In a welcome move, given the preponderance of attention to the exotic in travel-writing scholarship, Legassie's final section pursues the notion of the medieval discovery of the proximate. Noting that many more travel accounts tend to treat short-range journeys after 1350, he focuses on two specific travelers: the prehumanist intellectual Petrarch, whose journeys paradoxically culminate in a rationale for staying put, and Castilian noble Pero Tafur, whose writings attempt to make his journeys conform with existing "courtly ethnographic" and chivalric "adventure" modes (204). While these final chapters are often observant and illuminating accounts of Petrarch's and Tafur's texts, at times they read as less closely bound into the concerns of the volume than their forerunners. As Legassie himself points out, that Petrarch "distinguishes himself from most of his contemporaries by resisting the tendency to assimilate literate labor to the art of travel" may partially explain the imperfect fit (15). However, chapter 5's attempt to explain Petrarch's attitudes through "the diasporic orientation of his political consciousness" (202) also reads as an underexplored afterthought rather than as central to the chapter's analysis.

Nonetheless, this is a well-researched, thoughtful, and stimulating engagement with an impressively broad range of late medieval travel texts. It benefits particularly from its attention to multiple textual versions across a range of original languages. Legassie's cultural-historical methods are surefooted; he both situates travel texts in their cultural contexts and uses them to identify previously unrecognized trends in the thought and practice of travel and travel writing. Finally, he tells us a compelling new story about the writing and culture of travel in the later Middle Ages and their hitherto-unrecognized modes of connectivity with prior and later eras, all without lapsing into a teleological narrative. This volume is likely to become essential reading for scholars and students in the field.

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*The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402–1555.* Matteo Salvadore.
Transculturalisms, 1400–1700. London: Routledge, 2017. xii + 236 pp. $149.95.

This is the first book-length study on Ethiopian-European encounters during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It has three revisionist aims. First, Matteo Salvadore seeks to highlight the African (understood as sub-Saharan) contribution to the Renaissance world. While studies on European representations of Africa and Africans abound, the African perspective on Europe is often out of reach. Second, Salvadore opts "to de-Atlanticize and de-Americanize" African history by challenging the prominence of topics like racism and slave trade in current scholarship. Ethiopia in the late medieval and early modern period was a proud, proactive, and Christian African entity that met with European authorities on equal terms. A literate culture on its own, it provides sources

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and an African perspective that today often seems to be irretrievably lost or buried in doubts about whether the subaltern can speak. These two points address Renaissance and African studies, respectively. Third, Salvadore would also like to see a paradigm shift in Ethiopian studies, which he fears is siloed, positivist, and hyperspecialized.

Salvadore succinctly defines *encounter* "as the combined experience of lay and ordained Ethiopians and Europeans who, either on behalf of the polities to which they belonged or as independent agents, traveled, either with their feet or with their mind, beyond the Arab world to seek power, profit, or knowledge" (3). The encounters are staged in Ethiopia itself, the Red Sea region, Alexandria, Jerusalem, or Cyprus. The European places and persons involved all happen to be on either the Italian or the Iberian Peninsulas.

The narrative is structured chronologically, beginning with the Ethiopian legation that arrived in Venice in 1402. Emperor Dawit I commissioned it to look for relics of the true cross. The mission was successful and the introduction of the relic is celebrated in Ethiopia to this day. The following chapters are devoted to other encounters, among them an exchange of letters between Emperor Zara Yaqob and king of Aragon Alfonso V (discussing the prospect of a Christian alliance against Islam, intermarriage, and technological transfer), Ethiopian pilgrims traveling to Rome and further on to Santiago, an Ethiopian delegation to the Council of Florence, and the founding of Santo Stefano in Rome as the first permanent Ethiopian presence in Europe, dedicated to proto-Africanist studies and a mildly Rome-centered ecumenism.

While Europe was losing ever more of the Mediterranean to the Ottomans, it was gaining strength in the Atlantic world. Portugal became a hub of Africa research, and Portuguese missions effortlessly combined the quest for the mythical Prester John with the exploration and exploitation of the African coasts. Accordingly, those missions were fueled both by lofty millenarian hopes to regain Jerusalem with a pan-Christian army and by solid financial covetousness. When the Portuguese finally reached Ethiopia in 1520, Iberian enthusiasm for a ruler in a faraway land with strange and suspiciously Jewish or Islamic customs was cooling down already and Catholic reform continued to cool interest. When Cardinal Alfonso wrote from Lisbon to Dawit II in 1539, he opened with complaints about Ethiopian customs like circumcision.

The book is a fascinating read, full of surprises to the nonspecialist (such as this reviewer). It convincingly fleshes out how crosscultural collaboration could work either in the evolution of the myth of Prester John or in the production of a map of the world. Concerning the representation of Africa, the Venetian cartographer Fra Mauro, for instance, strikingly claimed that visiting prelates from Africa "drew for me with their own hands all these provinces, cities, rivers and mountains" (28).

Judging by the endnotes, the book is a synthesis of often quite old research. Though Salvadore does draw on a couple of texts in Ge'ez and Arabic and some archival sources, the most vital sources for his argument have been published in different European languages, even if sometimes in journals and collections that are hard to access. Still, it gives

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one pause to see a specialist with explicit revisionist aims quoting extensively in English, e.g., from an Ethiopian letter (which seems accessible in a European archive) based on a French translation from 1889 (168). While it may be true that an Ethiopian studies specialist has to stand on the shoulders of racist and genocidal Ethiopianists of the early twentieth century, Salvadore (who clearly does not share their ideology) might have done more to prove their findings wrong by delving into primary sources and relevant secondary literature like, say, Alastair Hamilton's *The Copts and the West*. The fascinating narrative of how, in the Ethiopian-European encounter, "faith trumped color" would deserve a firm foundation.

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*Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World c. 1410–1800*.
Tracey A. Sowerby and Jan Hennings, eds.
Routledge Research in Early Modern History. London: Routledge, 2017. xiv + 306 pp. $149.95.

The study of early modern diplomacy has been transformed during the past two decades. Hitherto viewed through the lens of monarchical states assumed to be protean bureaucracies, it focused upon national foreign policies based upon the correspondence in the archives of these same polities. In this perspective the sneers of its many detractors, to the effect that it was "the record of what one clerk said to another" (in G. M. Young's famous verdict), appeared fully justified. During the past two decades, however, the subject has been revived by a more cultural approach. The "New Diplomatic History," as it is now known, "builds on the premise that sociocultural practices constituted political relationships" and were nothing less than their "basis" (2), as the editors note in their introduction. Precisely titled, this timely volume focuses on the practices of negotiation, on process more than outcome, and provides a valuable introduction to the approaches that now guide researchers.

This new scholarship is global in scope, in contrast to the Eurocentricity of the older diplomatic history, and also demonstrates a welcome willingness to extend the range of actors studied beyond the monarchical *régimes* upon which attention had been myopically concentrated. Both aims are evident in Frank Birkenholz's impressive study of the role of gift exchange in the way the VOC—the Dutch East India Company—established contacts with the powerful Safavid and Mughal empires in, respectively, Persia and the Indian subcontinent. Central to his approach is the notion that the VOC—exactly like its English counterpart—was a "company-state," with its own diplomatic node in Batavia, the center of Dutch commercial and political power in the Far East. Guido van Meersbergen's scholarly and wide-ranging examination of early VOC contacts with the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb traverses the same ground and confirms that Dutch

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