

What is the Place of Paratextual Information in a Catalogue?

The Social Lives of the Ethiopian Psalter Project

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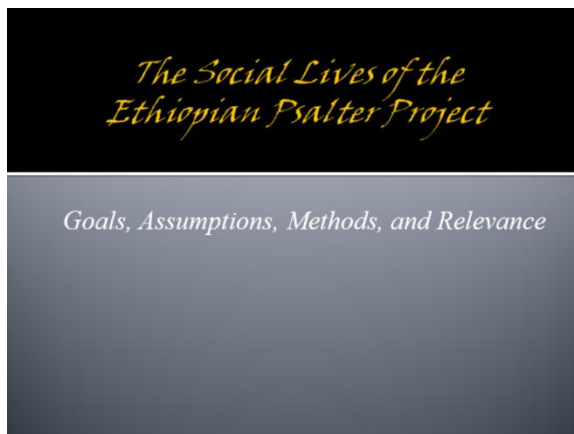


Introduction



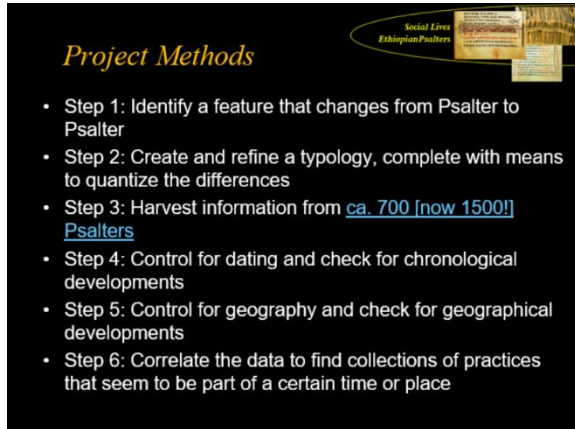
Among amateur astronomers, there is a saying about the moon: “Looked over, then overlooked.” It describes the intense fascination that beginners have with viewing the moon. However, this fascination soon wears off, when the viewer has seen the moon up close several times and comes to believe there is nothing more to see.

Perhaps one can say the same thing about the Ethiopian Psalter, which is the quintessential book of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Virtually every scribe copied one. Most people in the culture aspired to own one. Everyone memorized and chanted as much of it as they could. But after you have seen one, or ten, or twenty, is there anything else to see?



I'd like to report on a project I am running. It is entitled: The Social Lives of the Ethiopian Psalter. Its goal is to identify and explore aspects of Ethiopian Orthodox book culture as preserved and reflected in Ethiopian Psalters. Two assumptions guide the project. First, we embrace the primary thesis of the so-called New Philology: Every manuscript is, first and foremost, an artifact with many stories to tell beyond that of the texts they carry; if we learn to “read” the paratextual information in books, we can begin to

identify various social niches and practices that left their mark on the codex. Second, we embrace the primary thesis of Quantitative Codicology: the features of any one manuscript can only be fully appreciated when set against the backdrop of a huge number of other manuscripts, whose combined information provides an ever-increasing understanding of the totality of the book culture that produced the extant manuscripts—especially in their chronological and geographic developments.



Project Methods

- Step 1: Identify a feature that changes from Psalter to Psalter
- Step 2: Create and refine a typology, complete with means to quantize the differences
- Step 3: Harvest information from [ca. 700 \[now 1500!\] Psalters](#)
- Step 4: Control for dating and check for chronological developments
- Step 5: Control for geography and check for geographical developments
- Step 6: Correlate the data to find collections of practices that seem to be part of a certain time or place

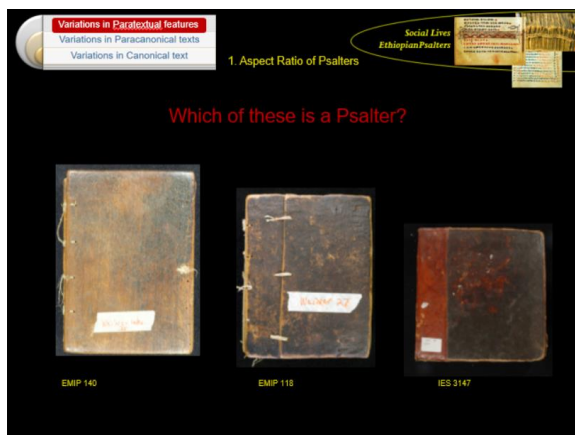
Broadly speaking, we execute the methods of the project in six steps (see text on slide).

For the purposes of this conference we want to consider these questions: What are the potential benefits to scholarship if we pursue a more detailed program to identify and interpret the lesser texts and the paratextual aspects of the Psalters? In what ways should the results of investigations in quantitative codicology shape our future agenda for cataloguing? What are the practical limits to this agenda? How do we prioritize what should be done?

Types of Variation in the Paratextual Elements of Psalters

We have identified one hundred nineteen¹ categories of what we call “loci of variation.” These are some aspect of the Psalter, whether textual or paratextual, in which there is some degree of variation. These categories cover such paratextual features as the preparation of boards as covers, the aspect ratio of the book, the layouts of the textblock, the practices around the use of protection sheets (sometimes called fore guard and rear guard), rubrication of text, strophe calculations, marking of the midpoint, arrangement of the book for programs of reading, the use of spine straps, etc. The categories also cover what we call secondary texts (superscriptions, titles, standard prayers, and notices, etc.) as well as what we call tertiary texts like *asmāt* prayers and personal records written in the end pages of the book.

