

JERÓNIMO LOBO: HIS TRAVELS AND HIS BOOK¹

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It is an honour for any scholar to be invited to deliver one of the Rylands lectures. For me it is not only a signal honour, which I appreciate very greatly, but a source of keen personal pleasure. Almost exactly thirty years ago I escaped from a Government department into academic life. It was the University of Manchester that made my escape possible; I spent fourteen very happy years on its staff, and during that time I received a great deal of support, help and kindness from this University. It is always a pleasure to come back, particularly in what will be my last year as a university teacher, and I thank the authorities of the Library very warmly for inviting me.

I have chosen as my subject the adventures and the writings, and more particularly the adventures of the writings, of a seventeenth-century Portuguese Jesuit. His achievements and his books impinge not only on the history of his own order, the Society of Jesus, but on the history of Ethiopia, of Portuguese India, of British diplomacy in the 1660s, and on the early activities of the Royal Society, and they are relevant to the origins of Dr Johnson's *Rasselas*, besides affording a story of bibliographical complexity which I hope makes them a suitable topic to consider in a lecture given under the auspices of a great library.

Jerónimo Lobo was one of a small band of Jesuits who attempted to persuade the Christians of Ethiopia to renounce their ancient, Coptic, Monophysite faith, and to accept the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and the jurisdiction of the Pope. The attempt failed disastrously, though not before they had achieved some spectacular successes, notably the conversion of the Emperor Susenyos. He, however, failed in his efforts to impose on his subjects the doctrines and practices to which he adhered personally. Within two years of his death in 1632 his son

¹A lecture delivered in the John Rylands University Library on Wednesday, 11 March 1981.

and successor Fasiladas proscribed the Catholic faith and expelled the Jesuits. Those who did not leave were eventually executed, the last of them in 1641. Ethiopia then entered upon a period of deliberate isolation, greatly assisted by geography. What occurred is curiously parallel to what had happened only a few years before on the other side of the world, in Japan, where too the Jesuits were expelled, their followers persecuted, and a policy of rigid and almost total exclusion of foreigners adopted by the Tokugawa Shogunate. As one might expect, the Ethiopians were less thorough and less successful than the Japanese; long before Commodore Perry's time James Bruce had penetrated to Ethiopia, lived there for some years, and published his celebrated, lively, and in some respects inaccurate, description.

Most of these Jesuits, though not all, were Portuguese; there were some Spaniards and Italians among them, and at least one Indian. They were astonishingly few, if one remembers the vast extent of Ethiopia, which occupies about one million square kilometres. There were never more than twenty-five Jesuit Fathers in the country at any one time, and sometimes there were only two or three. So far as we can judge, they were very remarkable men, of great personal courage and physical hardihood. Pedro Páez, for instance, who, incidentally, was a Castilian by birth, not a Portuguese, failed in his first attempt to reach Ethiopia. He and a companion were captured near Shihr on the south coast of Arabia and sent to the Turkish Pasha at San'a in the Yemen. They spent seven years as prisoners, part of the time as galley slaves in the Red Sea. When they were at last ransomed and brought back to India, Páez immediately embarked on a second attempt, and this time he was successful. Most, probably all, of them were highly educated, often of noble birth, and many gave evidence of great intellectual ability. They acquired a knowledge of the classical language of Ethiopia, Ge'ez, far superior to that possessed by the Ethiopian clergy, and were much more successful in teaching it to young Ethiopians. They sometimes showed unexpected abilities as craftsmen. Paéz was evidently a competent architect, builder, and locksmith; he introduced the Ethiopians to two-storeyed houses, and his practical skill was one of the reasons for his influence with the Emperor, who owed his life to the fact

