

The Accidents of Transmission: On a Surprising Multilingual Manuscript Leaf*

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Summary

A finely illuminated Ethiopic Psalter dating to the fifteenth-sixteenth century, sold on auction in 1983 and still in the possession of an unknown private collector, was made the object of two distinct publications in 1986. Ewa Balicka-Witakowska focused on the art-historical importance of the manuscript, while Richard Pankhurst dealt with its guard-leaves containing additional notes in Portuguese and Latin and their significance. Almost unnoticed or largely misunderstood remained a small Ethiopic text belonging to the primitive layer of the fly-leaves, that probably held the last place in a larger multiple-text manuscript, of which one loose leaf might have survived. So far unpublished, the text is the Ethiopic version of the *Lex lata Constantini Augusti de Arian damnatione* (CPG nos 2041 = 8519). Along with the Ethiopic version of the *Epistula Constantini imperatoris ad ecclesiam Alexandrinam* (CPG no. 8517), unpublished as well, the former is also attested by the earliest Ethiopic canonico-liturgical collection known as the *Aksumite Collection*.

The occasion of the auction sell at Sotheby thirty-three years ago on 20 June 1983—stated as ‘recently’ in 1986—of a ‘remarkable, finely illuminated, Ethiopic, or Ge‘ez, manuscript of the Psalms, Biblical Hymns, Song of Solomon and Horologium’, occasioned two interesting contributions: the first by one of the most outstanding historians of modern Ethiopia, Richard Pankhurst, published in *The Book Collector* of 1986; the second one, by Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, a renowned art historian specializing on Ethiopic manuscripts, in a *Festschrift* monographic triple issue of *Orientalia Suecana*, actually also published in 1986.¹ As happens, the two authors wrote independently on the same manuscript on the occasion of the auction sell, focused on completely

* I am profoundly indebted to Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, who has generously put at my disposal a complete microfilm set and prints of the first leaves of the manuscript that is largely the subject of this note. For advice and encouragement I am very grateful to Alberto Camplani. – This research has been funded by the European Research Council, European Union Seventh Framework Programme IDEAS (FP7/2007–2013) / ERC Advanced Grant agreement no. 338756 (TraCES), 2014–, as well as by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft through the Sonderforschungsbereich 950 (Manuskriptkulturen in Asien, Afrika und Europa), 2011–. Important materials were provided in the course of time by field-researches carried out by Jacques Mercier, 1999–; Antonella Brita, within the framework of her PhD research at the University of Naples ‘L’Orientale’, 2005–2006, and since 2011 in the Sonderforschungsbereich 950; and Denis Nosnitsin, within the framework of the ERC project Ethio-SPaRe, 2009–2015.

different aspects, and inevitably ignored each other. Interestingly enough, while their own points of view are dealt with at large and in-depth—respectively, the relevance to sixteenth century Ethiopian history on the one hand, and the art historical significance of the artefact on the other—both disregarded an aspect connected with textual transmission, which is resumed here.

Pankhurst dated the manuscript judging from its ‘script and illuminations’ to the late fifteenth to early sixteenth century, a time when the first Portuguese-Ethiopian contacts took place. The same dating is proposed independently on art-historical grounds by Ewa Balicka-Witakowska.² Pankhurst goes on with the history of the manuscript stating that

Nothing is known of the manuscript’s provenance or history until the mid-twentieth century when it was in the possession of the Second Baron Rennell of Rodd, K.B.E., C.B. (1895–1978) who was in charge of British Military Administration in the Middle East, including Ethiopia, at the close of World War II. It has, however, proved impossible to establish whether he acquired the volume in its country of origin or elsewhere. All that is certain is that he had it auctioned by Sotheby’s on 10 November 1952 (lot 49), that it was purchased by the Armenian collector, Hagop Kevorkian, and was later sold again, once more by Sotheby’s, on 20 June 1983 (lot 170). The work is now in the possession of an anonymous private collector.³

By personal communication of Balicka-Witakowska (March 2016), I know that the anonymous private collector was at the time Henri Schiller, from Paris, who has presumably died in the meanwhile: it is unknown who owns the manuscript at present.

