

Memory of the World Register - Nomination Form

Ethiopia - Treasures from the National Archives and Library Organization of Ethiopia

Part A - Essential Information

Abstract

Ethiopia has rare, precious and priceless manuscripts written in its own alphabet in form of verse and prose which reflect its indigenous civilization. The nominated documents are but a few highlights: Homily and Gospels written on vellum in the XIVth and XVth centuries; letters from King Tewdros to Queen Victoria of Britain, from King Menelik II to Nicolas Cesar II, from King Sahlesselassie of Shoa to the Queen of Britain; the first printed publication in Ethiopian history (1513); manuscripts written on vellum in the XVIIth, XIXth and XXth centuries, relating Ethiopian history...

Identity and Location

Name of the Documentary Heritage: Treasures from the National Archives and Library Organization of Ethiopia

- Homily of the passion of our Lord and services for passion week
- St. Paul's Gospel
- The Fourth Gospel (Bible: New Testament)
- Letter from King Tewodros to Queen Victoria of Britain
- Letter from King Menelik to Nicholas Cesar II of Moscow
- Letter from King Sahleselassie of Shoa to Queen of Britain
- Psalterium Davidis
- Fetha Negest (Nomocanon)
- Tarike Negest (History of the Kings)
- Anaphora
- History of Menelik II
- Henock

Country: Ethiopia

State, Province or Region: Addis Ababa

Address: National Archives and Library, P.O. Box 717, ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia

Name of Institution: National Archives and Library Organization of Ethiopia

Legal Information

Owner: National Archives and Library Organization of Ethiopia

Custodian: Almaz Mengistu (Head of National Library), P.O. Box 717, ADDIS ABABA

Legal status

Category of ownership: Public

Details of legal and administrative provisions for the preservation of the documentary heritage: It is in accordance with the Proclamation N° 127 of 1977, which dealt with the definition of powers and responsibilities of Ministers, bestowed upon the Ministry of Culture and Sports to establish and control national and public libraries, historical archives and museums.

Accessibility: Accessible for researchers only

Copyright status: All rights are reserved to the National Archives and Library Organization

Responsible administration: The sole administrator and caretaker of these manuscripts is the National Archives and Library Organization.

Identification

Description:

a) Homily of the Passion of our Lord and Services for passion week – The manuscript is written on vellum of horse in two columns in the Geez language in the XVth century. The writings are bold and neat. Names and headings are rubricated. Its size is 46 x 33.5 cm and has 434 pages with wooden board covered with stamped leather. (Original)

b) St. Paul's Gospel (Bible: New Testament) - The manuscript is written on vellum in two columns in the Geez language in the XVth century. The writings are bold and neat. A painted picture (drawing) of St. Paul and his followers is seen in the book. Its size is 34.6 x 25 cm and has 281 pages and is covered by hard leather. (Original).

c) The Fourth Gospel (Bible: New Testament) - The manuscript is written on vellum in two columns in the Geez language in the XIVth century. The writings are bold and neat. Its size is 29.5 x 20.5 cm and has 554 pages. The first 45 pages of the book are filled with painted pictures (drawings); particularly of Jesus Christ, his followers, Saints, Angels etc. The book is partially damaged due to mis-handling.

d) Letter from King Tewdros to Queen Victoria of Britain - The letter deals with the misunderstanding created between him and the Queen. He also urges the Ethiopian people to go along with the direction he has started so as to develop the Nation. And finally his dreams to bring about a competent Nation and the misunderstanding created by his men; his final repentance is stated. (Original)

e) Letter from King Menelik II to the King of Moscow Nicolas Cesar II - The letter deals with Meneliks victory over Italians at Adowa in 1896 and acknowledges the King and the Red Cross Society who were by his side. In the same letter, he also requested the King to further strengthen the relationship between Ethiopia and Moscow. (Original)

f) Letter from King Sahlesselassie of Shoa to the Queen of Britain - The letter deals with the reception and dialogues between the King and the envoys of the Queen. In the same letter he also asked to strengthen the ties with Britain. (Original)

g) Psalterium Davidis - The Book is written by Johannes Potken in Geez language with an introduction in German language and was printed in Rome, 1513. The book is printed without change in the calligraphy of the writer. It is considered as the first printed publication in Ethiopian history. (Original)

h) Fetha Negest (Nomocanon) - The manuscript is written on vellum in two columns in the Geez language in the XIXth century. The writings are bold and neat. Its size is 22 x 23 cm and has 146 + 7 V and 1 V folio with wooden boards covered with stamped leather. It is full of marginal notes.