that a lock made by Páez foiled an assassination attempt. The Jesuits left behind a number of books about Ethiopia which contain a mass of detail, not only about their own missionary work, but about the teachings and practices of the Ethiopian church, the history of the country, including much which they translated or abridged from chronicles written in Ge'ez, its topography, the customs of its different peoples, and its natural history. These books are the histories of Ethiopia by Páez and by Almeida, the latter being a revision and continuation of the former, the treatises of Manoel Barradas on religion in Ethiopia and on the great northern province of Tigre, the *Expediitio aethiopica* of the Patriarch Afonso Mendez, the only one of these works to be written in Latin and not in Portuguese, and the *Itinerário* of Lobo himself. None of these was published in its author's lifetime, and none was at all adequately published until this century. In 1660 an abridgment of Almeida's history, with some additional material, was published at Coimbra by Balthazar Tellez, the Father Provincial of Portugal, and a writer and theologian of some distinction. His surname, incidentally, was adapted from the English name Tilly by his father, a Catholic recusant who took refuge in Portugal. An English translation of Tellez's book was published at London in 1710 and was probably the most important source of information about Ethiopia in eighteenth-century England until the publication of Bruce's *Travels*. Apart from this, however, and Lobo's book, the fate of which was complicated and peculiar, these works remained in manuscript until this century, when they were published with admirable care by P. Camillo Beccari in the fifteen volumes of his *Rerum aethiopicarum scriptores occidentales inediti* (1905–17). Even now they have been very inadequately exploited by scholars who have concerned themselves with the history of Ethiopia.

The vicissitudes of Lobo's writings were as remarkable as those of his life. He died at Lisbon in the Jesuit house of São Roque on 29 January 1678. By then one small treatise by him had been published, anonymously and in English. In 1669 a little book was printed for the Royal Society of London. The title page reads: *A Short Relation of the River Nile, of its source and current; of its overflowing the Campagnia of Aegypt, till it runs into the*

Mediterranean and of other curiosities: written by an eye-witnesse, who lived many years in the chief kingdoms of the Abyssine Empire. There are 105 pages. It consists of short essays on five topics, the reason for the annual rise of the Nile, the unicorn, the reason why the Emperors of Ethiopia were called Prester John, the reason why the Red Sea is so called, and the manifold uses of the palm-tree. On the page opposite the title-page these contents are set out and the book is said to have been 'Translated out of a Portuguese manuscript at the desire of the Royal Society by S^r Peter Wyche K^t fellow of the same'. It is dedicated to Arlington, of Cabal fame, and in the dedicatory epistle Wyche states that the discourses 'were by Curious S^{tr} Robert Southwell procured from an inquisitive and observing Jesuite at Lisbon'. When I first came across this book I naturally suspected that the Jesuit must have been Lobo; I think he was the only survivor of the Ethiopian mission living at Lisbon at this time. I went to the Royal Society and found there, as I had hoped I might, the Portuguese manuscript from which Wyche had made his translation, as well as two letters from the Secretary of the Society, Henry Oldenburg, to Lobo, and one from Lobo to Oldenburg. These letters are in Latin. They refer to the manuscript of the *Short Relation* and to an inscribed copy of Tellez's book which Lobo presented to the Society, and which is still in its library; in return he was given scientific instruments and spectacles.

These dealings of the Royal Society with Lobo were a by-product of English diplomacy. You will remember that in 1640 a coup d'état in Lisbon had ended the union of crowns between Spain and Portugal which had lasted for sixty years, and that the Duke of Bragança had been proclaimed King of Portugal as John IV. The Spanish court had refused to recognize the dissolution of the union and an inconclusive war was still continuing when, in 1665, the English government, which was anxious to bring it to an end, decided to send Sir Robert Southwell to Portugal to assist and supplement the activities of their envoy plenipotentiary, the Earl of Sandwich. Like the translator Sir Peter Wyche, Southwell was a Fellow of the Royal Society, of which he later became President. Southwell arrived in Portugal in 1666 and, apart from a visit to Madrid, remained there till 1668; he then returned to England

briefly, went back again to Lisbon, and finally came home in 1669. His official duties as well as his personal interests may well have been conducive to contact with the Jesuits, for the Society of Jesus had great influence at the Bragança court and some of its members were active in the protracted peace negotiations. It is of course possible, though I know of no direct evidence, that the Royal Society had suggested to Southwell that he should seek out Lobo when he reached Lisbon and put these specific questions to him. The *Short Relation* was republished twice, once in 1673, and again in 1798, when the interest aroused by the publication of Bruce's account of his travels in Ethiopia had no doubt made a reissue seem commercially worth while. There was even a French version by Thévenot published in 1674.¹

