The medial status of the body – the body as an image and images of the body: King Kāleb and other Ethiopian saints depicted in Portugal and Brazil in the 18th century

The aim of this sub-project, which links Ethiopian studies and art history, is to examine the intermedial construct of saintliness from the viewpoint of critical whiteness studies. The question about the role that the colour of skin plays in characterising saints in texts and images will be addressed diachronically. A group of Ethiopian saints is at the heart of this study. The unmarked nature of skin colour in Byzantine, Syrian, Arabic and Ethiopian hagiographies from the sixth century onwards and the marking of it in the reception of these sources in the 17th and 18th century are of particular interest. The intention here is not only to trace the medial shifts and semanticisation of figures of saints over the centuries, but to piece together the system of relations that played a role in marking (or the lack of it). According to recent research, in 17th- and 18th-century Brazil, Ethiopian saints were used to establish Christian brotherhoods primarily intended to appeal to African slaves.