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An Outline of the National Archives and Library of Ethiopia

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Every written civilisation in the history of the world has possessed its own, unique system for gathering materials of historical importance. Thanks to the watchful eye of those who have cared for them, some of these ancient or medieval records have been preserved and are now testimony to the events of the past.

Ethiopia is one of the countries boasting of a centuries-old tradition and history of writing. It is also a place in which a peculiar library system existed – manuscripts, kept under the custody of monks from the Ethiopian Church, were hidden in corners of monasteries scattered throughout the mountainous Ethiopian Highlands, and thus were inaccessible to the uninitiated. It was there that the first examples of Ethiopian writing were created – holy books were written and re-written by monks in Gəʿəz. Such a system of storing valuable book collections existed until as late as the 1930s.

Until the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936–1941), the country possessed neither archives nor libraries in the European sense of the word. Archive records were kept in a traditional way, that is manuscripts were stored and rewritten in churches and monasteries, but the country lacked a central repository to collect and protect such documents from damage. In 1911, during the reign of Emperor Mənilək II, the first printing house in Ethiopia's history was established. Small printing houses at church and private missions, however, were in operation as early as in the 1890s, mainly in Eritrea. The first publication printed in Addis Ababa seems to have been *Mäşəra Šəllase*, written in Amharic in 1911¹. Since the early 1930s, more and more printed publications, initially mainly press, began to appear. Thus, educated Ethiopians and foreigners living in Ethiopia were offered an opportunity to read them, which later led to the idea of establishing a central reading room, collecting and making available all materials which appeared in print.

Emperor Həylä Šəllase I, on the occasion of his coronation in 1930, opened a small library in which he gathered books, written in a number of European languages, which he had bought or been presented with, among them a

¹ STEPHEN WRIGHT, "Book and Manuscript Collection in Ethiopia", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1964, p. 14.

French edition of Alexander Dumas's works². They were, however, accessible only to a handful of people from the Emperor's closest circle. During the war and Italian occupation only a small part of the library escaped serious damage, and what was left was later handed over to the Ministry of Education. During the occupation of 1936–1941 the Italians established a Central Government Library in Addis Ababa for Italian East Africa, which was opened to public use in 1941. The library had its branch in Asmara. The year 1936 is an important date for the archiving of Ethiopian documents because all the books published in print before that year are considered by some experts in Ethiopian studies to be 'incunabula'³. In Europe, however, incunabula include materials published from the invention of print (between 1440 and 1450) to 1501.

The first National Library of Ethiopia was opened on May 5, 1944, exactly three years after the liberation from Italian occupation. Its Ethiopian name was *Yāhəzb betä mäshəft*⁴. Since in Amharic *yāhəzb* may mean both "public" and "national", the library throughout the years of its existence combined two functions – gathering the national heritage and making it available to the reader⁵. The majority of the 15,000 volumes were inherited from the Italian Government Library. The collection was moved to an old but well-preserved building intended for a hospital and constructed by the Italians during the occupation. The aim of the library was to gather and protect valuable Ethiopian literary materials published at home and abroad against damage, in particular manuscripts scattered all over the world – the most valuable Ethiopian written texts. The first librarian was Säräqa Bərhan Gäbrä Əgzer, an Eritrean, who had received training in the libraries of Egypt and Greece. In the first ten years, library staff succeeded in gathering approximately two hundred out of 15,000 manuscripts kept in Ethiopian churches and monasteries. According to Stephen Wright, one of the first foreign expert-advisors to the library, access to valuable manuscripts hidden in monasteries was extremely difficult at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century. Monks watchfully guarded their treasures and only the chosen ones were allowed to see them⁶.

² STEPHEN WRIGHT, "Book and Manuscript ...", p. 23.

