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# ETHIOPIAN MANUSCRIPTS AND ARCHIVES: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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#### **Abstract:**

Ethiopia is categorized among the countries which developed an ancient civilization in the world. It has rare, valuableparchment manuscripts written in its own Ethiopic language called Ge'ez. Investigations started in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the establishment of modern government institutions and the coming of the printing press and we found an enormous amount of paper archives. For a long period, the Ethiopian Orthodox churches, monasteries and Mosques were usedas a peculiar repository centerfor these valuable manuscripts. Yet, these valuable manuscripts and archives in Ethiopia were and are still deteriorating and being destroyed. The initiative to establish a central repository at the top of Mount Maqdalagoes back to the reign of Emperor Tewodros II (r.1855-1868). Following this, different efforts were made by successive regimes to collect and preserve the country's historical manuscripts and archives. This paper will highlight the historical development of archive institutions in Ethiopia; identify the challenges of manuscripts and archives management in Ethiopia and it will propose possible recommendations. In order to prepare this paper the researcher examined different literatures on the topic and conducted serious field observations, interviews and field surveys.

# A Glimpse of Ethiopic writing history and manuscript tradition:

The earliest written accounts in Ethiopia are found in four different languages: Sabean, Greek, Ge'ez and Arabic which were inscribed in epigraphic monuments. The dates of the excavated Sabaean inscriptions vary from 500 B.C.E to the first quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century ending with the

trilingual inscription of King Ezana. The contents of this inscription are historical, cultural and constitutional which fill the gaps in thepaucity of records from the Axumite period. <sup>1</sup>

In the4th century Christianity became the official religion of the Aksumite kingdom. It broughta "reform" tothe writing system, the use of new materials for writing, and the adoption and further development of book-making techniques. The evangelical activity of the Nine Saintscontributed greatly to the development of the Ge'ez liturgy and literature and introduced Hebrew, Greek and other older language terms and vocabulary into Ge'ez. Among the saints Abba Isaac or Gerimais the only authentic and also the oldest manuscript of the early Christian period of the Aksumite kingdom known until today as the7thcentury illuminated Abba Gerima Gospel.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1: Ezana's Inscription (on the left), Abba Gerima Gospels (on the right)

**Source**: Denis Nosnitsin, Ethiopian Manuscript Studies Yesterday and Today, Hamburg University, 2013.

The production of parchment manuscripts was a task of the monastic communities. In Ethiopia parchment was used as writing material until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. <sup>3</sup> The writing of Ethiopian manuscripts commonly used two colours and a few other coloursmightbe used for decorative ornaments and miniatures. <sup>4</sup> There wereschools for calligraphy and book binding techniques in Begemdir and Shewa, in central Ethiopia.Monks and Itchege<sup>5</sup> of the monasteries were engaged in writing and translating gedel(hagiography) anddersan(homily) of the martyrs and saints. Once they were trained they were employed in the royal court forrecording the events under the title of TsehafeTezaz. The tradition of writing chronicles goes back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of AmdeTsion and continued up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. <sup>6</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>SergewHableSellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270 (Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University, 1972),pp.94-95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Denis Nosnitsin, "Ethiopian Manuscripts and Ethiopian Manuscript Studies a brief overview and evaluation", Gazette du livremédiéval, no 58, fasc. 1. 2012,pp.2-3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>ተክለፃዲቅመኩሪያ, የኢትዮጵያታሪክከወፄልብነድንግልእስከወፄቴዎድሮስ, (አዲስአበባ,2000), *ገ*ጽ. 18-19. (written in Amharic)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>SiegbertUhlig, etal (eds.),2007. EncyclopaediaAethiopica.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>The highest ecclesiastical title an Ethiopian cleric could hold traditionally as the head of the monastery and he anointed the kings.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>Ibid.

Based on the format of writing and binding we can find three categories of Ge'ez manuscripts; MeshafeBerana(Codex), Ketab(Scroll) and Sensul(Accordion book).







