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## THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND LIBRARY OF ETHIOPIA: SIX YEARS OF ETHIO-FRENCH COOPERATION (2001-2006)

*Anaïs Wion\**

Most scholars are aware of the fragility of the “material” they are working with, especially in the field of Ethiopian studies where the confrontation between the western world and so-called traditional societies creates unevenness. The researcher, deeply involved in his own process of assimilation and analysis, often tends to avoid noticing those distortions, let alone trying to fight them. Nonetheless, it is necessary to stress that cultural heritages are endangered in different ways. One category of threats that has long been known consists of natural disasters and improper preservation. These are well-known mechanical threats. A second, more cultural category derives from the consequences of the inner modernisation process of Ethiopian cultures that lead new generations to disdain marks of “backward” or “non-civilised” traditions, to use two terms very frequently employed by Ethiopian themselves to designate their own societies. This mirror effect transforms Ethiopian cultures into undesired ones, and “western culture” –often considered wrongly as a homogenous entity-, becomes the one and only desirable model. It would be jumping to conclusion to speak of acculturation, given that Ethiopian societies are made up of different and complementary traditions, most of them very proud and aware of their own specificities. Nonetheless the value of cultural heritage is changing together with the transformations of the societies. The growth of the heritage industry put on threat some artefacts that, from a plain insertion in the society who create and use them, become highly prized pieces of art. This value-added, fabricated and sold by the western world, is a major threat. Robberies provoked by this fairly recent and lately increasing interest of collectors, museums and libraries for Ethiopian traditions are a reality that should more often be discussed openly by the scholarly community.

In Ethiopia, certain governmental agencies are mandated to protect and preserve the national heritage, namely the Agency for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH), in regard to archaeological and cultural heritage *in situ*<sup>1</sup>, and the National Archives and Library of Ethiopian (NALE)<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately these institutions are not always well known

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<sup>1</sup> The duties and powers of the ARCCH were defined in proclamation n°209 of the year 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Recently, NALE has become ENALA, Ethiopian National Archives and Library Agency.

by scholars. Leading a scientific and technical cooperation program with NALE, as project director in the field of library studies, I had the chance to participate in the Second International Enno Littmann Conference with two colleagues from NALE, Mrs. Helina Seyum, head of the Ethiopian Studies section of the National Library, and Mr. Kiros Adera, head of the department of Archives Administration.

## 1. Historical overview of NALE

The National Library and the National Archives are rather young agencies, inasmuch as the Library was founded in 1944 and the Archives only really attained a legal existence in 1976. Nonetheless, the history of libraries is as old as the history of written culture in Christian Ethiopia, as Ethiopians will proudly state in any communication on the topic. Archive management in its modern signification was first introduced during Menelik's reign, around 1908, when he created a Ministry of the Pen in charge of collecting the records of other ministries.

### *1944-1953: the first years*

The first attempt to create a central public library in Addis Ababa dates back to the beginning of Haile Selassie's reign<sup>3</sup>. After the Italian occupation, the *bētā māṣḥāft wā-māzāgebtā ṭebābat wā-ḫēna alāmat* was founded on November 1943<sup>4</sup> and the King of Kings inaugurated it on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1944<sup>5</sup> under the name *Yā-Hezḥ Bētā Māṣḥāft wā-Māzāker*<sup>6</sup>. On this solemn day, exactly three years after the liberation, Haile Selassie declared: "It is perhaps especially suitable that on this day of national liberation we should open this first National Library of Our Empire. As we celebrate the liberation of our people, we lay the foundations for the liberation of their minds"<sup>7</sup>. The National Library was responsible to the Ministry of Education and was regulated by two official proclamations<sup>8</sup>. The National Library included part of the previous collection of the Ethiopian public library as well as the collection of the Italian library of the Governor General<sup>9</sup>. The first General Director was Sārāqā Berhan Gābrā Egzi'abhēr, a young and promising

<sup>3</sup> Wright, 1964 :22, who states that an *ex-libris* in a French book preserved in National Library bear the mention "Offert par Sa Majesté Haïle Selassié I à la Bibliothèque Nationale d'Éthiopie à l'occasion de son avènement au trône impérial. Addis Abeba le 2 novembre 1930"; see also on the first imperial library, Richard Pankhurst, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> According to the foundation plaque placed in the entrance hall.

