

THE *ITINERÁRIO* OF JERÓNIMO
LOBO

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lion gave a roar and a jump, so heedless that he fell into a ditch that had been made there for him. The youth rushed on him with the same courage and attacked him, now with even greater confidence because he was sure of victory. He finished killing him, with the other spear he still had in his hand, as safely as if it were a little cub. It was so small that, having skinned it, he brought me the skin with the head joined to it, which was as bulky as a huge loading basket. The mane was extremely beautiful, the teeth very large and red, being those of a veteran. I asked that the skin be stretched out and measured in my presence, and they found that, from the head to the end of the tail, it measured sixteen spans of a man who was measuring it. The reader can picture the size this represents and the bravery of the bold youth, whom I congratulated most heartily after scolding him for his rashness. His courage and the happy outcome, however, are certainly worthy of admiration. Worthy of even greater admiration, however, was another encounter occurring a few days thereafter and involving another man, this one married, who was on another property of the Church. Because another lion killed one of his cows one evening, he went out in search of him to take vengeance, taking as his only weapon a dagger in his belt. He was, however, half out of his mind with the loss of the cow, which for a poor man was a substantial loss, especially because cattle are the major form of wealth for these people. After a few steps, he found the lion going down a hill. He went around to the other side of the hill in order to take him unawares and went toward him from one side on a level with him. The lion went toward him, and coming close to him made his leap to tear him apart. But watching him closely, the daring man, with much presence of mind and assurance, at the moment of impact nimbly removed his body from the path of the lion letting him fall next to him. He immediately threw himself upon the lion holding him by the head and neck with his left hand as tightly as he could; and, quickly drawing the dagger, he began to strike with it with such furiously repeated blows that the lion soon fell dead at his feet with the man over him. It is very true that, while the man was striking him, the lion caught his arm in his jaws from the inside of the elbow downward and, with his teeth, broke and mangled all the bones, so that the man was crippled because of it and still remains so today. The lion was dead and Aile Ieotos, for this was the man's name, meaning illustrious fortress of Jesus,¹ had proved his valour. The two events must cause respect for the courage of the

¹ Presumably Haile Iyasus, 'the Power of Jesus'.

Abyssinians, with no lack of respect for the Ethiopian lions, for even if their great ferocity had not been demonstrated by these experiences, their being African, and as such famed and feared, would be sufficient in itself.

Elephants are countless. One time among others, I came across three hundred of them grazing in a field in three herds. This was when we were being chased by the heretics as we were making our way through the woods, where we lay in hiding by day and travelled at night. Since we had a longer distance to travel that night, we set out at four in the afternoon and, on going down a hill, we saw the valley with three hundred elephants coming across the road where we necessarily had to pass. It was impossible for us to stop and even more so for us to turn back, but by going ahead we were running the danger of experiencing the wrath of these wild beasts who are particularly fierce when they go in herds with their young and females. As the least of the evils, we chose to go ahead, imploring God's mercy, which fortunately interrupted the wild beasts in their course as they either turned back or went another way, so that we were able to continue our journey in safety. However, we were not completely out of this danger when we encountered another equally great. Since the people who were leading us are extremely superstitious, being uncivilized and schismatical, as soon as they hear a certain bird singing on their left, they will not take another step forward until they hear it on their right. Unfortunately for us, a bird sang on the wrong side as we were hurrying to be sure to be out of such great danger and they ordered us to stop, dismount and sit down. When I learned the reason for this, it was necessary for me to counteract the spell. After a short space of time, therefore, I came to them in rapture saying that the bird had sung on the right. At this news, they happily continued the journey, as, with that bit of foolishness, I had overcome the blindness of their vain superstition. On another occasion, with greater danger, as we were travelling to Masuá, now as prisoners of the Turks, in another uninhabited place we saw five elephants next to a large rock, one of huge size, the four others smaller. Because they were within a stone's throw of us, we came closer to them to have a better look at them, and a youth foolishly shouted at them, at which they became so enraged that, after the small ones had first made certain turns around the large one, which, with its trunk raised high looking like a large tree trunk or beam, was giving dreadful trumpeting, provoked by anger, they rushed so boldly and furiously at us that they would quickly be upon us and most of us would surely

not escape being torn to pieces by them. But God willed that, as they reached the steep bank of a certain dry river bed, they could go no further because the jump was too far down,¹ so that they turned and we began to run faster, watchful not to awaken any more sleeping dogs or to go near any similar wild animals on whose size I shall comment in the following remarks.