It was, however, widely known that, apart from this little work, Lobo had written a much longer and more comprehensive book. This first appeared in French in 1728, thanks to the efforts of the Abbé Le Grand. This savant had gone to Portugal as secretary to the Abbé d'Estrées, the French ambassador, and finding himself underemployed, had passed his time in collecting Portuguese manuscripts relating to the remoter parts of the world. He acquired several concerning Ceylon and India and the wars of the Great Mogul Aurangzib against the Marathas. He was particularly anxious to obtain a copy of Lobo's book, and was at length shown one by the Count of Ericeira. He had been told of its existence by Thévenot, who believed he had himself published an extract from it. Le Grand, when he saw the Ericeira manuscript, realized that what Thévenot had seen was only the *Short Relation*, the result, as he says, of conversations between Lobo and someone whom he calls M. Sotwel. Le Grand's translation was published, with additional treatises, as *Voyage historique d'Abissinie* in Paris in 1728.

Seven years later an English translation of Le Grand's version of Lobo's travels was published at London. The translation was the work, one of the first works, of Samuel Johnson. Boswell tells us that he dictated most of it from his bed and that he saw no proofs. He received five guineas for his labours. Over thirty years later

¹P. Gonçalves da Costa gives details of Italian and Dutch translations, *Itinerário e outros escritos ineditos* (Barcelos, 1971), p. 670.

Boswell brought him a copy, but was told to pay no attention to it. 'Your style, Sir,' said Boswell, 'is much improved since you translated this.' 'Sir, I hope it is' was Johnson's retort. An American friend of mine, Professor Joel J. Gold of the University of Kansas, has published in *PMLA* a careful comparison between Le Grand's text and Johnson's version.¹ He has shown that in a number of places Johnson abridged or adapted the French text. The book is not impressive as an example of his prose style, but it did of course supply some of the background for *Rasselas*.

The Portuguese original, however, remained unpublished and its whereabouts unknown. It was often said that it must have perished in the great Lisbon earthquake of 1755, which, as anyone with experience of Portuguese bibliography will know, has so often served as an unanswerable excuse of the less energetic librarians. It was, though, noted by some that it is recorded in the Memoirs of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Lisbon that in December 1829, at one of the Academy's sessions, Manoel José Maria da Costa e Sá 'presented the autograph of the travels of our well-known Father Jeronymo Lobo, accompanied by some observations, which travels are not to be found in Portuguese, though printed in other languages'. Naturally it was hoped that a copy would be found in the Academy's library, but in vain, and it was concluded that it must have been lost subsequently. This mistake is made, for example, in the article on Lobo in the *Grande Enciclopedia Portuguesa e Brasileira*, of which the relevant volume appeared soon after the Second World War. However, the word for 'presented', *apresentou*, does not necessarily imply that a copy was given to the Academy. It means no more than that it was displayed, presented in the sense that an impresario presents a theatrical performance. I became convinced that this was the correct interpretation when I found that the list of books and other items donated to the Academy in the year in question makes no mention of a copy of the *Itinerário*.

Reference books continued to state, either that the manuscript had been lost in the earthquake, or that it had disappeared from the Academy's collection. Then, in 1947, P. Manuel Gonçalves da

¹'Johnson's Translation of Lobo', *PMLA*, lxxx, no. 1 (March 1965).

Costa, the parish priest of Lalim, a village in northern Portugal, in the diocese of Lamego, unexpectedly found it in the Public Library of Braga. He was not looking for it; he was, in fact, compiling a list of unpublished philosophical treatises in Portugal, but he understood the importance of his discovery. He was, however, not only scholarly and erudite, but extremely busy. He never neglected his heavy pastoral duties. When I visited him at Lalim some years later I had the impression that he gave not only spiritual, but also administrative, legal, horticultural, and veterinary guidance to his numerous flock. He has nevertheless contrived to publish a series of learned and valuable books and articles largely concerned with the history of Lamego and its neighbourhood. It was not until 1952 that he found time to make known his remarkable discovery. He then did so in an article in a periodical called *A Voz de Lamego*, 'The Voice of Lamego', a local diocesan magazine. Here it did not at once attract the attention of international scholarship.