Aspect Ratio of Psalters. For each locus of variation, we must first create a typology. In the case



Variations in Paratextual features
Variations in Paracanonical texts
Variations in Canonical text

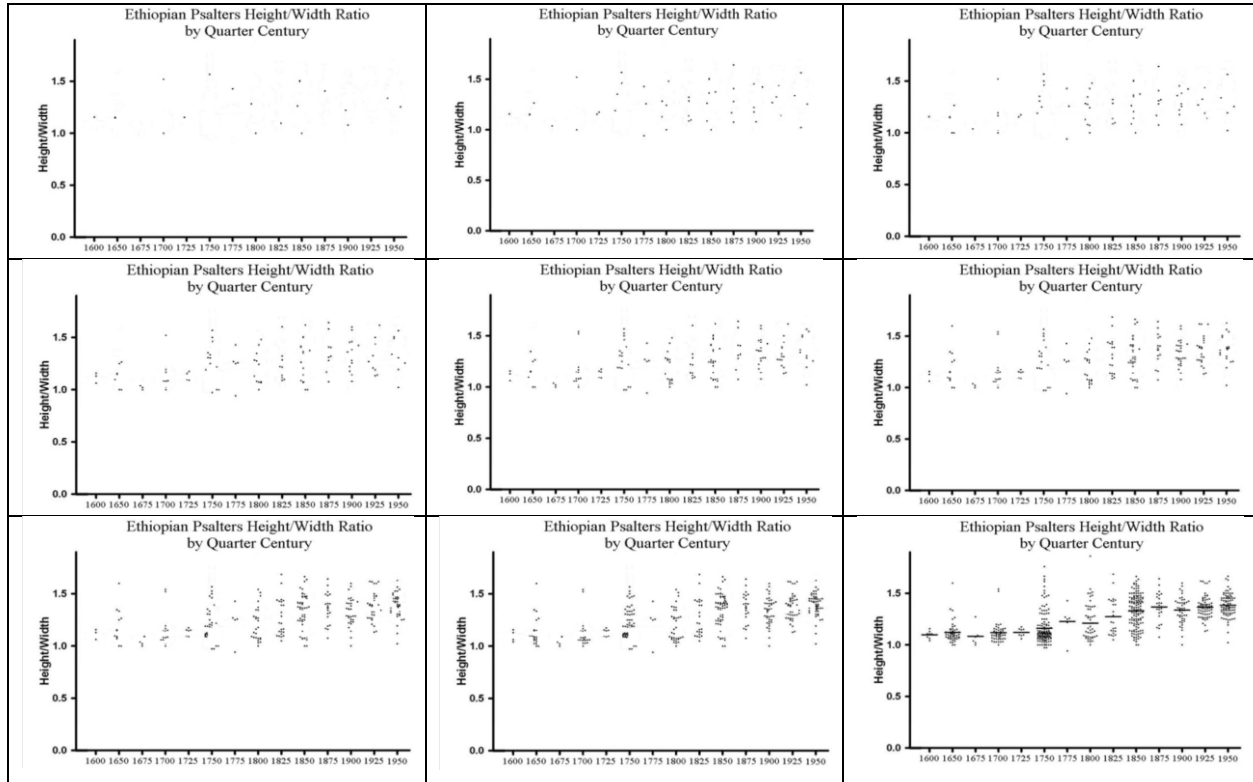
1 Aspect Ratio of Psalters

Which of these is a Psalter?

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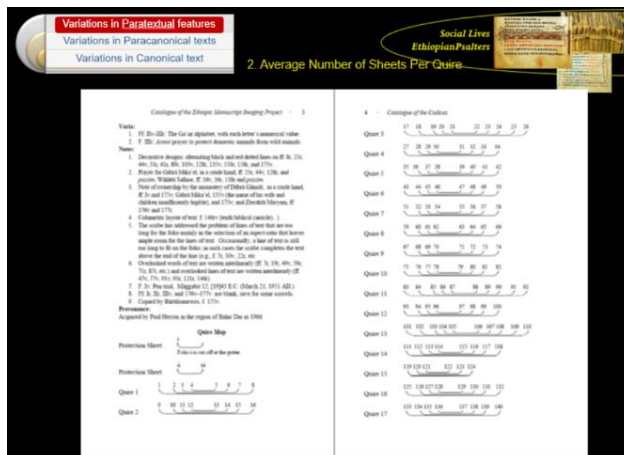
of the aspect ratio of an Ethiopian Psalter, the typology is straight-forward: we simply take three measurements. But after having done so, we notice that, over time, the Psalters are not uniform in their dimensions. Sometimes they are squarelike (an aspect ratio of 1 to 1). Others were taller, with aspect ratios more like 1 to 1.5. Are there patterns and trends? The answers to these questions do not become obvious, or even detectable, with a sample of only eighteen Psalters. In the end, it required a sample of 1,080 Psalters and a little bit of data processing (simply marking the median of each quarter-century sample) to see the trends.

¹ We fully expect that both we and others will find additional loci of variation. The work is only just begun.

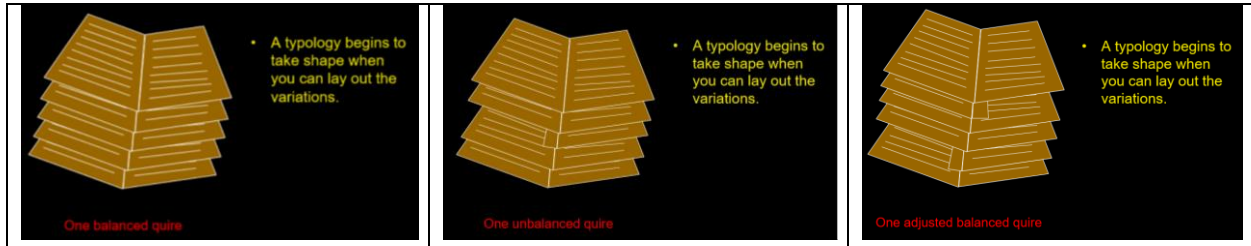


Once we see the data, we can begin to spot epochs, stages indicating quite different things. We can begin to formulate questions like the following: How do we interpret the three stages suggested by the data? Two are more-or-less equilibrated systems; one speaks of change. What caused the change? How might we exploit this information for dating purposes?

