



Ethiopian Cultural Heritage: Manuscripts as Artefacts and Issues of Conservation

*Ethio-SPaRe: Cultural Heritage of Christian Ethiopia, Salvation,
Preservation, Research, Hamburg University*

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Mekelle University, 11 June 2014



Universität Hamburg

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European Research Council
Established by the European Commission





Ethio-SPaRE

Cultural Heritage of Christian Ethiopia: Salvation, Preservation and Research

Project type: ERC Starting Grant (EU 7th Framework Programme)

Project full title: Cultural Heritage of Christian Ethiopia:
Salvation, Preservation, and Research

Project acronym: Ethio-SPaRE

Project running time: Dec. 2009-Dec. 2014

Project team: PI (Principal Investigator)
Five research associates
Two PhD candidates



ETHIO-SPARE: Cultural Heritage of Christian Ethiopia: Salvation, Preservation, Research



EthioSPARE
News
Workshops
Publications
Missions
Contacts
Tasks
Focus
Team
Guests
Database
HLCES



Ethiopia is one of the countries with the most ancient Christian history, and the only country in Africa where Christianity became official religion as early as in the 4th century A.D. It is also one of the very few African regions where the history has been documented in written sources: manuscripts in possession of ca. 600 monasteries and 20,000 churches, some of which date back to early Middle Ages, have been estimated to number dozens of thousands.

Only a minor part of these archives have so far received scholarly evaluation, only less than one tenth of manuscripts have been microfilmed or digitalized, and only those that have come in possession of European libraries have been duly catalogued and are well protected. A great part of this unique heritage is on the verge of extinction, and urgent action needs to be taken to save it from complete disappearance.

New online: [sixth mission report!](#)

Presentations:

- [October 2011: D. Nosnitsin: the Making of Ethiopic Book](#)
- [June 2012: D. Nosnitsin: DomLib/EthioSPARE online catalogue](#)
- [October 2012: D. Nosnitsin: Different Books from East Tigray-Layouts, Organization of Text](#)
- [October 2012: D. Nosnitsin: Titles, Rubrics, Tables of Contents](#)
- [October 2012: D. Nosnitsin: Morphology of Ethiopian Binding](#)
- [October 2012: S. Ancel: Some Biblical and Liturgical Books](#)
- [October 2012: M. Krzyzanowska: Scribes of East Tigray](#)
- [November 2012: D. Nosnitsin: Lesser Known Features of the Ethiopian Codex](#)
- [July 2013: D. Nosnitsin: An Ethiopian Manuscript after its Completion: Typologies of Reuse](#)
- [July 2013: S. Ancel: Travelling Books: Change of Owner and Library in Ethiopian Manuscript Culture](#)

Project
Website

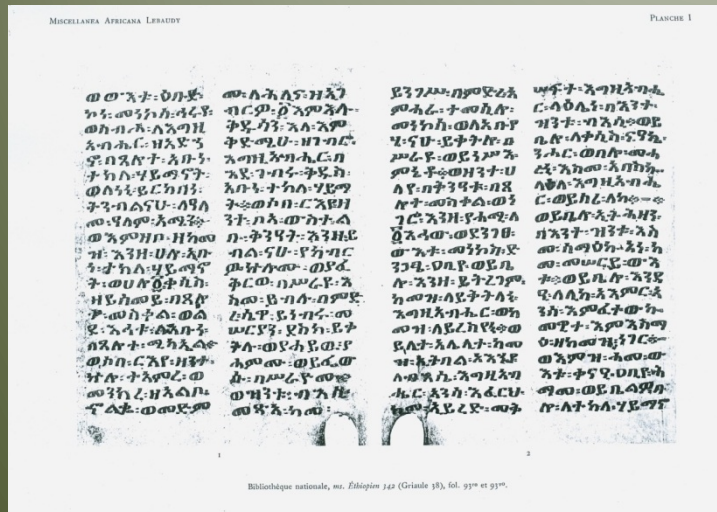
Ethio-SPaRe: main aims

- Systematic research and recording of manuscript collections
- Physical preservation
- Study of the newly discovered texts and objects
- Development of new standards in Ethiopian manuscript studies for cataloguing
- Research into the local history and traditions
- Interdisciplinary work: elaboration of comprehensive research schemes
- Education

