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Medieval Ethiopian Manuscripts Contents, Challenges and Solutions

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1. Introduction

Ethiopia belongs to a small group of countries boasting ancient civilizations. It s a cradle of civilization that dates from 1000 BC. It is home of one of the oldest Christian Churches in the East which is rich in patristic legacy, religious art, architecture, iconography, hymnody, literature, and monastic traditions. This has always been proved to be true, simply, as one has to look at the big body of literature documented in Gəʾəz and Arabic which has been an object of wonder and uniqueness in its quantity, quality, and variety as well as in its sustenance.

This short contribution aims at presenting a brief account of the literary heritage discussing the current state of the heritage recalling remedial measures that have been taken, examining the establishment of a philology unit at Addis Ababa University (the first of its kind in the country), presenting other good developments related to exploring,

documenting and promoting the wealth. Moreover, the current challenges will be identified and remedial measures will be proposed.

2. Enormous wealth

Ethiopia is a host to an immense body of oral and literary tradition. The latter, which is the chief interest to us here, is the direct product of centuries of continuous scribal production which has played a great role in preserving, transmitting and disseminating knowledge and culture of the ancient and medieval times. This literary tradition includes manuscript writing with the aid of authentic reed pens, natural ink, and preparing parchment from animal skin authoring, copying, editing and translating texts from non-Ethiopian languages. Apart from indigenous compositions by local scholars, a significant portion of the literary corpus was derived through translation or adaptation from different writing cultures of the Christian and Islamic Orient including Greek and Arabic as well as Syriac and Coptic through Arabic intermediate versions. These texts were translated (from Greek and Arabic sources directly into Gəʿəz) and/or edited with the aim of transferring knowledge of the Christian and Islamic Orient into Ethiopia. Certain translations even include works no longer extant in their original language and even, at times, different versions form texts known in other literary cultures.

2.1. In Gəʾəz

To recall a personal experience: when I first arrived in Hamburg (Germany) in 2006 to do my PhD, what struck me was the name of the department at which I was enrolling—*Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Aethiopistik*; i.e. Department of African and Ethiopian Studies. I asked my host professor why it was so. He was quick and positive answering my question saying, *Es ist wegen Ihrer wunderbaren Literatur*—'It is because of your wonderful literature'. It was at that moment that I realized our literary heritage has made the attention of Western scholars focus on us.

The Christian literature of Ethiopia was, and still is, written in the ancient Ethiopic language, Gəʾəz (also called Ethiopic by some scholars). Engagement in literary production started through translation with the appearance of a few indigenous literary products. The tradition was, specially, related to the medieval Ethiopian wisdom, which was born, developed and spread from about the fourth century onward. It covers not only the topic that the heritage was designed for i.e. religion, but also philosophy, history, social law, statecraft, culture, and last but not least, the technical sciences including mathematics, astronomy, astrology, architecture, medicine, the fine arts and several allied disciplines.

2.1.1. Wealth in translation

As indicated above, translation has contributed immensely in the long literary history of Ethiopia. It began with the Bible and apocryphal as well as patristic works. For the bulk of the translation into Ethiopic, different branches of Oriental Christianity (mainly Syriac and Coptic) have contributed much as sources.

Until about the 17th century, translations came mainly from Greek which prevailed in the church of Egypt. Although no conclusive evidence exists to confirm, some translations might have been made also from Coptic, possibly between the seventh and the 12th centuries. When Arabic became the dominant language in the Egyptian Coptic church around the 12th century, translations were made from Arabic. Beside the Bible, books such as መጽሐፈ ሄኖክ (the Book of Enoch), መጽሐፈ ኩፋሌ (the Book of Jubilees), ዕርገተ ኢሳይያስ (the Ascent of Isaiah), and ሐርማ ነቢይ (The prophet Herma) were among those translated from Greek to Gəʿəz . Of these, the first two are preserved in their entirety only in the Ethiopic version. Works like መጽሐፈ ቄርሎስ (the Book of Cyril), a collection of homilies, which belong mostly to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, ሥርዓተ ወትእዛዛተ ዘአባ ጳኩሚስ (The Rule of Pachomius) a work of high inspiration for Ethiopian monasticism, and a few lives of saints were translated from different Greek sources at that time.