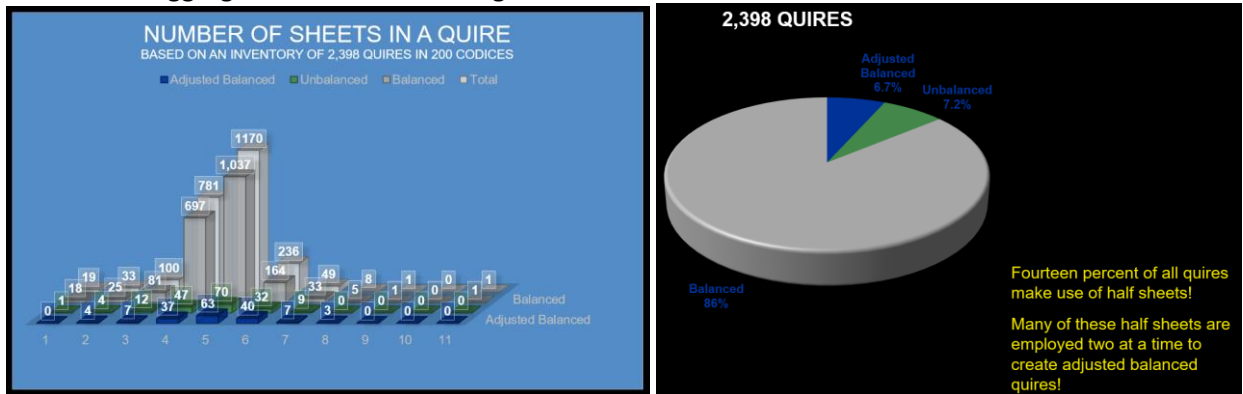
Variation in Sheets in a Quire. Similarly, we can identify variations within the construction of quires or gatherings and we can begin to quantify those differences in various ways.



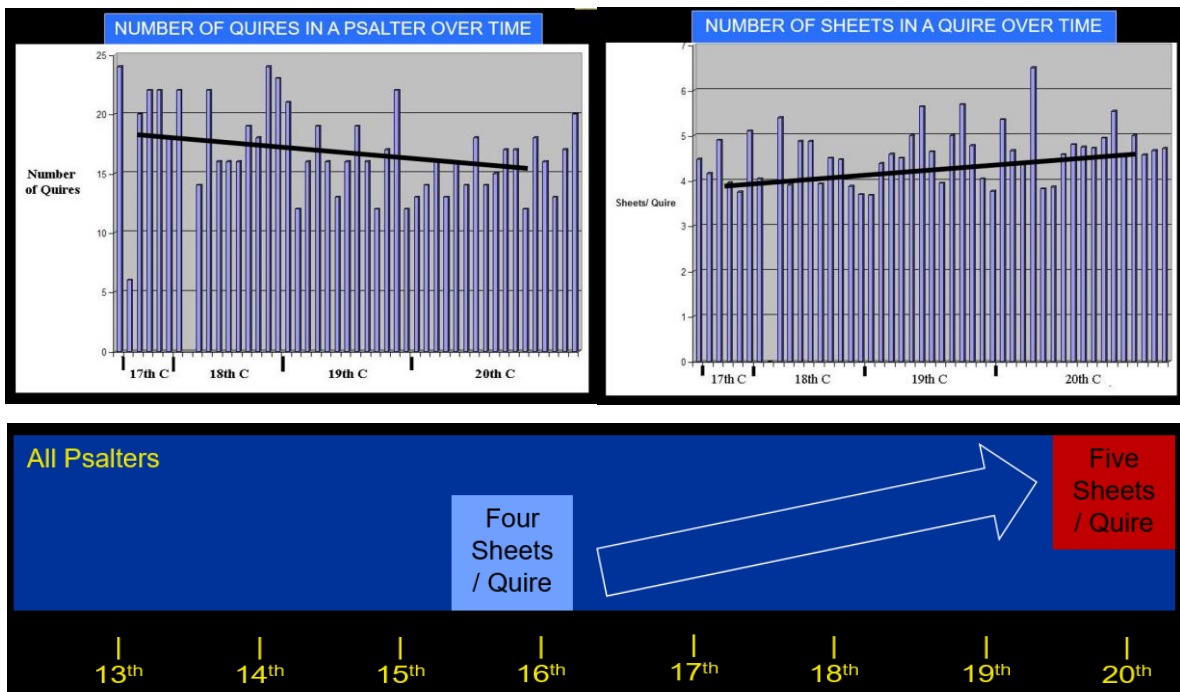
We began the process by mapping out every quire in about 300 codices. We identified typologies not only related to the number of sheets, but also related to the use of half sheets in quire construction: a) balanced quires with no half sheets; b) unbalanced quires with the use of one half sheet; and c) adjusted balanced quires with the use of two half sheets (one before the fold of the quire, one after the fold of the quire). The data from the individual books were then aggregated



From the data it was a straight-forward process to identify a typology—the various ways in which quires were constructed, with and without half sheets. And, with the typology one can re-apply it to the dataset and aggregate the numbers into grand summaries of various sorts:



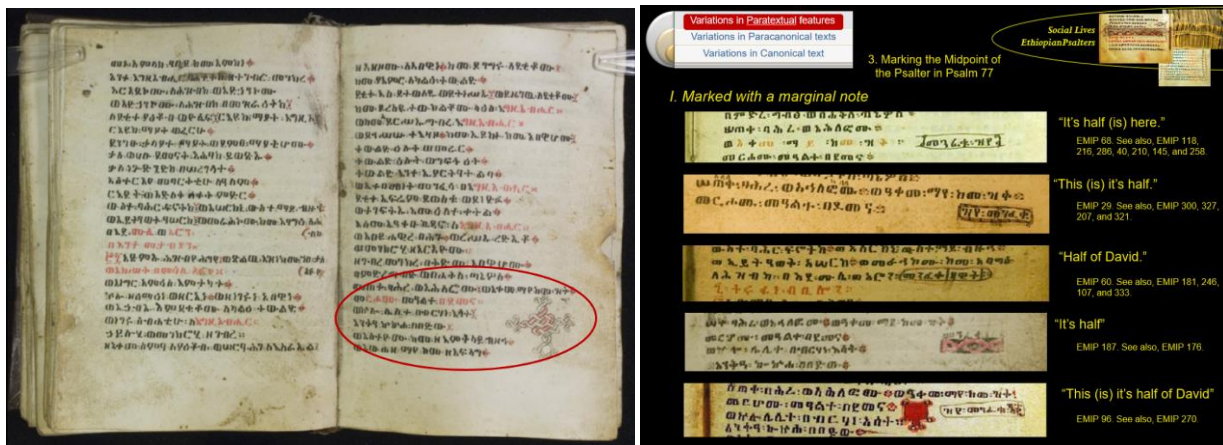
Since we have assigned each Psalter a date, based on paleography or some other factor, we can go on to state these summaries not just in terms of the composite statistics, but in terms of chronological developments:



With composite statistics and chronological developments available to us, we are now in a position to pose an entirely new set of research questions, as well as to reflect on our methodology:

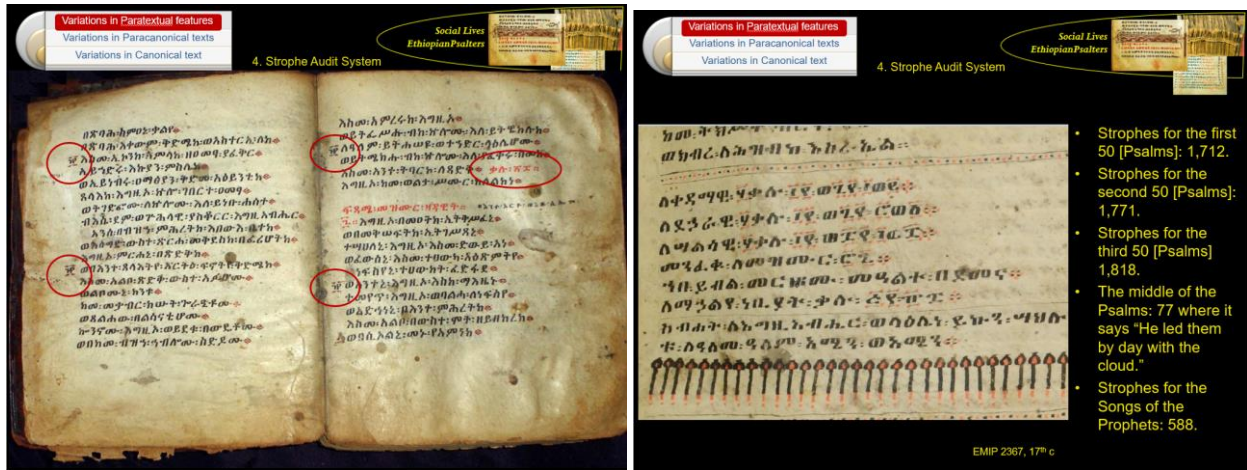
- What would it mean if we could detect a long-term movement from less sheets to more sheets per quire? What would it suggest about standard workflows, impacts on the economic network of craftspeople producing and consuming parchment, etc.? How would we set about looking for the answer to why such developments were taking place?
- We will never think to ask these questions if we have no idea something is going on.
- We will never know that something is going on unless we gather the data that moves us beyond seeing the particularities of individual manuscripts in the context of a typology to the developments being played out on a huge scale across space and time (geography and chronology) in the book culture.

Variation in Marking the midpoint of the Psalter in Psalm 77. Just under half of all Ethiopian Psalters mark the middle strophe of the Psalms at chapter 77 with the line, “And he led them by day with a cloud.”



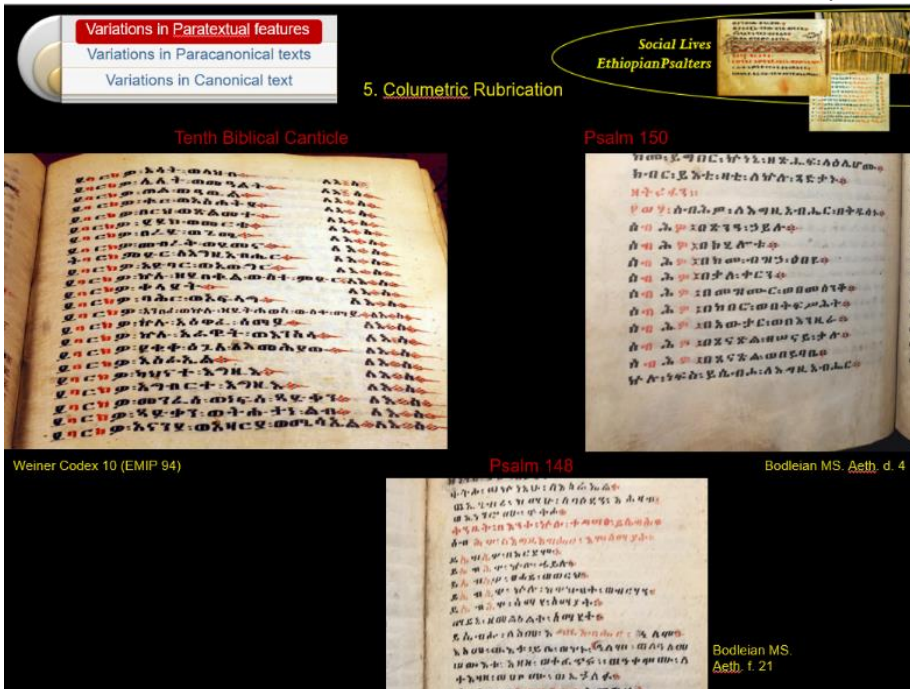
It turns out that there is quite a bit of variation in the manner in which the midpoint can be marked, including with rubrication of letters, indentations, harags and crosses in the margin, solid or dotted lines, or even with a small line of text that says something like, “this is its half,” or “half of Dawit.” Again, though, there are general chronological patterns as well as composite statistics in the specific manner of marking.