<sup>5</sup> *Ethiopian Review*, 1945, 11.

<sup>6</sup> It's worthy to notice that NALE is still known today in Addis Ababa under the popular nickname of *Wāmāzāker*.

<sup>7</sup> Haylā Selassé I, 1944 ; "National Library now open to public", *Ethiopian Herald*, 1944.

<sup>8</sup> Proclamation 71/1945 ; Proclamation 80/1946.

<sup>9</sup> Roberts, 1946: 188 quoting "La Biblioteca del Governo Generale dell'A.O.I.", 1940:752-53 and "Invio di pubblicazioni alla Biblioteca Generale dell'A.O.I.", 1940.

intellectual, educated in the first graduating class of the Imperial School<sup>10</sup> and having pursued his education in Library Sciences during the war in Greece and Egypt<sup>11</sup>. He seems to have dedicated a lot of energy to the development of the young institution, an involvement that led him to a promotion<sup>12</sup>. He was then replaced by Käbbädä Mikaél, the famous poet and writer. It may be as early as these first years that Abba Jérôme Gäbrä Musé was hired as keeper of manuscripts<sup>13</sup>. The origin of the first manuscript holdings is not known; indeed, almost the entire history of this collection remains to be done.

*1953-1967: expansion and competition*

In 1953, the institution was placed under the authority of the newly created Imperial Board of Antiquities, headed by Käbbädä Mikaél<sup>14</sup>. Some structural changes occurred. The “Library of the People”<sup>15</sup> was divided in two: the Public Library and the Research Library<sup>16</sup>. The Public Library had to perform a variety of duties. It had to build from scratch a network of libraries in the country. The Public Division also offered services for readers such as book loans, consultation of Ethiopian and foreign newspapers, a children’s section and some Braille books for blind readers<sup>17</sup>. In 1957, the number of registered readers numbered 26 000<sup>18</sup>, mostly young people. The collection contained around 10 000 books<sup>19</sup>, with only one thousand in Amharic<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Mahetemä Sellasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, 1949: 604.

<sup>11</sup> *Ethiopian Review*, 1945.

<sup>12</sup> Pankhurst, 1979:601-02.

<sup>13</sup> Tubiana, 1983:305 states that *Abba Jérôme* held this position from 1944 to his retirement in 1964; see also Rita Pankhurst evoking “the learned and witty Abba Jerome Gabra Muse, with his flowing beard” but without stating his exact position. This at least testifies that he was working for the National Library between 1957 and 1961 : in “The Speech delivered during the laying of Cornerstone for National Archives and Library building”, 7<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2002, available at [www.nale.gov.et](http://www.nale.gov.et) “News” (last consulted in 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Kebbédé Mikaél and Leclant, 1955.

<sup>15</sup> The potential ambiguity of Amharic “*yä-beḩb*”, lit. “of the people”, when translated in English has been very much used after 1961 by S. Wright and his followers to criticise the “dual role” of the National Library. According to S. Wright, *yä-beḩb* means at the same time “National” and “Popular” and, by analogy in the context of library, “Public”. This denomination would contain the germ of the incapacity of the National Library to accomplish its task. See Wright, 1964: 22, and almost all articles of Rita Pankhurst since 1966 until present. Nonetheless, the English version of Haile Selassie’s speech (1944) confirms that the institution can be referred to as the National Library.

<sup>16</sup> Kebraab W. Giorgis, 1976 : 87.

<sup>17</sup> Lockot, undated:8.

<sup>18</sup> According to Rita Eldon, 1957:369, later Rita Pankhurst, at this time librarian of the Public Division. But evaluations differ. According to Paton, 1970:30, only 600 readers were registered to take out books. According to Lockot, undated:8, at the end of the 60’s there was an annual activity of 60 000 readers.

<sup>19</sup> 13 000 in 1962, according to Danton, 1962:1733.

<sup>20</sup> Eldon, 1957:369.

The Research or Scientific Division had to establish a centralized research library and to coordinate the national bibliography, this last task being effective only after the issuance of the law on legal deposit in 1975<sup>21</sup>. Its collections comprise books and material related to Ethiopian studies<sup>22</sup>, including the manuscripts collection. It received all the publications of the United Nations (nowadays in the Public Section). It also directed the Archaeological Section, founded in 1952 by the Emperor and led by French scholars. The review *Annales d'Éthiopie* was issued by this department and co-edited by Kābbädä Mikael<sup>23</sup>.