According to the more detailed description by Balicka-Witakowska,⁴ the manuscript is composed of 205 leaves (numbered 1–205) plus two guard leaves at the beginning (numbered I–II). Pankhurst’s description⁵ mentions the 205 leaves (those with ‘Psalms, Biblical Hymns, Song of Solomon and Horologium’), which, however, are said to be ‘preceded by *three* initial, torn and badly stained leaves of different sizes and apparent provenance’ (emphasis is mine):

The first of these sheets is almost entirely blank, but the other two contain interesting passages in both Latin and Portuguese. They are written clearly, almost in a ‘copy-

1 Pankhurst 1986; Balicka-Witakowska 1986. Note that both studies, along with the remarks by Ricci 1987, did not escape the sagacity of the too much regretted Gianfranco Fiaccadori, who mentioned the illustrated manuscript as well as others and collected the relevant bibliography in his major contribution on illuminated Octateuchs, Fiaccadori 1994, 100, n. 66.

2 Balicka-Witakowska 1986, 21.

3 Pankhurst 1986, 463.

4 Balicka-Witakowska 1986, 17–19.

5 Pankhurst 1986, 463.

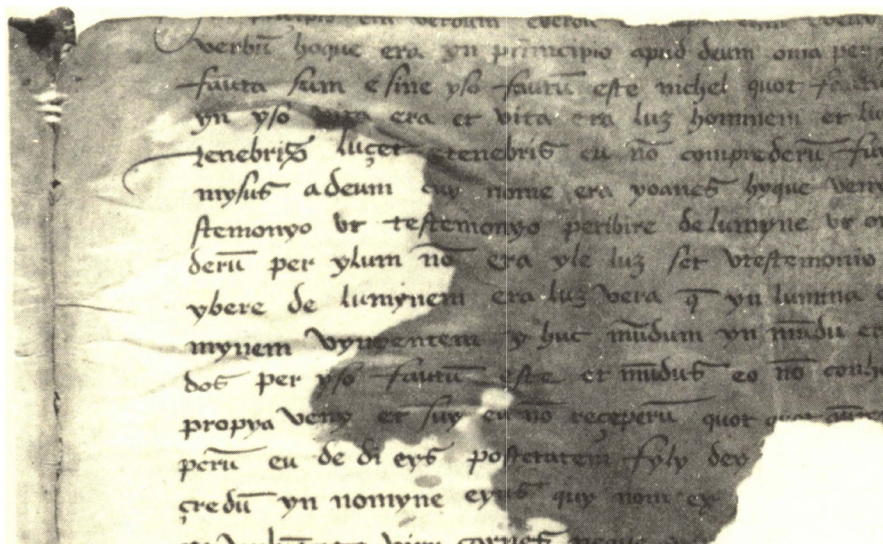


Fig. 1. MS Schiller Psalter (ψ^{Sch}), f. 1r, from Pankhurst 1986, 468, plate 1, f. 2r = Balicka-Witakowska 1986, f. 1r: on the left, stitches and a preceding leaf are visible.

book' hand, and would seem like exercises, painstakingly written by someone learning, or at least not fully conversant with the languages in question.⁶

Balicka-Witakowska does not number her two guard leaves, but in her description she numbers 'f. 1' the first of the last 205 leaves which constitute the main body of the manuscript. It is therefore convenient here to mark with Roman numbers 'I–II' her two guard-leaves (fig. 1). Basing on the contents,⁷ Balicka-Witakowska's ff. I–II clearly correspond to Pankhurst's ff. 2–3.⁸

Apparently, the descriptions of the two authors correspond but in one point, namely that Pankhurst places one more leaf at the beginning ('The first of these sheets is almost entirely blank'), which is not recorded by Ewa Balicka-Witakowska.⁹ The existence of one more blank guard leaf at the beginning is a detail that does not affect the substance of my contribution.

6 *Ibid.*

7 'feuilles de garde: fragment de textes en latin et en portugais ainsi qu'une lettre de Constantin au sujet du brûlement des écrits d'Arius', Balicka-Witakowska 1986, 17. I will come back later to the latter important point of the description.

8 Pankhurst 1986, 465–486, plates I–IV, containing respectively ff. 2r, 2v, 3r, 3v (= Balicka-Witakowska 1986, ff. 1r, 1v, 2r, 2v). Pankhurst numbers continuously the guard-leaves plus the 205 leaves.