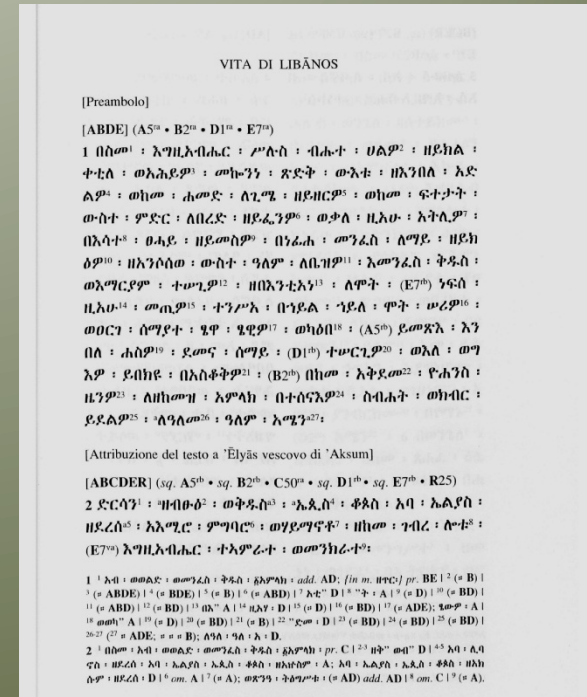
Ethio-SPaRe: concept

- Research in the Ethiopian manuscript culture in its original context
- Application of approaches and methods of *modern manuscript studies*:
 - (philology)
 - palaeography
 - codicology
 - material study of manuscripts

Philology and text studies



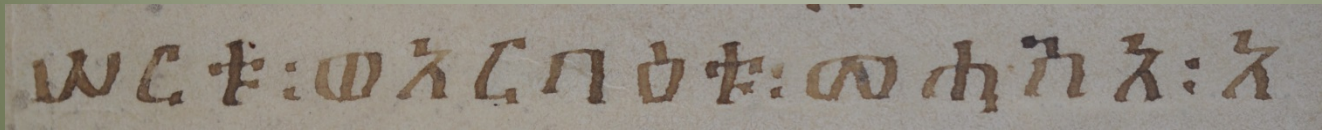
Methods of critical edition of texts, reconstruction of stemma codicum



Palaeography

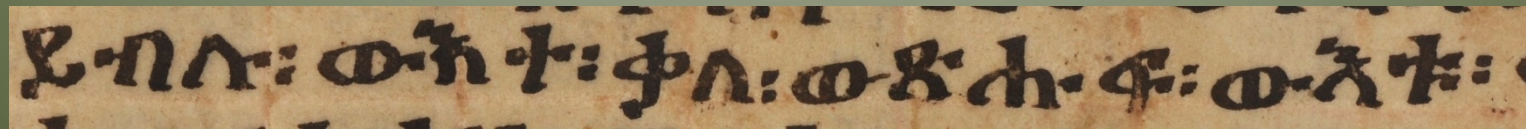
(After S. Uhlig, *Äthiopische Paläographie*, 1988)

