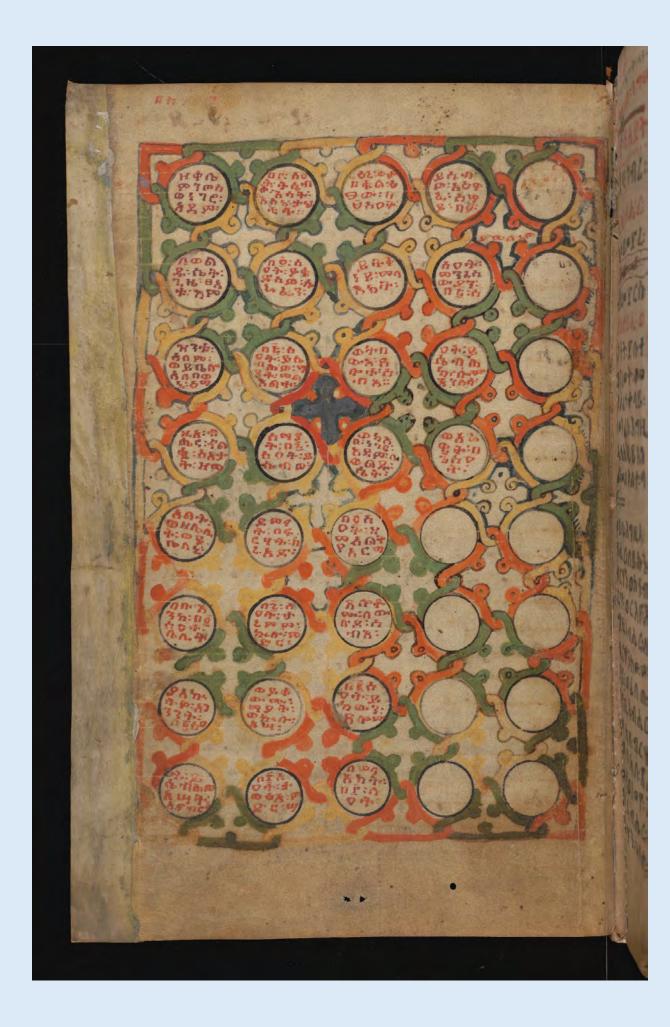
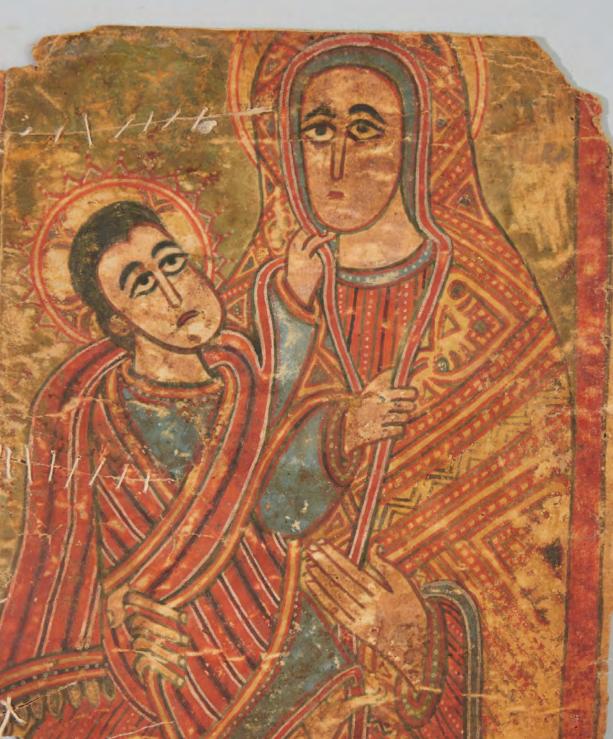


The colourful hieratic images that decorate Ethiopic manuscripts produced during the time span considered by this project – the early Solomonic period (1270–1527) – are unlike anything else produced in sub-Saharan Africa. These illustrations embody the spiritual aspirations and cultural identity of the artists who made them. The Ethiopian Empire was the longest-lived empire in Africa after that of Ancient Egypt. However, while there have been thousands of publications on the arts of Ancient Egypt, the visual culture of Ethiopia continues to be marginalized and misrepresented. By looking at the illustrations in medieval Ethiopic manuscripts, focusing especially on hitherto little-known examples in collections in Germany and the UK, the project aims to improve our understanding of this material through a range of publications and activities that will reconstruct the vibrant cultural and religious history of the Ethiopian Empire during the early Solomonic period.