9 The verso of this leaf seems to appear in the microfilm documentation generously provided to me by Balicka-Witakowska, even though the first leaf itself was not filmed, aside from the binding area. Disregarding for the moment being the question

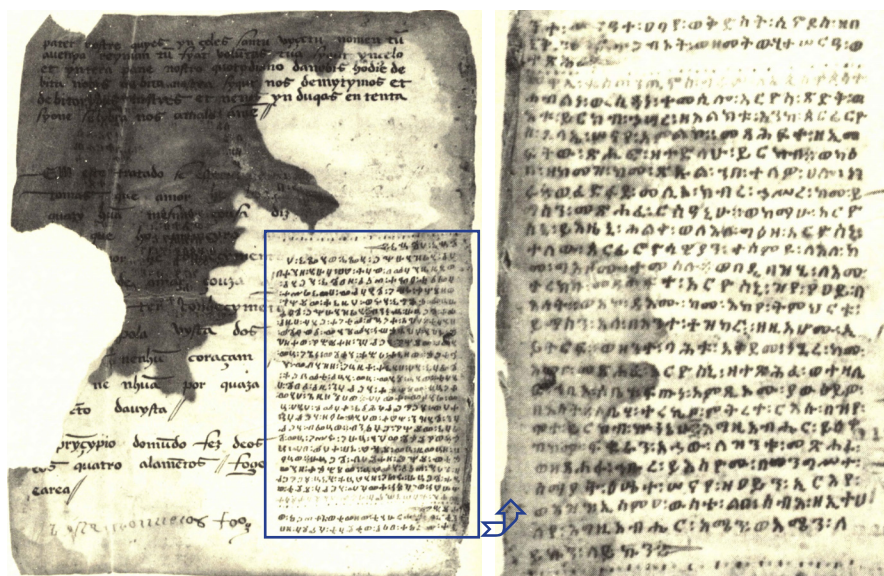


Fig. 2. MS Schiller Psalter (ψ^{Sch}), f. IIv, from Pankhurst 1986, 468, plate 4, f. 3v = Balicka-Witakowska 1986, f. IIv, guard leaf (left), here printed upside-down: in the left column, upper side, Ethiopic version of the *Lex lata Constantini Augusti de Arian damnatione* (right).

Coming back to the content, Pankhurst details as follows on the two guard leaves covered with writings:

The second leaf contains St John's Gospel, I, 1–14, in Latin and the Apostle's Creed in Portuguese on one side, and Psalm 51 'Miserere mei', 3–19, in Latin on the other. The third and most interesting, leaf¹⁰ is largely devoted to a series of linguistic exercises.

Pankhurst further details on the nature of these linguistic exercises, which consist of the Portuguese alphabet, followed by a series of syllables in Latin script (*ba*, *be*, etc.), apparently a rendering of the Ethiopic syllabic script in Latin; five lines of European Christian names (*Pedro*, *Paulo*, *Yoane*); the Portuguese names of the months and days of the week; a set of numerals written in Arabic characters as used in Europe; and the opening words of the *Ave*

of the first guard leaf—only possible to ascertain when the actual codicological state of the manuscript will be accessible and directly verifiable, not without excluding that loose leaves might have moved or even gone lost—I will number the published guard-leaves according to the system by Balicka-Witakowska, namely ff. I–II (corresponding to Pankhurst 1986, ff. 2–3).

10 Pankhurst 1986, f. 3 = Balicka-Witakowska 1986, f. II. Cf. here fig. 2.

Maria in Latin. In the lower margin, Ethiopic characters were added later, an attempt at transliterating the Portuguese names of the numbers.¹¹

As to the last page of the guard leaves (fig. 2), Pankhurst states:

The second side of the folio is mainly devoted to the Lord's Prayer in Latin and to some philosophical remarks in Portuguese. An empty space is occupied by an Ethiopic hymn, inadvertently written upside down, which praises the orthodoxy of the great Ethiopian Emperor Za'ra¹² Ya'qob referred to by his regal name Qostāntinos, or Constantine, whose long reign (1434–1468) may well have ended within a few decades of the manuscript's completion.¹³

Here, again, there is disagreement on the contents of f. IIv: according to Pankhurst it would contain a 'hymn, inadvertently written upside down', praising the orthodoxy of the Ethiopian King Zar'a Yā'qob (1434–1468), whose reign's name actually was Constantine (Q^waṣṭantīnos),¹⁴ while according to Balicka-Witakowska it is a letter by the Emperor Constantine (d. 337 CE) concerning the burning of writings by Arius (the famous heretic). We can anticipate here that the latter's opinion is the right one, but let us have a closer look at the guard leaves.