Figure 2: MeshafeBerana(Left), Ketabor magic scroll (middle) and Sensulor Accordion book (Right)

Source: Denis Nosnitsin, Ethiopian Manuscript Studies Yesterday and Today, internet sources

# History of manuscript and archive repository centres: the Ethiopian context:

As Denis Nosnitsin cited from Professor SergewHable Selassie's valuable work titled Book Making in Ethiopia there are around 200,000 manuscripts in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Orthodox church obtained most of them and considered themanuscripts as sacred objects, preserved in the same place with other liturgical objects, paintings, clothes, textiles, crosses in yeqa bet (literary house of treasures). In some cases manuscripts are entrusted to an aqqabemäsahéft. <sup>7</sup>According to TekleTsadiqMekuria the church manuscripts were also kept in royal court, in the houses of nobilities, dignitaries and educated clergies. <sup>8</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>Keeper of the books, who is responsible for their care.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup>ተከለፃዲቅመኩሪያ, የኢትዮጵያታሪከ..... ገጽ.21.

Emperor Tewodros II was one of the leading Ethiopian rulers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was known for his efforts to modernize and unify his country. Beside this he hadanother innovative idea to build a church of MadhaneAlem on the top of Maqdala to make it acentre of cultural learning and praying. For this purpose he began to collect church service books and manuscripts from Gonder, Shewa, Gojjam and Bagemder. According to the English geographer C.R Markham a corpus of Ge'ez and Amharic manuscripts waskept in Maqdala. Another prisoner of Emperor Tewodros II, Henry Blanc, stated that parchment manuscripts and paper were preserved in a separate building away from muskets, pistols and other materials. Furthermore, Blanc mentioned that the manuscripts had been carefully monitoredby leading chiefs once or twice a week to assure they werein perfect order and safe keeping. This indicated that the emperor was early to recognize modern archival management principles and that the nature of the material can cause deterioration.<sup>9</sup>

The modernizing effort started by Tewodros II was strongly continued by Emperor Menelik II (r.1889-1913). He introducemany novel ideas among which he implemented western modelled government ministerial institutions in 1907. From these the Ministry of Pen was responsible for collecting non-active government records. It was first led by the emperor's chronicler, TsehafeTezazGabra-SellaseWalda-Aragay.<sup>10</sup>

# **Formative stage (1930-1974):**

Emperor Haile Selassie I (r.1930-1974) opened alibrary in 1930. However the library provided service mainly to the member of the nobility class. <sup>11</sup>During the period of the Italian Occupation of Ethiopia (1936-41) Addis Ababa served as the capital of Africa Orientale Italiana. Although in 1941Italy opened a new public library at Addis Ababa it was not maintained. <sup>12</sup>

On 5 May 1944 Emperor Haile SelassieI launched the first National Library called YeHezbBeteMesahfet(Public Library) under the Ministry of Education. Egypt and Greece educated SaraqaBerhan G/Egzer was the first General Director of the Public Library. abbaJerome GabraMuse wasthe first keeper of the manuscripts. In 1953, the Public Library underwent structural changes. First it came under the Imperial Board of Antiquities, headed by the famous writerKabada Mikael.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Rita Pankhurst, "The Maqdala Library Of Tewodros", in TaddeseBeyene, Richard Pankhurst, Shiferaw Bekele (eds.), Ksaa and Kasa, papers on the Lives, Times and Images of Tewodros II and Yohannes IV(1855-1889), (Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa,1990), PP.223-230.some stated that the chronicler of the Emperor, AleqaZeneb was one of the chiefs of the royal treasury.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup>ብሄራዊቤተ-መዛግብትናቤተ-መፃህፍትኤጀንሲ, የመዛግብትስብስብጥቅልጋይድ,አዲስአበባ፣ 2009. ነፅ.9. (written in Amharic)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup>KatarzynaHrycko , "An Outline Of The National Archives And Library of Ethiopia" Aethiopica 7(2007),p.92. <sup>12</sup>Ibid.



Figure 3: The building of the first Public Library, Photo by the author.<sup>13</sup>

Second it divided into Public and Research divisions. The public division was responsible forprovidingservice to the users. The research division was engaged in gathering books, manuscripts and preparing catalogue. Emperor Haile Selassie assigned first foreign advisor of the library Hans Wilhelm Lockot as head of the research division. The research division of the Library was able to collect around 10,000 books; most of them were donated by Western embassies and international organizations. Within ten years it hadcollected 200 manuscripts from churches and monasteries. To enhance the collection of the library the Emperor gifted 600 Christian and Islamic manuscripts. The task of collecting manuscripts was challenged by the monks and clergies because they see them as sacred. The Public Library was unable to function fully because of financial and professional personnel shortages. The public Library was unable to function fully because of financial and professional personnel shortages.