Demarginalizing Medieval Africa Images, texts, and identity in early Solomonic Ethiopia (1270-1527)

Illustrated manuscripts in the Ethiopic language, as material objects that carry textual and visual information, are among the most valuable sources of data for art historians specializing in this area. These 'hand-written artefacts' continue to be studied individually and collaboratively by researchers specializing in fields such as philology, codicology, literary studies, biology, conservation, statistics, history, theology, sociology, and anthropology. Given that current reasonable estimates put the total number of Ethiopic codex manuscripts at 200,000 units or more, and that a significant portion of these remain undocumented or understudied, it is evident that there is a continued need for research devoted to cataloguing these items.



A Handlist of Illustrated Early Solomonic Manuscripts in British Public Collections^{*}

JONAS KARLSSON, Universität Hamburg, JACOPO GNISCI, University College London, and SOPHIA DEGE-MÜLLER, Universität Hamburg

Introduction

This is the second in a series of two contributions devoted to the identification, description, and cataloguing of illustrated Ethiopic manuscripts from the Early Solomonic Period. The first contribution,¹ which was published in the previous volume of *Aethiopica*, focused on public collections in Germany, whereas the present one deals with objects found in the United Kingdom. For a discussion on the ideas behind this set of two publications and an overview of the aims of the AHRC-DFG project Demarginalizing medieval Africa: Images, texts, and identity in Early Solomonic Ethiopia (1270–1527), we refer the reader to the previous contribution. Our earlier contribution also provides a detailed rationale for our approach to cataloguing.² One addition that we have made to the cataloguing scheme applied in the first handlist is the introduction of the additional sub-category 'illuminated tables'.

The forty-one manuscripts included in this handlist were viewed between 2022 and 2023 by one or more of the contributors to this essay. The most significant

Research for this contribution was supported by the AHRC-DFG project Demarginalizing medieval Africa: Images, texts, and identity in Early Solomonic Ethiopia (1270–1527), codirected by Jacopo Gnisci, Alessandro Bausi (2021–October 2023), and Aaron Butts (since November 2023), grant ref. nos AHRC AH/V002910/1 and DFG 448410109. The authors are particularly indebted to Vitagrazia Pisani, who was part of the ITIESE project until February 2022, and to Dorothea Reule for her TEI XML advice and for granting access to some of the Bodleian Libraries manuscripts that she had digitized together with Jacopo Gnisci. Additionally, we would like to thank Alessandro Bausi, Antonella Brita, Ted Erho, and Theo M. van Lint. Special thanks for support are also due to library staff and museum curators, including Eleanor Lucy Deacon, Eyob Derillo, Yasmin Faghihi, Ulrike Hogg, Luisa Elena Mengoni, and César Merchán-Hamann. Images of manuscripts in the Bodleian Libraries, including the one published as Fig. 4, were obtained through the support of the ERC project Monumental Art of the Christian and Early Islamic East: Cultural Identities and Classical United.

Dege-Müller et al. 2022.

A Handlist of Illustrated Early Solomonic Manuscripts in German Public Collections

SOPHIA DEGE-MÜLLER, Universität Hamburg, JACOPO GNISCI, University College London, and VITAGRAZIA PISANI, Universität Hamburg

1 Introduction

Processes that revolve around the identification, collection, organization, and presentation of data and that can be subsumed under the term 'cataloguing' are of critical importance to research in the science and the humanities. This is true also for the field of Christian Ethiopian art that takes the material and visual culture of the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox churches as its main object of study. Illustrated manuscripts in the Ethiopic language, as material objects that carry textual and visual information, are among the most valuable sources of data for art historians specializing in this area. These 'hand-written artefacts' continue to be studied individually and collaboratively by researchers specializing in fields such as philology, codicology, literary studies, biology, conservation, statistics, history, theology, sociology, and anthropology. Given that current reasonable estimates put the total number of Ethiopic codex manuscripts at 200,000 units or more, and that a significant portion of these remain undocumented or understudied, it is evident that there is a continued need for research devoted to cataloguing these items.