The National Library was one of the institutional tools conceived to elevate Ethiopia, and its Emperor, to the same rank as the industrialized and free nations, at a time when most of African and Southern countries were still under colonial domination. This, at least, can be inferred from the monumental mural painting covering one of the walls of the Public Division main reading room<sup>24</sup>, the former Blatengéta Heruy Reading Hall. In the centre sits enthroned Haile Selassie, wearing a crown and holding a sceptre and an imperial globe, with three lions at his feet and the Trinity church in the background. Allegorical scenes are depicted all around. At the left of the Emperor, one can see dead bodies of traditional warriors, women and children fleeing in terror, a column of horsemen holding spears and small tanks on the top of a hill. Two statuesque women, holding books but not reading, mourn and condemn this scene. Between sky and earth, heavy black birds glide over this desolation. At the right of the Emperor, one can see in the background women running to exalt khaki-dressed soldiers marching in column while huge tanks stand in the background and proud planes protect the army. In the foreground, children have stopped their games for reading amid peaceful scenery. Two allegoric female figures symbolise Justice and Veneration for the Emperor. All this happens on earth. In the heavy cloudy sky, winged demons fight against archangels and four horsemen gallop to the cardinal points, referring clearly to the Apocalypse (6: 1-7). As suggested by Giulia Bonacci, this very symbolic painting could be a representation of the final eschatological battle leading to the advent of the messiah incarnated here by the Ethiopian Emperor<sup>25</sup>. The political meaning of the whole could be therefore, when related to the context of a National Library, a praise of modernisation and enlightenment, and a condemnation of the kind of backwardness which would not allow Ethiopia to stand on equal footing with the industrialised countries. Books and education are here compared to weapons and are designated as one of the main strengths of a Nation.

Curiously enough, in spite of its monumental size and strong symbolic message, none

<sup>21</sup> On this quite controversial topic see issues of the Unesco periodical *Bibliography, Documentation, Terminology* VIII/6 (1968), XI/6 (1971), XII/3 (1972), XIII/6 (1973); Ministry of Culture and Sports, 1982; Gupta, 1992: 45-56.

<sup>22</sup> «(...) about 30,000 catalogued books and a good number of others awaiting classification », Eldon, 1957: 370.

<sup>23</sup> Kēbbédé Mikael and Leclant, 1955 ; Miquel, 1956. The close connection of *Annales d'Éthiopie* with the National Library is showed through the very complete reviews of Amharic books published in the first issues.

<sup>24</sup> I am greatly indebted to Estelle Sohier who provided me with a colour picture of the painting.

<sup>25</sup> Giulia Bonacci, personal communication, Sept. 2006.

of the articles mentioning the National Library has ever paid attention to this painting. And I was able to find only three published photos in black and white<sup>26</sup>. According to Richard Pankhurst, the painter was Beatrice Playne, a British artist who lived in Ethiopia at the end of the 1940's and beginning of the 1950's. In her book on Ethiopian church paintings, she introduced herself saying that she had learned mural painting in Mexico, that she arrived in Ethiopia as a British Council worker on December 1945 and that she "was engaged on some special work in the National Library in Addis Abeba very shortly after [her] arrival"<sup>27</sup>. The Emperor later had his portrait repainted by Em'a'älaf Heruy<sup>28</sup>, son of *alüqa* Heruy, who had his atelier in the National Library and was appreciated for his fine execution of portraits, which he painted from photos. It was a very dynamic period for the National Library, which also sheltered the atelier of the famous Afä-Wärq Täklä. Additionally, the National Library had an Art Gallery as well as a Historical Museum<sup>29</sup>.

It was during this time that H.W. Lockot worked as a consultant for the National Library. In 1951, he seized the occasion of an unexpected encounter with the Emperor to ask to be appointed to the National Library. And he did receive the appointment as he depicts in the conclusion of his book, *The Mission*. Although already in his forties with ten years of professional experience in librarianship, he felt overwhelmed by the task. Even after having spent some twenty years at the Ethiopian National Library and the last two years as the head of the Research Division, he seems remarkably ambivalent or even negative when he states, at the conclusion of his book: "Who needed such an institution here in Ethiopia? Could they afford it? And how could the expense be justified? Most of the users of a national library are not yet born. (...) And what worlds should this library represent –the Western world? All the printed literature that had found its way here was from the West, and the new literature originating in the country somehow mirrored the Western spirit."<sup>30</sup> Such a portrayal does not fit very well with the enthusiastic desire for books described in many accounts of the period, as the Public Division offered a very successful loan service and did not have enough books to satisfy its readers.

