



Aethiopia 22 (2019)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

VERONIKA SIX, Hamburg

Review

DENIS NOSNITSIN, *Catalogue of Ethiopic Manuscripts*

Aethiopia 22 (2019), 271–276

ISSN: 1430-1938

Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut
Hiob-Ludolf-Zentrum für Äthiopistik
der Universität Hamburg
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

Bairu Tafla, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg, and Siegbert Uhlig

this well-organized urban space gradually extended towards the plateau south of Betä Giyorgis, an area noted for the grandeur of most of the monuments realized at this time (Chapter 7). The study concludes, asking whether ancient human activity and exploitation strategies have contributed to soil erosion. Archaeological and paleo-agricultural evidence allows us to conclude that the causes of soil degradation are probably the recent demographic decrease and the consequent lack of land maintenance.

In conclusion, the book is a good contribution to the reconstruction of the ancient settlement strategies of the Aksum region and a very technical synthesis in which the archaeological data have been successfully organized and discussed; it will be a reliable reference work for those scholars involved in future investigations in the area of Aksum and on the Təgrayan plateau.

Alessio Agostini, Sapienza Università di Roma

DENIS NOSNITSIN, *Catalogue of Ethiopic Manuscripts*, Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts, Xylographs, etc. in Danish Collections, 11 (Copenhagen: NIAS Press–Det Kongelige Bibliotek, 2017, pub. 2018). xv, 208 pp., photographic illus., also colour pl. Price: £160. ISBN: 978-87-7694-231-1.

This publication contains the description of thirty-one Ethiopian manuscripts in Det Kongelige Bibliotek (Royal Library) in Copenhagen. The first part of the Introduction (pp. ix–xii) gives detailed information about the background, the history, the original ownership, and how the Royal Library acquired these manuscripts.¹

One manuscript (Cod. Etiop. 1, pp. 3–7), containing the *Gädlä zäMika’el Arägawi* and the *Gädlä Gäbrä Krastos*, was purchased by a Danish member of the so-called Niebuhr expedition to Yemen (1761–1767), financed by King Frederik V. The German scholar Carsten Niebuhr was the cartographer of the Danish mission and the only one who finished the journey, and wrote a report on the voyage.² Formerly, the second manuscript belonged to the Københavns Universitetsbibliotek (Copenhagen University

¹ At the end of each description there is information on the respective acquisition. Therefore, the catalogue offers an extensive overview about the different sources of the collections and about the purchase of the manuscripts.

² The name of the German scholar is mentioned in the Index, p. 170, as ‘Niebur, expedition’, the other entries have the correct spelling, Niebuhr: pp. ix, 4, and 172.

Library) and was recorded in 1845. It is Cod. Etiop. 2 (pp. 8–13), a paper manuscript, put together by a scholar who was probably member of Hiob Ludolf's circle. This manuscript contains additional notes by Ludolf himself. Until the 1980s, the Royal Library bought manuscripts at different intervals, and, apparently, only one manuscript (Cod. Etiop. Add. 1, p. 16) was donated. A printed book from 1701 (OS-2015-1/Mus, pp. 153–155) and a paper manuscript (OS-2015-2/Mus, pp. 156–160) are interesting not only for their features but also because they were previously owned by Lazarus Goldschmidt who sold his collection to the Royal Library in 1948–1949.

According to the remarks of the publisher of the series in the Foreword (p. vii), the library recently (2011) took the opportunity to acquire eighteen manuscripts of different formats and content at an online auction. These manuscripts had been in the possession of a Danish collector of Oriental manuscripts.

The library's collection consists of manuscripts which were in daily use. They are typical texts of Ethiopian church literature like liturgy, Old and New Testament texts, hagiography, poetry, and the so-called *mälkä*³; however, there are also rare theological or historiographical works. In addition, some manuscripts bear witness to the interest of European scholars in Ethiopian philology, theology, or linguistics. The collection also contains five scrolls and two leporello-shaped manuscripts.

Cod. Etiop. 2 (pp. 8–13)³ is one of those copies which European scholars have used or produced. It is surprising that the author has not consulted the volumes VOHD XX 3 and VOHD XX 6.⁴ For example, VOHD XX 3 (p. 261; manuscript Cb 5152, Universitätsbibliothek Kiel, pp. 258–263) contains information about Reussel and Morlands; and VOHD XX 6 (pp. 209–210; manuscript Eb 415, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Dresden, pp. 207–210) has information about Reussel, Morlands, and Odhel.⁵ With regard to the manu-

³ The citation of the shelf mark in the descriptive part is not consistent with the citation in the Index.

⁴ Nosnitsin mentions in his Introduction (p. xii), that 'the references to the secondary literature or manuscripts in other collections had to be restricted only to those necessary'. But in this case it is difficult to understand his choice.

