

The field of Ethiopic studies finds itself at an interesting juncture. The last fifty years have seen the digitization of tens of thousands of previously-inaccessible manuscripts. This influx of new source material has the potential to revolutionize the field. But, first, a number of methodological issues need to be resolved. Most important for this lecture is that, with only a few possible exceptions, all Ethiopic manuscripts stem from after 1200, with the vast majority dating to after 1500. Thus, scholars are faced with pressing methodological questions about how to employ medieval (or later) Ethiopic manuscripts that purport to speak about earlier periods, including even about late antique Aksum. In this paper, I explore this question through a case study of the *Homily on Frumentius*. The *Homily on Frumentius*, which is attested in Ethiopic manuscripts only from the fourteenth century and later, narrates a story set in the fourth century about the conversion of a ruler of Aksum to Christianity at the hands of one Frumentius. Previous scholars have used this text as evidence for the history of fourth-century Aksum, and especially its conversion to Christianity. I will argue, in contrast, that the Ethiopic *Homily on Frumentius* provides little to no historically-meaningful information about late antique Aksum. This does not, however, mean that the *Homily on Frumentius* is devoid of value for the historian. Rather, different historical questions need to be asked. I will show that the *Homily on Frumentius* opens a window into the cultural and political matrices of the time of its promulgation and copying in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and that this is of no less importance for the history of Ethiopia than problematic origin stories. Thus, this lecture, along with the broader project of which it is a part, aims to reorient the field of Ethiopic studies to the medieval period.