An Ethiopian Manuscript after its Completion: Typologies of Reuse

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Functions of Ethiopian Manuscripts

• Functions of texts
• Functions of carriers (codex: textbock + binding)
• Functions of illuminations/decorative aspects
Functions of Ethiopic Manuscripts: Text

- Liturgy and church rituals
- Theological discourse
- Personal devotion
- “Magical” practices
- Computus/calendar
- Monastic life
- Preaching
- Legal procedures
- Records: history
- Records: transactions
- Education
- Entertainment
Functions of Ethiopic Manuscripts: (Text +) Textblock/Binding

- Carrier of text and images
- Object of prestige and luxury
- Object of display (e.g., in processions)
- Object of particular reverence
- Repository of records
Areas of the Ethio-SPaRe Activity


Ca. 100 manuscript collections studied
Ca. 2,000 mss digitised
Ca. 530 catalogued.
Deluxe Gospel Bindings


“Golden Gospel”: Object of Prestige and Display. QDMG-049

Qäqäma Maryam. QDMG-049. Four Gospels, 1926/27 (?).

"Golden Gospel": Object of Prestige and Display. AP-003


Silver gilded cover with incisions, 20th century.
Historical Bindings of Aksum

Manuscripts as Objects of Display in Processions

Books with Metal Embellishments: Objects of Prestige. DD-001

Däbrä Dammo. DD-001. The Story of Virgin Mary. 18th cent. (fols. 105-132 of 19th cent.).

Silver studs: 19th-cent. (?)
Expansion of Functions of Manuscripts

• Introducing new codicological units (leaves, quires)  
  (12.5% of the 530 described manuscripts are composite)

• Filling the blanks (introducing guest texts / marginal notes)  
  (72.2% of the 530 described manuscripts)
Composite Manuscripts: MKL-016: Added Liturgical Function


“Homily on the Four Living Creatures”, for the feast of 8 Hedar, added at a later point (by the same scribe, for the same commissioner)
Composite Manuscripts: AP-005: Stressed Liturgical Function (?)

Addäqaḥarsi Ṭāraqliṭos. AP-005, apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, Miracles of St. Michael. Late 15th cent. Ff. 174v-175r, with the beginning of the added Homily on St. Michael by Timothy of Jerusalem (fol. 175r-180v, 16th cent.?!) for the feast of 12 Tahsas.
Composite Manuscripts: Fragments from Other Manuscripts

Läqay Kidanä Məḥrät. MKL-008. Missal, 1650-60. Old-Amharic poem “Refutation of Glory” (fols. 141r-143v) around the same or somewhat later time.

Çäḥat Mädhane Aläm. MAC-006. Pauline Epistles, 18th cent. End-leaves (fols. 155-156) from a 15th cent. lectionary (containing also excerpts from Apostolic Epistles)
Guest Texts: Theological Discourse

Säbäya Maryam. SM-003, Four Gospels. 1730-1800.
Anti-Catholic treatise “The Faith of Ancient Fathers” written on the fly-leaves by Gäbrä Ḥeywät, late 19th-early 20th century
Andel Maryam. MA-001. Four Gospels, 1650-1750 (?).
Four theological treatises:
1) 1ra-4vb, 145va-146vb;
2) 104ra-vb, 12rb;
3) 282ra-283vb;
4) 284ra-vb, 281va-vb,
same period, different hands.
Addigrat Qirqos. AMQ-001, Four Gospels, 1800-1830.

Additional notes, from the late 19th-cent. onward, increasingly in the second quarter of the 20th cent.
Additional Notes: Added Functions

- Legal notes
- Monastic rules
- Commentaries and glosses
- Writing and drawing exercise
- “Magical” texts and drawings
- Genealogies
- Poetry
The First “Death” of the Manuscript

- Damage or depreciation
- Theft
- Ideological reasons
- Aesthetical reasons
- Other reasons
Läqay Kidanä Mēhrät. MKL-001. Leaves of a recent manuscript re-utilized as guards for the “Book of the Rite of the Holy Week”, 1650-1750

Däbri Giyorgis. DQG-008. Leaves of an ancient manuscript re-utilized as guards for repair for the Miracles of Mary, 18th cent. (?)

Säbäya Maryam. SM-001. Boards of a manuscript re-utilized in the binding of the Miracles of Jesus, 19th-cent.
The After-Life: Re-use in Other Manuscripts

Endian Maryam Qorrar. EMQ-048. Leaves of a 15th-cent. Four Gospels book re-utilized as fly-leaves in the, Miracles of Mary, 19th cent.
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Thank you for your attention!

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