This raises the problem of the policy sustained by the Imperial government toward the National Library, a policy which showed no strong political will for the development of the institution. The General Directors appointed by Haile Selassie were outstanding intellectuals like Käbbädä Mikaél and after him the historian Täklä Sadiq Mekurya, or, at the end of the 1950's, *blatengéta* Sahlä Sädalü<sup>31</sup>, an old dignitary who had made his career in the first part of

<sup>26</sup> One detail presenting the Emperor, the church and the lions is found in Lockot, undated:8. One general view of the Reading Room displays a full sight on the painting, in Arefaine Belay, 1985:190. It is the only complete view published. Shoot during the Derg period, it shows that a white piece of paper was stuck on Haile Selassie's portrait in order to hide him. A third photo shows Haile Selassie himself standing in front of the mural for an official ceremony at the National Library, in Gérard, 2006, p. 40-41 photo commented by Estelle Sohier.

<sup>27</sup> Playne, Beatrice (1954), *Saint George for Ethiopia*, London, pp. ix-x.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Pankhurst, personal communication, Sept. 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Eldon, 1957.

<sup>30</sup> Lockot, 1989:131.

<sup>31</sup> Pankhurst, 1979:602, 604

Haile Selassie's reign<sup>32</sup>. They may well have done their best to lead the institution but none of them was properly trained in librarianship nor had the tools to integrate the institution into the international community of librarians. The foundation by the government, in December 1961, of the University Library, consolidating the holdings of different colleges and universities collections and especially the rich holdings of the University College Library, marked a step in the development of the National Library. The new public institution hired Anglo-Saxon advisors who had been working for a long time in Addis Ababa: Stanislas Chojnacki, former librarian of the University College Library, Stephen Wright, who donated his private collection of Amharic books to the new library and became the Amharic books librarian, Richard Pankhurst, who was appointed director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, and Rita Pankhurst, former librarian of the Public Division of the National Library, who became librarian of the I.E.S<sup>33</sup>. The creation of this team, together with a strong policy of cooperation with American libraries and foundations, led to a very dynamic development of the University Library system. Unfortunately this was of no real help for the National Library and brought no relief to its numerous tasks. Very soon a competition arose between the two institutions, with the University Library claiming the right to absorb the Research Division of the National Library, to obtain legal deposit and to publish a national bibliography. Rita Pankhurst describes this situation very clearly in her article "Leadership in Ethiopian Post-war development: the National Library vs. the University Library", pointing out all the handicaps, failures and shortcomings of the National Library<sup>34</sup>. This uninspiring image of the National Library was disseminated in the numerous publications distributed in the international network of libraries resources by the university and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, as well as by the foreign experts sent by UNESCO<sup>35</sup>, who all echoed this same sentiment. In the meantime, the National Library itself had an almost total lack of public-relations policy.

*1967-77: legal improvements and long-term projects*

In 1967, the National Library was placed under the Ministry of Culture and Sports<sup>36</sup>. This was also the year when the Ethiopian Library Association was created<sup>37</sup>. One of the main institutional changes was the creation of a department for archives. The need to establish the archives more firmly was growing and the pre-revolutionary period realised clearly the need for preserving official documents. The archives remained for some years a theoretical creation. This first attempt to give birth to a National Archives which would be legally empowered to gather records came to fruition only a few weeks before the Revolution. In July 1974, a committee under the Antiquities Administration proposed to the Prime Minister's Office a draft structure for National Archives. This program had no time to be realised. It was only a few years later, in

<sup>32</sup> Bahru Zawde, 2002 :75-76

<sup>33</sup> Wright, 1964:23-24

<sup>34</sup> Pankhurst, 1979.

<sup>35</sup> Danton, 1962; Dike, 1968; Paton, 1969 and 1970.

<sup>36</sup> Aleme Eshete, 1982:39 even considered that the National Library has been the nucleus of the newly created Ministry of Culture.