As early recognised by Lanfranco Ricci,¹⁵ there is clear evidence that these initial leaves¹⁶ have undergone a threefold passage of status. If we look at them chronologically, we can reconstruct the single phases as follows:

(1) ff. I–II or at least f. II, once belonged to a manuscript devised to host Ethiopic (Gə'əz) texts: the letter by the Emperor Constantine concerning the burning of Arius' writings was not written incidentally; it is written very carefully, with rubrications, in the first (left) column of an originally recto leaf,¹⁷ as a continuation of a text that is lost: the first word in the first line of the text

11 Pankhurst 1986, 464.

12 *Sic*.

13 Pankhurst 1986, 464.

14 Cp. Buzi and Bausi 2013, 413b–415a for the fortune of Constantine as a royal name in the Ethiopian tradition.

15 In a short, but dense note reacting to Pankhurst 1986, Ricci 1987, esp. 254–255 (Ricci did not yet know of Balicka-Witakowska 1986). Ricci rightly pointed out that the Portuguese and Latin notes on the leaves in the manuscript are secondary writings, which have nothing to do with the earlier layer of the Gə'əz text: this latter, originally placed in the upper left corner, was eventually turned upside down in order to make as much free space as possible, confining the older text in the lower right corner. Ricci also highlighted that the leaf with the Gə'əz text (which he did not identify) was originally the last one of a manuscript or of a quire at least, so that what remains is nothing else but the end of a more extended piece.

16 It does not matter whether three or two, actually two are those which bear clear positive evidence of this.

17 This hypothesis, that cannot be verified at the moment, presupposes that the leaf is a single leaf at present.

is not complete and must have started in the (now lost) preceding leaf. It is difficult to say if the text was part of a more extensive collection of which it occupied the last position, as usual, much more exposed to material loss. This appears extremely likely, but the present state of documentation does not allow to go so far. If the letter of Constantine was not secondarily written down in this manuscript leaf, the other notes in Portuguese and Latin are secondary writings, added after the leaf had been detached from where it originally belonged and re-used; this also implies that the present sequence of ff. I–II does not represent the primary sequence of these two leaves and that they could even have a different provenance;

(2) whatever the respective original destination of each of the two leaves was, f. II, the one with the letter of Constantine, was at a certain time re-used and became part of a note or exercise book for noting texts in Portuguese and Latin;

(3) finally, as we find them, ff. I–II were used as guard leaves of a manuscript datable to the fifteenth/early sixteenth century. The script of the letter of Constantine on f. II is also datable to this period, but no possibility can be excluded: the leaf could be older or even younger, in the latter case being used as a guard leaf when the manuscript was rebound time after its early production and binding.

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Before coming to relevant points, a short explanation at least on the significance of the Portuguese and Latin scripts on the guard leaves must be given. This is definitely not a minor part of the environment where probably one of the last stages of the transmission of the letter of Constantine took place, and more likely than not, also came to an end. The re-use of a parchment leaf with a letter of Constantine as an exercise book is something of a very emblematic character for the kind of changes and challenges the Christian Ethiopia was facing in the sixteenth century, with the irreparable loss of a previous layer of literary knowledge under the urgency of the confrontation with Catholicism.

In his contribution, Pankhurst detailed on the point of the European scripts: he proposed to connect this small multilingual document with the practices, skills, intellectual curiosity, and in the end the personality of one of the most outstanding character of the second end of the fifteenth and mid-sixteenth century, namely the *əččage* (head of Ethiopian monasticism) ʾĒnbāqom (Ethiopian form for Habakkuk). ʾĒnbāqom (c.1470–c.1560) was a major character of his times, with a unique career: born in Yemen from a Jewish mother, he eventually came to Ethiopia (c.1489), converted to the Christian faith and some decades after (c.1523) became the abbot of Dabra Libānos (during the reign of Ləbna Dəngəl, 1508–1540), with the title and function

of *ǣččage*. Accused and sentenced to death by some dignitaries *c.* 1527–1528, he was in exile in various places, until he was called to court by the new king Galāwdewos (1540–1559), also resuming his position in Dabra Libānos at the death of Galāwdewos, on bequest of the successor Minās (1560–1563). ‘Ēnbāqom in fact is known, not only for his career, but also for his literary activity, being responsible for composing or translating into Ethiopic (Gə‘əz) several important works, from the authored *ʾAnqasha ʾamin*, to the *Baralām wayəwāsəf* and *ʾAbušākir*, to various patristic and monastic writings. According to a reasonable hypothesis advanced by Solomon Gebreyes, following Ignazio Guidi, he could have also been the author of the peculiar *Chronicle of Galāwdewos*.¹⁸