To alleviate the dearth of professionals in the 1960s the public division organized evening librarianship courses with the support of the U.S. National Library, the University College of Addis Ababa (later the Haile Selassie I University -HSIU) library and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Library. In 1970 the head of the Research DavisonMengestuAbegaz prepared a catalogue for 272 manuscriptsfor the first time.

The library of the newly opened Haile Selassie I University -HSIU(the present day Addis Ababa University) was much better than the public library; it has skilled staff, <sup>16</sup> modern buildings, has organized the first Amharic book exhibition and prepared the first bibliography, and with the assistance of UNESCO Professor Stefan Strelcyn organized the first course in cataloguing manuscripts. <sup>17</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup>Initially the building of the library was constructed by the Italians for Hospital purposes.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup>AnaisWion, "TheNationalArchivesandLibraryofEthiopia: sixyearsofEthio-Frenchcooperation(2001-2006)",2<sup>nd</sup>InternationalLittmannConference, Aksum, Ethiopia(Jan. 2006). p.3. KatarzynaHrycko, "An Outline of...pp.94-95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup>The Director General of the Library was the Minister of Education and Director of the National Museum at the same time.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup>Like; StanislasChojnacki, Rita Pankhurst, Stephen Wright

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup>KatarzynaHrycko, "An Outline of....p.97.ብሄራዊቤተ-መዛባብትናቤተ-መፃህፍትኤጀንሲ,

#### **Seminal stage (1974-1991):**

In 1974 the socialist revolutionary military government toppled the monarchy and took power. The government introduced reforms within the Public Library. In July 1974, it wasproposed to establish National Archives. In 1975, a Legal Deposit Proclamation issue No.50/1975 by the Ministry of Culture and Youth obligedthe publishers to submit three copies of their publications to the Public Library. In this period large numbers of Eastern bloc publications began to fill the library. After three years, in 1977 the National Archives Division was definitively founded and became a member of the International Council for Archives (ICA). <sup>18</sup>In order to strengthen the position of the National Library the new government created a Microfilm and Microfiche Section and in 1979 made the Public Library a part of the Ministry of Culture and Sports as the Department of Libraries and Archives. In 1987 the two sections were merged and became the National Library and Archives of Ethiopia (NALE) under the Ministry of Information and Culture.

This period is also remarkable for the collection of manuscripts, particularly the initiative takenby one of the reformist Patriarchs, AbuneTewoflos,(became Patriarchon 9 May 1971-1976)of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) to reproduce the manuscript heritage. The project was initiated bycollaboration between the Ethiopian OrthodoxChurch, the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture, the Divinity School of Vanderbilt (Nashville,Tennessee) and the American University of Saint Louis, Collegeville. The project aimed to transport manuscripts from the churches and monasteries found in Shäwa, Gojjam, Bägémder and Gondär to the capital city, Addis Ababa. The projectwas challenged in two ways: first it was operated from one fixed microfilm centrelocated in Addis Ababa; secondthe heads of the churches were hesitant and unwilling to send all their manuscripts. <sup>19</sup>

Moreover the political turmoil affected the project activities and then after foreign institutions left the country in 1987 the National Library continued alone until 1991. Due to this, the National Librarypreserved the entire collection of 9238 microfilmed manuscripts, while the Hill MonasticManuscripts Library, as well as the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and the Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church possess the first 7454 microfilmed volumes. <sup>20</sup>

In the field of archives, the historical collections from the Imperial Era were transferred to the NationalArchives. 2755 files from the archives of the Royal Palace, also known as "Gebi archives", were collected in 1987. This is a very heterogeneous collection, composed of charters, topographical data, photos, letters, and documents concerning ports, boundaries, the establishment of the air force, and archives on the unification of Eritrea with the Ethiopian State. At the same time 229 folders were also collected from the very rich archives of the Alga WarashGebi (Crown Prince); some of the documents were related for instance to the aborted coup of 1960. Also made available were the private archives of DajjazmachZewdeGabreSellase, a former high-ranking civil servant, who had gathered 285 files concerning 19th century Ethiopian

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup>AnaïsWion, "TheNationalArchivesandLibraryofEthiopia...., p.7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-10. William F. Macomber, The Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, History In Africa, Vol. 3 (1976), Pp. 203-204. Participating in this project: Professor Walter Harrelson, former Dean of the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University,- Chairman; Dr. Julian G. Plante, Director of HMML and Research Professor of Classics in St. John's University, - Vice-Chairman; and Dr. SergewHable Selassie, Professor of History in Addis Ababa University,- Project Director; Professor Getachew Haile – Catalog Preparation in 10 volumes .