<sup>37</sup> Adhana Mengste-Ab, 1993:287. Unfortunately while writing this article I did not have access to the *Ethiopian Library Association Bulletin*, published from 1971 to 1978.

1977, that the National Archives Division was definitively founded<sup>38</sup>. It immediately became a member of the International Council for Archives (ICA).

The Derg regime also valorised the growth of the National Library. In 1975, the right of legal deposit was at last established by law<sup>39</sup>, substituting to an imperial letter addressed to each Ethiopian publishers but that has proved not effective. Three copies of all printed materials issued in Ethiopia were henceforth to be deposited at the National Library. The re-organization into four divisions was detailed by the General Director as followed<sup>40</sup>: National Library Division; Historical Archives Division; Technical Services Division; Public Services Division. The General Director also stated that in the first half of the eighties, sixty persons were employed by the National Archives and Library of Ethiopia (NALE) amongst whom twelve had a diploma and six a university degree<sup>41</sup>.

This period is also noteworthy for the collection of manuscripts and the general policy toward the ancient written heritage of the country. A first Amharic catalogue of the collection preserved in the Research Section was issued in 1970 by Mängestu Abagaz<sup>42</sup>. It describes 272 volumes, in a very concise way. This appears to have been the starting point of the card catalogue now available in the reading room. One can guess that at this time the collection indeed comprised 272 items, which would fit the estimations given at the end of the 1960's of 230-240 codices<sup>43</sup>. How this collection reached the current size of 835 volumes remains to be studied<sup>44</sup>, as well as who completed the card catalogue up to number 617, which is the last entry in the catalogue<sup>45</sup>.

#### *1977-1994: realisations of Post-Revolutionary Ethiopia*

A huge project that benefited from National Library support is the microfilming of

<sup>38</sup> Ezekiel, 1994:71.

<sup>39</sup> Proclamation 50/1975.

<sup>40</sup> Arefaine Belay, 1985:187.

<sup>41</sup> The history of librarians and archivists' higher education in Ethiopia is in itself a broad topic that cannot be treated here. Although some education programs were sustained since the 1950s in the National Library and at the University, most of the professionals had to complete their education abroad. During the eighties, librarians and archivists were doing their studies in U.S.S.R., U.K. and India. Some landmarks are described by : Shukla, Champaklal P. (1966) "Library training in Ethiopia" in: *Unesco Bulletin for Libraries* [XX/6] 325-326; Kebreab Wäldä Giorgis (1974) « La formation des bibliothécaires en Éthiopie » in: *Unesco bulletin for libraries* [XXVIII/3] 164-168 ; Sushma Gupta (1993) "Development of the Library Profession and Education in Ethiopia" in: *International Information and Library Review* [25] 73-83.

<sup>42</sup> [Mängestu Abägaz], 1970.

<sup>43</sup> Lockot, undated:8 ; Paton, 1970:30 ;

<sup>44</sup> A good hundred of them reproduce famous manuscripts coming from churches and monasteries and were entirely done by the scribes *mārigēta* Hāwazä Berhan Wäldä Mikael and *mārigēta* Mälk'ä Krestos Näbyu. It also seems that some codices were collected by the Archaeological Section, but it is not known under what circumstances (Miquel, 1956).

<sup>45</sup> Part of the work was done by the former keeper of the section, Kenäfä Regb Ataläl († 2007).

manuscripts preserved in religious and private libraries. At the initiative of the Ethiopian Patriarch, *abunä* Téwoflos, it was planned as early as 1973 to conduct an extensive campaign of reproduction of the manuscript heritage. The project started up very quickly and was conducted during the entire Derg regime<sup>46</sup>, as a collaboration between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture, the Divinity School of Vanderbilt (Nashville, Tennessee) and the American University of Saint Louis, Collegeville. The American side withdrew in 1987 and the National Library carried on alone until 1991. Then, due to the political situation, the project had to stop. This is the reason why only the National Library preserved the entire collection of 9238 microfilmed manuscripts, while the Hill Monastic Manuscripts Library, as well as the I.E.S. and the Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church<sup>47</sup>, possess the first 7454 microfilmed volumes<sup>48</sup>. This collection covers a large number of churches, in Addis Ababa, Shäwa, Gojjam, Bägémdar and Gondär. Nonetheless, this coverage could not have been absolutely exhaustive, for, in the absence of mobile microfilming unit, the churches had to transport their manuscripts to Addis Ababa to have them microfilmed at the National Library. Understandably, some communities were reluctant to send all their manuscripts on the long and risky journey to the capital city.