Innumerable translations were made from Arabic texts of Coptic literature when Greek ceased to be the language of the Coptic church (ca. end of 11th century). During that period, the following notable works were translated: collections of canonical regulations like ሲኖዶስ (*Synodicon*, and ዲድስቅልያ (*Didascalia*). These works might have found their way into Ethiopia in the 12th/13th century. In the 13th or 14th century works like ዜና እስክንድር (Story of Alexander) and some liturgical books like መጽሐፈ ግንዘት (Book for the preparation of the body of the dead), a ritual for funerals; መጽሐፈ ሰዓታት ዘግብጽ (Book of the Hours of Egypt), the horologion of the Western church; ገድለ ሰማዕታት (Contendings of the Martyrs); ገድል (Meritorious Acts, i.e, of saintly persons); ገድለ ሐዋርያት (Contending of the Apostles, i.e. their apocryphal acts); ግብረ ሕማማት (Acts of the passion), a lectionary for the Holy Week; ውዳሴ ማርያም (Praise of Mary), ፊልክስዩስ written by Philoxenos of Mabbug, regarding monastic life were translated. Such works as ዜና አበው ቅዱሳን (Stories of the Holy fathers), ስንክሳር (the *Synaxarion*), ተአምረ ማርያም (Miracles of Mary) were also translations of the period. Attributed to the 15th century are the translation of, ፍትሐ ነገሥት (the Code of the Kings), a revered book of juridical relevance, the two renowned treatises of ascetic life አረጋዊ መንፈሳዊ (The Spiritual Elder) and ማር ይስሐቅ (Master of Isaac), the reputed work of Isaac of Nineveh were also translated in the 15th and 16th centuries. In the 16th and 17th centuries, works like ሐይማኖተ አበው (the Faith of the Fathers), ታልሙድ (Tilmidh (The Pupil)), መጽሐፈ ሐዊ

(Book of Hawi), ፈውስ መንፈሳዊ (the Spiritual Medicament), were translated.

2.1.2 Indigenous legacy

The overwhelming mass of Coptic literature brought to Ethiopia stimulated a vigorous movement of original Ethiopic literary production. It is difficult to fix the time of the beginning. However, the majority of the earlier surviving works seem to date back to the 13th or 14th century, a period when the activity of Egyptian clerics in Ethiopia as translators and original writers in Gəʾəz was at its peak.

The original Ethiopian literature emulated the genres of the Coptic Christian literature of Egypt. In character, it was theological (dogmatic and pastoral), didactic and monastic, as well as apocalyptic, eschatological, and hagiographic (*gadl* is the typical Ethiopic term for such narratives), mainly concentrating on Ethiopian saints and historical material (based on Christian principles and telling about events in the life of the rulers of Ethiopian society, such as kings, high officials, and dignitaries of the church). Other topics included in this prolific literature were grammar, magic, and chronology. The contents, as a rule, drew on the models offered by the Christian literature of Egypt. Nonetheless, the Ethiopian writers developed an impressive degree of originality. Noteworthy to be mentioned earlier is the *Dəgg*^{w}*a*, a hymnal book ascribed to St. Yared (the musician and priest who

became famous since the reign of Gabra Masqal in the 6th century) that contains beautiful hymns, some rhyming, for God and the saints of the Church, is a notable work that should be considered as original. There are also works on Gə'əz *sawasəw* (lit. ladder) otherwise 'grammar'. In this connection, it is worth mentioning an original and thriving method of commentary on the Scriptures and patristic texts, which developed in the traditional oral teaching in church schools, where *sawasəw* was taught. This art of commentary is usually called *andəmta*.

The literature surveyed above was written in prose, but poetry was also widely cultivated. Ethiopians developed flourishing poetic literature of original stock. Certain types are thought to have been inspired by Coptic models. Such is the poetic form called *malkəʾ* (effigy, image) a composition made of stanzas, each of them praising, in symbolic language, the physical parts as well as moral qualities of a saintly person (Christ, Virgin Mary, etc.). The same may be said of another type of poetry, similar in form and content to the *malkəʾ* which is used to praise holy persons; such poems are called *salam* (peace, equal to the greeting "hail"), taken from the word with which they begin. The *salam* also seems to date from the beginning of the 15th century. Another typical poetic genre is the Qəne, which is metaphorical and possesses a hidden meaning. It has a high degree of elaborateness and is considered by Ethiopians as a poetic genre of the highest standard. All these compositional forms and styles seem to go back for their beginning to

the 15th century. So, it may be that grammar and poetry were introduced into Ethiopia at the same time. They are all studied and practiced in schools.