Catalogues of Ethiopic manuscripts have been essential tools for researchers since August Dillmann's publication of a volume devoted the collection of the British Museum (subsequently moved to the British Library after its foundation in 1973) in 1847. Since then, catalogues of Ethiopic manuscripts housed in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Europe, America, and other parts of the world have been published at regular intervals, though—as Alessandro Bausi observes in a study devoted to the methodological importance and historical development of cataloguing in the field of Ethiopian studies—every cataloguer has adopted a different approach to the task.¹

Art historians and other specialists have also approached the task of identifying and describing illustrated Ethiopic manuscripts in different ways. Important

Bausi 2007; see also Witakowski 2015.



Dege-Müller et al. 2022, 59-67.

Aethiopica 26 (2023)

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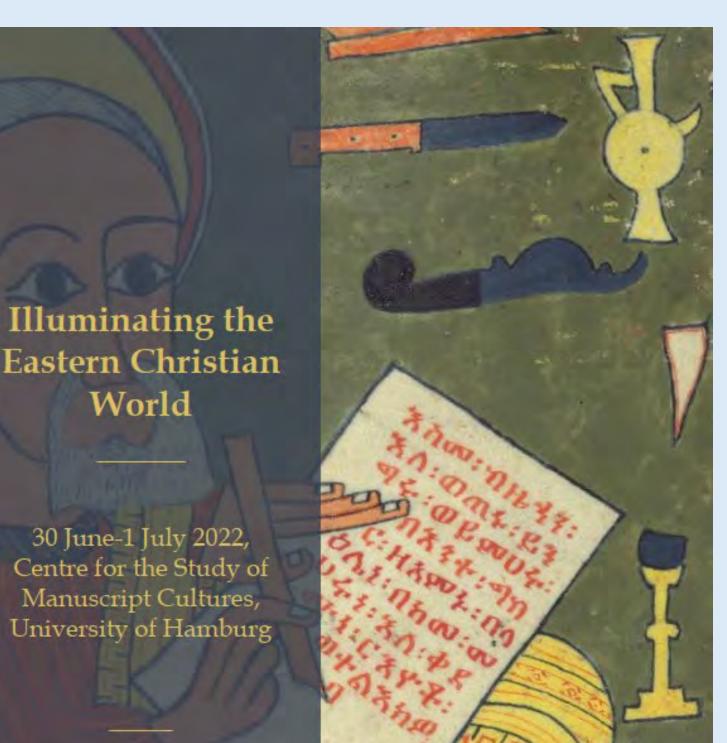
MANUSCRIPT TREASURES FROM AFRO-EURASIA

SCRIBES, PATRONS, COLLECTORS, AND READERS

Edited by Jacopo Gnisci, Sophia Dege-Müller, Jonas Karlsson and Vitagrazia Pisani

Conference Proceedings – DeGruyter 2025

Throughout the Middle Ages manuscripts were routinely commissioned, copied, illustrated, displayed, read, and transferred across both sides of the Mediterranean. Their significance as vehicles for the transmission of visual and textual knowledge is well known. Less understood, particularly when it comes to non-Latin manuscripts, is the complex web of spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional interactions that influenced their production and reception. The twelve essays presented here seek to address this gap by exploring the very direct relationships that existed between manuscripts and those individuals or communities that were involved in their making. The volume is broad in scope, covering written artefacts produced between Late Antiquity and the fifteenth century and presenting case studies that range from the British Isles to East Africa and from Spain and the Maghreb to Armenia. The visual and textual evidence preserved in these manuscripts is interpreted by drawing from disciplines such as palaeography, art history, codicology, and textual criticism. The result is a book that details the impact of makers, patrons, collectors, and readers on the making and circulation of manuscripts across Afro-Eurasia.



STUDIES IN MANUSCRIPT CULTURES

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