', 32–33; Grimm, 'Two African Saints in Medieval Germany', 129; Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second,* 310–13.

[63] *Historia diplomatica Friderici Secundi,* ed J. L. A. Huillard-Bréholles, 6 vols (Paris, 1852–1861), III, 135–40; Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, III, 179–84, trans. J. A. Giles, *Matthew Paris's English History*, 3 vols (London, 1852), I, 157–58, 179–84, 213–229, 465; 'Letter from Gerold, Patriarch of Jerusalem to the Christian Faithful: The Coming of Antichrist ca. 1230', trans. Dans C. Munro, in *Crusade and Christendom: Annotated Documents in Translation from Innocent III to the Fall of Acre, 1187–1292*, ed. Jessalyn Bird, E. Peters and J. M. Powell (Philadelphia, 2013), pp. 261–65; Ibn Wasil, fols 119v–253v, cited in F. Gabrieli, 'Frederick II and Muslim Culture', East and West 9 (1958): 53–61 (pp. 158–67) For a more detailed presentation of the provisions of the treaty, cf. *Historia diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, III, 85–90; Weltecke, 'Emperor Frederick II', 94; Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, pp. 149–50; J. M. Powell, 'Patriarch Gerold and Frederick II: the Matthew Paris Letter', J*ournal of Medieval History* 25 (1999) : 19–26; Watt, 'The Papacy', 142; Abulafia, 'Ethnic Variety and Its Implications', 220; Gabrieli, 'Frederick II and Muslim Culture', 53–61; Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second*, 185–93; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, III, 183–90.

[64] Jackson, 'The Mongols and Europe', 705–08; idem, 'The Crusade against the Mongols (1241)', 5–16; Sodders, 'Conrad the Fourth as German King', I, 129–133.

[65] Sodders, 'Conrad the Fourth as German King', I, 202–03, 207–09; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, III, 179–223.

[66] Breitinger, 'African Presences and Representations', 118–19; Devisse, 'A Sanctified Black Maurice', 160–64; Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 9–18; idem, 'Black Africans in Hohenstaufen Iconography', 30, 33.

[67] Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 17; Grimm, 'Two African Saints in Medieval Germany', 129; Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second*, 9.

black Africans were not diabolic creatures incarnating evil, infidel adversaries of Christianity, or, at best, heretics who had gone astray from the path of the right faith, but instead could also be warriors of Christ, highly spiritual people with Christian values, then the papacy's approach to them must have been faulty.

In the polemic to which Frederick was subjected by the papal party, he was accused of being a heretic and a precursor of the Antichrist; his African officials and the esteem accorded to him by the court of Egypt became the pretext for reproaching him as a Muslim sympathiser.[68] Through the sculpture of the African black Maurice he might have been giving his answer to all this polemic. For the faithful at the Magdeburg cathedral, St Maurice seemed to repudiate the current perception of the "heretic" Christians of the East; he detached the colour of the body from the cleanliness of the soul and, most importantly, envisaged the emperor, instead of the pope, as God's viceroy on earth: he who unites under his power the entirety of Christians across the world. In the battle for power that waged between the emperor and the pope, it seems that St Maurice of Magdeburg was also called to arms. This might be the reason why his cult did not spread significantly throughout Italy. His representation as African was limited to the imperial regions of Germany as well as those under their influence.[69]

It should be noted here that Frederick did not seek to establish relations with Nubia and Ethiopia. As a pragmatist, which he certainly was, he was primarily preoccupied with having a firm grip on his own realm. Even his crusade to the Holy Land was nothing more than an opportunity to enhance his authority in Europe. Therefore, since he anticipated how futile any attempt to subdue Egypt would be, he thought it better to use diplomacy and remain in good terms with the Sultan.

Conclusion

To summarise, then, the tie that might have bound the black St Maurice of Magdeburg to Nubians and Ethiopians during the 13th century could only have been an indirect association. In this sense, the creation of the African saint's statue cannot be conceived independently of the Christians of Africa. It was the contact of Nubians and Ethiopians with the Latins, primarily in Jerusalem, but also elsewhere,[70] as well as the knowledge acquired by westerners of the existence of these Christians, that shaped the context which allowed for this representation of St Maurice to be accepted in medieval society. The painful shock of losing Jerusalem to Saladin's troops made clear the role of Egypt in the preservation of the Latin statelets of the East, leading to a need for a better understanding of Egypt and its adjacent states. However, this was not enough for a rapprochement to be achieved between the Christians of East and West. Thus, no efforts were made for collaboration with the Nubians and Ethiopians, which, during the 13th century, could have served as a diversion for the Egyptians at their southern border.

It was the presence of an outstanding leading figure, namely Frederick II, that created the black St Maurice. This leader, born in Sicily, where the East and the West coexisted, was able to approach the eastern world more than any other western leader of his time.[71] To him, the East was a space worthy of respect for its culture and its knowledge, but also because it stood closer to his own notion of power. Through the black St Maurice, he expressed this respect towards the East and he did so within the German territory of his realm. Hence, when, in the 1240s, his authority found itself under serious threat, the black statue of the saint served to underline the universality of his power, as opposed to that of the pope. The Christians of Africa

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[68] Weltecke, 'Emperor Frederick II', 86, 88, 94–95; Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 16, 223 n. 81; Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 149–50; Abulafia, *Frederick II*, 171; J. M. Powell, 'Frederick II and the Church: A Revisionist View', *Catholic Historical Review* 48 (1963): 487–97; Gabrieli, 'Frederick II and Muslim Culture', 53–59; Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second*, 185–93; 519–26.