Some years later I happened to meet in London Professor Francis M. Rogers, then Professor of Romance Languages at Harvard University. We found we were both interested in Lobo and he told me that he had arranged for one of his research students, Donald M. Lockhart, to work on some short, unpublished writings by Lobo in the possession of the Duke of Palmela. I in turn told him about the letters in the library of the Royal Society, and why I was satisfied that the Lisbon Academy of Sciences had not lost, but had never possessed, the manuscript of the *Itinerário*. Soon after this mutually satisfactory conversation Professor Rogers left for Portugal.

Not long afterwards I received a jubilant postcard from him beginning with the word 'Eureka' followed by a row of exclamation marks. Professor Rogers had heard P. da Costa's discovery mentioned and had at once hired a car and driven to Lalim, and then to Braga. He was soon satisfied that this was indeed the long lost manuscript. Through his acquaintance with Dr Perdigão, the President of the Gulbenkian Foundation, he was able to arrange for Dr Lockhart and me to go to Lisbon and meet P. da Costa. With support from the Foundation the latter then prepared a complete edition of all Lobo's known writings. This he did with exemplary care and it was published at Barcelos in 1971. Dr

Lockhart has made an English translation of the Portuguese text established by P. da Costa. When I have written an introduction and some additional notes, principally historical and topographical, this is to be published by the Hakluyt Society.

In his introduction P. da Costa has elucidated the extraordinarily complicated history of the Braga manuscript. What he suggests cannot be proved in every particular but does appear to be the only plausible explanation consonant with such evidence as we have. It is certain that Lobo's original version was written in 1639/40, when he had returned to Portugal from the East for the first time. The manuscript was left at the Jesuit house of São Roque in Lisbon when Lobo himself sailed again for India in March 1640. P. da Costa has cited evidence that in 1668 Lobo, now back in Portugal again, was working on a revised version. He thinks that the manuscript of this became the property of the Counts of Vimieiro. In 1724 the Count of Ericeira began a series of communications to the Royal Academy of History which were concerned with the library of the Counts of Vimieiro. It will be remembered that it was the Count of Ericeira who made a copy of the *Itinerário* available to Le Grand. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the French translation, and in consequence Johnson's, depend on Lobo's second and revised version, written about 1668. This would explain the differences which we now know to exist between Le Grand's translation and the Braga manuscript. The library of the Counts of Vimieiro was, as P. da Costa has noted, destroyed in the earthquake, so that it is unlikely that we shall ever see the exact text from which the French translation was made.

The Braga manuscript, then, represents the first version, completed not later than March 1640. Its most likely history, as reconstructed by P. da Costa, would seem to be as follows. It remained for some time in the house of São Roque in Lisbon; he has traced a reference to its presence there in the works of P. António Franco, a historian of the Jesuits in the early eighteenth century. When Pombal expelled the Jesuits in 1761 the books and manuscripts from São Roque were transferred to the Confraternity of the Misericórdia, which sold a few from time to time to raise money for its charitable purposes. Among the

purchasers was Sir Joseph Banks, the botanist and collector, who was for thirty-two years President of the Royal Society of London. It is known that Banks acquired a manuscript of Páez's history of Ethiopia as well as a number of Jesuit letters; it is not known, but it may well be the fact, that he also bought Lobo's *Itinerário*. In 1789 a Portuguese nobleman, António de Araujo e Azevedo, Count da Barca, passed through London on his way to take up his appointment as ambassador to the United Provinces at The Hague. He was introduced to Banks who gave him a number of his Portuguese manuscripts, including those relating to Ethiopia. When the army of the French Marshal Junot overran Portugal and the mad Queen Maria and her son the Regent, later King John VI, fled to Brazil, the Count da Barca accompanied them; his library followed. His brother and heir eventually sold a large part, some 6,700 volumes, to the National Library in Rio de Janeiro. His manuscripts, however, were not included in the sale and returned to Portugal, where they passed into the possession of a certain Dr Manuel de Oliveira, and at his death, to the Public Library of Braga. It seems likely, therefore, that Lobo's *Itinerário* found its way from Lisbon to Braga through London, The Hague and Rio de Janeiro. To go 'to Birmingham by way of Beachy Head' would seem direct in comparison.