Strophe Counting in the Psalter. Before the 17th century it was customary to audit the strophes in Psalters. The system had three main elements: 1) Numbers or text in the left margin indicating groups of strophes, usually 9, or 10, or 12, or sometimes marked with the word “here”; 2) chapter summaries, near the end of each Psalm in the right margins; and 3) a final audit of the entire book enumerating the number of strophes in each group of fifty Psalms. This final audit is often found at the end of the Song of Songs, but could be in other locations, or even at the end of each group of fifty Psalms.



But after the sixteenth century this practice becomes very rare, i.e., less than 1% of the Psalters contain the full system with all three elements. However, the first of these elements (numbers or texts in the left margin indicating groups of strophes) persists well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even though the summaries disappear.

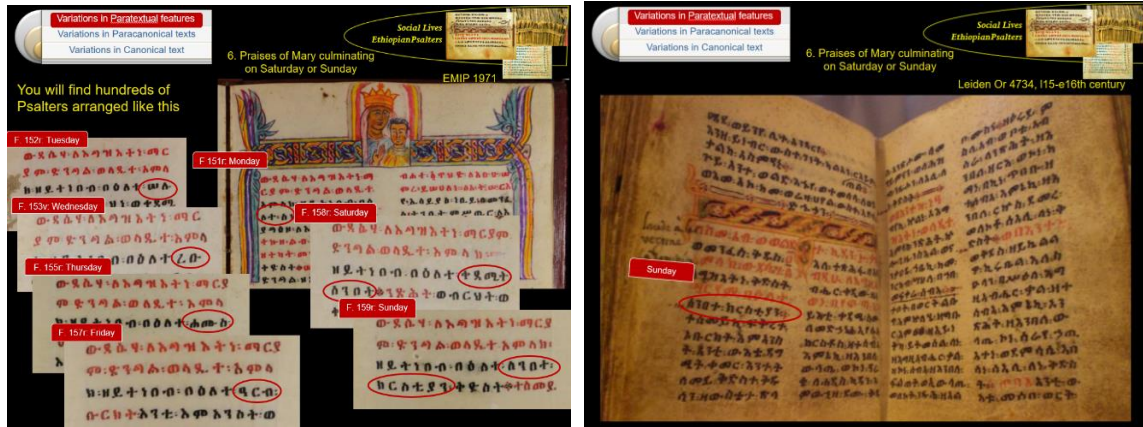
Columetric Rubrication in certain Texts. From the seventeenth century onward, a practice spread among scribes where they



scribes where they rubricated certain letters or words in subsequent lines in such a way that the rubricated letters formed a column. This practice was common in some locations more than others. From most frequent to least frequent we have: the tenth biblical canticle, Psalm 150, Psalm 148, Psalm 28, Psalm 145. A few very extraordinary manuscripts from earlier times show this practice, but it is only later that the practice seems to catch on in great

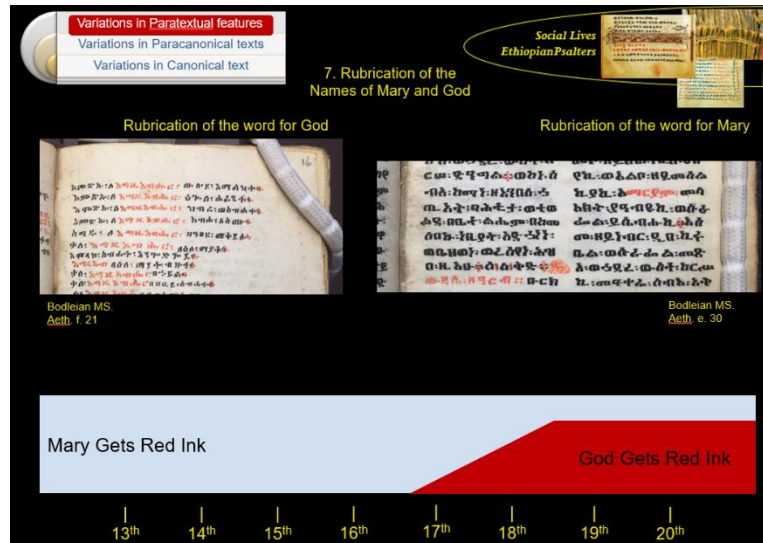
numbers. We are left to wonder: What is the engine that drove this practice? Where did it come from? Why did it arise when it did, seemingly out of nothing?

The Arrangement of the Praises of Mary. The praises of Mary are seven in number and scribes arranged them according to the days of the week. However, in Psalters before the sixteenth century, the first of the days is Sunday and the Praises culminate on Saturday. After the sixteenth century, the first of the days is Monday and the Praises culminate on Sunday.