2.2 In Arabic

Apart from Gə‘əz, Arabic played a crucial role in the literary tradition of Ethiopia. This is because of the geographical proximity of Ethiopia to the Arab world. It is believed that Arabic took root in Ethiopia since the first contact between Ethiopia and Islam which was established when followers of Prophet Mohammed found refuge at the Axum court. The language started to function well as a literary language beginning from the 13th century. Since then, the country accumulated an enormous body of Arabic literature.

Like the Gə‘əz literary wealth, the Arabic literature found in Ethiopia is divided into two types: works originally composed by Arab authors and works written by indigenous scholars. Harar, as the major center of Muslim scholarship in Ethiopia, imported various Arabic literary products such as Ibn Malik’s ʾAlfiya, Ibn Ḥajar’s Tuḥfa, Būṣīrī’s Burda and Hamziyya and Jazūlī’s Dalā’il al-xayrāt. These works differ from one another both in genre and content.

Harar was not only the center of attraction of foreign literary products authored by Arab scholars, it was also a center of literary production by

indigenous scholars. Celebrated Ethiopian scholars like Abd al-Aziz ibn Amir Hasim and Hamid ibn al Faqih Siddiq al-Himyari were based in Harar in the 18th century and produced high standard poetic and pious literary texts. Apart from Harar, there were centers of Islamic literary excellence located in the narrow lowland area between the highland in the west and the desert in the east. Important locations were Anna in Rayya (northern Wällo), Dana in Yäjju, and Gäddo and Shonke in Däwwe (in southern Wällo). Scholars like Mufti Dawud (late 18th century) Shekh Muhammed al-Anni, Shekh Ahmad b. Adam (both late 19th century), and Shekh Jawhar ibn Hayder (early 20th century) were famous scholars of the area who produced wonderful textual works written in classical Arabic.

Speaking of Arabic literary wealth in Ethiopia, one should not forget the presence of a huge body of literature written in different Ethiopian languages (Amharic, Argoba, Oromo, Səlṭe and probably Afar and Tigrinya) using the Arabic script (*ʿAjami*). Praise to the establishment of the Philology unit in the Department of Linguistics at Addis Ababa University, the magnitude and importance of this body of knowledge has become increasingly known as graduates are discovering more texts in the different parts of the country.

Although there is a misconception in associating Arabic only with the Islamic faith in Ethiopia, the language has served the Christian faith the

result of which could be seen in monastic archives in terms of literary compositions of various genres. As pointed out above, the translations are essentially from Arabic sources through the Coptic Church. The contributions of the Ethiopian scholars who braved through the desert to master the language and come back carrying Arabic books should also be noted. There were language training centers here in Ethiopia too; Dabra Māryām, in South Gondar, was one of the famous centers during the Gondarine period where monks with the talent as well as sons and daughters of the nobility were able to learn Arabic and Hebrew; and even Greek. As is the case with Gəʾez, the literary wealth imbedded in Arabic is understudied.

3. Worrying conditions

Those marvelous manuscripts (very few though) which are housed in museums in Ethiopia or elsewhere in the world are 'heaven dwellers' compared to the unfortunate great majority of manuscripts which are found dangerously in about 20,000 churches and 800 monasteries, in numerous mosques and in traditional schools all over the country. Although, for their existence, the custodians have to be commended, the manuscripts are undeniably in deplorable conditions. Priceless volumes lie on dirty floors or are simply piled up and are being eaten up by rats and/or insects; others are exposed to damage from rainwater. In many cases, the security is also worrisome. *Iqa betoch* (storehouses) are frequently built of flimsy materials and are sometimes unlocked or

locked with cheap padlocks which can easily be broken or forced open. Some *Iqa betoch*, because of inflammable thatching, have burnt down along with priceless collections.

Natural and manmade caves were repositories of priceless manuscripts during unhappy times like those of wars. A significant amount of the heritage has been lost when the individuals, who buried the manuscripts and kept the information secret for fear of leakage, died.

Theft of manuscripts as well as other relics and church paraphernalia are reported too frequently to allow complacency. There is a suspicion that unscrupulous persons catering for tourists or the international market attempt to corrupt poor clergymen by offering tempting amounts of filthy lucre. Another major problem is that most churches, monasteries, and private collections have no facilities for scholars wishing to consult manuscripts. These are situations of 'closed books', so to speak, as far as the advancement of knowledge is concerned.