For the past ten years, then, all of Lobo's writings that have survived, and all that he is known to have written, has been available in a scholarly edition in the original language. It is therefore now possible to judge more fairly than ever before the quality of what he wrote. The Jesuits of the Ethiopian mission have often been abused, sometimes with gross unfairness. James Bruce was the author of what is probably the most famous travel book about Ethiopia, and in many ways it is an excellent book, but in detail, especially where Bruce's own prejudices or his vanity are involved, it can be very unreliable. He was a quarrelsome man, and he especially detested Portuguese; he also detested Jesuits. Three instances of the absurdity of some of his comments will suffice.

In his narrative of the reign of David IV (1714–19) he describes the execution of some Capuchin missionaries at the Emperor's order, and he implies that there are sinister reasons why these

priests are not mentioned in the Jesuit martyrologies. Tellez, he remarks, 'says not a word of them'. It would have been astonishing if he had done. On Bruce's own authority their trial and execution took place in 1714; Tellez published his book in 1660; even the English translation which Bruce used was published in 1710. Again, after describing the famous falls of the Blue Nile at Tislat, Bruce writes: 'It was a most magnificent sight, that ages, added to the greatest length of human life, would not efface or eradicate from my memory; it struck me with a kind of stupor, and a total oblivion of where I was, and of every other sublunary concern. It was one of the most magnificent, stupendous sights in the creation, though degraded and vilified by the lies of a grovelling fanatic priest', by whom Lobo is intended. In the nineteenth century the British explorer Charles Theodore Beke proved conclusively that Lobo's descriptions of the source of the Nile and of these falls are in fact more accurate than Bruce's, and this has been verified in more recent times by the very careful investigations of the late Col. R. E. Cheesman, published in his *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile* (1936). Again, Bruce writes that 'Lobo ... sailed from the peninsula of India, and, being bound for Zeyla ... embarked in a vessel going to Caxume, or Axum, capital of Tigre, and ... arrived there safely'. Zeila, as Bruce correctly remarks, is near the entrance to the Red Sea. Aksum, though he does not say so, is not on the coast; a ship could not possibly sail to Aksum, which is about 125 miles from the sea. Bruce, ignoring the fact that it lies inland, but knowing that it is in the northern part of Ethiopia, comments that 'it is inexplicable, how a ship going to Zeyla should choose to land 300 miles beyond it; and still more so, how, being once arrived at Axum, they should seek a ship to carry them back again to Zeyla, 300 miles eastward, when they were then going to Gondar, not much above a hundred miles west of Axum. This seems to be absolutely impossible to explain.' The explanation is simple, and Bruce would have found it easily if he had read carefully even the sources available to him in English. Caxume has nothing to do with Aksum. It is a Portuguese name for Qishn on the south coast of Arabia, the capital of a small sultanate which since about 1480 had controlled the island of Socotra, and which was often relatively friendly to the Portuguese. Had Bruce read the

narrative with any attention he would have realized that Aksum could not possibly be meant.

There were, however, other statements about Lobo by more careful writers than Bruce which can now be seen to have been unjustified. Anyone reading Le Grand's version must notice that it differs markedly in tone from the writings of the other Fathers of the Ethiopian mission. In contrast to the works of Páez, Almeida, Barradas and Mendez, which are impersonal, even when describing the adventures of the authors themselves, Lobo's book is for the most part a personal narrative. It is more sophisticated in its comments, less discreet, more humorous, in fact closer in temper to the eighteenth century. So much is this so that when I first read Le Grand myself, without knowing of the existence of the Braga manuscript, I concluded that the Abbé must have adapted the text to suit the tastes of the contemporary Parisian audience, which were not those of the Lisbon public of 1640. My suspicion can now be seen to have been wholly unjustified. Lobo's own manuscript shows him to have been in many ways, at least as a writer, very different from his celebrated companions. He is seen to belong in some respects to the age of Louis XV rather than that of Philip IV and the early Braganças.

One episode of his life about which we now have much more detail is his first, abortive, attempt to reach India in 1621. In Le Grand's book this has been drastically abridged; whether Le Grand abridged it because it had no relevance to Ethiopia, or whether Lobo himself abridged it when he revised his work, we have no means of knowing. If P. da Costa is right in his conclusion that the manuscript used by Le Grand perished with the rest of the library of the Counts of Vimieiro in 1755, we have little hope of ever knowing.