This unique collection of microfilmed manuscripts revealed new texts and made possible access to manuscripts still in the possession of their owners. The first 5000 codices have been catalogued<sup>49</sup>.

In the field of archives, the historical collections –it is to say archives that are not gathered directly at the ministerial record centres- found their way to the National Archives. First some governmental documents from the Imperial Era were transferred to National Archives. The archives of the Royal Palace, also known as “Gebi archives”, were collected in 1987. This is a very heterogeneous collection, composed of charters, topographical data, photos, letters, and documents concerning ports, boundaries, establishment of the air force, and last but not least,

<sup>46</sup> Sergew Hable Selassie, 1974-1993. The first issue of the *Bulletin* gives a very well-documented presentation of the origin of the project.

<sup>47</sup> The Library of the Patriarchate does not seem to possess anymore the entire collection.

<sup>48</sup> In October 2005, a technical team from the Hill Monastic Microfilm Library digitized in NALE the microfilms they lacked. These digital images were later displayed at NALE and IES.

<sup>49</sup> *A Catalogue of Ethiopian Manuscripts Microfilmed for the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa and for the Monastic Manuscript Library* (beginning with Vol. II: *for the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library*), Collegeville: Vol. I: *Project Numbers 1-300*, by William F. Macomber (Collegeville 1975) 355 p. ; Vol. II: *Project Numbers 301-700*, by William F. Macomber (Collegeville 1976) 542 p. ; Vol. III: *Project Numbers 701-1100*, by William F. Macomber (Collegeville 1978) 524 p. ; Vol. IV: *Project Numbers 1101-1500*, by Getatchew Haile (Collegeville 1979) 760 p.; Vol. V: *Project Numbers 1501-2000*, by Getatchew Haile and William F. Macomber (Collegeville 1981) 623 p.; Vol. VI: *Project Numbers 2001-2500*, by Getatchew Haile and William F. Macomber (Collegeville 1982) 650 p.; Vol. VII: *Project Numbers 2501-3000*, by Getatchew Haile and William F. Macomber (Collegeville 1983) 414 p. ; Vol. VIII: *Project Numbers 3001-3500*, by Getatchew Haile (Collegeville 1985) 405 p. ; Vol. IX: *Project Number 3501-4000*, by Getatchew Haile (Collegeville 1987) 413 p. ; Vol. X: *Project Numbers 4001-5000*, by Getatchew Haile (Collegeville 1993) 511 p.

the unification of Eritrea with the Ethiopian State<sup>50</sup>. At the same time the very rich archives of the crown Prince (Alga Wäraš Gebi) were also collected; some of the documents were related for instance to the aborted coup of 1960. Historical collections were made of nationalised papers, as those of *däggazmač* Zäwdä Gäbrä Sellasé, a former high-ranked civil servant, coming from a family of Tigrean dignitaries, who had gathered for his Oxford PhD<sup>51</sup> a huge amount of papers concerning the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopian internal and foreign policy.

Institutional improvements continued at the time of the overthrow of the Derg regime in 1991 and during the transition to a stable regime, thanks to the efforts of National Archives department's successive directors<sup>52</sup>, of the different committees establishing recommendations and guide-lines<sup>53</sup> and of the visits and advices of foreign experts mandated by the International Council of Archives<sup>54</sup>. Nation-wide, a civil service reform led to major institutional reforms<sup>55</sup>. In June 1994 the Department of Ethiopian Library and Archives was upgraded to an Agency, opening at last the way for a real national policy.

During this period of improvement, the National Archives acquired various historical collections, mainly from Ethiopian intellectuals. In 1993, the papers of the great historian *aläqa* Tayä Gäbrä Maryam (1860-1924)<sup>56</sup> were transferred from the Ethiopian Language Academy. In 1996, the archives of *blata* Märs'e Hazän Wäldä Qirqos and *däggazmač* Käbbädä Täsämma, both of them dignitaries of the Imperial regime and historians who had recorded their own views on the political life of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were transferred from Brana printing press. In 1997, the records from the Censorship unit of the Ministry of Culture during the Derg Regime were acquired. Then, in 2000, some archives concerning the Ethiopian monastery of Jerusalem were transferred, also from the Ministry of Culture<sup>57</sup>.