³ STEPHEN WRIGHT (who created the concept of Ethiopian incunabula, widely criticised by experts in Ethiopian Studies), *Ethiopian Incunabula*, Addis Ababa 1967 and STEFAN STRELCYN, "La connaissance des 'Incunables' Éthiopiens dix ans après la parution de l'ouvrage de Stephen Wright", *Proceedings of the Vth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies [Session A], Nice/19–22 December 1977*, Rotterdam 1980, p. 35.

⁴ RITA PANKHURST, "Leadership in Ethiopian Post-War Library Development: The National Library vs. the University Library", *Proceedings of the Vth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Session B, April 13–16, 1978*, Chicago 1979, p. 601 and 610.

⁵ STEPHEN WRIGHT, "Book and Manuscript ...", p. 22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

In 1951, in order to make the task of gathering all publications easier for the library's staff, the Minister of the Pen sent a letter to the five printing houses then in existence in Addis Ababa requesting them to deposit in the National Library three copies of each book they printed. The letter, however, did not have the force of law and the response proved to be far from enthusiastic and spontaneous – only a few publications were donated⁷.

Over the next few years, the number of books published in European languages gathered in the library steadily increased, particularly thanks to donations from embassies and such European institutions as the British Council. The UN also regularly sent its documents. The collection expanded as copies from printing houses and donations from individuals were sent in. At the beginning of the 1960s, Stephen Wright decided to leave Ethiopia after the attempted coup d'état of 1960, and handed over his books on Ethiopia published in various languages to the British Council. Subsequently, the British Council donated them to the National Library.

The library was directly responsible to the Ministry of Education, was managed by state clerks, advised by foreign experts and its staff were helped by youth volunteers. Ḥaylā Śállase I's first advisor, appointed in 1950, to create the Ethiopian National Library meeting European standards, was a German, Hans Wilhelm Lockot, who had come to Ethiopia in search of an interesting job. He recounts the moment of his appointment in the following way: "(...) he asked, 'What do you want to do?' (...) I replied that I would be happy to be able to serve at the National Library in an endeavour to build it up along the lines of the national libraries of Europe, and thus contribute to the development of librarianship in the country. (...) Finally I heard his words spoken quietly and firmly: 'You will do it. We command.'⁸ Hans Lockot worked for the Ethiopian National Library for over twenty years, holding the post of the head of the Research Division for most of this period⁹.

The National Library building also housed an art gallery and a historical museum, which made it a popular place, especially among school-children and university students. Another attraction was a terrace, which had been turned into a reading room open to all, free of charge. Readers wishing to borrow a book paid a ten-Ethiopian dollar deposit and every three months a one-dollar membership fee. They were allowed to borrow two books at a time and keep them for a month. School-children could borrow books for free provided their teacher agreed to guarantee their return. Apart from cur-

⁷ RITA PANKHURST, "Leadership in Ethiopian ...", p. 602.

⁸ HANS WILHELM LOCKOT, *The Mission. The Life, Reign and Character of Haile Sellasie I*, (2nd edition), New York 1992, pp. 128–130.

⁹ *Ibid.*, biographical note on the jacket of the book.

rent issues of magazines published in Ethiopia and Eritrea, the library offered access to a foreign press reading room, where one could leaf through *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Times*, *le Monde* or *Times of India*, among others. In addition, a special annex with elementary readers and picture books for young children was created¹⁰.

At the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, the National Library was informally separated and two divisions were formed: the Research Division, which was the basis for the future National Archives (it gathered approximately 34,000 books and many other, non-catalogued ones at that time¹¹), and the Public Division, which functioned as the Central Public Lending Library. Such a state of affairs resulted from the Library's undefined status and the character of its staff's responsibilities, which involved working with different literary materials – accessible and inaccessible to the visitor. The Public Division gathered publications concerning Africa written in an easily-understandable English, in particular those related to the social sciences, as well as papers, aimed mainly at students, written in Amharic. The duties of the Research Division included gathering copies of all Ethiopian publications issued at home and abroad and developing a bibliographical centre, cyclically publishing a list of all materials published in Ethiopia¹².