I. Monumental script (prior to the second half of the 14th cent.)



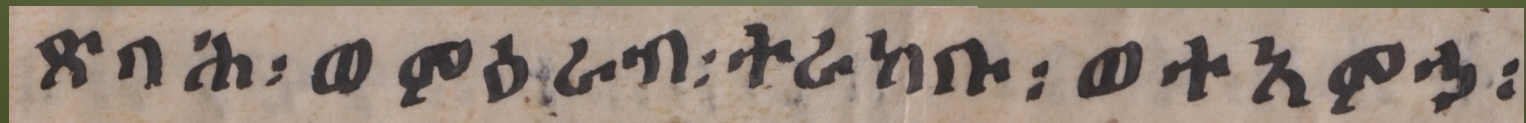
UM, Octateuch

II. Square script (second half of the 14th – mid-15th cent.)



TKGM, Four Gospels

III. Rounded script (mid-15th – mid 16th cent.)

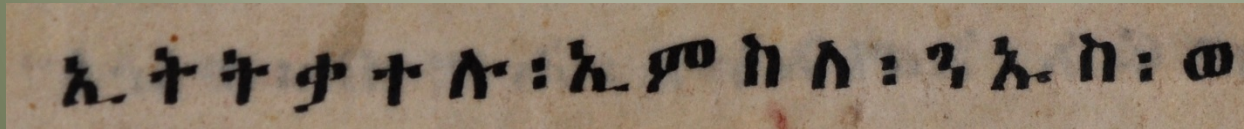


MGM, Collection of homilies

Palaeography

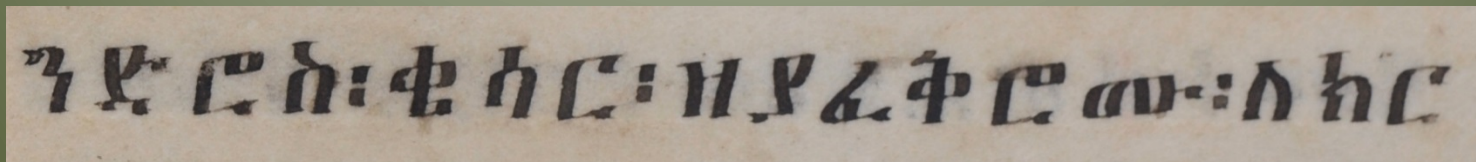
(After S. Uhlig, *Äthiopische Paläographie*, 1988)

IV. Compressed slender script (mid-16th – mid-17th cent.)



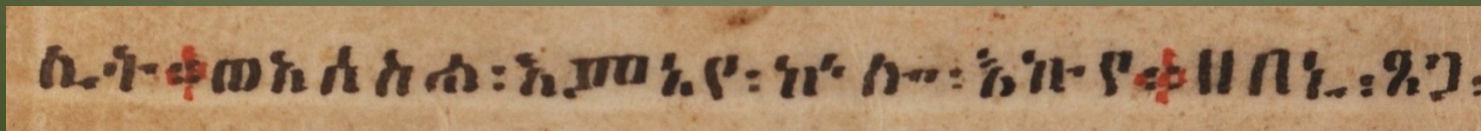
EQM, Theological treatise

V-1. Official *Gwelh*-script (mid-17th – second half of the 18th cent.)



RGQ, Synaxarion

V-2. *Räqiq*-script (mid-17th – mid 19th cent.)



RQG, Psalter

Codicology



First and last
leaves pasted
down on the
boards

Systematic
analysis of
physical
features



Coloured
endbands



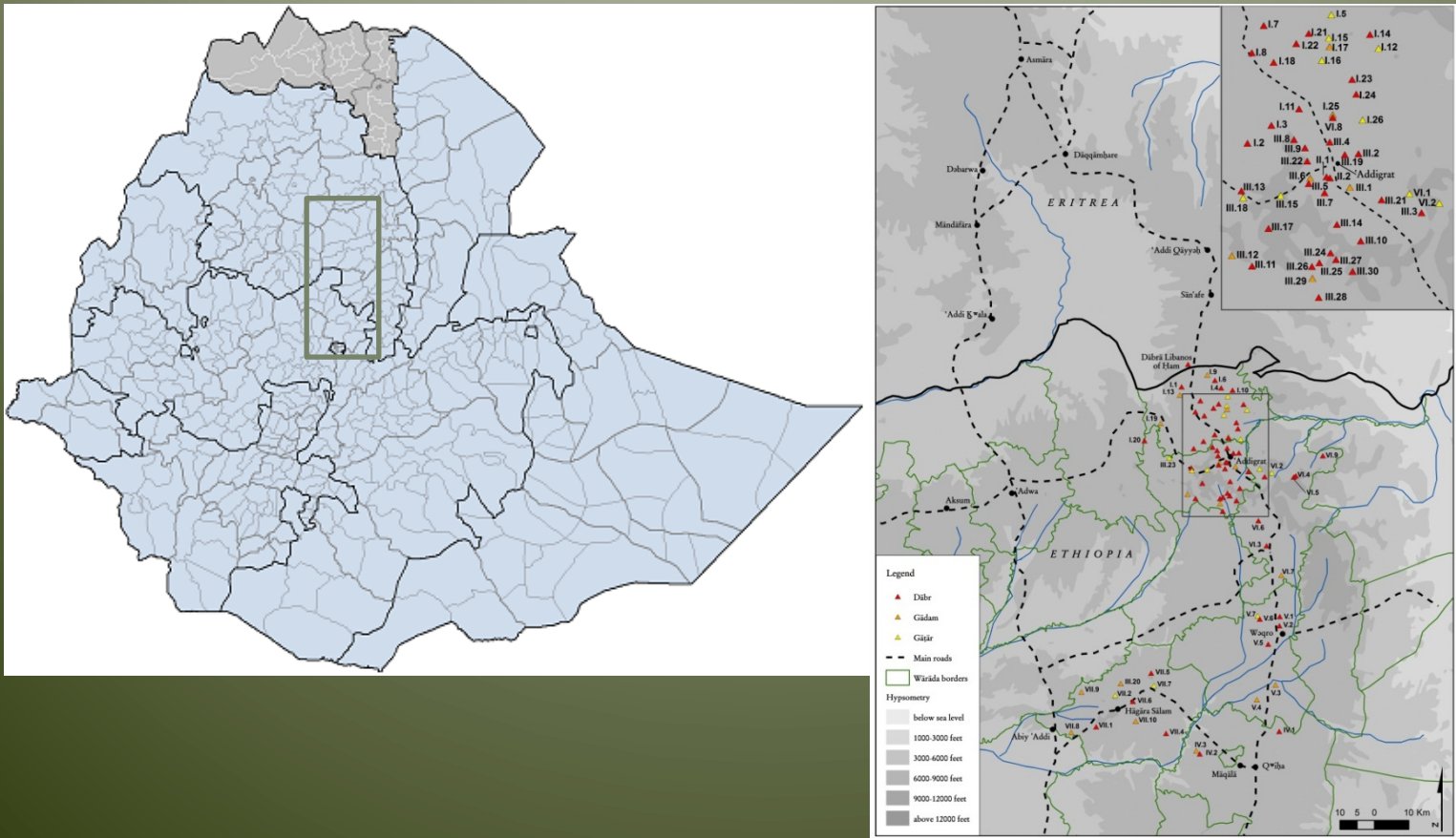
“Tackets” on
quires prepared
for binding