4. Remedy

As pointed out above, although the literary wealth of the country is generally in worrying conditions, there are some encouraging attempts to make available the knowledge imbedded in the medieval literary heritage of the country. The remedial measures that are taken to

safeguard and avail the knowledge for researchers are briefly discussed below.

4.1. Preserving and conserving traditionally

The literary wealth of Ethiopia suffered from different man-made and natural challenges. However, a significant body of the wealth transmitted through a long chain of generations has reached us. This is because of the effective indigenous techniques of preserving manuscripts of our forefathers. The author of this contribution conducted a modest study on the rationale, techniques and methods of the indigenous conservation and preservation of Gə'əz manuscripts the result of which was presented at the 1st International Conference on Ethiopia's Manuscripts (8-9 October, 2018, Addis Ababa). He is convinced that Ethiopians' past wisdom of preserving manuscripts was effective and can still be applied, of course, along with to the modern techniques and methods.

4.2. Modern preservation and documentation

It is only a very small subset of the literary heritage which embodies the country's cultural and spiritual wealth that has got a chance to be exhibited in libraries and museums in Ethiopia and abroad and received scholarly evaluation. Otherwise, the immense wealth of precious manuscripts and other relics are kept in church and monastic archives and storehouses, in mosques as well as in private possessions.

With regard to efforts to stop the deterioration of manuscripts, few organized initiatives were taken which could not be seen through to the end. The most important undertaking which could have helped preserve thousands of manuscripts was the joint project conducted by the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwaḥədo Church (EOTC) and the Hill Monastic Manuscripts Library of St. John's University (1971-1980s). That project was the most effective ever in the attempt to answer the crucial question of preserving a portion of the written heritage of ancient Christianity. But, unfortunately, the project came to a halt as the result of the political upheaval in the 1970s which caused the execution of the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox church, who was one of the initiators of the project.

Again in 1970, there was another preservation attempt by UNESCO in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. The project microfilmed manuscripts of some libraries in Gojjam and Addis Ababa and deposited the microfilms in different institutions including in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the University of Hamburg microfilmed the manuscripts of the monasteries on the islands of Lake Tana and in the surroundings through what was named the Äthiopische Handschriften vom Tanasee. The head of the project was Prof. Ernst Hammerschmidt.

The Hamburg based EthioSpare project (December 2009 to May 2015) led by Dr. Denis Nosnitsin is a recent project which aimed at identifying

the most important collections of manuscripts in the Tigray region, making inventories and digital copies. The researchers visited over 100 monasteries and churches, many of them with large libraries, and were able to digitize over 2000 manuscripts.

As to the effort to spare the Arabic and *ʿAjami* literary heritage of Ethiopia, we do not witness any organized project that took place except the project Islam in the Horn of Africa: A Comparative Literary Approach (IslHornAfr), funded by the European Research Council Advanced Grant no. 322849, 2013–2018, PI Alessandro Gori. For more information on the project see http://www.islhornafr.eu/. Other efforts are on individual basis which were funded by different institutes like the Endangered Archives Program of the British Library funded by the Arcadia.

Today, some actions are being taken to the extent possible by different bodies to give a relatively safe haven to some manuscripts. In Addis Ababa, more than ten parishes and monasteries built fairly modern museums where one can visit their collections. Monasteries and parishes like ʾƎnṭoṭo Māryām Church, St. George Church, Hāmara Noah Kidāna Məḥrat monastery, the Holy Trinity Cathedral, etc. have museums that availed ancient manuscripts in their domains. The Patriarch's library and museum located in the vicinity of the Patriarchate which houses hundreds of medieval Gəʿəz manuscripts is

the leading museum run by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The museum has also established a digitization station equipped with the necessary infrastructure and trained man power.

Another commendable effort is the expansion underway by the National Archive and Library Agency (NALA). As it is this institution that has legal authority to collect the country's written documents, it plays an imperative role in collecting and archiving manuscripts. Therefore, the ongoing construction of the 14 story complex under construction which is supposed to be fully dedicated to archiving the written heritage and make available is a commendable effort from the government side.

The Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), the other most important center of manuscripts, is also on a good footing documenting and displaying the manuscripts and archival documents it obtained from the public.

