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A Serious Question of Ethiopian Studies**

Five Thousand Ethiopian Manuscripts Abroad, and the International Community

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Ethiopic, or Ge'ez, manuscripts [hereafter MSS] are of fundamental importance for scholarship and spiritual and cultural education.

Ethiopic literature formed a major part of ancient and medieval Christian literature. Many important Ethiopic works were, and still are, unknown to the outside world:

Foreign scholars learnt for example of the **Book of Enoch** and the **Book of Jubilees** only because they were preserved in Ethiopia.

Though most Ethiopic literature is religious, numerous texts also cover subjects, including **history, philosophy, law, mathematics, and medicine.**



For the study of Ethiopic, as other texts, scholars need to consult more than one copy.

This is because MSS were written by hand, and scholars have to compare different versions to control the scribes accuracy, or lack thereof, and thus establish a definitive text.

Ethiopian MSS often also include "**marginalia**", i.e. end papers, etc., containing notable secular material: data on land sales and grants, marriage settlements, church and **monastic inventories, etc.**

See for example **Tax Records of Emperor Tewodros of Ethiopia**, published by the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, which I wrote with Girma Sellasie Asfaw, in **1978.**

Ethiopian MSS are no less important for the history of Ethiopian art. Illustrations, painted by hand, are by definition unique, for which reason too it is necessary to study several works, not merely one, on any theme.



For all these reasons it is essential to collect as comprehensive a photographic collection of Ethiopian MSS as possible.

EMML, UNESCO, and Professor Hammerschmidt

It was for the above reasons, as well as in the interests of preservation, that the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, EMML, was established in 1973.

It was based on co-operation between the **Ethiopian Patriarchate, the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture,** and St. Johns University in Collegeville, Minnesota, **USA.**

It was for the above reasons too that Ethiopia facilitated the microfilming of MSS by UNESCO, and by the late Professor Ernst Hammerschmidt, of Hamburg University.

The EMMML went to immense pains microfilming thousands of MSS in remote parts of Ethiopia. By making such film available to scholars it gave an immense fillip to international, as well as Ethiopian scholarship.



The Time Has Surely Come

The time has surely come to focus not only on Ethiopian MSS in Ethiopia,

but also on an estimated **5,000 Ethiopian MSS in Europe, North America, Asia, and Oceania:** so as to make them more readily available for scholarship.

The microfilming, or preferably digital photographing, of such MSS abroad is scarcely less important than the copying of MSS in Ethiopia itself.

Photography in technically advanced countries would be less demanding, and hence less costly, than in the Ethiopian countryside.

It is only fair to add that whereas microfilming in Ethiopia has been of major assistance to international

scholarship, the failure to copy Ethiopian MSS in the rest of the world remains an obstacle to scholarship within Ethiopia itself.



It is good that the odd Ethiopian manuscript is preserved in Spain or New Zealand, but this scarcely helps research in Ethiopia.

The Five Thousand Manuscripts Abroad

Let us look at the worldwide diffusion of Ethiopian MSS. The figures below are conservative, for they do not include privately owned MSS, or recent library acquisitions.

Great Britain

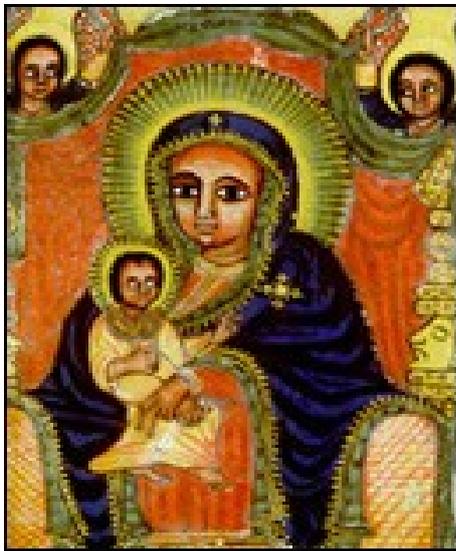
The largest number of Ethiopian MSS abroad, over 850, are in the United Kingdom.

A little less than half were looted by the Maqdala expedition of 1867-8: their return is currently demanded by the Ethiopian organisation **AFROMET**.

