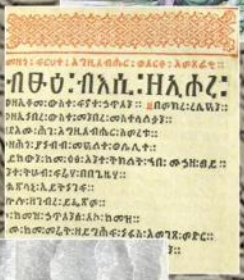
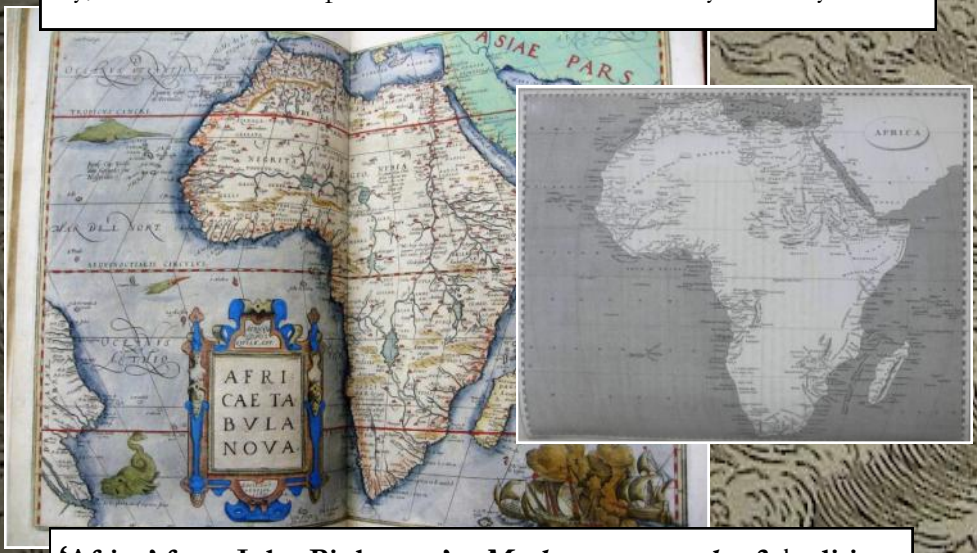
# Always Something New



## Africa in the Special Collections of St John's College

**'A new map of Africa' from Abraham Ortelius, *Theatrum orbis terrarum*. Antwerp : Christopher Plantin, 1579.** The shape of Africa was well-known by the time that atlases became an established format, this one being the second edition of Ortelius' pioneering work. What was less certain was what lay beyond the coastline. The interior of Africa often became a theatre for European fantasies. In spite of being one of the foremost cartographers of the time Ortelius has included the Kingdom of the Amazons in the centre of south Africa, the river Niger flowing westwards to flow into the Senegal estuary, and the two lakes postulated as sources of Nile by Ptolemy.