Another encouraging front is the effort being made at the national and regional levels to create awareness. Accordingly, conferences, workshops and symposiums are conducted. In this regard, mention could be made of the annual Gə'əz Conference and Symposium held by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism as well as the regular fora provided by such institutions as Bahir Dar University, Mekelle University and

Aksum University where manuscript-related studies are presented by scholars. It should also be mentioned that the First International Conference on Ethiopia‘s Manuscripts which focused on studying and promoting Ethiopian manuscripts was conducted on October 8-9, 2018 in Addis Ababa. It was organized by Addis Ababa University, Minstry of Culture and Tourism and National Archive and Library Agency of Ethipia. The second international conference is planned to be held in 2021.

4.3 Philology Unit at Addis Ababa University

Over the last many years, the country’s wealth of manuscripts has been a focus of interest to scholars and has served as an object of research to paleographers and philologists of various Western universities. Paradoxically, Ethiopia did not have, until recently, an institution that could train high-level manpower which could engage in the discovery, description, transcription, editing, glossing, annotating and commenting of Gə’əz, Arabic and *‘Ajami* manuscripts which are endangered as the result of the conditions they are in. The country was absolutely dependent on foreign expertise in interpreting, preserving and appreciating its past.

For a long time, there was yearning at Addis Ababa University for Ethiopian philologists. Although European philologists who were experts vis-à-vis Ethiopian manuscripts, the high pay they demanded

and their commitment to their own universities could not satisfy the local need. Hence the country was left with the only choice to open its own institution for training high-level manpower in the field.

This highly anticipated and much articulated vision finally came to be true when the Department of Linguistics, AAU, opened the Philology MA program in September 2004 with unreserved support from the Department of History and Heritage Management, AAU, and with the collaboration of the University of Florence, Italy.

Right from the beginning, the Philology master's program consisted of two streams namely, Gəʿəz and Arabic. The sacred objective was to train local philologists who would search, preserve and study the rich heritage of manuscripts and other written sources for the various governmental and non-governmental organizations of the country. Graduates were also meant to diffuse knowledge of the rich heritage in the country as a whole, especially to the younger generation, through the school system. The research outcomes were also meant to enrich the scholarship in general. Nevertheless, since there was shortfall in local staff, a joint PhD program in collaboration with foreign universities became necessary. Consequently, in 2007 a PhD program was officially launched with the objective to train philologists who can teach in the MA program and engage in research. The Department of Linguistics started conducting the PhD program in collaboration with the

University of Florence and the University of Naples L'Orientale the professors of which participated in training and/or supervising PhD candidates.

By its own nature, Philology is a multi disciplinary field of study. It draws a lot from the essence, principles and methods of history, linguistics, literature, religion, culture, archeology, etc. of the humanities and the social sciences. In the curriculum of the MA program, six modules are offered and thesis writing is mandatory. Through the modules, the students attain the basics of Ethiopian Philology and brace for their specific research topics. The PhD program is mainly research based commencing with three advanced courses followed by engaging students in their doctoral research and a block workshop focusing on different technical trainings. The program involves extensive reading of recent publications, auditing recommended courses, giving a seminar and/or writing conference papers . The doctoral research is supervised by a committee of academics from within and outside the university. Master's theses and PhD dissertations are evaluated by ~~a~~ board of examiners (from within and outside the department). The candidates whose theses or dissertations are accepted are recommended for graduation. To date, about 80 MA theses and 15 PhD dissertations were approved and a corresponding number of candidates graduated. Most of the graduates

are engaged in teaching and research in the universities across the country.

As anticipated by the founders of the program, the results of the seeds of Philology sown at Addis Ababa University are now taking root especially in other institutions of higher learning in the country. To date, about four teaching departments and units have been opened in four universities. These are specifically: Gəʻəz Language and Literature MA (Bahir Dar University), Gəʻəz Language and Literature BA (Wollo University), Gəʻəz Language and Literature BA (Aksum University) and Gəʻəz Language and Literature BA (Gondar University, in Progress). In addition, four research institutes which focus on the Gəʻəz language and manuscripts have been opened. These are: Zarʿa Yaʾəqob Ceneter for Medieval Studies (Bahir Dar University), St. Yared Center for Ethiopian Philology (Mekelle University), Haddis Alamayehu Institute of Cultural Studies (Debre Markos University) and Abbay Cultural Studies Center (Bahir Dar University). The majority of these academic establishments were founded by the alumni of the Philology unit of the Department of Linguistics at Addis Ababa University.

5. Challenges

The written heritage that stood the test of time is the identity and source of pride to generations of this ancient country. As it was brought to the attention of the reader above, the heritage reached us passing through

incessant endangerment. To better ensure preservation, the follwing are the main challenges that need to be overcome.