The principal depositories of Ethiopian MSS are in the British Library, which, at my last count, had **598** MSS ; the Bodleian Library, in Oxford, had **101**;

Cambridge University Library, 67; John Rylands Library, in Manchester, 42;

the British and Foreign Bible Society, **35**; the School of Oriental and African Studies, **9**;



and the Royal Library, Windsor castle, 6 particularly fine manuscripts (from Maqdala).

There are also over 40 other MSS in other collections: 17 in the Wellcome Institute

Library, in London; six in the India Office Collection of the British Library,

also in London; five in the Selly Oaks College Library, in Birmingham; five in the Victoria and Albert Museum, in London;

three in the National Library of Scotland, and three in the University of Edinburgh Library, both in Edinburgh; one in the Fitzwilliam Museum, in Cambridge;

one in the Jews College, in London; **and one in St.**



Andrews University Library, in Scotland.

Nine scrolls, formerly in the possession of the

London Library, **all or mainly from Maqdala, were sold by Sothebys in July 1970.**

A substantial number of British Library MSS (but not all)



have been generously microfilmed by the **British Council, for the Institute of Ethiopian**

Studies, in Addis Ababa. MSS in other UK collections remain, however, uncopied.

Germany

Germany possesses scarcely fewer **Ethiopian MSS.** **734** have recently been catalogued by **Professor**

Ernst Hammeschmidt, and Dr Veronika Six, both of Hamburg.



These MSS are scattered throughout Germany: in Berlin, Bonn, Bremen, Dillingen, Dresden, Frankfurt, Gottingen, Hamburg, Heidelberg, Kessel, Mannheim,

Munched, Munster, Reibek, Stuttgart, and Wiesbaden.

Details are available in the admirable Veronika Six catalogues.

France

France possesses almost as many Ethiopian MSS: at least 700. Most are in the Biblotheque Nationale in Paris.

The latest information available to me, in our old friend Professor Stefan Strelcyns catalogue, indicates that the collection, by 1954, had reached a total of 688 MSS.



The Vatican

The Vatican possesses over 600 Ethiopian MSS. The majority are in the Apostolic Library, which contains 618.

A little over half, i.e. **319**, were collected by the former **Italian Vice-Governor-General of Italian East Africa, Enrico Cerulli**, in questionable circumstances. There are also **9** manuscripts in the Library of the Potificio Istituto Biblico.

The United States

The United States heads the list of countries with smaller Ethiopica collections, probably slightly over 400 MSS.

No less than 325 are in the Princeton University Libraries.



Smaller collections are in four libraries in New York, with a total of **17 MSS**; and at the Free Library in Philadelphia, with **13**.

Yale Univeristy has nine.

A further **39** MSS are in smaller collections: at the Walters Art Gallery, in Baltimore;

the Public Library and Endowment for Biblical Research, both in Boston; the Newbury Library, in Chicago; the Public Library, in Cleveland;

the Seminary Library, in Hartford; Haverford College, in Haverford; the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia; Vasser College,

in Poughkeepsie; the Peabody Museum, in Salem; and the Catholic University Library **and the Smithsonian Institution, both in Washington.**

The Netherlands



The Netherlands possesses some 180 Ethiopian MSS, mostly acquired in recent decades. Virtually all are in the Bibliotheek de Rijksuniversiteit, in Leiden. Some were purchased from Sothebys, and possibly include fakes.

Italy

Italy possesses around 100 Ethiopian MSS in public collections: 38 in

the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, in Milano; 14 in the Biblioteca del Monumento Nazionale Abbazia, in Grottaferrata; 13 in the library of the Italian Geographical Society, in Rome; and nine in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, in Firenze.

There are also smaller collections in the Biblioteca Angelica, the Biblioteca Casanatense, the Biblica dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei,



the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, and the Biblioteca Ephemerides Liturgica, all five in Rome; the Biblioteca dell'Istituto Universitario, in Napoli; the

Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, in Venezia; the Biblioteca Universitario, in Padova; the Biblioteca Comunale, in Pistoia; the Museo Egizio, in Torino; and the Biblioteca Estense, in Modena.

Russia

Russia also possesses about 100 Ethiopian MSS, plus over 600 magical scrolls.