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup>AnaisWion. "TheNationalArchivesandLibraryofEthiopia...p.8.

internal andforeign policy and two foldersItegeMenenAssefaw (the wife of Emperor Selassie I) and seven folders of Princes Medferiyash-WarqAbebe in 1981.<sup>21</sup>

# The Period of institutionalization - Post 1991<sup>22</sup>

On 29 June 1999 by proclamation No179/1999 the Transitional government upgraded the National Library and Archives of Ethiopia to the Ethiopian Archives and Library Agency. <sup>23</sup> The government attempted to equip the National Library and Archive Agency with the technical skills and material support of the French and Japanese governments. It also built the first National Library and Archive Agencya new building with the help of different government and private institutions.

Now the agency is attempting to increase its acquisition of more private and institutional archives forthe Agency;in 1993, 54 paper files of the great historianaläqaTayäGäbrä Maryam (1860-19240); in 1995, 54 foldersof blataMärs'eHazänWäldäQirqos and in 1996, 28 folders of däjjazmačKäbbädäTäsämma, both of them dignitaries of the Imperial regime and historians; 39 files of KesateBirhanTessemaHabte Michael.In 2000, some archives concerning the Ethiopianmonastery of Jerusalem were transferred to the Agency. The largest archive collections in the Agency come from Hager GizatMinistry, whichcover the period from 1940-1990 and which hold 203,000 files or 2,336 folders. Regarding the Manuscripts collection, currently the organization has deposited 9500 microfilm manuscripts, 865 manuscripts, twelve literary heritages registered by UNESCO and nine Islamic manuscripts.<sup>24</sup> This makes it clear that the Agency's manuscripts collections are incomparable alongwith the country's corpus of literary potential.

#### Challenges to manuscripts and archives management in Ethiopia:

#### 1. The Occurrence of wars and the Arrivalof travelers, diplomats, and missionaries:

At the beginning of the 10thcentury the power of the Aksumite Dynasty began toweaken. The rise of a pagan Queen Gudit was one of the factors for the decline. Oral traditions and other texts affirmed her destructive measures inflicted on the cities of Aksum and churches. The war had a catastrophic effect on the national heritages. This period in Ethiopian history is referred to as a Dark Age because most of the historical sources of the time werelost.<sup>25</sup>

The ZagweDynasty (r. 1150-1270) continued the cultural and political legacy of Aksum. The living achievements of the Zagwe dynasty clearly show that the period was one of cultural and literary revival in the Christian kingdom. The translations of many religious works from Arabic into Ge'ez also date from this period. Following the restoration of the "Solomonic Dynasty" in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup>The provisional military government was deposed in 1991 and the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took power.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup>Federal NegaritGazeta - No. 63, Proclamation No.1 79/1999,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup>Memory of the World Register - Nomination Form , Ethiopia - Treasures from the National Archives and Library Organization of Ethiopia[www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of—the-world/register/access-by-region-and-country/et/ ];ብሄራዊቤተ-መዛግብትናቤተ-መዛግብት

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup>SergewHableSelassie."TheProblemofGudit",JournalofEthiopianStudies.Vol.10, No.1 (1972).