⁵ Respectively V. Six, *Äthiopische Handschriften vom Tānāsee 3: Nebst einem Nachtrag zum Katalog der äthiopischen Handschriften Deutscher Bibliotheken und Museen*, Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, 20/3 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999) (= VOHD XX 3); and V. Six, *Äthiopische Handschriften 3: Handschriften deutscher Bibliotheken, Museen und aus Privatbesitz*, ed. E. Hammerschmidt, Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, 20/6 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994) (= VOHD XX 6).

script situation of these transcriptions and prints, a separate study would be desirable, especially since almost all copies kept in European libraries are probably known.⁶

Cod. Etiop. Add. 10 (pp. 67–70), *Šənä fəträt*, is important with regard to the philology (Amharic) and probably offers a variant of the already published texts.

Concerning the description of the content of Cod. Etiop. Add. 12 (pp. 79–80), a text called *Säyfä šəllase*, there is no clear bibliographic information, although Nosnitsin has pointed out elsewhere that ‘the issue requires a proper study’.⁷ It is regrettable that Nosnitsin does not explain in more detail some of his statements in the catalogue: under ‘Alternative titles’, Nosnitsin mentions *Zena nägäromu läšəllase*. On page 79 one finds the following remark: ‘The authorship of the *Säyfä šəllase* is traditionally attributed to Giyorgis of Gasəčča/Sägla (d. ca 1425)’. This is surprising, considering that the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* entry, written by Nosnitsin himself, relating to the authorship of the *Säyfä šəllase/Zena nägäromu läšəllase*, does not mention Giyorgis of Gasəčča. In the entry about Giyorgis of Gasəčča, there is no reference to his being the author of this text either.⁸ Moreover, the classification of this *Säyfä šəllase* as a text belonging to divination (‘Subject’),⁹ also needs some explanation.

Nosnitsin provides, on the other hand, detailed reference to the literature concerning the well-known text of a *Mäzmurä Dawit*. There are seven wit-

⁶ However, U. Pietruschka and I. Hegenbarth-Reichardt, *Koptische Handschriften 6: Die Handschriften der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz – Bohairische und bohairisch-arabische Handschriften*, ed. H. Behlmer, Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, 21/6 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2018) (= VOHD XXI 6) refers to a further manuscript, which—for whatever reason—had been overlooked. The Introduction to VOHD XXI 6, p. 9, lists an Ethiopian manuscript of the Orientalist Theodor Petraeus (1628–1672), belonging to the library, as follows: ‘Äthiopisch E don.var.41.4°: “XII Prophetæ Minores” äthiopisch / lateinisch’. And, p. 9, n. 41: ‘Auf Bl. 63r handschriftlicher Vermerk des Petraeus über Abschrift der Hs. in Rom’.

⁷ D. Nosnitsin, ‘Tä^oammärä šəllase’, in S. Uhlig in cooperation with A. Bausi, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, IV: O–X (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 795b–796b, here especially p. 796b.

⁸ See G. Colin, ‘Giyorgis of Sägla’, in S. Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, II: D–Ha (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 812a–b.

⁹ See B. Burtea, ‘Magic literature: Christian magic literature’, in S. Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, III: He–N (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 638a–640b, here especially p. 639a, reference to magic literature.

nesses to this text which he systematically describes in full detail.¹⁰ Among these, Cod. Etiop. Add. 4 (pp. 35–42) is worth mentioning because of its age (sixteenth/seventeenth century) and origin (purchased from a bookseller in Jerusalem) as is OS-2015-1/Mus (pp. 153–155), because H. Ludolf initiated the print and, later, this printed book belonged to L. Goldschmidt.

Regarding the content of the collection, Cod. Etiop. Add. 13 (pp. 83–89) deserves special mention: in one of the texts, there is the apocryphal version of the *Story of the Passions of Christ* (*Zena ḥəməmatihu lāmādhane ʿalām*; p. 83, Unit 1 I), which was revealed to the three women, one of them called Bärzeda.¹¹ The figure who is behind this name is St Birgit. The description of this manuscript shows that the author seems to be more interested in codicological issues than in the content of a manuscript:¹² Cod. Etiop. Add. 17 (pp. 104–108) also offers a *Zena ḥəməmatihu lāmādhane ʿalām* (p. 104, III) in which the traditional naming and the traditional context are presented. The difference between Cod. Etiop. Add. 13 and Cod. Etiop. Add. 17 and particularly the rareness of Cod. Etiop. Add. 13 is not mentioned; furthermore, in the Index (p. 169) the two manuscripts are cited as if offering the same text.

When presenting a collection of manuscripts for the first time, the focus should primarily be on the content, the physical condition, dating, and illustration. In the previous catalogues of this series, the arrangement of the categories or keywords seemed to be more thematic. The description scheme in this catalogue, generated by the working method using a computerized entry mask, leads to a fixed structure of the listing of even the smallest detail and, ultimately, to a manuscript being dismantled, thus taking away the special character of each manuscript, even though excellent photographs of selected pages follow the descriptive part. Moreover, since the photographs are not facsimiles (each page has the constant large format of the catalogue pages), the reality is distorted. The uniqueness of a manuscript is blurred by the fragmentation into the tiniest items and, additionally, the relevance of many individual details is flattened out. Perhaps some of the resulting discrepancies are due to the specifications of the medium, but some serious shortcomings can only be attributed to the author of the cata-

¹⁰ That he has classified Cod. Etiop. Add. 2 in the Index (p. 167) as *Māzmurā Dawit*, instead of Cod. Etiop. Add. 1, is surely a typing error.