One morning I was in a wilderness which I spent the whole day crossing. Having many trees and plenty of water, it is a place well suited to and much frequented by these animals because of the branches and boughs on which they subsist and the roots of large trees which they uproot, eating the tenderest ones as a great treat. The water in pools or streams serves them for bathing as they put themselves into it and into the mud, like swine. I am reminded, by the way, to undeceive those who believe the tales of antiquity that elephants do not have joints, never lie down, but sleep leaning against trees, etc.; for they do lie down and sleep on the ground, kneeling down like any other supple animal. One of these had just refreshed himself in a mud-hole and, going to a nearby tree, had cleaned himself on it as they are wont to do, and I found this mark very recently made, for he did it almost in my sight. Out of curiosity, I wanted to measure how high it was. Although I was riding a good-sized mule and stood up on the stirrups, I was unable, with my arm and hand extended, to reach the mark he had left, falling more than two spans short of reaching it. Such is the scale and size of the wild animals in those parts. Among the wild animals there are also the famous rhinoceroses, whom alone the elephants fear. The famous unicorn, as celebrated in story as it has been unknown until now, has been seen in a heavily wooded province of these kingdoms called Agau at such close range that it could be seen and identified and its features could be noted. It is a beautiful horse of a chestnut colour with black mane and tail. Those of Tuncua² have a short tail; those of Ninina, a district of this province,³ have long tails and manes which go down to the ground.⁴ There are many other animals of various

¹ Elephants are unable to jump and can be stopped by a ditch too deep for them to step into or out of, and too wide for them to step across.

² Tumha, about five miles NW of Danghela. Le Grand reads Tũaçua.

³ More commonly Nanina. The name does not appear on modern maps but it is marked on Almeida's and Ludolf's. Almeida, *Historia de Ethiopia a alta*, in Beccari, 1905-17, v, 469, says that the Emperor Sartsa Dengel gave the Portuguese lands in this district bordering on Agau territory, 'four or five leagues from the source of the Nile'. The Portuguese won victories over the Agaus and gained more lands, but because of the jealousy of the Ethiopians they were removed to Dambya. Paez, liv. IV cap. 7, says there were many Portuguese there. They were the descendants of the survivors of D. Cristovão's expedition.

⁴ Mr I. R. Bishop of the British Museum (Natural History) informs me that there is no animal which has all the features ascribed by Lobo to the unicorn. The animal most

types which follow them. Similarly, deer, goats, gazelles, and other animals of this sort follow the elephant for the purpose of defending themselves, under his protection, against the other carnivorous animals; for the elephant lives only on grass and branches and boughs and provides safety for these poor ones through his protection and generosity.

The number of domestic animals is almost unlimited: mules, asses and horses, the latter very beautiful and excellent; oxen and cows. Since cows are their principal form of wealth, there are an extremely large number of them. Some succeed in having many thousands of them. They have a delightful custom, which they never fail to observe among themselves, that whenever one gains ownership of a thousand cows, he gives a great banquet, inviting relatives and friends, and taking milk from all the cows, for only cows are counted in the thousand, they take a bath in it, which I appropriately used to call 'a fly or huge fly in the milk' when they were in it. This custom is so prevalent that when people ask how many thousand cows a certain person has, they answer that he has already bathed two or some other number of times, which means that he owns that many thousand cows. They use them only for milk and breeding. Every three years there is a general 'burning' in all the the kingdoms of the empire, which means that the Emperor takes one of every ten cows and the one that he takes has a mark branded on her buttock with a branding iron. For that reason they call it *tucus*, meaning 'burn'.¹ The Emperor collects many thousands of cows in this way. It is one among many tributes the people must pay to him. They use the oxen for ploughing and as beasts of burden, as if they were mules. They are very large and beautiful, usually without horns, but some with horns so flexible that they seem to be disjointed arms hanging from their heads. They raise a certain strain of ox called *gueches*, as large as a pair of ours, used only for slaughter.² They feed them from the time they are small with the milk of two or three cows so that they fatten and grow as I have said. Their horns

likely to have been intended is the oryx. 'It seems quite possible that the legendary Unicorn was based on this elegant Arabian antelope; certainly some of the early European visitors to the region, such as Varthema, in 1503, described the Oryx they saw as such', D. L. Harrison, *The Mammals of Arabia* (London, 1964-72), II, 348. Dr Harrison tells me that an oryx seen from the side might easily appear to have only one horn, and some animals may have lost or badly damaged one. For a photograph of an Ethiopian oryx which has only one horn, see W. George, 'The bestiary: a handbook of the local fauna', *Archives of Natural History*, 10 (1981), 189. Dr George remarks that 'frequently, antelopes have broken or misshapen horns because their horns are soft at birth and unicorns, or one-horned oryx, are not unknown'.

¹ Amh. *tucus*, 'burnt in'.

² Amh. *gosh*, 'buffalo'.