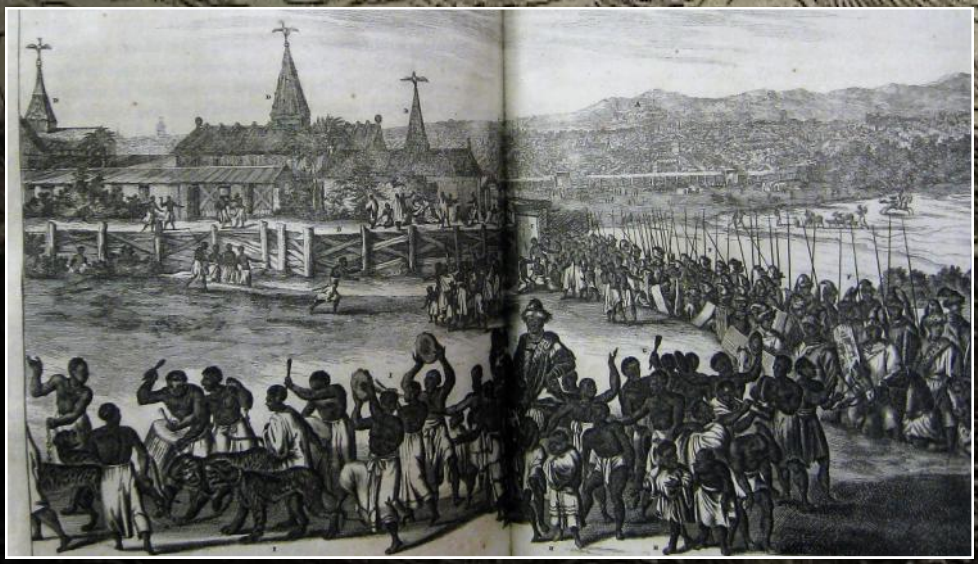



**'Africa' from John Pinkerton's, *Modern geography*. 3rd edition, London, circa 1811.** If in earlier centuries Europeans had filled out their maps with more or less fanciful states and inhabitants, in the 19th centuries they began to cleanse them. This left large white spaces between those areas which Europeans had charted in some way. In part an admission of the limits of geographical knowledge these lacunae also gave the impression that there was nothing there in terms of human organization and settlement, perhaps paving the way for the colonial mindset that led to the scramble for Africa in the 1890s. John Pinkerton was at the forefront of the movement away from the cartouches and depictions of beasts that had characterized cartography heretofore, ditching decoration in favour of accuracy.


**'New map of parts of Africa' from Miguel Servet's edition of Ptolemy's *Geography*. Lyon : Hugh de la Porte, 1541.**

King Manuel I of Portugal rides on a dolphin around the coast of Africa. Portugal, a small kingdom on the margins of Europe, was forced to seek its fortunes outside of the Mediterranean and during the 15th century a succession of ambitious rulers, encouraged navigations out into the Atlantic and around the coast of Africa. Consequently Portuguese sailors were able to develop a new type of ship, the caravel, that was suited to this type of long-distance voyage, as well as the various techniques needed to sail into the headwind that prevented the return trip. During the reign of Manuel (1495-1521) Portugal was beginning to become a major world power, as its gamble meant it was making profits from trading directly with West Africa, and its ships had circumnavigated the whole continent. This revision of Ptolemy's *Geography* was printed 20 years after Manuel's death. The atlas was still a nascent form at this point in the 16th century, waiting to be popularized by Ortelius, so most geographical texts took the form of revisions of Ptolemy's work. This particular edition was the second prepared by Miguel Servet, the Aragonese humanist and polymath. Servet's unorthodox religious views meant he offended both Catholic and Protestant authorities, and was burnt for heresy by both—in effigy by the French, and later in person by Calvin in Geneva.

**'The city of Benyn' from John Ogilby's *Africa*. London : Thomas Johnson, 1670.** The Oba of Benin rides out of his city mounted on a horse, proceeded by leopards and musicians. Whilst the image conveys an appropriate impression of royal prestige and urban sophistication, it is difficult to tell if any of the detail is authentic. This volume is basically a collection of accounts from numerous sources translated into English and re-packaged by the former dance-master John Ogilby. Even the illustrations are drawn from elsewhere, in this case a Dutch account of Africa, produced 2 years before by Olfert Dapper. Dapper, a physician who never left the Netherlands, was himself relying on reports from missionaries and explorers, and although his text is fairly authoritative, he paid little attention to the visuals that accompanied it, leaving those to the fancy of his publisher Jacob van Meurs, who designed engravings to appeal to his audience. Benin was the pre-eminent city in western Africa, impressing the Portuguese and Dutch in the 16th and 17th centuries, and managing to maintain its medieval palaces and vast fortifications until the British looted it in the 1890s, taking with them the famous Benin Bronzes, which had adorned the Oba's residence, and of which Dapper provides the earliest account: *The King's ... court is a square, and is as large as the town of Haarlem and entirely surrounded by a special wall ... It is divided into many magnificent palaces, houses, and apartments ... and comprises beautiful and long square galleries, about as large as the exchange in Amsterdam, but one larger than another, resting on wooden pillars, from top to bottom covered with cast copper, on which are engraved the pictures of their war exploits and battles ..."*