The transition from the one system to the other is abrupt and when it takes place, it is virtually complete, with very few exceptions either way. Once again, we are left to wonder: What can account for the relatively sudden and total shift in practice around this arrangement? How might these phenomena align with or express known historical controversies around Sabbath observance?

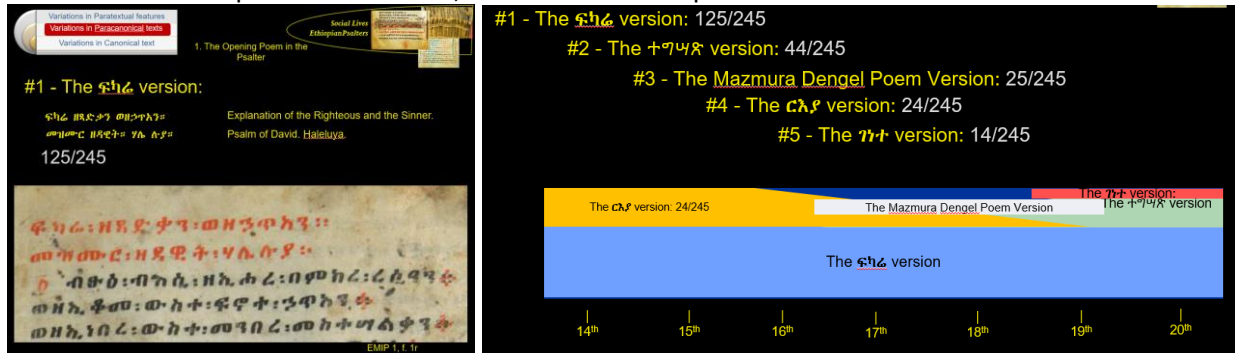
Rubrication of the Names of Mary and God. Virtually all Psalters from all centuries contain works devoted to Mary. When scribes copy Mary’s name, the tradition is uniform in rubricating it. Surprisingly, the practice with regard to the name of God is quite different. Before the seventeenth century, scribes never rubricate the name of God in the text of the Psalms. But starting in the seventeenth century, and growing in frequency in the subsequent centuries, the name of God is rubricated more and more. Interestingly, when we track the geographic regions where the Psalters were made, we discover that it is only scribes in the North of the country that rubricate the word for God; in the south, around Ankobarr—a region for which we have many extant Psalters—the word for God remains unrubricated. We can pose the questions: What was the meaning of the system prior to the seventeenth century? What is the meaning of the system after the seventeenth century? What happened in the seventeenth century to change the practice? How does this align with or express known historical controversies around veneration of Mary? Why do the Psalters in the south fail to rubricate the name of God? The Psalters do not provide the answers for these questions, but the data does invite attempts at explanation.



Types of Variation in the Paracanonical Texts of Psalters

To this point, our attention we have focused on paratextual features in Ethiopian Psalters. Our loci of variation include a number of what we will call “secondary texts,” prayers, poems, and superscriptions which can vary to a surprising degree.

The Opening Poem in the Psalter. Before the text of Psalm 1 begins, there are anywhere from one to five or more lines containing various opening prayers or poems or titles. We have documented five major variations. In a sample of 245 Psalters, we could trace frequencies and trends over time.



The Psalter of the Virgin. In the late sixteenth century a form of the Psalter appeared, called the Psalter of the Virgin. After each Psalm there is a five-line rhyming hymn whose first line is the same as that of the Psalm, but the remaining four lines focus on the Blessed Mother, mentioning her by name in red ink. They also recast themes from the Psalm to glorify Mary. We do not find them before the mid-sixteenth century and it is thus tempting to connect the rise of this work with the veneration of Mary which was greatly amplified during the time of Emperor Zar’a Ya`qob (1399–1468). Eventually, the Psalter of the Virgin will comprise up to 15 percent of the Psalters produced in the centuries after the seventeenth.

The Spiritual Meaning of the Hebrew Letters in Psalm 118 (119). Psalm 119 in the Hebrew Bible is an elaborate system of acrostic poems in which several strophes all begin with the first Hebrew letter, the

• How did Ethiopian theologians respond to the challenge of the Hebrew acrostic?

• They create a system of superscriptions to each section:

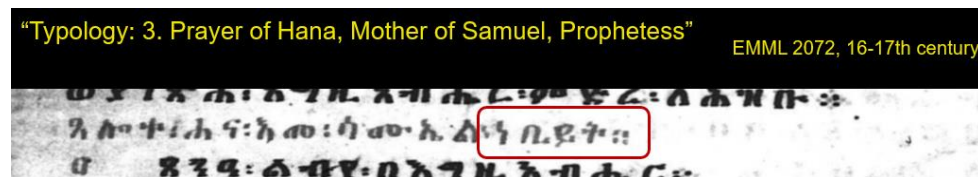
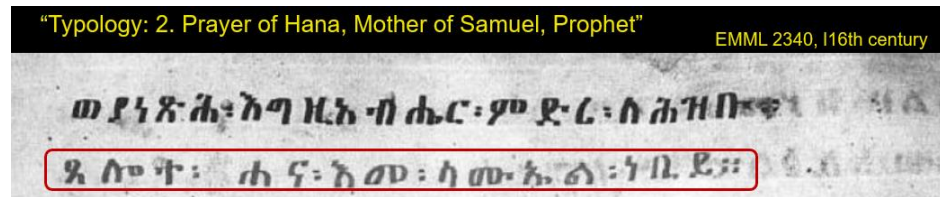
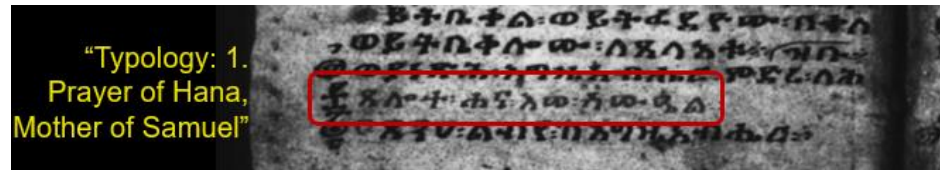
- አለፍ ብሄል አብ ፈጣሪ ጵሉም፡፡ Aleph means the father ('äb) created the whole world.
- ቤት ብሄል ባዕል እግዚአብሔር፡፡ Bet means God is wealthy (ba`äl).
- ጋሜል ብሄል ግሩም እግዚአብሔር፡፡ Gamel means God is awesome (gærum).
- Etc.