The activity of the Library was hindered and slowed by financial and personnel problems, and fulfilling its new tasks proved to be problematic. It was even the case that the Minister of Education held the position of the Director General of the Library (and the National Museum, which had the same board of directors). As a result, the overworked Minister was unable to devote adequate attention to the work of librarians. To make matters worse, the institution did not have enough funds to develop itself and purchase new titles, which, together with the lack of properly qualified staff, paralysed its activity even further. Ethiopia simply did not have qualified librarians, and this led to stagnation and impotence, especially as far as cataloguing the collection was concerned. Up to that point, it was Stephen Wright who had catalogued and described the publications and manuscripts.

In the 1960s, the Public Division organised evening courses in the basics of librarianship. Its teachers came from the United States, the National Library, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Library, and finally from the University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) library, where the first librarian was Stanisław Chojnacki. It was not long before the University Li-

¹⁰ RITA ELTON, "The National Library of Ethiopia", *Ethiopia Observer*, no. 11, 1957, p. 369.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

¹² RITA PANKHURST, "Leadership in Ethiopian ...", p. 603.

brary had surpassed the National Library both in the field of organisation and the size and quality of its collection. It was the UCAA library that held the first exhibition of books published in Amharic and later provided their first bibliography¹³. It not only competed with the National Library's Research Division but also with the Public Division.

In the course of time, the UCAA collection became more valuable for research purposes than that of the National Library. In the 1950s, an idea, supported both by the visiting and resident librarians, to merge the National Library with the UCAA library arose. The idea was to establish by the merger a National and University Library, providing those conducting research with even easier access to indispensable source materials. The idea was supported, among others, by Stephen Wright, who gave as an example a similar and successful merger which had taken place in Khartoum. Unfortunately, the plan was not carried out as it came up against strong opposition from the National Library's board of directors. As a consequence, while the UCAA library – helped by generous donations primarily for staff training sent mainly from the USA – was gradually developing, the National Library was in stagnation.

In 1962, the UCAA was transformed into Ḥaylä Šəllase I University (HSIU), and it was the university library that was the first to publish bibliographical works on Ethiopian literary heritage. This was, in fact, the task of the National Library, but it proved unable to carry it out¹⁴.

In 1966, the Faculty of Education of HSIU started to run librarianship courses, organised as a part of the UNESCO teacher training project. Their participants acquired the knowledge necessary for establishing and running libraries in small schools¹⁵. In addition, the Faculty offered one-year full-time and two-year part-time diploma courses in Library Science, the aim of which was to train middle-level librarians. In the course of time students started to go abroad for library training. The first graduates returned in 1970, and in

¹³ RITA PANKHURST, "Leadership in Ethiopian ...", p. 605.

¹⁴ The Institute of Ethiopian Studies of HSIU formerly issued annuals listing all publications written by Ethiopians concerning Ethiopia, published at home and abroad. The first bibliography collection in this series, *List of Current Periodical Publications in Ethiopia*, edited by STANISŁAW CHOJNACKI and EPHRAIM HAILE SELASIE, was published in 1964, and contained a list of newspapers, periodicals, reports and serial publications published in 1963. Successive issues contained thematic lists of all publications from various fields of knowledge printed in Ethiopia and abroad in the years preceding the year of issue, e.g. STANISŁAW CHOJNACKI – MERGIA DIRO, *Ethiopian Publications, Books, Pamphlets, Annuals and Periodical Articles Published in 1962 Ethiopian and 1970 Gregorian Year*, published in 1971.

¹⁵ KEBREAB WOLDE GEORGIS, "Library Education in Ethiopia", *International Library Review*, no. 5, 1973.

1974, nine out of the fifteen fully-trained librarians working for the university library were Ethiopians. In 1974, under the auspices of UNESCO, Professor Stefan Strelcyn¹⁶ organised the first course in cataloguing manuscripts¹⁷.

Meanwhile, the foreign experts who used to work for the National Library – Rita Pankhurst, Hans W. Lockot and Stephen Wright, together with many other committed library assistants – were eventually employed by the university library.