According to the Portuguese sources, ‘Ēnbāqom was also well versed in several languages: besides mastering Arabic and Gə‘əz (and we must certainly add Amharic), he studied Coptic and Portuguese, and also ‘wrote ‘in his own writing’ the Gloria of the Holy Mass, the Credo, the Pater, the Ave Maria, the Creed of the Apostles and the Salve Regina, and [...] he knew them in Latin’; he might have known Armenian and almost certainly also Italian, probably (the script at least) Hebrew and Syriac.¹⁹ On this basis Pankhurst proposed that ‘Ēnbāqom might have been responsible for these writings.

On the other hand, Ricci is much in favour of the hypothesis of a Portuguese, considering the calligraphic character of the script. He arrives even to think of Francisco Alvarez, the first European envoy to the Ethiopian court to have written a lengthy and influential report on his journey, printed in Lisbon in 1540.²⁰

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Let us finally come to the point of the nature and content of the letter of Constantine. Rightly understood in its contents by Balicka-Witakowska, the letter is the Ethiopic version of a text that is relatively well known to the specialists of patristic writings, although its precise identification escaped the attention of several Ethiopianists.²¹ After being edited several times, a comprehensive

18 See Solomon Gebreyes 2016.

19 See ‘‘Ēnbāqom’, *EAE*, II (2005), 280a–282a (E. van Donzel), for all references (but unfortunately Pankhurst 1986, Ricci 1987, Balicka-Witakowska 1986, and Fiacca-dori 1994 are ignored).

20 See ‘Alvares, Francisco’, *EAE*, I (2003), 213b–215a (M. Kleiner). For the same period, some multilingual documents are known from the Jesuit archives, see for example the interesting case illustrated by Martínez d’Alòs-Moner and Cohen 2015.

21 Ricci, however, keenly remarked that it is probably not an original text, on the basis of its language and syntax in particular. It could be hardly mentioned in the overview encyclopedic article ‘Arius’, *EAE*, I (2003), 339b–340a (D. Notsitsin), where most

re-edition of the original Greek, along with two Latin versions and an ancient Syriac one²² was finally included in the classical collection of testimonia to the Arian controversy published by Hans-Georg Opitz for the first part of the third volume of Athanasius' works, where it is the document no. 33, 'Das Edikt gegen Arius'.²³ It was eventually listed as *Lex lata Constantini Augusti de Aarii damnatione* in the standard repertory of CPG where it appears twice, as nos 2041 and 8519.

I happened to come across the same Ethiopic version of this text preserved in a completely different context: the *Lex lata Constantini Augusti de Aarii damnatione* is actually transmitted in a fully-fledged canonical liturgical archaic collection attested so far in this form by a *codex unicus* to be probably dated around or before the thirteenth century. As I have remarked on several occasions, this collection—that I have proposed to name *Aksumite Collection*—is of great interest for the philological phenomenology and its actual contents, since most if not all of its texts appear to be based upon a Greek *Vorlage*.²⁴ The letter, on the present ff. 79vb–80ra of the manuscript (fig. 3), follows another letter of Constantine on ff. 78va–79vb (*Epistula Constantini imperatoris ad ecclesiam Alexandrinam*, CPG no. 8517) and precedes the *Epistula ad Epictetum*.²⁵

of the traditions mentioned are to be referred to their early sources. The first identification of the text was proposed by Bausi 2006, 52, n. 17, and 63 (no. 15, 'Epistola sulla condanna di Ario di Costantino'); see also Buzi and Bausi 2013, 413b–414a; Bausi and Camplani 2013, 222–223, where the importance of the occurrence of this letter in an ancient Latin version in the ms Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare, Codex LX (58), f. 113v ('Ver.' in Opitz 1934–1935), is duly stressed; on the ms Codex LX (58), see Camplani 2006. More details will be hopefully presented in a publication by myself and Alberto Camplani, that is in preparation; see also Camplani 2015.