Pss 118 spir meanings of Heb Letters	Pss 118 spir mnings of the Heb Let	Ps 118 spir meanings of Heb letters: system 3: new Common	Psalm 118 spiritual meanings of Heb Let: System 5 "two letters at a time"	Psalm 118 spiritual meanings of the Heb letters: system 7, "O Father"	Psalm 118 spir mngs of the Heb letters: system 8. "እን ለእኩር" system	Ps 118 spir mngs of Heb letters: system 9: Expanded Common New System	Psalm 118 most have no meaning given, just the letter
System 1: old system.	System 2: Abbr Old System	System 3: Longer Old	System 4: new Common	System 5: "two letters at a time"	System 7: "O Father"	System 9: Expanded Common New System	Psalm 118 most have no meaning given, just the letter

next several begin with the second Hebrew letter and so forth. The Ge'ez tradition follows the Greek tradition, neither of which try to replicate the acrostic per se. Instead, a transliteration of the Hebrew letter appears at the head of each section. In the Ge'ez tradition, superscriptions are crafted most of which begin with the phrase "Aleph means. . ." or "Bet means. . .", etc. The subsequent few words interpret the spiritual meaning of the Hebrew letters. It turns out that there is not one system for interpreting the Hebrew letters. We have

found nine (perhaps four main ones) and they usually offer some pun in the Ge'ez target language which explains the meaning. We can determine patterns of chronological development over time

The Superscription to the Fourth Biblical Canticle, the Prayer of Hana. Each of the fifteen Biblical Canticles has a superscription. The fourth of these is the Prayer of Hana, known to us originally from the book of First Samuel (chapter 2). There are three forms of the superscription known to us from the manuscripts: 1) "Prayer of Hana, mother of Samuel"; 2) "Prayer of Hana, mother of Samuel, prophet"; and 3) "Prayer of Hana, Mother of Samuel, Samuel, prophetess." This latter translation is accomplished by the addition of a single letter, t, which transforms the final word, prophet, from masculine singular (and thus referring to Samuel) to feminine singular (thus referring to Hana).



The interesting phenomenon in this case is not just the nature of the three readings. It is how scribes struggled between the last two options. Many manuscripts show secondary intervention in one of four ways. They may show a secondary addition of the word for prophet. They may show the secondary addition of the word prophetess. They may show the word for prophet being transformed into "prophetess" by a secondary hand. Or, they may show the intervention, by a secondary hand, to remove the final t that transforms the final word from prophet to prophetess. The reading is clearly a point of contention between factions who appear to be arguing about whether or not Hana is to be considered among the prophets.

Variations in the Canonical Text

*Psalm 151.*² In terms of the actual words of the 151 Psalms of David, there are very few variations in the canonical text. And yet, the last of them, Psalm 151, has four significant points of variation, three of which are single-word variations (plus or minus), the fourth is a long plus/minus.

² Our (Steve Delamarter and Cameron Marvin) work on Psalm 151 will be found in Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov, eds. *The Textual History of the Bible*, Volume Two (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

Variations in Paratextual features
Variations in Paracanonical texts
Variations in Canonical text

1. Psalm 151

Social Lives
Ethiopian Psalters

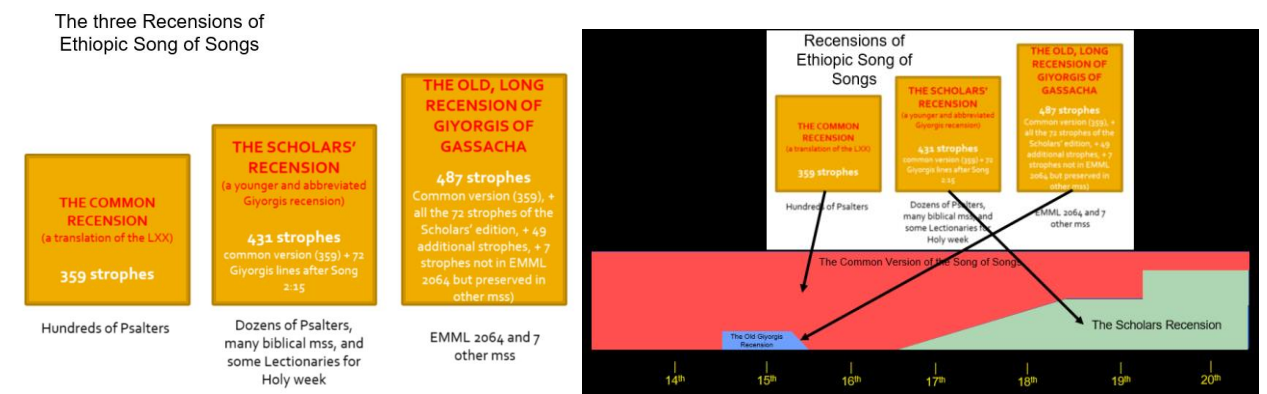
Two Versions? Or, four hot spots?

