

Manuscript cataloguing in a comparative perspective:  
state of the art, common challenges, future directions  
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## Cataloguing Ethiopic manuscripts: update and overview on ongoing work

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### 1. Introduction: and two basic questions

The starting point of this conference is the awareness that the study of the materiality of manuscripts has increasingly acquired importance during the last decades, that it is having a deep impact on the understanding of the contents of manuscripts, and that it has shaped (or should shape) accordingly their scientific description and cataloguing practices. The declaration of the concept text stresses in fact strongly that

the presentation of data in standard manuscript catalogues often does not allow to understand correctly the structure of the objects in relation to their contents, and sometimes even leads to the suspicion that their physical and historical complexity had escaped the attention of the cataloguers themselves.

There is one more point that I feel the need to mention and that I would like to suggest to the general discussion, hoping that it will find the space and attention it deserves: and this is the factor of the *textual complexity* in cataloguing. This point is apparently less present and only marginally relevant in the traditions of classical Greek and Latin texts, but it is already crucial when coming to the related codex manuscript cultures, for example those of the Christian Orient, where an established canonization of texts is not easily viable and many obscurities still remain. Particularly for the early Christian phase, but for other periods as well, these traditions can contribute considerably to new perspectives. Yet, conversely, in these still less known manuscript cultures, the canonization of texts has been frequently determined on the base of the evidence from other cultures and linguistic domains, that have exerted their influence and at times imposed their own categorizations. This has its good reasons: for example, it is always very helpful and even necessary to highlight a relationship of *translation* to model (*Vorlage*) for a certain text and it would be a great mistake to ignore it, even at the level of cataloguing. To consider every text or content in itself as an *unicum* in absolute terms or the single, unique product of a copyist, would bring about an atomisation of the evidence that would not help understand much, because it would not correspond to the perception and view of the manuscript culture itself. Yet, this scholarly process of attribution brings about also distortions and simplifications, and prevents important conclusions.

Another topic that would deserve some consideration is the social environment where we imagine that the profile of our ideal cataloguer would work: as from the concept note of this conference,

contemporary manuscript cataloguers ought to have not only a good training in the fields of palaeography and codicology and a solid knowledge of text histories, but also a growing familiarity with IT languages and architectures.

One can repeat here that competence and acquaintance with ‘text histories’ is quite different in the different manuscript cultures, in terms of complexity, but also in terms of available resources and shared knowledge. But one should also discuss, in light of evolving rules applied to the job market and affecting the career of the researchers, how realistic and sustainable this expectation is, where and how. Or should we discuss perhaps even more basic points, concerning the transmission of knowledge more in general, particularly in the case of the ‘kleine Fächer’, and fields dramatically underrepresented at academic level?

## 2. Ethiopic manuscripts cataloguing: the last decade

I come back more precisely to the task assigned and I will try to sketch simply the state of the art of reflection on cataloguing, and summarily the state of cataloguing, of Ethiopic manuscripts. Denis Nosnitsin will follow with more focused observations on some precise cases, also drawn from his own direct experience. We both formally represent the long-term project Beta Maṣāḥəft (i.e. ‘Library’ in Ethiopic): Manuscripts of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Among the tasks of this project there is also a substantial part of cataloguing, and meta-cataloguing, one could say. The same project will be also represented later in this conference by Pietro Liuzzo.

There are at least two small overview contributions dedicated to the cataloguing of Ethiopic manuscripts: one is by myself from 2007 and the second one is by Witold Witakowski from 2015 (Bausi 2007; Witakowski 2015). Both are somehow related to the COMSt experience, in the sense that the first one was for me the very first occasion of reflecting on cataloguing Ethiopic manuscripts within a comparative environment, which strongly stimulated the initiative that was later carried out in the COMSt programme; and the second one by Witakowski was included in the COMSt manual. In fact, to be honest, I had already done something similar for the Christian Arabic tradition, that has not remained a field of mine, although I wrote years ago a few papers on Christian Arabic New Testament Apocrypha (*Apocalypse of Paul* and *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*) and canon law collections: I happened to publish a modest note in 1993, that was inspired by a book of a great Italian palaeographer, Armando Petrucci, for the AELAC *Bulletin* of 1993, where cataloguing practices of Christian manuscript traditions were extensively dealt with (Bausi 1993).