[69] Joaneath A. Spicer, 'Free Men and Women of African Ancestry in Renaissance Europe', in idem (ed.), *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe* (Baltimore, 2012), 81–98 (p. 86), Devisse, 'A Sanctified Black Maurice', 143–47, 194; Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 12–18; idem, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, 71–75.

[70] Bożena Rostkowska, 'The Visit of a Nubian King to Constantinople in A.D. 1203', in P. Van Moorsel (ed.), *New Discoveries in Nubia: Proceedings of the Colloquium on Nubian Studies, The Hague, 1979* (Leiden, 1982), pp. 113–16.

[71] Abulafia, 'Ethnic Variety and Its Implications', 220; Gabrieli, 'Frederick II and Muslim Culture'; Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second*, 195–96; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, III, 175–76. For a critical approach on this subject, see Weltecke, 'Emperor Frederick II', 85–106. For the perception of blacks that Byzantines and people in Southern Italy had, see Devisse, 'The Black and His Color: From Symbols to Realities', 89–110.

– whom he probably knew better than the pope did, since he used to study the works of Arab authors – were represented as integrated into the Christian world under his auspices, without the stigma of heresy that the papal church imputed to them. With the derisive attitude towards religious issues that seemed to be typical of him, it is as though, through St Maurice, he was responding to the accusations launched at him by the pope. He was not the heretical enemy of religion as accused; on the contrary, he was the noble knight with the deep spirituality that St Maurice's statue represented. And, just like the East and its Christian populations, he was misunderstood by the papal church, excommunicated as a heretic and pro-Muslim, and faced with the crusades waged by the papal see in the struggle to maintain its secular power.

Frederick and the Hohenstaufen dynasty ultimately came out of this struggle defeated. Nevertheless, the black St Maurice of Magdeburg is probably responsible for a change in the representation of Africans in European art throughout the following three centuries. It is not only Prester John who, as we have already seen, became African, but also the Christians of Africa who found a place in the Christian world of the West with the appearance of King Balthazar as African in depictions of the Adoration of the Magi.[72]

As far as the relations of western Christianity with the Nubians and Ethiopians are concerned, they seemed to grow stronger during the 14th century, when proposals were made by some of the pope's counsellors contemplating the participation of Nubians and Ethiopians in future crusades that were being planned.[73] As the pope experienced difficulty in exerting control over the kings in Europe and to secure their support for a new crusade, he turned to people

that were outside his authority, African Christians among them.[74] Even though the black St Maurice of Magdeburg had illustrated the integration of Christian Africans into the *orbis Christianus*, from the Holy See's point of view this integration would not be accomplished as long as the African Christians did not accept the pope's spiritual authority over themselves. However, the efforts of the Church of Rome to expand its authority in Ethiopia were determinedly opposed by the Ethiopians.[75] At the same time, Christendom in Nubia was already being forced into extinction, for in 1323 the Mamluks placed a Muslim King on the throne of Dongola.[76]

[72] Devisse, 'The Black and His Color: From Symbols to Realities', 128; Kaplan, 'Introduction to the New Edition', 21–25: idem, 'Black Africans in Hohenstaufen Iconography', 34; idem, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, 3, 8; Grimm, 'Two African Saints in Medieval Germany', 130–32.

[73] Such proposals handed in to the pope by the Armenian, Hayton of Corycus, 'Flos Historarum Terre Orientis', *Recueil des historiens des Croisades, Vol. 2: Documents Arméniens* (Paris, 1906), pp. 255–363, and Marino Sanudo [Torsello], *Liber secretorum fidelium crucis*, ed. Joshua Prawer (Jerusalem, 1972). See also A. S. Atiya, T*he Crusade of Nicopolis* (London, 1934), pp. 20–23, and idem, *The Crusade in the Later Middle Ages*, 62–64, 114–27; Kurt, 'The Search for Prester John', 302–320; Seignobos, 'L'autre Éthiopie', 59–63; Shinnie, 'Christian Nubia and the Crusades', 605–06.

[74] Salvadore, 'The Ethiopian Age of Exploration', 599; Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige*, 24. For the papacy in the 13th century, see Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 233–53; Watt, 'The Papacy', 107–09, 158–63. For the strain on the pope's relations with the monarchy in Europe see J. A. Watt, 'Spiritual and Temporal Powers', in J. H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350–c. 1450* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 367–423 (esp. 399).

[75] Atiya, *The Crusade in the Later Middle Ages*, 277–78; Jones and Monroe, *A History of Ethiopia*, 57–58.

[76] Zacharopoulou, 'Nubia and Byzantium', 222–26; Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia*, 242–55; Adams, *Nubia: Corridor to Africa*, 522–31; Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan*, 171–83, 186–90; Shinnie, 'Christian Nubia and the Crusades', 584–86; Hasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan*, 106–23.

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