22 As first edited by Schulthess 1908, 1–2.

23 Opitz 1934–1935, 66–68 ('Urkunde' no. 33); with German translation in Brennecke et al. 2007, 116, 'Dok. 28' = 'Urkunde 33'.

24 For a first orientation on this collection and the state of publication of its single texts, as well as for further references, see Bausi 2006, 2015a, 367–372, and 2015b, this latter particularly on the circumstances of its discovery and subsequent digitization and restoration, that was carried out in various phases and within the framework of more projects (the manuscript is preserved in Ethiopia, Tigray, 'Ura Mäsqäl Church, C3-IV-73, Ethio-SPaRe UM-039), and Bausi and Camplani 2013; on the importance of the 'List of apostles and disciples', published by Bausi 2012, see now Guignard 2015; on the list of Nicaean fathers published in Bausi 2013, see now Voicu 2015.

25 See now Savvidis 2016, 634–635 and 703–735, where also readings from the Ethiopic version were noted; see also 'Athanasius', *E Ae*, I (2003), 392a–393b (W. Witakowski).

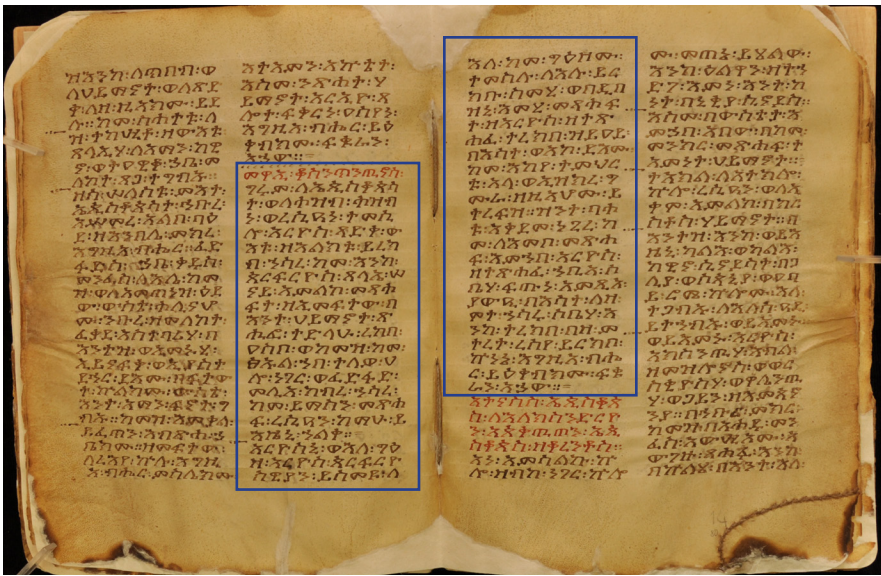


Fig. 3. MS ‘Ura Mäsqäl Church, Ethio-SPaRe UM-039 (after restoration), the *Aksumite Collection*: on ff. 79vb–80ra Ethiopic version of the *Lex lata Constantini Augusti de Arii damnatione*, preceded by the Ethiopic version of the *Epistula Constantini imperatoris ad ecclesiam Alexandrinam*, and followed on ff. 80ra–b by the *Epistula ad Epictetum*.

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It is clear that the two manuscripts—I will indicate with the siglum Σ the *Aksumite Collection* and with ψ^{Sch} (‘Schiller Psalter’) the guard leaf—witness to one and the same translation and go back to one archetype. The text is heavily corrupted in both manuscripts and not easy to reconstruct. There are separate errors in both manuscripts and those in Σ demonstrate that ψ^{Sch} is not derived from Σ and actually attests to an independent transmissional branch. That Σ was copied from ψ^{Sch} is manifestly excluded by palaeographical reasons, namely Σ is apparently much older than ψ^{Sch} .

The critical edition of the Ethiopic version of the *Lex lata Constantini Augusti de Arii damnatione* is forthcoming in the following issue of *Adaman-tius*, 22 (2016), on the bases of the only two manuscript witnesses known so far—to my knowledge at least—together with that of the other aforementioned Constantinian letter (*Epistula Constantini imperatoris ad ecclesiam Alexandrinam*)²⁶ preceding in the manuscript.

26 The purported reference (‘CPG II 8517’) assuming a Syriac version in Kaufhold 1999, 119, n. 3, is due to a typo for ‘CPG IV 8515’.

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