1270 the Church reached into the Ethiopian interior after the nine saints had instituted the earliest monasteries in the Aksumite kingdom. The expansion of monasticism and church education contributed to the development of literacy throughout the kingdoms. Particularly during the period of EmperorZar'aYa'iqob (r.1434-1468) different valuable works were written and translatedinto the Ethiopic language. <sup>26</sup>

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century another political turmoil erupted between the Christian Highland Kingdom and the Adal Sultanate tocontrol the Zeila trade route. One of the leaders of the Muslim Sultanate of Adal, Imam Ahmad ibn Ibrahim (Ahmad Gragn), overwhelmed the Christian Kingdom. The unrest in the region lasted from 1531 to 1543. The Christian church is an important repository centre of cultural heritage and the church was a special target of the Imam. His chronicle, theFutuh al Habasha(meaning "The Conquest of the Abyssinians") records that a large number of beautiful churches were pulled down, their holy books (manuscripts) burnt and the clergy massacred. The most importantchurches and monasteries ofDebreLibanos,MertoLemariam, MekaneSellase, Lalibela and HayqEstifanosand others were destroyed. In this way the rich material and spiritual culture attained by medieval Ethiopia was almost completely ruined.<sup>27</sup>

A rigorous attempt was made regardingthe literary and intellectual revival in the kingdom of Gondar.Gondar was the capital of the Gonderine Kingdom, established in 1632 by King Fasiladas. It remained the capital of the Kingdom for some two hundred years. The successive kings built many churches in and around the city. It became a centre of church learning; church painting, cross making, calligraphy and other types of art flowered in the city. Yet the Mahdist forces, of about 60,000 to 70,000, led by ZakiTummalfought and mortally wounded Emperor Yohannes IV of Ethiopia at the battle of Matamma The Sudanese Dervishes (Mahdists) burned and sacked the treasures of thecity of Gondar. <sup>28</sup>

The Italian Occupation of Ethiopia 1936-41 targetedthe Ethiopian Orthodox church as the main enemy and it destroyed the oldest churches and monasteries like DebreLibanos, MahbereSelassie, Zeqola Abo and others. In the 1946 Paris Peace Conference it was stated that the church lost twothousand manuscripts, icons and, it was estimated, two million lira. <sup>29</sup>

# 2. The Coming of foreign envoys, explorers and missionaries:

Throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>centuries Idynastic conflicts and internal and external political instability in the Christian Kingdom brought the external involvement of the Portuguese and Ottoman Turks. Then, afterwards, aninflux of European diplomatic missions, geographical explorers or travellers and missionaries began to enter into Ethiopia. When they departed theytook a corpus of Ethiopian cultural heritages. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the most important of these apocryphal works wasthe Book of Enoch, which had been preserved justin Ge'ez. The Book of Enoch was lost for centuries to Western scholars who knew it only because it is mentioned in the Epistle of St. Jude, until, in 1773, James Bruce brought three complete manuscripts to Europe. He also brought the KebreNegest or Glory of the Kings, the Psalm of David and other literary

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> "The Establishment of the Ethiopian Church," Unpublished manuscript prepared by TaddesseTamrat and SergeweHableSelassie.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup>TaddesseTamrat, Church and Stat .(Tsehai Publisher.2009),p. 4.;p.301.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup>SiegbertUhlig, etal (eds.),2007. EncyclopaediaAethiopica.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup>WuduTafete, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, The Ethiopian States and Alexanderian See: Indigenizing the Episcopacy and Forging National Identity, 1926-1991",(PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana - Champaign, 2006),pp.87-88.

heritages and they are preserved in the Bodleian Library of Oxford. The coming of Protestant missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) like C.W. Isenberg, Samuel Gobat,Lewis Krapf and Henry Salt to Ethiopia in the 19<sup>th</sup> centuryplayed a vital role inthe accumulation of Ethiopic manuscripts in England. They took TheGospel of the four evangelists,the Psalm of David andthe Book of Digua.<sup>30</sup>

The influx of Ethiopian manuscripts to England took place during the military expedition of General Robert Napier of 1867-68. This expedition was accompanied by Richard Holmes, the representative of the British Museum who was entrusted with £1000. The heroic suicidalact of Emperor Tewodros II at Maqdala marked the end of the war and the beginning of the looting of the MedhaniAlem Church of Maqdala. The correspondent and the representative of the expedition H.M. Stanley and Dr.Rohlfs stated that the surroundings of Maqdalawere strewn with a lot of parchments, scrolls, Amharic books, leaves and fragments. On 17 April 1868 British troops fired and destroyed Mount Maqdala and MedhaniAlem Church.