* The text is partly damaged by water

* Wooden boards broken on one side but connected with some pieces of cords

* The text is badly damaged due to carelessly handling and long service

* It has marginal notes and designs. It also has illumination. There are musical notations over the text

* It has plenty of marginal notes and designs
(Microfilm)

i) Tarike Negest (History of kings) - The manuscript is written on vellum in two columns in the Geez and Amharic language in the XXth century. The writings are bold and neat. Its size is 21.3 x 16.5 cm and has 12 folios with paperback cover.
(Microfilm)

j) Anaphora - The manuscript is written on vellum in two columns in the Geez language in the XVIIth century. The writings are bold and neat. The headings and names are rubricated. There are musical notes over most of the text. It has marginal notes and designs. Its size is 19.5 x 15.5 cm and has 78 folios with wooden boards cover.
(Microfilm)

k) History of Menelik II - The manuscript is written on paper in one column in Amharic language in the XIXth century. The writings are bold and neat. It includes the Governments of Shewa and its Districts and diary and St. Tekle Haimanot and history of aramo people. Its size is 21 x 17 cm and has 178 folio with hard cover.
(Microfilm)

l) Henock - The manuscript is written on vellum in two columns in the Geez language in the XVth century. The writings are fine and neat. Its size is 15.5 x 19 cm and has 160 folios with simple wooden boards cover. There are marginal notes on each page. Some times the pen changes. It includes 10 other books in between. (Microfilm)

Management Plan

Assessment against the Selection Criteria

The manuscripts selected are authentic sources of history and are rare collections

Consultation

Nominator

Name : Mr Akalu Woldemariam

Relationship to doc. heritage : Historian and Team Leader to Translation & Research Department

Contact details : P.O. Box 717, National Archives & Library, ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia

Assessment of Risk

Most of the manuscripts are not in a good physical condition. Because of financial constraint, it is not even possible for the Department to provide microfilm or Xerox copy. Instead, the original copy is always at the disposal of researchers. This kind of service, by its very implication, has its own contribution to the deterioration of the physical condition of the manuscripts.

Ethiopia has rare, precious and priceless manuscripts written in its own alphabet in form of verse and prose which reflect its indigenous civilization. Apprehending their historical, religious, philosophical, artistic and socio-cultural values, the Ethiopian National Archives and Library is trying its best to collect all those manuscripts for scholastic research and preserve them for the next generation. In so doing the department has managed to microfilm 10,000 manuscripts and books written on vellum (parchment). There are also some written on paper. Alongside with these, it also has managed to collect hundreds of

original copies. This activity was made possible through the financial assistance from donor agencies (like the Ford Foundation). But, at present, there is no more financial assistance; therefore the Library could not go ahead with its collecting. Because the budget allocated by the Government of Ethiopia is not sufficient enough to accommodate the problem. Leaving aside the collections under the custodianship of the Library, it is estimated that some 500,000 manuscripts are still preserved by their owners and their legal successors. Had the microfilming activity along with the inventory continued, it could have been possible to rescue the endangered manuscripts and preserve them for posterity in the National Library.

Finally, the nominator sincerely admits that the above-mentioned manuscripts are not the only proper ones to be nominated. The nomination here is only meant to give highlight. Unless a project designed and sponsored by a donor is carried out, I feel that it is impossible to select and be up to the demands of the "Memory of the World" Register from a large number of collections the National Library has.