#### *1994 onward: a new legal frame and the birth of NALE*

The National Library and its National Archives department were reorganised and strengthened by the issuance in June 1999 of a law, the "Ethiopian National Archives and Library Proclamation n°179/1999,<sup>58</sup> giving them a legal framework and a nation-wide mandate. This proclamation lays the groundwork for setting up a reliable policy for NALE, which starting in 1999 was considered as an Agency within the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Information and

<sup>50</sup> According to the communication of Kiros Adera at the 2d International Littmann Conference, January 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Zewde Gabre Sellasie (1975) *Yohannes IV. A political biography*, London, Oxford.

<sup>52</sup> Abdurahman Yaheya Garad, 1979; Id., 1980; [Dereje Hailu], 1996.

<sup>53</sup> Degife Gabre Tsadik, 1991:77-79.

<sup>54</sup> Lenz, 1976; Mabbs, 1982; Swift, 1996.

<sup>55</sup> Atkilt Assefa, 1996.

<sup>56</sup> Alemé Esheté, 1974 and Bahru Zewde, 2002:67-70.

<sup>57</sup> from Kiros Adera, 2006.

<sup>58</sup> Available on the web site of NALE : [www.nale.gov.et](http://www.nale.gov.et)

within the Ministry of Culture and Tourism since the October 2005 change of government<sup>59</sup>. The proclamation details with great care the powers and duties of the National Archives and the National Library. With the responsibility for collecting, preserving and making available the information resources of the country (precisely defined), it must initiate regulations and directives, inspect their implementation, ensure professional training, and represent the country with regard to international collaboration.

Following the proclamation, a large restructuring process was undertaken which was put into effect in 2003: the National Library and the National Archives were upgraded as two distinct directions with new departments. As the proclamation states: “Where found necessary, Archives and Library may be established separately and have their respective autonomous body” (Part. I, art. 4/1). Their common services have been redefined.

With this 1999 proclamation, the long-planned new building for the Agency<sup>60</sup> became a concrete reality. The budget of more a 30 million Birr was provided by the Ethiopian government and some Ethiopian sponsors, and the stone corner was laid on December 2002<sup>61</sup>.

## 2. Five years of Ethio-French cooperation in the fields of archives and libraries

In this context of the implementation of new regulations and at the request of the General Director of NALE, acting with the rank of Deputy Commissioner, M. Atkilt Assefa, the French Embassy<sup>62</sup> in Addis Ababa arranged a visit for two consultants from May 28<sup>th</sup> to June 8<sup>th</sup> 2001 in order to draw up a program of co-operation with NALE. The experts were Denise Ogilvie, curator at the French Historical Centre of National Archives<sup>63</sup>, who had previously conducted the collection and inventorying of Vicomte du Bourg de Bozas archives<sup>64</sup>, and myself, historian, at that time working on my doctoral thesis on the complementary roles of oral

<sup>59</sup> Proclamation n°270/2005; Proclamation n°271/2005.

<sup>60</sup> In 1943, the National Library was settled in an Italian building that had sheltered the Trade Ministry and which quickly proved to be too small for sheltering the growing collections. See Wright, 1945:13.

<sup>61</sup> Speech of the General Director Mr. Atkilt Assefa, 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2002, cf [www.nale.gov.et](http://www.nale.gov.et) “News”.

<sup>62</sup> More specifically the Service de Coopération et d’Action Culturelle (SCAC), at this time headed by Éric Lavertue.

<sup>63</sup> Centre Historique des Archives Nationales (CHAN), section of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>64</sup> Inventory and description of some unknown archives of the mission led from 1900 to 1902 by the Vicomte du Bourg de Bozas in Southern Ethiopia. These papers were found while collecting the private papers of the parasitologist Emile Brumpt. They are composed of field-notes, topographical data and photos. They were deposited at the Pasteur Institute Archives. They were described together with the description of other Du Bourg de Bozas archives preserved in the French National Library (archives of the Société de Géographie), in the French National Archives (série F 17) and at the Museum of Mankind, by S. Billonau and D. Demellier.

traditions and written documents for the transmission of history<sup>65</sup>.