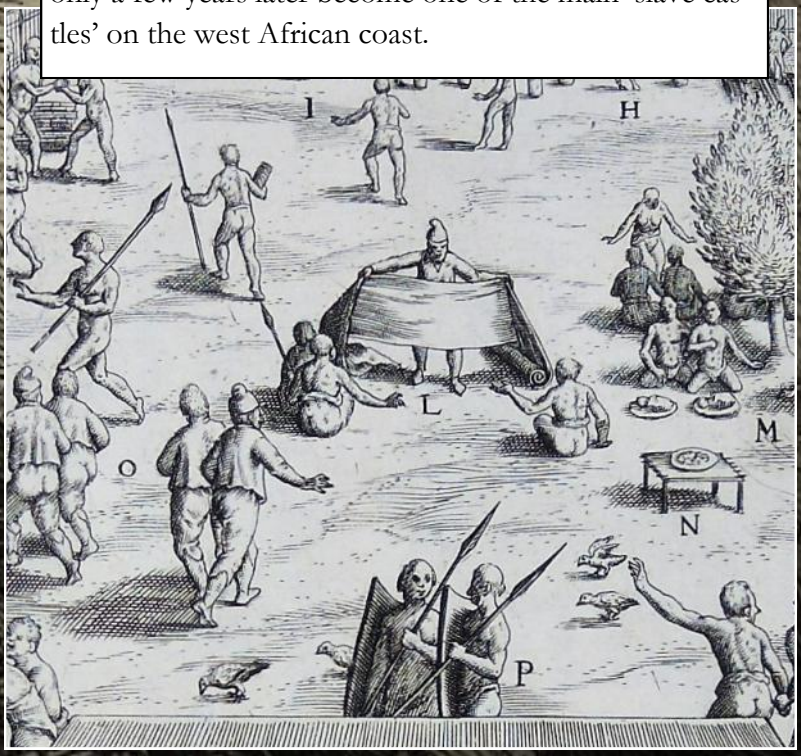


**Quran produced in the Maghrib (probably Morocco) around 1600.** This hand-written Quran is not the work of a professional calligrapher, rather that of a gifted amateur. Unfortunately the framed space they designed for their signature at the end of the book was never filled in, so their identity remains unknown. Nevertheless the style of the hand-writing is of a type known as 'Maghribi' indicating its origin as somewhere in north western Africa, most probably Morocco, in the late 16th or early 17th century. It came to the College through Archbishop Laud, but he received it from the collections of Sir Kenelm Digby, scholar and courtier. Digby had travelled in Europe, collecting books, but he had also undertaken an expedition as a privateer through the Mediterranean, stopping at Algiers for five to six weeks, so he could have picked this up there. At the same time he also bought the freedom of several English captives taken by the corsairs who operated out of bases along the Barbary coast.

**English translation of Francois Pidou de Saint Olon, *Estat present de l'empire de Maroc*, London : R. Bently, W. Freeman, S. Manship, 1695.** The states of western Europe had a somewhat ambiguous relationship with Morocco. Moulay Ismail, the second Sultan of the Alaouite dynasty, encouraged the corsairs of Salé, receiving revenue form the slave auctions. At the same time he had excellent diplomatic relations with Louis XIV of France. An embassy from Morocco was sent to Paris in 1682, and a return embassy seeking to sign a commercial treaty was conducted under Francois Pidou de Saint Olon in 1689. Although the embassy only lasted a few weeks, Pidou wrote this account of his travels, including observations on religion, customs and costumes.

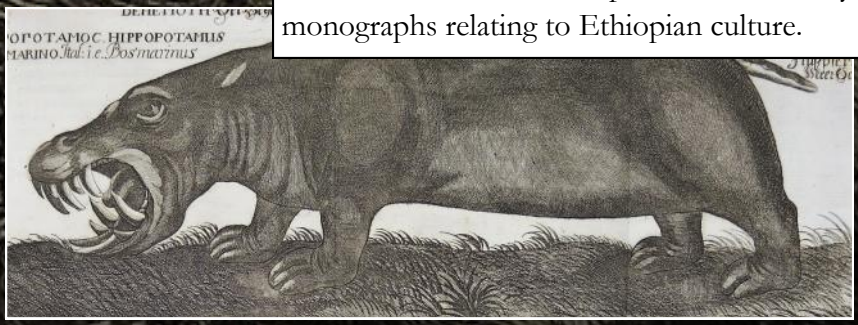

**John Braithwaite, *The history of the revolutions in the Empire of Morocco, upon the death of the late Emperor, Muley Ishmael*, London : J. Darby & T. Browne, 1729.** Moulay Ismail was a brutally effective ruler. He established an elite Black Guard from slaves which he used to overawe his country. He drove the Spanish and Portuguese from the Moroccan coast. In spite this he failed to plan for his succession and the country fell into chaos on his death, as described in this contemporary English account penned by the soldier and diplomat, John Braithwaite. His careful description of the state of the country in the immediate aftermath the Sultan's death was of great strategic interest to many in the British forces, as demonstrated by the list of over 400 subscribers, many of whom were military men.