[minus]	and saved me	Ps151:1a ንዑስ እን እምአሐውዮ። Ps151:1b ወሬዛ በቤተ አቡዮ። Ps151:1c ወእራሊ አበግዓ አቡዮ። Ps151:2a እደውዮ ይገብራ መስገቆ። Ps151:2b ወአግብዕዩ ያስተዋድዳ ሙዝሙረ። Ps151:3a ሙኑ ነገሮ ለእግዚአብሔር ውእቱ ሰምዓኒ። Ps151:3b ውእቱ እግዚአብሔር ውእቱ ሰምዓኒ። Ps151:4a (ወ)ውእቱ ፈነወ መልአክ ወአድጋንኒ ። Ps151:4b ወንሥአኒ እምአበግዓ አቡዮ። Ps151:4c ወቀብዓኒ (ቅብዓ) ቅዱስ። Ps151:5a አሐውዮስ ወናገን ወላሂቃን። Ps151:5b ወአሠምረ በሙ እግዚአብሔር። Ps151:6a ወወጸእኩ ለተእገዙቱ ለሕዝብ ነኪር። Ps151:6b ወረገምኒ በእማልከቲሆሙ ርኩስን ። Ps151:6c ወአንሰ ነሣእኩ ወላስተ አዕባን እምአፍላግ። Ps151:6d ወወጸፍከዎ እንተ ፍጽሙ። Ps151:6e አሜሃ ወድቀ በጋይላ እግዚአብሔር። Ps151:7a ወአንሰ ነሣእኩ ዘእምላዕሊሁ ከይፈ። Ps151:7b ወሙተርኩ ርእሰ ለንልዮድ። Ps151:7c ወአስሰልኩ ጽዕልተ እምደቂቀ እስራኤል።	1a I was the smallest among my brothers 1b and the youngest in my father's house, 1c and I used to tend my father's sheep. 2a My hands built a musical instrument, 2b and my fingers accompanied a psalm. 3a Who would announce this to my Lord? 3b The Lord himself hears me. 4a He himself sent his messenger. And saved me. 4b and took me from my father's sheep, 4c and anointed me with holy oil. 5a My brothers were handsome and big, 5b but the Lord did not approve of them. 6a I went out to meet the strange foreigner, 6b he cursed me by his abominable false gods. 6c But I picked up three stones 6d And I slung it at his forehead 6e And he fell down by the power of the Lord 7a But I pulled out his own sword, 7b and cut off his head of Goliath, 7c and I removed reproach from the children of Israel.
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The variations are interesting in their own right. But their true significance stems from the different historical patterns by which the four readings came and went. They are not four expressions of the same historical pattern. Instead, they

represent four hot spots each acting independently from the others over time to one extent and another.

*The Three Recensions of the Song of Songs.*³ The most interesting and dramatic textual history of any of the books of the Ethiopic Psalter is to be found in the Song of Songs. In the manuscripts we find three distinct versions: 1) a common version of about 359 strophes translated from the LXX; 2) a so-called Scholars' Recension comprised of about 431 strophes (i.e., all of the strophes of the common edition along with about 72 additional strophes strewn throughout the book after 2:15); and 3) what we call the Old Giyorgis Recension of Giyorgis of Gassacha with around 487 strophes (i.e., all of the strophes of the Scholars' edition and an additional 49 strophes strewn throughout the book between 1:1 and 2:14).



³ I and two students, Jonah Sandford and Ashlee Benson, have made presentations on this topic at one of the Pacific Northwest Regional Society of Biblical Literature meetings and at two of the Annual Society of Biblical Literature meetings.

The three recensions show not only differences of substance, but also show distinct chronological developments.

Summary and Conclusions

This study has analyzed 15 types or loci of variation in Ethiopian Psalters. These can be grouped into three categories: 1) Variation in Paratextual Features; 2) Variation in Para-canonical Features; and 3) Variation in Canonical Features.

Paratextual Features	Para-canonical Features	Canonical Features
Aspect Ratio of Book	Opening Prayer/Poem	Psalm 151
# Sheets per Quire	Psalter of the Virgin	Song of Songs version
Marking Midpoint	Psalter of the Christ	Known Variants
Strophe Audit System	Spiritual Meaning of the Hebrew Letters	
Columetric Rubrication	Hana, Mother of Samuel	
Praises of Mary Days		
Rubrication of Mary/God		

Our intent was not to create a system for dating Psalters; it was, instead, to identify typologies of variation and look for developments over time. What actually resulted, though, was a system of observations whereby we can date Psalters rather accurately and which can serve as a compliment, if not a corrective, to the standard paleographic methods. That said, I consider it even more exciting to be able to identify and describe hitherto unknown aspects of Ethiopian history and book culture, whether they be centered on theology/ideology, economics, scribal practice, the practice of craftspeople, artists, etc.

I carry out this work in three phases. In a first phase, I identify loci of variation and create a typology of the types of variation in each case. In a second phase, I harvest data from (eventually) hundreds of Ethiopian Psalters and aggregate them into one data repository. In a third phase, I process and visualize the data in order to be able to identify chronological and, in a few cases, geographic variation.⁴

Such work requires huge amounts of time and the implications for cataloguing are yet to be worked out. We need answers to such questions as: Which loci of variation should be prioritized? By whom? Should the loci of variation be given xml codes? By what process? Since this data only becomes meaningful when collated and processed, should there be a central [web-based] repository to which many cataloguers could contribute work? Where should this be? Who should run it?

⁴ I am fortunate to have been joined recently by Mike Cooke in the role of Data Manager and by Jarod Jacobs and Martijn Naaijer in the role of Data Processing and Visualization.