Another stage in the development of Ethiopian librarianship was the opening in 1970, on the university campus, of the Kennedy Library, founded by the US Agency for International Development. The library boasted of professionally-trained staff, a modern building, a collection of books in Braille, a comfortable reading room and space for displays.

One of the few achievements of the National Library's Research Division at that time was the preparation, in 1970, by Mängəstu Abägaz of a catalogue of 272 Ethiopian manuscripts, which was later published in Amharic.

In 1974, a project to microfilm manuscripts from Ethiopian churches and monasteries was launched. It was financed from American aid funds and run under the auspices of UNESCO, and its co-ordinator was Dr. Särgew Hablä Šəllase. Several thousand manuscripts from Addis Ababa churches were microfilmed, and this resulted in the publication of a bulletin containing the list of microfilmed manuscripts. The bulletin was later handed over to the National Library.

Once Emperor Həylä Šəllase I was overthrown and the new, pro-Soviet regime of Mängəstu Həylä Maryam took over, the character of Ethiopian library collections changed. A stream of Marxist publications started to flow in, whereas the number of western publications was significantly reduced. The National Library received new gifts and donations, this time from the countries of the Eastern Bloc. In 1975, the Government issued proclamation no. 50¹⁸, obliging all Ethiopian publishers to submit three copies of each publication to the National Library. The decision was an important step in the development of Ethiopian librarianship. Thanks to the proclamation, the National Library was able to collect all publications printed in Ethiopia and pre-

¹⁶ Stefan Strelcyn (1918–1981) was made honorary professor for the Institute of Oriental Studies of Warsaw University in 1950. There he established the Department of Semitic Studies, which admitted its first students in 1951. Strelcyn was in charge of the department until 1969. In 1967 he was awarded the Həylä Šəllase I Award for Ethiopian Studies.

¹⁷ RITA PANKHURST, "Leadership in Ethiopian ...", p. 608.

¹⁸ *A Proclamation to Provide for the Deposit of Printed Materials in the Ministry of Culture and Youth*, Nägarit Gazeta, Proclamation No. 50 of 1975.

pare indexes of Ethiopian bibliography containing publications issued in a given year.

In order to strengthen the position of the National Library, the new government created the Microfilm and Microfiche Section, and in 1979, made the Library a part of the Ministry of Culture and Sports as the Department of Libraries and Archives. The new department started its activity by taking over and cataloguing the collections gathered by the overthrown government. In 1987, the Microfilm and Microfiche Section was reorganised, and the Department of Libraries and Archives was transformed into the National Library and Archives of Ethiopia (NALE), now a department in the Ministry of Information and Culture¹⁹.

From 1981 onwards, the Legal Deposit and Bibliography Section of the Department of Library and Archives in the Ministry of Culture and Sports started to publish a series of national bibliography indexes in Amharic and English, entitled "*Ethiopian Publications*". These indexes, like the above-mentioned series of bibliographic publications prepared by the HSIU, listed all materials printed in Ethiopia and abroad, gathered annually by the Legal Deposit by virtue of the 1975 proclamation. The lists were topic-based. They included, among others, the following publications from 1982: *Ethiopian Periodicals and Non-book Publications Index of the Legal Deposit and Bibliography Section*; *Bibliography on Ethiopian Literature of the Legal Deposit and Bibliography Section*; *Bibliography on Religious Works of the Legal Deposit and Bibliography Section*, also *The Index of the Legal Deposit and Bibliography Section* and *Author Index of the Legal Deposit and Bibliography Section*, published in 1983, and *Holdings of English Language Publications of the Legal Deposit and Bibliography Section* from 1984. The Legal Deposit staff preparing these indexes, quote as their motto, in the introduction to one, the words of Samuel Johnson, the great 18th century English writer and lexicographer: "Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it."²⁰ The national bibliography indexes, published by the Legal Deposit and Bibliography Section, were intended to be a treasury of information on source materials. In its publications, the Legal Deposit appealed to all Ethiopian publishers to contribute, by submitting to NALE a copy of each printed material, to the compilation of the indexes, which were mainly meant to serve researchers and library workers.