My contribution of 2007 was presented in a conference held the same year—which demonstrates that even for conference proceedings it is possible to overcome Horace’s *nonumque prematur in annum* (*Ars poetica*, 388). The conference, that was organized by Caterina Tristano and embraced a large number of traditions of the *codex* area, vividly debated questions of integration of electronic information system. Not few of the papers titles could well feature in today’s conference.

Like Witakowski in his later contribution, I focused in mine on a few exemplary cases—the immense contribution of the classic catalogues of the nineteenth century and their textual focus, the high standard of the recent VOHD series, the broad contribution of the EMML catalogues, and the few catalogues, for example that by Eugène Tisserant and Sylvain Grébaut for the Vatican Library, Oscar Löfgren for the Uppsala collection and Paolo Marrassini for the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana and a few others, where codicological data were presented for the first time in detail (Grébaut and Tisserant 1935, 1936; Löfgren 1974; Hammerschmidt 1973, 1977; Hammerschmidt and Six 1983; Six 1989, 1994, 1999; Macomber 1975, 1976, 1978; Getatchew Haile and Macomber 1979; Getatchew Haile 1981; Getatchew Haile and Macomber 1982, 1983; Getatchew Haile 1985, 1987, 1993; Marrassini 1986, 1987). I also noted the emergence of an increasing attention to the materiality of the description, in catalogues like the small one that was the ancestor of the series of the EMIP (Ethiopic Manuscript Imaging Project), published in 2007 (Delamarter and Demeke Berhane 2007). These catalogues, continuously improved in the course of time, are specifically oriented towards the investigation of scribal practices (see Delamarter and Melaku Terefe 2009; Getatchew Haile et al. 2009; Melaku Terefe et al. 2011; Six et al. 2011). A bit critically I noted that the very first attempt of the series seemed to be a *describere sine interpretatione*, paraphrasing the well-known methodological indication by Karl Lachmann, so often criticized in turn, i.e. *recensere [...] sine interpretatione et possumus et debemus* (see Timpanaro 1981, 47–48 for all details). Like the philologist in the phase of the *recensio* has to suspend any judgment on the intrinsic value and meaning of the single readings and try instead to establish the general relationship of the witnesses, so in the phase of the description, only the materiality shapes the description, largely disregarding any aspect of textuality.

Intentionally refraining from any consideration on problems of census, safeguard, recovery, I proposed a series of objectives where, ideally, aspects of materiality should not be considered to the disadvantage of the textual ones, and where the history of studies held its strong place.

In detail:

(1) give more space to the material data identified as meaningful by the comparison with other areas—or even by intrinsic reasons—in ways that do not in any case detract from the legibility and clarity of the cataloguing enterprise;

(2) identify the texts with reference to the essential repertoires of biblical, apocryphal, hagiographic, patristic literature, in particular Christian Arabic, with inclusion of the whole specific bibliography related to the Ethiopic texts, or systematic cross-references, when possible, to further repertoires, such as the new *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*;

(3) transport the existing printed catalogues online and make new ones (on-line or even in print) as far as human and financial resources will allow: on condition that it is guaranteed—immediately or in a non-indefinite future—an adequate space for textual data, which for the study of a largely unpublished, or not critically edited, literary heritage such as the Ethiopian one, have a specific importance objectively greater than for other domains;

(4) create an online—or even printed—‘catalogue of catalogues’ or a simple ‘MSS repertory’ of reported and newly reported manuscripts, according to appropriate standards and methods of collaboration;

(5) to produce a bibliographic repertory related to each Ethiopian manuscript preserved in the historical European funds, on which the history of the studies from the beginning to today has been made, comparable to the BIBMAN project underway for the manuscripts preserved in Italy.

But we must be honest and acknowledge that at that point—I am still talking of the 2007 conference—there was a major issue that had not yet been considered and this is the concept of the *complexity of manuscripts*, and in one way or the other, the concept of the *codicological unit* and its effects on cataloguing: these issues were at the time starting to be appreciated in all their implications for the cataloguing descriptions, but at least in the marginal codex area traditions their effect was not yet perceived. I will not elaborate on this central point, because this will be resumed in detail by Pietro Liuzzo, also for what concerns the Beta Maṣḥəft project, with an original proposal of his own.

### 3. Ethiopic manuscripts cataloguing: the last decade

This last point was however already central in an enterprise I have already mentioned, that has been fundamental for me and certainly for other people, in and outside Hamburg, not least because it has produced a coherent result and a comprehensive tool that allows to embrace in a comparative perspective features of the book cultures of the codex area, and this is the COMSt programme (2009–2014), resulted in the publication of the COMSt manual in January 2015. This experience still lasts as a network under the generous and broader umbrella of the CSMC.