Lobo was born at Lisbon in 1595, the third of five sons and six children of a nobleman who had been Governor of Cape Verde. The surname Lobo is the Portuguese word for 'wolf' and might seem inappropriate for anyone exercising pastoral responsibilities. He may have felt this himself; certainly at one time he was asked by his superiors to use some other and chose his mother's surname, which was Brandão. He was educated by the Jesuits at Lisbon and Coimbra, and then was suddenly told that he was to

go to India. This was in 1621. The post from Lisbon reached the Jesuit college at Coimbra at 8 a.m. on the Friday after Easter, 16 April. Lobo was not there; he was staying at a farm outside the town. He was fetched, and at 9.45 a.m. he learnt that he was to go to India. He left at 3 p.m. that afternoon. At midnight on the Monday following he knocked at the door of St. Anthony's, the Jesuit college in Lisbon. On Tuesday the Inquisitor-General ordained him sub-deacon; on Wednesday he was made deacon, on Thursday priest. On Sunday he said his first mass. On the following Thursday morning he sailed for India in the ship that was carrying the new Viceroy of the Portuguese possessions in the East, Dom Afonso de Noronha. This was most expeditious and it is obvious that Lobo must have been chosen at the last moment.

However, in October he was back in Lisbon after an unfortunate voyage of which he gives a spirited description. 29 April was late for the annual fleet to sail. It had, indeed, been trying to leave for a long while. Lobo tells us that it had often been prevented from sailing because no galley was available to tow the ships into mid-channel where the wind was adequate, which it was not at their moorings. They sighted the peak of Tenerife in the Canaries, sailed between the islands and the African mainland and, so Lobo says, kept too close to the shore. They encountered calms, heavy rain, and adverse currents. As so often on these voyages there was difficulty about food and drink. Much of the wine on board was so bad that it had to be poured out through the port-holes; some of the rice was dumped on the deck, and it was in such a state that Lobo at first thought it was lime. They carried a supply of salt pork, much of which went bad; it was alleged that wet salt had been used in preparing it so as to make it weigh more and attract a higher price, much as in some countries today fresh fruit and vegetables are sometimes injected with water from the most conveniently situated puddle with the same object. The frequent calms naturally bored the sailors. Lobo relates that to relieve the tedium they used to catch sharks, which swarmed around the ships. They would poke out the eyes of the unfortunate creatures and then set them to fight each other, this being a substitute for the bull-fights they would have been enjoying at home. Another pastime was to take empty bottles,

stopper them with care, and tie them to the tails of the captured sharks. They would then throw the sharks back into the water and amuse themselves watching how their efforts to dive below the surface were frustrated by the buoyancy of the empty bottles tied to them.

Sickness on the voyage was serious. The Viceroy's ship on which Lobo sailed carried about 900 men, nearly all of whom fell ill. He himself ascribed this partly to the fact that the ship had returned from India the year before; about 300 men had died on that voyage and the infection had remained. This kind of thing, by the way, was not unusual. There are records of ships arriving in Portugal from India with only about half a dozen men well enough to work. Lobo fell ill himself. He thought he had contracted the disease while hearing the numerous confessions of the sick and dying, which seems plausible. At last, after being nearly wrecked on shoals off the island of São Tomé in the Gulf of Guinea, the attempt to reach India that year was abandoned and the ships headed back to Portugal. Even this was troublesome. They were in difficulty in the Sargasso Sea and did not sight the Portuguese coast till 4 October. Soon afterwards they met with a fishing boat, which, however, could offer them no supplies except for a single apple. Lobo describes how none of them ate it, but they passed it round from hand to hand, smelling it and relishing its fresh savour. Even when they entered the estuary of the Tagus they were not out of danger. They found there some French galleys on their way to take part in the famous siege of La Rochelle. The Viceroy asked the French to tow his ships to a safe mooring, but in language all too familiar ever since, they replied that they had received no instructions authorizing them to do so. The fleet finally anchored on 7 October. The failure of this voyage had serious consequences, for it had been intended that the new Viceroy should bring relief to the besieged Portuguese stronghold on the island of Humuz in the mouth of that Gulf which must be called Persian or Arabian according to the nationality of one's interlocutor. The town on the island, then a very important commercial entrepot, was being attacked by Shah Abbas I with English assistance and was forced to surrender in the following year.