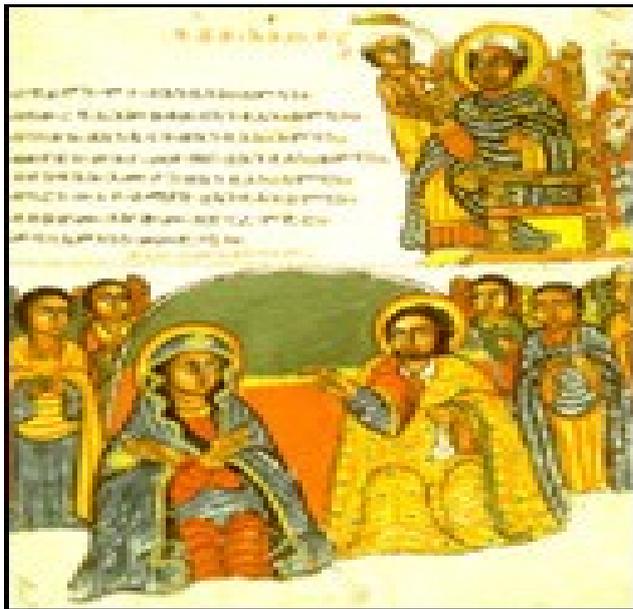
The collection is divided between the Library of the **Russian Academy of Sciences, with 86 MSS,**

the Russian National Library, with 28, and the Institute of Oriental Languages, with four.

Sweden

Sweden possesses almost 100 Ethiopian MSS: 57

in the Universitetbibliotek, in Uppsala; four in the



Kunglige Bibliotek, in Stockholm, and three in the Universitetbibliotek, in Goteborg, as well as **32** identified MSS in private possession.

Ireland

Ireland possesses over 60 Ethiopian MSS: 53 in the Chester Beatty Library, in Dublin, which includes some items from Maqdala, and 13 in Trinity College, likewise in Dublin.

Israel

Israel possesses over 50 Ethiopian MSS, mostly in Tel Aviv. This does not include MSS recently brought by Falashas, or Beta Esrael immigrants.

Austria

Austria possesses just under 50 Ethiopian MSS:

45 are in the Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek, and ten in the Universitatbibliothek, at Graz, and the Bibliothek der Mecharistenkongregationen in Vienna.

Armenia

Armenia possesses 30 Ethiopian MSS. Microfilm copies have been deposited at the Institute of Ethiopian Studiess.



Belgium, Canada, Switzerland, and Portugal

Lesser collections of Ethiopian MSS are reported from Belgium, which has over a dozen Ethiopian MSS (**five in**

the Bibliotheque Royale; and nine in the Societe des Bollandistes: **two of the latter were looted from Maqdala;**

Canada, which has just under a dozen Ethiopian



MSS (most at the McGill University Library, in Montreal; the remainder in the Royal Ontario Museum and the University of Toronto);

Switzerland, which has about half a dozen

Ethiopian MSS (most at the Burger Bibliothek, in Bern, and one in the Evangelischen Missionsgesellschaft, in Basel);

and Portugal, which also has at least half a dozen Ethiopian MSS (three at the Biblioteca Nazionale, in Lisbon; and one in the Biblioteca Municipale, in Porto).

The microfilms in Switzerland have been generously microfilmed for the Institute of Ethiopian Studies,



Poland, Spain, New Zealand, and Greece

Small collections are also found in Poland, with at least four Ethiopian MSS (in the Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, in Cracow);

Spain, with three Ethiopian MSS, (in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid);

New Zealand also with three Ethiopian MSS, looted from Maqdala, at the Auckland Free Library;

and Greece, with one Ethiopian manuscript (in the National Library of Athens).



The Scholarly Interest

Adding up the above, very conservative, figures for

Ethiopian MSS abroad, and making allowance for recent and unlisted items, **we assess that around 5,000 Ethiopian MSS are scattered outside the country.**

Many of these works are of fundamental importance for Ethiopian studies, i.e. for the study of the country whose people produced them.



We urge that systematic action be taken to develop a comprehensive microfilm and/or **digital photograph project aimed at the creation**, in Addis Ababa, of a world-wide Ethiopian photographic manuscript archive.

This is a culturally imperative matter which deserves priority. It is hoped that the above-listed repository countries, which have preserved these MSS, will enthusiastically cooperate in this valuable endeavour.