Since its inception in 2009, cataloguing was a central issue in COMSt. There were four international meetings held on cataloguing, in Uppsala (22–23 September 2010), Frankfurt (14 June 2011), Copenhagen (7–8 June 2012), and Athens (6–7 June 2013), with a total of 90 participants (9, 32, 32, and 17 respectively). Topics debated were ‘Cataloguing Projects of Oriental Manuscripts: Evolution of Descriptive Criteria’; ‘Towards an Ideal Handbook Chapter on Manuscript Cataloguing’; ‘The electronic revolution? The impact of the digital on cataloguing’; ‘Towards a final version of the chapter on cataloguing. Palaeographic descriptions’. Initially coordinated by Witold Witakowski, the team for Cataloguing was eventually led by Paola Buzi who finalised the relative chapter, acknowledging important inputs from Patrick Andrist and Marilena Maniaci.

In the end, the COMSt chapter on Cataloguing, with the contributions authored by Andrist, is still a good synthesis on cataloguing manuscripts with an eye at the questions of stratigraphy and syntactical description.

### 4. Ethiopic manuscripts cataloguing: the last decade

In order to share our knowledge on the current state of cataloguing, I have prepared a handout with some basic data on printed contributions concerning the description of Ethiopic manuscripts. This does not include digitised manuscripts provided with minimal metadata (which would imply considering the Endangered Archives Programme etc.), but only precisely closed, structured and comprehensive

descriptions intended for publication. I have also not provided here the link to the HMML and Beta Maṣāḥəft websites.

As appears, the last fifteen years have marked a real explosion in the study of the Ethiopian manuscripts, including aspects of cataloguing. The two basic reasons for this development are the extremely high number of still little known or completely undocumented manuscripts, particularly in Ethiopia, but in many collections in Europe and the USA as well, and the peculiarity of Ethiopian manuscript tradition being a still living tradition, the study of which has also profited from ethnographic observation.

Also note that besides what was published, the number of unpublished formalized descriptions of smaller private collections, consisting at times of one manuscript only, is really huge. The diaspora of Ethiopic manuscripts in Europe, particularly in Italy for obvious reasons, and in the USA as well, is still far from having been assessed.

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# Bibliographical Notes: Catalogues, cataloguing, and systematic descriptions of Ethiopic manuscripts from the last years

## **Repertories and general contributions on cataloguing Ethiopic manuscripts**

Beylot and Rodinson 1995; Bausi 2007; Witakowski 2015; Wion et al. 2018.

## **Studies on Ethiopian manuscripts in general**

Bausi 2004; 'Manuscripts', *EAe*, III (2007), 738a-744a (S. Uhlig and A. Bausi); 'Manuscripts: Preparation of manuscripts', *EAe*, III (2007), 749a-752a (E. Balicka-Witakowska); Bausi 2008, 2011; Getatchew Haile 2011; Nosnitsin 2012; Bausi 2014; Bosc-Tiessé 2014; Brita 2014; Bausi 2015; Balicka-Witakowska et al. 2015; Bausi and Nosnitsin 2015; Nosnitsin 2015a, 2016; Bausi 2016a; Delamarter 2017; Delamarter et al. 2017; Platonov 2017. – Ethnographic surveys: Mellors and Parsons 2002a, 2002b, 2003; Wion 2010; Krzyżanowska 2015; Winslow 2015; Gidena Mesfin 2016.

## **Scientific analyses of Ethiopian manuscripts**

Wion 2004; Richardin et al. 2006; Phillipson 2009; Liszewska 2012; Aldón 2013; Phillipson 2013; Nosnitsin et al. 2014; Nosnitsin and Rabin 2014; Otto 2014; Tomaszewski et al. 2015; Tomaszewski and Gervers 2015.

## **Philological practices**

Bausi 2016b (with further references).

## **Catalogues mentioned in the presentation**

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## **Monographic catalogues (reviews are provided only for the more recent catalogues)**

### **VOHD catalogues and supplements:**

985 MSS (plus supplements): Hammerschmidt and Jäger 1968; Hammerschmidt 1973, 1977; Hammerschmidt and Six 1983; Six 1989, 1994, 1999. For supplements: (39 MSS from Zürich plus 21 MSS from German libraries) Six 1996, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2007a, 2009.