Lobo spent the winter of 1621–2 in Portugal and went to

Coimbra for Christmas. He sailed for India again on 18 March with a new Viceroy, Dom Francisco da Gama, Count of Vidigueira, a direct descendant of Vasco da Gama. Understandably, Dom Afonso de Noronha preferred not to make another attempt to reach India. This time there was no serious mishap until the fleet was approaching Moçambique. Here they encountered, and were obliged to fight, a squadron of three Dutch and two English ships; there had been three English ships but one of them had run aground chasing a small native craft which was improbably supposed to be taking gold from Madagascar to the mainland. Lobo's description of the fight is not without interest. He tells us that the Portuguese carried heavier guns and had more stoutly built ships than their opponents. The Portuguese, therefore, fired into the sides of the English and Dutch ships, causing many casualties, whereas the English and Dutch fired at the rigging of the Portuguese ships, hoping to make them unmanageable so that they would be driven aground by the currents. Eventually the fight was broken off, but the Portuguese navigated so carelessly that two of their ships ran aground trying to enter the harbour. They were forced to continue their journey in smaller vessels. Some of these went astray; instead of Cochin, which was supposed to be their destination, one fetched up in Ceylon and another in Quilon. Lobo at last reached India on 4 October 1622. It is impossible to imagine the other Jesuits of the Ethiopian mission affording so much detail of so little relevance to the propagation of the faith as he does in his description of these two voyages.

After a year spent in theological study at Goa he was assigned to Ethiopia. The difficulty which always confronted the Portuguese was how to get there. Christian Ethiopia is essentially a high plateau the eastern side of which drops precipitously to a hot and arid plain part of which lies below sea level. This plain was, and still is, inhabited almost entirely by Muslims, principally Somali and Afar, hostile on several counts to the Christian Amhara. The easiest access was by the port of Massawa on the west coast of the Red Sea, a natural harbour where the edge of the plateau approaches very near to the sea. This had been used by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century at a time when its local ruler owed allegiance to the Emperor of Ethiopia. In the middle of the

century, however, it was occupied by the Turks and became part of the Ottoman province of Habesh. This meant that the Portuguese could only use it either by bribing the local officials or by passing through in disguise, which, given the number of Muslims travelling between the Portuguese settlements in India and the ports of the Red Sea, was very dangerous. There was always a considerable risk that they would be recognized by someone who had seen them in Goa or Diu or Cochin or elsewhere in India. We find, therefore, that they constantly tried to find alternative routes to Ethiopia, by way of Zeila on the Somali coast or even Malindi in what is now Kenya.

Lobo and another Jesuit Father, a Spaniard named Juan de Velasco, were concerned in a desperate attempt to make use of the second of these alternatives. It had already been tried in 1613–14, but from the Ethiopian end. P. António Fernandez and an Ethiopian envoy called Fequr Egzie had set out to reach Malindi by crossing the Blue Nile in Damot and heading southwards. It is not surprising that they failed and were forced to turn back. It is surprising that they survived to relate their travels in the Cushitic states of south-west Ethiopia, a region about which we have virtually no further information until the later nineteenth century. Lobo was one of eight Fathers destined to serve in Ethiopia. Because of the difficulty and uncertainty of getting there they were divided into three parties. Four were sent by way of Massawa and arrived safely, the Ottoman governor having demanded and received as a bribe the present of a zebra. Two others went through Zeila and were executed by the ruler of Aussa in the interior. Lobo and Velasco went to Malindi, where they were told they could reach their destination by ascending the valley of the Juba. This they tried to do. Lobo had provided himself with a Turkish costume, a shirt with wide sleeves, a jacket, wide trousers fastened at the ankle, a big turban, and shoes turned up at the toes. He must have looked as if he were to take a part in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. He also had Arab clothes and was able to dress as a Portuguese layman as well as in his religious habit. The Jesuits hired a boat with a Muslim crew of eight, but it was so unequal to the weight it was required to carry that for most of the way the two priests had to walk along the shore. The ground was

so slimy that they could not wear shoes and so covered with shells that their feet were badly cut. They slept on the ground in the open. After covering some 200 miles in this way they arrived at a village at the mouth of the Juba near which was a large Galla encampment. Here they were told that their proposed journey was totally impracticable because of the number of quite independent savage tribes through whose territory they would have to pass, where no one could guarantee their safety. Lobo, indeed, is one of the few Portuguese of that time to have understood, if only from his own painful experience, how politically fragmented was sub-Saharan Africa. On this journey in southern Somalia he found that every few leagues he was crossing into the domain of another independent chief. The first with whom he met was rowing his own boat and was stark naked except for a very old and battered straw hat. This potentate was addressed by Lobo's interpreter as 'Your Highness' (*Alteza*), which the Jesuits thought somewhat unseemly. What, however, most gratified him was not being addressed as though he were the King of Portugal, but the gift of a lump of fried fish.