Modern manuscript studies

- (philology/text studies)
- palaeography
- codicology
- study of material aspects

Ethio-SPaRe: field work

6 research missions in 2010-2012, over 100 ecclesiastic sites of Tegray (North Ethiopia) surveyed, more than 2000 manuscripts recorded



Ethio-SPaRe: Restoration



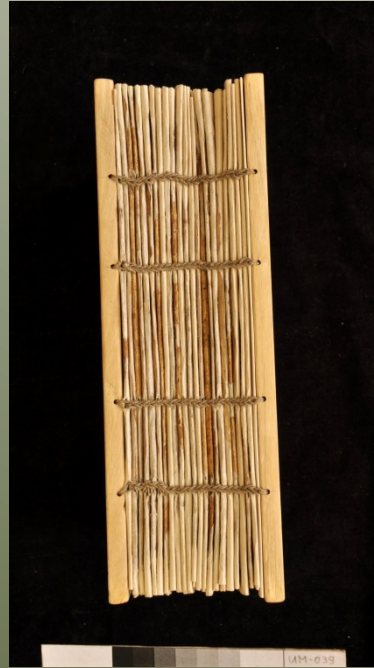
New standards in manuscript restoration: cooperation of book conservators (N. Sarris, M. Di Bella) with philologists (A. Brita, A. Bausi). Thorough study of texts before any intervention, reconstruction of the original page sequence

Ethio-SPaRe: Restoration



a: Ms. MY-004, humidifying and stretching leaves
b-c: Mss. UM-039, UM-018: reconstruction of quires,
leaves repair with Japanese paper

Ethio-SPaRe: Restoration



- 5 missions in 2011-2014
- 25 old manuscripts recorded in specialised restoration database
- minor consolidation measures on 5 manuscripts
- 3 manuscripts fully treated

a-b: Ms. UM-039, spine before and after consolidation

b: Ms. MY-004, minor repairs of sewing and textblock



Program of the workshop

- 1) 9.00-9.30. Introduction (Dr. Denis Nosnitsin)
- 2) 9.30-10.30. “Cultural heritage and ethics of conservation: A case study of intangible heritage and cultural spaces” (Desiree Domec)
- 3) 10.30-12.00. “Ethiopian manuscripts: protection and conservation” (Dr. Nicolas Sarris, Marco Di Bella).
- 4) 12.00-12.30. “Instrumental analysis in the study and conservation of manuscripts” (Dr. Ira Rabin)
- 5) 12.30- 13.00. Conclusion (Dr. D. Nosnitsin)

Aims of the workshop

- 1) Widening of participants' knowledge about the types of historical heritage and principles of its conservation.
- 2) Survey of the material aspects of the Ethiopian manuscript culture.
- 3) Survey of some technical guidelines and principles to be applied for the protection and correct storage of parchment manuscripts.
- 4) Presentation and demonstration of some recent instruments and technologies used in manuscript material studies and conservation works.



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