The collection, now referred to as the National Library and Archives of Ethiopia, has been preserved to this day. It is the only Ethiopian institution,

¹⁹ www.nale.gov.et.

²⁰ *Ethiopian Periodicals and Non-book Publications Index of the Deposit and Bibliography Section*, Addis Ababa, Ministry of Culture and Sports 1982.

currently serving as the national archive, officially gathering and storing documents of historical importance. The collection is stored in the same post-Italian building located in the centre of Addis Ababa, not far from the Black Lion Hospital. The idea to construct a new building, where the collection could be moved, arose as early as the 1950s, but it was not until this century that it was implemented. On 7th December 2002, thanks to various sponsors – including the Ethiopian National Theatre, non-governmental organisations such as the Ethiopian Red Cross, but also private businesses, e.g. Ambo Mineral Water Factory and Commercial Paintings – a corner-stone was laid under the new NALE building. The construction work started on September 7th, 2002, and was finished in August 2006²¹.

In contrast to the duties to which it had been entrusted, the place for many years resembled a library rather than a national documentation centre, as not enough attention was paid to the social and economic role of NALE. Researchers, who might have contributed to the country's development, had difficulty conducting research, which in part was due to the lack of access to reliable source materials. After Mängəstu Haylä Maryam's regime was overthrown and Mäläs Zänawi's government seized power in 1991, particular emphasis was placed on solving this problem. The National Library and Archives, at that time forming part of the Ministry of Culture and Sport, was reorganised and, by virtue of the 179/1999 Proclamation, was assigned numerous duties, among them the duty to serve as an information centre and the treasury of Ethiopian literary heritage. This involved not only collecting, storing, sorting and making written materials, microfilms, audio and video tapes, maps, etc. available for research purposes but also gathering examples of oral tradition, handed down from generation to generation, such as poems, hymns, proverbs, etc²². The proclamation repealed all of the binding legal acts which had previously regulated the activity of the National Archives and Library²³.

NALE serves as a national documentation centre, a repository of Ethiopian literary heritage and as a national registry of ISBN and ISSN numbers. The plans for its modernisation involve making use of state-of-the-art technology with a view to completing one of NALE's duties – the creation of an efficient information system based on modern methods of records management and the organisation of a source material database for more advanced study and research purposes. NALE staff duties include editing, publishing, ensuring distribution of the Ethiopian national bibliography and periodicals

²¹ *www.nale.gov.et*.

²² Proclamation No. 179 of 1999, part 1, item 3 and part 2, item 7 and 8.

²³ *Ibid.*, part 5, item 24.

index publications. NALE is also obliged to serve as a training centre, but its most important task by far is to collect, catalogue, preserve and make the records available for study and research purposes. It is also responsible for returning to Ethiopia the originals or copies of valuable examples of the country's literary heritage which have been taken abroad, thus creating a unique collection of archive materials, being the evidence of centuries-old Ethiopian literary heritage. Other NALE duties include: acquiring and preserving documents from defunct institutions, government offices and records without owners; ensuring that original archive records are not taken permanently abroad²⁴; giving permission for taking such materials out of the country; gathering old, priceless and rare manuscripts and icons, taking microfilm and microfiche copies of them, and making them available for study and research purposes. Finally, NALE is responsible for co-operation with Ethiopian and international institutions, which is meant to bring up-to-date knowledge on national archive management²⁵.

The following are the most valuable items the Library has managed to acquire by purchase, donation or gratitude to the 179/1999 Proclamation during the 60 years of its existence:

- Manuscripts written in the 14th and 15th centuries, among others:
 - The Four Gospels;
 - *Käbra Nägäšt* (Glory of Kings)
 - A Letter of Saint Paul
 - The Passion of Christ and Services for Passion Week²⁶.