It would be easy to multiply such examples of the amusing details which enliven this remarkable book. I remember, though, that sixteen years ago, when I last listened to a Rylands lecture from the seats which you are now occupying, that, elegant as they are, they become somewhat uncomfortable after about fifty minutes. So I do not think I should be justified in asking you to share more than one more of Lobo's tribulations. The following is his account of a visit made to him by an Ethiopian monk much later, when he was travelling inside the country:

One of the monks came to see me. He was blind, but a great windbag and was held to be a man of learning. To tell the truth he could have a greater reputation by his blathering than by any basis of knowledge he might have had, though he had a reasonable command and awareness of Holy Scripture, with which he won respect for himself. Though blind in his body he could be a king in the country of those who were blind in their souls and acquaintance with divinity. He pretended to be a good Catholic and very much our friend. I welcomed him and gave him supper one night, which was allowable in the country and on the road, the more so in uninhabited country such as I was in at the time. When I was travelling I used to take with me servants and supplies as there are no inns, and I did not want to be a burden to the people and places through which I went. Although they are obliged to give free shelter and food

to guests, this is still a hardship especially for the poor, and very burdensome. However, someone helped me out with some of his mead, which was a great stimulant for the monk. It is much more than that for these people, and it is thought very hospitable to have plenty of it. For them, all entertainment and politeness consists in this, as in this country drunkenness is much in vogue. The more drunk a guest is the more courteously he thinks he has been welcomed. This was so much so with the monk that when he came out he had to rid himself of the large quantity of excess mead there was in his stomach. Even so he was in such a happy state that he spent the whole night in total oblivion and came to thank me in the morning for the courtesy I had shown him.

Among other things he did to show his gratitude he told me about the wonders and miracles wrought by the founder of his order, whom they call Tecla Aimanot, which means Plant of the Faith. One of the cock and bull stories they tell about him is that a devil used to frequent the spring where his monks used to go for water, and used to bother and molest them, playing tricks on them, some of which were amusing and some vexatious. Provoked by this and the annoyance to his monks, the said Tecla Aimanot went to the spring. He found the devil and rebuked him for what he was doing. After various arguments and excuses, he at last succeeded in persuading him to become a monk as a penance for his sins, in which he did badly for a bad object. But, as circumcision is absolutely necessary among the Abyssinians, he did not want to accept him till he had been circumcised. The devil consented for the advantage he hoped would ensue to him as the same monk was to carry out the operation. When it had been done he put the habit on him and he lived an exemplary and edifying life among the other monks, dying ten years after taking the habit. So blessed was his death that he went to heaven, where those poor savages have no difficulty whatsoever in believing that he is.

It is very true that the more intelligent among them ridicule these cock and bull stories, but the stupid consider them sacred, being persuaded by these monks. They tell thousands of these stories, like the one about another devil who had a son they call Abbot Mamas, whom they revere as the great saint of the monastery of Abagarima, which was a league away from my village, and where I went many times. And about another devil who was killed by a great saint whom they call Guebra Manifes Kedus, which means Slave of the Holy Ghost. This monk is supposed to have killed this devil whose body was one hundred ells long and two ells wide. Though his proportions were nothing much, unless they took him for a column or a pillar, still he paid the penalty for some evil deeds he committed in that district. Many people came together to throw his dead body down from a cliff but they could not move it till the aforesaid saint came, hauled it with his girdle and hurled it down. It is pitiful to see how attached they are to these cock and bull stories and how they believe in them.

Again, this robust contempt for laxity, ignorance and superstition is different in tone from anything we find in the writings of the other members of the mission. Indeed, it recalls in some degree the attitude of that other intrepid traveller in Ethiopia, who so much despised Lobo and abused him so unfairly, James Bruce of Kinnaird.