The leader of the expedition, General Napier, ordered the organisation of a auction and for this purpose anearby place, called Delanta plain, was selected. The amazing thing is that 200 mules and 15 elephants were needed to transport manuscripts and relics from Maqdala to Delanta. This makes it crystal clear thata lot of cultural heritages were pillaged by the British expedition. The official record of the expedition, written by two officers ,T.T Holland and H.M. Hozier, mentions that 359 books were retained for scientific purposes. Three of the manuscripts retained by Holmes and six manuscripts were presented to QueenVictoria and kept in Windsor Castle Library. The rest, 350 manuscripts from Maqdala and other Ethiopic literary works, are foundin Britain's public institutions: Cambridge University Library, British Library, John Rylands Library and the British Museum and in private hands. The founder of Scientific Ethiopian Studies in Europe Christian August Dillmann and also

William Wright prepared a catalogue for these manuscripts.<sup>31</sup>

One of the leading centers for Ethiopian manuscripts in Europe is found in France. On 21 July 1699, when Dr. Charles Jacques Poncet reached the city of Gondar, he became the first western European to successfully enter the Christiankingdom of Ethiopia since 1632. He stayedto cure the reigning emperor or negus, Iya'su I "the Great" (r. 1682-1706), of an unidentified skin ailment. When he returned to France the emperor bequeathed him ornaments, staff, horses and other materials. Later the great Shewan King Sahle Sellasie concluded an agreement with the French mission led by Rocherd Héricourtand conveyed a gift of the Fetha Negest, or Law of the Kingsand Senkessar or Synaxarium to King Philip of France. Another prominent French scholar Antoine d'Abbadie spent many years in Gojjam, Begemider, Shewa and Tigre regions. He collected 234 different manuscripts in the fields of history, geography, languages and natural sciences. Now his collection has been accumulated in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. 32

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup>Which is one the works of St. Yared.ተከለፃዲቅመኩሪያ,የኢትዮጵያታሪከ..... *า*ፅ. 24-25.

<sup>31</sup>GirmaKidane, "የቴዎድሮስአJታትናየሙቅደላው ዘረፋ" in TaddeseBeyene, Richard Pankhurst, Shiferaw Bekele (eds.), Ksaa and Kasa, papers on the Lives, Times and Images of Tewodros II and Yohannes IV(1855-1889), (Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa,1990) 16.209-212; Rita Pankhurst, "The Maqdala Library...p.25-26; Edward Ullendorff, The Ethiopic Manuscripts In The Royal Library, Windsor Castle, Rassegna Di StudiEtiopici, Vol. 12 (Gennaio-Dicembre 1953), Pp. 71-79

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup>Ronald S. Love, "A French Physician at the Court of Gondar: Poncet's Ethiopia in the 1690s", Proceedings of the Western Society for French History (Volume 31, 2003),pp.103, 121, ተከለፃዲቅሙኩሪያ, የኢትዮጵያታሪከ..... ነፅ. 25-26.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the German scholar Job Ludolphu(1624-1704) founded Ethiopian studies as a discipline in Europe. He collected his sources mostly from his Ethiopian teacher Abba Gregory. There are important centres in Germany withEthiopian manuscripts which were gathered by C.W. Isenberg, EnnoLittmannand others,depositedinHamburg, Berlin and Leipzig. In Italy, Rome and the Vatican also important centres for Ethiopian manuscript collections.<sup>33</sup>

In Europe alone, justithe three biggest collections of Ethiopian manuscripts (Rome, BibliotecaApostolicaVaticana; Paris, Bibliothèquenationale de France; London, British Library) together encompass ca. 2,700 manuscripts.<sup>34</sup>