**Trading on the Guinea coast from *India orientalis – Veram et historicam descriptionem auriferi regni Guineae*, Frankfurt : de Bry, 1604.** Travellers' tales were big sellers in early modern Europe and Theodore de Bry was at the forefront of collecting them and selling them on. In the 1590s he'd produced an immensely popular set of volumes on the European voyages to America chock full of exciting illustrations. After his death in 1598 his sons took this success and ran with it, doing the same for the Old World in *India Orientalis,* which eventually ran to 30 volumes. This, the 6th volume, focuses on the Gold Coast (now Ghana). Cabo Corsso, whose marketplace is illustrated here, would, only a few years later become one of the main 'slave castles' on the west African coast.



**An English translation of Duarte Lopes' *Relation del reame di Congo*. London : John Wolfe, 1597.** By 1597, when this item was published, the Kingdom of Kongo had been in existence for 200 years. This account of the country at that time comes from a Portuguese merchant. Duarte Lopes recounted his travels to Kongo to the Italian explorer Filippo Pigafetta who published them in 1591. Six years later they were translated into English by Abraham Hartwell, at the insistence of the Richard Hakluyt, an important proponent of geographical knowledge in England. In his preface Hartwell states that he undertook the work to "help our English Nation, that they might knowe and understand many things, which are common in other languages, but utterly concealed from this poore island", but that he "had much adoo to hold my hands from renting of him into many peeces", after reading of "two most honourable Gentlemen of England, whome in plaine tearmes he [Lopes] called Pirates."

**Hiob Ludolf, *Historia Aethiopica*. Frankfurt : David Zunner, 1681-91.** During the 14th century Ethiopia was identified by Europeans with the mythical kingdom of Prester John, a powerful Christian monarch in the east and potential ally to their cause against Islam. The myth encouraged cultural contacts between the Iberian kingdoms and the Empire. The King of Aragon and the Ethiopian Empire discussed a possible wedding alliance in 1428, and the Portuguese established diplomatic contacts a century later. At the time of publication of this volume the emperor was Iyasu I. Although Iyasu made overtures to Louis XIV and was generally more open to outside influences, his grandfather, Fasilides, had overseen the dismissal of Catholics as they rose to challenge the native church. Amongst those ejected were native Catholic converts, including one Abba Gorgoryos. Arriving in Rome Gorgoryos was introduced to a young German scholar, called Hiob Ludolf, who had taught himself Ge'ez, the Ethiopian liturgical language. Gorgoryos gave him a passage to read, only to fall about laughing at Ludolf's pronunciation. The 'laughter turned to astonishment', however, when Ludolf started successfully translating the passage. Through Gorgoryos' tuition Ludolf was able to produce several key monographs relating to Ethiopian culture.