There is a great number of manuscripts written in various languages kept in numerous monasteries, churches and private hands. Many thousands of microfilmed copies of these manuscripts are stored in NALE. In August 2004, the National Archives and Library received a four million-Birr (454,000 US-\$) grant from the Japanese Government, which was earmarked, among other purposes, for making copies of all valuable manuscripts remaining in monasteries, private hands or taken abroad²⁷.

By virtue of the 179/1999 Proclamation, the archives have been clearly separated from the library, despite the fact that they remain in the same building and share the same board of directors. It is therefore important to

²⁴ Part 5, item 25.3 of the 177/1999 Proclamation reads: "Any person who illegally takes out of the country archive books or documentary heritage shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment of three to ten years and with a fine from 4,000 to 20,000 Bərr."

²⁵ Ibid. part 2, item 8.

²⁶ www.nale.gov.et.

²⁷ www.nale.gov.et.

briefly sketch the main duties of the Library and its structure. The Library is divided into the following sections:

- Ethiopian Studies and Manuscript Division, housing Ethiopian incunabula (books published in Ethiopia before 1936), ancient maps, off-prints of journals on Ethiopia published in various languages by Ethiopians and foreigners. The manuscript section houses rare books, works of art, and a collection of documents written in languages used in Ethiopia, mainly in Gəʿəz. All the above-mentioned records are available to students and researchers (they are entitled to read and copy them) on producing a valid letter of recommendation;
- Reference, Documentation and Periodical Division, housing textbooks, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, periodicals, conference proceedings, fiction and Amharic literature. It serves mainly school-children, students and government employees. One can read and make copies of these materials here or ask for professional advice on the library research they conduct;
- Legal Deposit and Copyright Registration, which collects three copies of each book, periodical or any other printed publication as well as audio/video cassettes which come out in Ethiopia in any language. The Ethiopian National Bibliography is also compiled here. The section only serves researchers if the materials they need have not been found in other sections;
- Archive Repository and Research, housing archive records, photographs, charts, plans and maps. The section serves only researchers and scholars if the materials they need have not been found in other sections;
- Microfilm and Microfiche Library, housing microfilms and microfiches of old manuscripts. The section serves only researchers and scholars;
- Department of Acquisition and Union Catalogue, where the following databases are compiled²⁸:
 - National bibliographic database
 - Archive description list database
 - Microfilm Library database
 - Reference and Documentation database
 - Acquisition and Union Catalogue database
 - Library Catalogue database
 - *National Bibliography of Ethiopia*, listing all books and periodicals published in Ethiopia by any author and in any other language.

Another important task of NALE is working on cataloguing all the newly-acquired materials, which results in publishing among others:

²⁸ www.nale.gov.et.

- *Guidebook* – providing information on the available archive materials in NALE's possession²⁹
- *Calendar* – listing the selected archive materials compiled on the basis of the *Guidebook*.

During my visit to the Archives, I could use two such guidebooks, published in a mimeograph form. They are provided with a preface explaining the origin of the materials included in the publications. The archive materials which are listed in the *Guidebook* published in 2001, were brought to NALE from the private collection of blattengeta Märsē Hazān Wäldä Qirqos³⁰. Many original documents from his time have been preserved, e.g. proceedings of the demarcation commission, of which Märsē was a member on behalf of the Ethiopian government, which between 1924 and 1927, worked on changes to the border between British and French Somali. The second *Guidebook*, from 2003, lists the contents of Dr. Zäwdä Gäbrä Šällase's private collection³¹.

The archive records listed in the *Guidebooks* are available to all researchers. However, only ten pages of a given document can be copied regardless of its length; the principle aimed at protecting copyright. The Archive Repository and Research staff are currently considering compiling other lists of catalogued records, which will undoubtedly facilitate access to them.