5.1 Lack of clear policy

Although Ethiopia is a country rich in and known for written heritage, it has no comprehensive policy related to the latter. This is a major stumbling block.

5.2 'Hide and lock up'

The 'hide and lock up' strategy of the custodians of the manuscripts has been a problem all along to even research the literature let alone sparing it with the modern technology. As instructors who want students get practical experience working with physical manuscripts, we usually send them to different archives. The report we get is mostly depressing. Keepers of the manuscripts are not willing to open up their archives for research. This weakens the motivation of the students who aspire to unfold the knowledge and wisdom of our ancestors.

5.3 Unpleasant experience

Projects related to Ethiopian manuscripts are always faced with challenges. If we see the most successful project which could have documented about 10,000 manuscripts—EMML—as one good example, the initiator and leader of the project, His Holiness Abuna Tewoflos, the martyred Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

was heavily accused of selling the country's heritage which was one of the long listed accusations which resulted in his execution by the military junta. That phony accusation and the result it brought might have sent a signal of precaution to the leaders of the Church who came after him.

5.4 Lack of skilled manpower

As pointed out above, until the establishment of the Philology unit at the Department of Linguistics, AAU, there was no center for training experts with the knowledge and skills of working with manuscripts. If there were few scattered efforts by Ethiopians, they were by two pioneer Ethiopian philologists namely Prof. Emer. Getatchew Haile and the late Dr. Amsalu Aklilu. Those from the field of history were Prof. Taddesse Tamirat, Dr. Sergew Hable Sellassie and Ato.Tekle Tsadiq Mekuria. Currently, thanks to the establishment of the Philology unit, there are quite a number of young philologists. Now, what is yet to be dealt with is overcoming the problem of getting to the manuscripts. The new generation of philologists should be able to access the archives in the country and their expertise should be taken advantage of.

5.5 Lack of collaboration

Apart from EOTC which takes the greater share in producing and documenting Ethiopic literature, there are institutions that claim to be engaged in listing, documenting, safeguarding, and preserving

manuscripts. However, there does not seem to be co-operation among the institutions. There were times when one was accusing the other as intervening in its responsibilities. The issue between the EOTC and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) is a case in point.

6. What should be done?

The challenges, which obstruct the efforts to preserve and explore manuscripts should be dealt with. Below are some proposed actions.

6.1 Keeping the momentum

All the positive developments discussed above should be pursued and more effort should be made. The concerned institutions should build their capacity both in professional manpower and resources. The manuscript wealth of this country needs more infrastructure and fora. Hence, more attention and resource are required from all those concerned.

6.2 Workable policy

If we are to change the worrisome conditions our heritage is in, we need to have a workable national policy in place. A couple of articles that are in the country's legislative documents have very little to do with conservation and preservation of manuscripts and facilitation of research. An attempt has been made to initiate policy proposal in the

First International Conference of Ethiopian Manuscript Heritage to which a positive response is expected.

6.3 National mission

It is high time we forged a national mission which brings all stakeholders on board to think and act together so as to rescue our heritage. The mission would be engaged in, among other things, surveying, documenting and cataloguing Ethiopian manuscripts in the country and abroad, and compile a National Electronic Database (NED). Furthermore, it would facilitate preservation mechanisms incorporating both modern and indigenous methods and through training, awareness building and financial support, provide ready access to manuscripts through digitization and publication. Other achievable objectives are promotion of scholarship and research in the study of Ethiopian languages and Manuscriptology, setting up a National Manuscripts Library (NML), facilitating public engagement concerning manuscripts through lectures, seminars, publications, exhibitions and other outreach programs as well as campaigns in various ways.

6.4 Strengthening international co-operation

Even though we are proud of our written wealth, it is obvious that we lack resources. Therefore, working in co-operation with those who have the expertise and resource that can help us do the job is necessary. Of

course, that should be done without compromising our national interests and the integrity of the custodians that played an irreplaceable and ever celebrated role in keeping the wealth till now.

7. Conclusion

The concern for the written heritage of this country is not at all due to affiliation to this or that religion or ethnic group. It is not even limited to national interest at the level of Ethiopia. It goes beyond as the heritage is ultimately that of humanity in general. The heritage crucially important not because it is a source of pride, but it is essentially a source of valuable knowledge sought by various academic disciplines. Therefore, let us unite to preserve and explore the knowledge our forefathers produced and left to us.

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