**Psalter in Ge'ez edited by Johannes Potken. Rome : Marcello Silber, 1513** In 1513 the newly installed Pope, Leo X, was determined to enjoy his papacy, and lavished money on exotic acquisitions and on learning. Travellers came from across the Christian world and found a city avid to learn their languages. Amongst the guests was an Ethiopian pilgrim named Thomas Walda Samuel who taught one of Leo's secretaries, Johannes Potken, the ancient liturgical language of the independent Ethiopian Church - Ge'ez. Potken then proceeded to publish this Psalter, the first book to be printed in an Ethiopian language, getting a suitable typeface cut by a printer from Regensburg at his own expense. In spite of his enthusiasm, throughout his preface Potken consistently refers to the language as 'Chaldean', another term for Aramaic, an entirely different language spoken in Biblical times in the Middle East.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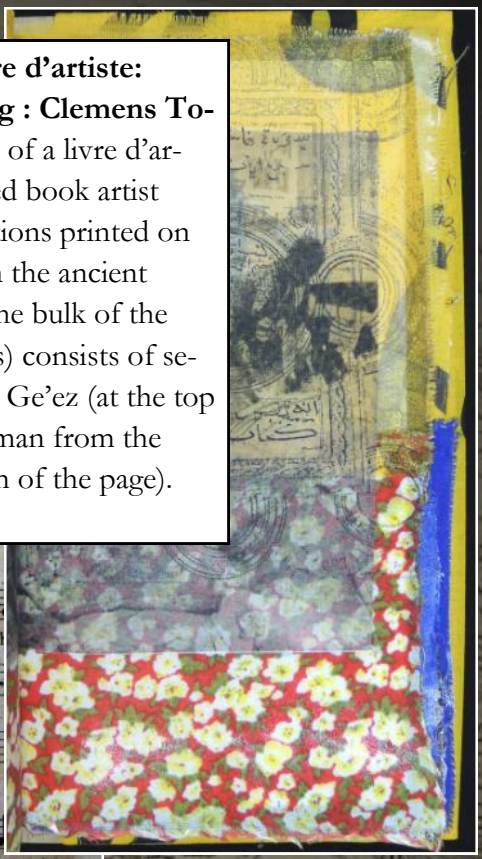
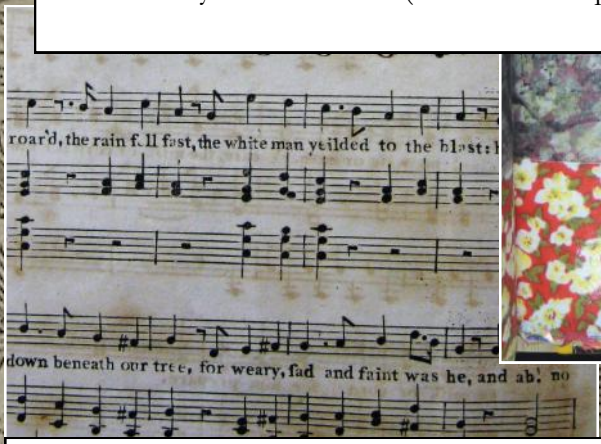
**Manuscript in Ge'ez containing prayers and the Miracles of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Ethiopia, 19th century**. The College's only Ethiopic manuscript, has been dated on calligraphic grounds to the 19th century, and is fairly pedestrian in presentation. The associated bag is not an uncommon feature of Ethiopian manuscripts and may indicate that this was a portable item, perhaps carried by a priest.

**Ge'ez used in a contemporary livre d'artiste: *Mechachal : Shewa Ber.* Hamburg : Clemens Tobias Lange, 2011.** One of 25 copies of a livre d'artiste produced by the Hamburg-based book artist Clemens Tobias Lange, with illustrations printed on cloth obtained in the market place in the ancient walled town of Harar in Ethiopia. The bulk of the text (printed on smaller paper inserts) consists of selections from the New Testament in Ge'ez (at the top of the page) in parallel with the German from the translation by Martin Luther (bottom of the page).






**Mungo Park, *Travels in the interior districts of Africa*. 3rd ed. London : W. Bulmer, 1799.** The Africa Association, a group sponsored exploration, particularly in West Africa. One of the chief questions that was troubling them was the question of the geography of the River Niger, particularly whether it flowed westward to the Gambia or Senegal rivers, or whether it flowed eastward. In 1795 they employed a young Scottish doctor called Mungo Park. Over the course of two and a half years Park conducted an expedition dogged by disease, theft, raids by slave-traders, loosing almost all his possessions, until he arrived in sight of the river and discovered it ran to the east, against many expectations. At one point he was taken in by a woman who sang a song about him while he rested, adapted here from Park's translation by Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire.

**David Livingstone, *Missionary travels and researches in South Africa*. London : Murrary, 1857.** The London Missionary Society had worldwide ambitions, but probably their most well known member was David Livingstone. He arrived in South Africa in 1841, originally residing at the missionary base in Kuruman near the Kalahari under Robert Moffat, and went on to set up a series of missionary stations of his own, moving on every couple of years, owing to a general lack of success. In six years he gained one convert—a chief of the Kwena called Sechele—and even he quickly reneged on his salvation. If his career as a missionary was fairly fruitless he did make an impact through his subsequent explorations of the interior of southern Africa. He was convinced that the key to opening up Africa to Christianity was through the use of its rivers as highways of commerce and civilization, and crossed the continent using the Zambesi. On the way he noted the huge waterfalls known as 'the smoke that thunders' by the locals and which he re-christened Victoria Falls. All of this made him a national hero on his brief return to Britain during which he published this account of his travels, replete as it is with dramatic illus-