In addition to the above-mentioned materials, the archive records also include chronicles, letters, historical documents and photographs concerning vital, both domestic and diplomatic, state issues, articles and research papers, correspondence, publications, maps and materials concerning law and the judiciary. The collection comprises materials in Amharic, Gəʿəz, English, Italian, French and Arabic. Here, one may find historically important emperors' letters, e.g. the letter of Emperor Tewodros II (1855–1868) to Queen Victoria, explaining misunderstandings between them; the letter of Emperor Yohannəs IV (1872–1889) to Queen Victoria, informing her of the threat posed by Ismail Pasha to Ethiopia's territorial integrity; the letter of Emperor Mənilək II (1889–1913) to Nicolas II of Russia, informing him of Ethiopia's victory over Italian forces at Adwa in 1896 and calling for the strengthening of relations between Ethiopia and Russia³².

²⁹ www.nale.gov.et.

³⁰ According to the *Guidebook's* preface, the blattengeta as a young man used to translate and rewrite church manuscripts himself. Märsē used to write books on history and literature, as well as translate and collect other materials of historical importance. He was also an advisor to Hāylä Šällase I and held numerous ministerial posts in his government.

³¹ A descendant of Emperor Yohannəs IV, a politician and diplomat in Hāylä Šällase I's government, and a foreign minister in Mikael Əmru's government in 1974.

³² www.nale.gov.et.

During my stay in Ethiopia in 2004, I had the opportunity of talking to NALE staff about methods of acquiring and preserving valuable archive records. Asked about the place from which the historical documents were acquired for the Archives, NALE staff claim that one such place cannot be singled out. They have been, and still can be found in private collections, the homes of high-ranking government officials, numerous institutions, ministries and government buildings.

One of NALE's duties is to preserve valuable archive materials exposed to dangers resulting from political unrest and the consequences of the 1974 Revolution. The Archive Repository and Research section has been obliged to sort out and move all the documents currently stored in Prime Minister Mäläs Zänawi's office, and collected there since the reign of Emperor Mənilək, that is the 1890s, to the new building of the Archives. Over the years, the documents were collected there by successive rulers of the country: Ləğ Iyasu (1913–1916), Empress Zäwditu (1916–1930), Emperor Həylä Şəllase I (1930–1974), Mängəstu Həylä Maryam (1977–1991) and finally Prime Minister Mäläs Zänawi (1991–). Employees of the Ethiopian National Archives were provided with the necessary knowledge on how to work with archive records from archivists of the French National Archives during a training course organised in 2004.

On November 1, 2004, NALE, in cooperation with the World Bank, opened its Development Information Services Centre, whose responsibilities include: providing Internet access not only for students, researchers and other interested individuals but also for the disabled; providing information on the activity and mission of the World Bank as well as spreading up-to-date information on HIV/AIDS prevention.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize that, starting with Həylä Şəllase I, all 20th century Ethiopia's successive rulers were well aware of the necessity of gathering and protecting Ethiopian national heritage and have attached great importance to the development of a European-style central repository of all written materials. Owing to their determination in establishing the documentation center as well as assistance of foreign experts and donors, in particular that of UNESCO, it was possible to organize the National Archives and Library of Ethiopia and later bring it to the European standards.

This care allowed gathering and making available to interested individuals numerous manuscripts and icons or copies of especially precious original works. Those responsible for the project succeeded in bringing back to Ethiopia a number of priceless historic items of Ethiopian writing which had been scattered all over the world in the turmoil of time. Unfortunately, the amount of archive material is still rather limited, and the pace of work on making more records available is extremely slowly.

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Summary

Ethiopia is a country of a centuries-old tradition and history of writing. It possessed its own unique system for gathering materials of historical importance and a peculiar library system. Throughout the years manuscripts were kept under the custody of Ethiopian Church monks. In the 20th century Ethiopia's successive rulers attached great importance to the building of a European style central repository of all written materials. They established and gradually developed the National Archives and Library of Ethiopia (NALE). The paper outlines the history of NALE from its beginnings up to now.