# 3. The Limits of Ethiopian: studies:

Ethiopian studies have been developed by the efforts made by Ethiopian and Ethiopicist scholars. They explored varieties of historical sources; inscriptions, coins, archaeological, Ethiopic Ge'ez texts and others. In particular Ethiopic chronicles, hagiographies and homilies were translated and edited by prominent foreign scholarslike Conti Rossini, Wallis Budge, Basset, Enerico Cerulli and M. Schneider and by others. In the 19th century A.d'Abbadiewas the first to notice the tradition of Ethiopian manuscript making. One of the authoritative scholarson Ethiopian manuscript studies, Denis Nosnitsin, argues that there is lack of solid studies, from applying up-to-date methodology to the most basic questions on Ethiopian codicology (material constituents and techniques of production) and paleography (act of writing). He also further mentioned thatthe field of Manuscriptology is isolated from the mainstreamfieldof studies on Ethiopia. 35 Since the 1970s there has been a temporal shift from the medieval to the modern period of Ethiopia history. 36Interest was lost in the culture and heritages of the medieval period ands o there was a great decline in the collection, preservation and use of Ethiopian manuscripts..With the exception of an attempt made by some scholars thematically, Ethiopianhistoriography devotedlittle effort to Islamic studies. In Ethiopia there are the oldest and most important Islamic centres in Wallo, Jimma and Harar. However, the endeavour made by the National Archive and Library Agency (NALA) and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) to collect Arabic manuscripts is insignificant. NALA kept only nine Islamic manuscripts compared to 859 Ge'ez manuscripts and 140 Arabic manuscripts in the I.E.S but most of them are un-catalogued sothis indicates that the institutions have overlooked Islamic heritage.<sup>37</sup>

# 4. Mishandling of the manuscripts and archives:

Over a long period the Ethiopian Orthodox Church developed its own manuscripts preservation mechanism. The Church has attradition of bookbinding techniques using leather, wood, even silver or gold and prepared sizable leather cases and flat support podiums made from wood or bronze.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup>Ibid., 26- 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Denis Nosnitsin "Ethiopian Manuscripts...,.p.2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup>Ibid.,pp. 12-13. Applying radiocarbon dating technologies with the exception of Abba Gerima Gospel there is no other effort.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup>EncyclopaediaAethiopica, pp.744-745.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup>BahruZewde, "A Century of Ethiopian Historiography", Special Issue Dedicated to the XIVth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Journal of Ethiopian Studies, Vol. 33, No. 2, (November 2000),pp.10-11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup>Hassen Muhammad Kawo, "Islamic Manuscript Collections...,pp.194-195. In this regard a great effort has been made by Abdulahi Ali Sherif to preserve Arabic manuscripts in Harar.

However, from my field observation in 2017 in different oldest monasteries and churches found in North Shewa, Gondar, Wallo and GojjamI sconcluded that the storage environment (light, temperature and humidity), storage materials and areas are not conducive to the conservation of the manuscripts. In most case the environment is favourable to the growth of rodents, and different biological agents which make the manuscripts lose their physical and intellectual integrity.







Figure 3: Indigenous Ethiopian Orthodox Church handling mechanisms; leather case, podium and silver made binding

One of the peculiar features of Ethiopian parchment manuscript is that they have bothtexts and icons (holy images) at the same time. In almost all churches and monasteries we couldn't find interleaveswhich prevent the diffusion or migration of colors across the folio. In the majority of Ethiopian Churches and monasteries manuscripts are preserved with other liturgical relics (metal crosses, crowns, and clothes) in a single room.<sup>38</sup>



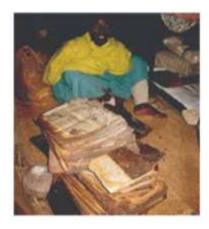


Fig.4; https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP704

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Field observation conducted from February to March 2017.

Regarding thearrangement problems, most of the oldest Ethiopian manuscripts are voluminous and large in size yet they are shelved vertically and such a type of arrangement aggravates deterioration. The above mentioned challenges have been further confirmed by Gezae Haile's research which focused on the degree of deterioration of manuscripts found inselected monasteries of north Ethiopia, titled "The Limits of Traditional Methods of Preserving Ethiopian Ge'ez Manuscripts" <sup>39</sup>

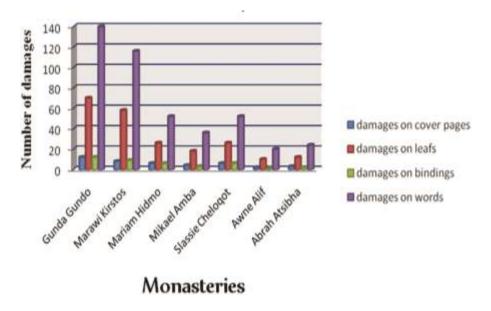


Fig. 5: Physical Condition of Ge'ez Parchment Manuscript

#### 5. Illicit heritage trafficking:

The Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH)by the Proclamation No. 209/2000 is responsible for the control of the illegal trafficking of heritages. One of the experts in the institution identified Bole International Airport, the Mettema area(border land between Ethiopia and Sudan) and Djibouti asthe main outlet route of illegal heritage trafficking in Ethiopia. The authority recognized the following reasons as important groundsfor illicit trafficking:

- The unwillingness of the religious institutions and private owners to register heritages found in their custody
- The complexity or intricacy of the nature of the heritages
- Diplomatic immunity
- Sending abroad original heritages by using official or legal clearance given for souvenir shops 40
- The inadequacy or absence of updated inventories and database systems

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup>Gezae Haile, "The Limits of Traditional Methods of Preserving Ethiopian Ge'ez Manuscripts" in Kendra S. Albright, Theo J. D. Bothma (eds.), International Journal of Libraries and Information Studies, Volume 68, Issue 1, (2018).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Under Proclamation No. 209/2000, Part Two - No.27. "Cultural Heritage outside the country" made clear that "Exporting Cultural Heritage is prohibited; however, it may be temporally taken out of the country for scientific study, cultural exchange or exhibition upon the approval of the Minister."

- The judges are not in a position to pass maximum penalties on individual/groups who committed theft and damage on cultural heritages based on the cultural heritage legislation and penal code. 41

In general, due to the above mentioned reasons we can find Ethiopian antiquities and cultural heritages on international online antiquities sales websites.

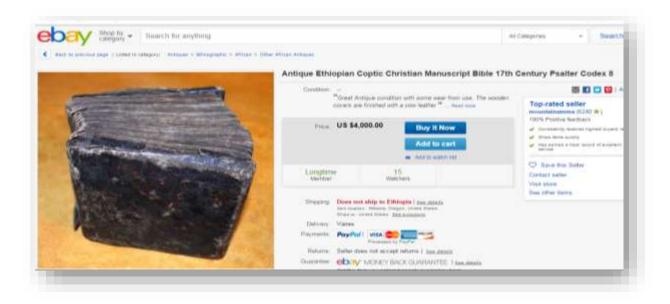


Fig.6: Ethiopian Parchment Manuscript on online antiquities sales websites (ebay)

#### 6. Lack of awareness, archive institutions and professionalism:

In Ethiopia there are two important centresformanuscript and archive collections; the National Library and Archive Agency (NALA) and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (Addis Ababa University). These institutions are responsible forcollecting and preserving the literary heritages of the country. Proclamation 179/1999 stated that "the Agency shall have its head office in Addis Ababa and may have branch offices elsewhere as may be necessary." Until now, the Agency has no branch in the nine administrative regions of the country. This hampers the functioning of the Agency to carry it responsibilities to control record management systems and collect archives and manuscripts throughout the country. As a result,in most government offices it is common to see poorlystored and discardedrecords considered as dead files by the record officers. <sup>42</sup>

Regarding theprofessionalism in these institutions, most of them are graduates of history who took one course titled "Record and Archive Management" with three credit hours in their undergraduate class and some of them trained in librarianship, record officer and informationscience. This signposted that the personnelin the institutions are para-archivists and this may challenge the function of the agency.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Interview with expert at ARCCH held in October 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup>It contradicts the Proclamation of Federal Gazetafor the establishment NALA-179/1999 part three no.14 said "Any provenant shall not dispose of records at its disposal." Budget, lack of updated technology and other are the shortcoming of the Agency

#### **Conclusion and Recommendation:**

Ethiopia occupies a unique place among African countries found south of the Sahara, having itsown literary language, Ge'ez. It has had strong tradition of secular and religious manuscript production especially from the 13<sup>th</sup>to the 20<sup>th</sup>century. Despite this fact,the major archive and manuscript repository centresin Ethiopia retain less than the country's potential production.

Therefore, the following recommendations are made

- Expand archival institutions throughout the country
- Enlarge the digitalization process of the Agency
- Capacity Buildingtraining and programmes should be launched particularly forarchivist professionals
- Develop and update databases and work jointly with UNESCO and INTERPOL to reduce illicit heritage trafficking
- Reinstate activities which should be conducted on Ethiopian written heritages (i.e. the Lalibela-Afro Aygebam Cross from Belgium, the Axum Obelisk from Rome, Italy and the return of the lock of hair of emperor Tewodros II from Britain)
- Create and develop awareness in society of the value of records and archives
- Enhance technical and professional alliances withinternational archival institutions