Spotlight on the Written and Manuscript Heritage of the Highlands of Ethiopia and Eritrea

Writing was adopted by the Semites settled in the area between the northern plateaus of the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea as early as the first millennium BCE. The highlands of Ethiopia and Eritrea have been home to a complex literary tradition (predominantly in Ga’az, a South Semitic language) that has no parallel in sub-Saharan Africa. Its emergence was determined by Late Antique culture (Byzantium including Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and the Red Sea), Mediterranean encounters, and the African background.

The complexity of literary history is fully reflected in the changes in grammar, lexicon and stylistic means of the Ge’az language. The texts have been transmitted in dozens of thousands of manuscripts dating from between the sixth and the twentieth century.

The project Beta maṣḥǝft: Manuscripts of Ethiopia and Eritrea is a long-term project funded within the framework of the Academies’ Programme under the auspices of the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Hamburg in the years 2016 to 2040. The project is hosted by the Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian Studies at Universität Hamburg.

The project aims at creating a research environment that shall manage complex data related to the Christian manuscript tradition of the Ethiopian and Eritrean Highlands.

Manuscript descriptions shall be made available and searchable, texts shall be edited, a comprehensive prosopography and a historical gazetteer of Christian Ethiopian and Eritrean culture shall emerge, alongside a digital Clavis of literature in Ga’az.

https://www.betamasheft.uni-hamburg.de/