¹¹ The spelling of the name is given in two different ways (p. 83 and p. 85).

¹² In the Introduction (p. xi), Nosnitsin mentions this manuscript, but with the focus on the codicological peculiarity and the historical part rather than on the existence of two versions of the Passions of Christ.

logue. As an example, on p. 43 or p. 79 the description structure merely presents the Roman numeral I, probably because of the file template. One wonders where II is and so forth (this is not an isolated occurrence).¹³ In the parameters, under ‘Subject’ (which is the thematic affiliation) there are some odd assignments. As an example, on p. 43 and p. 142, it is simply wrong to use the classification ‘Magic’, alongside others, in reference to a *Mäzmurä Dawit*. Similarly on p. 121 and p. 131, the category ‘Gospels’ is used for parchment scrolls, simply because excerpts of the New Testament are cited. Or, on p. 90 one finds ‘Hagiography’ when the content is exclusively a collection of hymns (*mälkä*) to saints.¹⁴ These are just a few selected examples.

When looking at the details recorded under ‘Ruling’ or ‘Collation’—the importance of which should in no way be diminished—the much-elaborated presentation mentioned in each manuscript description gives ruling and collation a relevance which lifts them to the status of a principal component. Furthermore, one cannot understand these elements and formulae without knowing the article by D. Muzerelle,¹⁵ which is the only source. Nosnitsin’s statement on p. xiv (‘Ruling—Described by means of a simple formula according to Muzerelle 1999’) is surprising. Quoting an article which is the only source and whose printed version (cited in the bibliography) is extremely difficult to access is not satisfactory.¹⁶

Citing only the beginning and end of a text (and this is generally the only citing of Ethiopian text passages) is in my opinion deceptive, because the ‘End of text’ given in the catalogue very often consists in the last page of a manuscript, no matter how many individual pieces the manuscript contains in total or whether the text is one of several paratexts.¹⁷ And it is definitely misleading in the case of Cod. Etiop. Add. 15, which—as Nosnitsin himself mentions—is composed of two units that can be assigned to completely different literary categories; he only quotes the beginning of the text of the first page of the manuscript and the text of the last page of the manuscript

¹³ And on p. 149, with Cod. Etiop. Add. 27, the counting is wrong.

¹⁴ Cod. Etiop. 1 (pp. 3–7) and Cod. Etiop. Add. 3 (pp. 29–43 and 181–182) are hagiographies.

¹⁵ D. Muzerelle, ‘Pour décrire les schémas de réglure: une méthode de notation symbolique applicable aux manuscrits latins (et autres)’, *Quinio*, 1 (1999), 123–170.

¹⁶ A version of the article is now available online: http://palaeographia.org/muzerelle/Muzerelle_FormuleDeReglure.pdf. It would have been helpful if Nosnitsin had mentioned it in the bibliography.

¹⁷ For example Cod. Etiop. Add. 13, where the photographs clearly demonstrate this (p. 89). One exception is Cod. Etiop. Add. 3 (p. 30), photograph p. 34, where it is actually the end of the main content of the manuscript.

(p. 96)! The excellent photographs following each manuscript description mostly present exactly the text quotations (in some cases colour reproductions too), so one option is superfluous.

The way in which this catalogue is organized makes it necessary to say a few general words about usability. The order in which the manuscripts are presented in the catalogue—keeping the aspect of acquisition in mind—is, at first sight, not clear. There is no guidance system for a quick orientation such as, for instance, page references in the Index. Searching for an entry in a printed work is completely different to a search in a computer file/database, because there is no comparable ‘search’ tool in a book. In the present case, the author does not seem to be aware of this. The index section (pp. 166–174) is subdivided into many different categories (‘Texts’, ‘Place names, Languages, Institutions, Selected Ethiopian Terms’, ‘Authors, Scribes, Commissioners, Owners, Donors, and other Individuals mentioned’, ‘Subjects’) and only the shelf mark is noted. Without page details and section references it is almost useless,¹⁸ and the typography and layout do not help either. Inadvertently, Nosnitsin demonstrates that online catalogues will replace the printed versions. The readers will find out for themselves where the inadequacies of this catalogue lie. The absence of a professional printer has never been felt as urgently as in this catalogue. However, for most of the shortcomings the author is responsible.

In any case, the catalogue is an impressive work, making this collection accessible to the public for the first time.

Veronika Six, Hamburg

¹⁸ The method of naming only the shelf mark, as for example practised in the catalogues of the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (EMML), does not work here, due to the complexity of the signature and the layout of the book. For example, in some cases, the entry ‘Amharic, language’ is nearly impossible to locate because there is just the shelf mark.