### **EMML (Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library)**

5000 MSS: Macomber 1975, 1976, 1978; Getatchew Haile and Macomber 1979; Getatchew Haile 1981; Getatchew Haile and Macomber 1982, 1983; Getatchew Haile 1985, 1987, 1993; Stewart 2017.

### **Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana**

328 MSS: Fondo Cerulli etiopico: Raineri 2004.

290 MSS: Fondo Comboni: Raineri 2000 (rev. Veronika Six, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 59/1-2 (2002), 190–191; Manfred Kropp: *Oriens Christianus*, 86 (2002), 272–273).

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23 MSS: Oxford, Bodleian Library; Cambridge, University Library; Manchester, John Rylands Library: Delamarter and Demeke Berhane 2007 (rev. Paolo Marrassini, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 67/5-6 (2010), 622–623).

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484 MSS: Delamarter and Melaku Terefe 2009; Getatchew Haile et al. 2009 (rev. Paolo Marrassini, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 67/5-6 (2010), 622–623; Alessandro Bausi, *Aethiopica*, 13 (2010), 236–241; Michael A. Knibb, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 57/1 (2012), 185–186); Melaku Terefe et al. 2011; Six et al. 2011.

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on 1 MS (Ma IX 31): Six 2010.

**Veroli (Frosinone), Biblioteca Giovardiana**

12 MSS: Brita et al. 2017.

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**Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek**

30 MSS: Nosnitsin 2018 (rev. Alessandro Bausi, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, 113 (2018), in print).

**Regularly updated list of online-accessible digitized manuscripts**

Erho 2017a.

**Smaller collections, or single or selected manuscripts**

**'Addigrat, Tegrāy, Ethiopia, Seminario Maggiore**

66 MSS: Zarzecny 2014.

**Bern, Biblioteca Bongarsiana**

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MS B.A.R. Ms. Orientale 334: Frantsouzoff 2014.

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1 MS: Papahagi and Burtea 2012.

**Chiari (Brescia), Fondazione Biblioteca Morcelli – Pinacoteca Repossi**

1 MS: Bausi 2017a.

**Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana:**

MS Vaticano etiopico 264: Bausi 2012.

**'Eindā 'Abbā Garimā, Tegrāy, Ethiopia**

'Abbā Garimā Gospels: McKenzie et al. 2016 (rev. Alessandro Bausi, *Aethiopica*, 20 (2017), 289–292; Gianfrancesco Lusini, *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, ser. 3, 1 (48) (2017), 208–213).

**Genova, Castello D'Albertis, Museo delle Culture del Mondo, Giuseppe Sapeto fund**

13 MSS: Brita et al. 2017.

**Grottaferrata, Badia greca**

14 MSS: Proverbio 2000.

**Gunda Gundē, Tegrāy, Ethiopia**

Old Testament MSS: Erho 2017b. On Old Testament MSS see also Erho 2013 (27 MSS); Erho and Stuckenbruck 2013. For MSS of the Sheper of Ermas see also Erho 2012, 2015.

**London, British Library (Former India Office)**

MS India Office, Etiopic 4: Valieva 2017.

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(32 MSS, i.e. 24 codices and 8 scrolls, of which 2 described: APCL 191 E 001 and 004): Mazzei 2015.

**Milano, Biblioteca Francescana**

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**Napoli, Università degli Studi di Napoli “L'Orientale”, Biblioteca del Dipartimento Asia, Africa e Mediterraneo**

3 MSS: Lusini 2006.

**Oxford, Bodleian Library**

MS Bruce 93: Wion 2009.

**Oslo, Kulturhistorisk Museum (ethnographic museum of the University of Oslo)**

10 MSS: Erho 2017c.

**Pistoia, Biblioteca Forteguerriana**

5 MSS: Lusini 2002, 2015b; Mazzei 2017.

**Roma, Biblioteca Casanatense**

on 2 MSS: Zarzecny 2015.

**Roma, Biblioteca dell'Accademia nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiana**

MS Cerulli etiopico 165: Dege 2015.

**Siracusa:**

2 MSS: Lentini (Siracusa), Parrocchia di Sant'Alfio e Santa Maria La Cava, Biblioteca 'Don Sebastiano Castro', ms. inv. 3373, and Siracusa, Biblioteca Alagoniana: Lusini 2007.

**Sofia, National Museum of History**

1 MS: Bausi 2017b.

**St Antony Monastery, Egypt**

1 paper fragment: Maximous el-Antony et al. 2016.

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