This mission made it possible to form an initial idea of the contents of the collections, as well as to state clearly the needs of NALE as regards equipment and professional training (this last point having already been clearly identified by an internal survey). In light of the new duties entrusted to NALE by the proclamation 179/99, we selected, in close collaboration with NALE's heads, a few fields of action in which it appeared likely that cooperation with French professionals could be profitable. A program was then drawn up, focusing on:

- concrete and practical support in the setting up of a systematic treatment of contemporary archives
- the providing of information and necessary training for the building of a section of sound archives
- professional training in the field of conservation and preservation, for all types of collections
- raising funds and implementation of a general catalogue of Ethiopian manuscripts
- issuance of a guide to Ethiopian archives in France, to provide accurate information on the numerous holdings in different French institutions concerning Ethiopia and Ethio-French relations.

This cooperative program proved its usefulness when, at the end of 2005, after five years of collaboration, a protocol agreement institutionalised the relationship between the Ethiopian and French partners<sup>66</sup>. The NALE, the French National Library (BnF) and the French National Archives (DAF) signed a tripartite agreement on technical and scientific cooperation. The text, composed of eight articles, emphasises the importance of reciprocal exchanges in the area of technical expertise. It also introduces new means of cooperation such as exchange of professional documentation and copies of material preserved in each institution, as well as the realisation of joint cultural events. The General Director of NALE, Atkilt Assefa, came to Paris in December 2005 for the joint signing with the President of the BnF, Mr. J.-N. Jeanneney and the Director of the DAF, Mrs. M. de Boisdeffre. Having learned French since 2002 within the framework of this cooperation, Mr. Atkilt Assefa performed these ceremonies in French a significant mark of his commitment to this cooperative program, which we will now present in detail.

<sup>65</sup> Wion Anaïs, « *Aux confins le feu, au centre le paradis* ». *Qoma Fasilädäs, un monastère royal dans l'Éthiopie du 17<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, doctoral thesis, Paris 1 Sorbonne University, 2003, 2 vol.

<sup>66</sup> I would like to express my thanks to all the people who have made this program possible, and first of all, to the Cooperation and Cultural Action Services (SCAC) of the French Embassy in Ethiopia for its annually renewed financial and logistical support until 2007 included. Namely, I express my gratitude to the successive cultural counsellors who have given their support to this project, Éric Lavertue (2001), Jean-Luc François (2002) and Jean-Baptiste Chauvin (2003-2007); to the first counsellor of the Ambassador, Jean Graebing (2003-2006); and with special thanks to the dynamic Deborah Girmay, project executive from 2004 to 2006. In the French National Archives, I would like to thank Christine Martinez, in charge of International Cooperation. I address my gratitude to the directors of the Alliance Éthio-Française, Lucien Roux (2001-2005) and Guy Maurette (2005-2006), and to the very competent staff of the Alliance, for always carrying out the training programs with great professionalism and care.

*Cooperation in the field of archives*

## Presenting French archives to Ethiopian acting heads (2001-2002)

Mr. Ahmed Adem, then head of the National Archives, came to France from 17<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> September 2001. Three priorities were given to his visit. The first was to provide him a survey of the network and methods of the French archives. Ethiopia is an Anglophone country, even if during the Imperial period, French was the language of diplomacy and intellectual elite. The British presence in Ethiopia from 1941 to 1944 has been decisive in the choices of school programs and in the steady advance of English in the country. Accordingly, Anglo-Saxon models for archival administration (Canadian, for instance) have until now been more studied in Ethiopia (expertise from British Council experts, easy access to literature). Russian archival methods are also well known and, in some respects, implemented in Ethiopia. A comparison with French methods was therefore expected by Ethiopian professionals.

The second aim of this visit was to present different collections of Ethiopia-related archives and documentary heritage. Finally, the third goal was for Ahmed Adem to introduce himself to different potential collaborators. The program was quite heavy: in Paris, Historical Centre of National Archives<sup>67</sup>, Centre of Contemporary Archives<sup>68</sup> (Fontainebleau), Centre for Overseas Archives<sup>69</sup>, Diplomatic Archives<sup>70</sup>, International Council of Archives<sup>71</sup>, Centre for Conservation and Research on Graphic Documents<sup>72</sup>, Institut Français de Restauration des Œuvres d'Art (IFROA) now in the Institut National du Patrimoine<sup>73</sup>, École Nationale des Chartes<sup>74</sup>, École Nationale du Patrimoine<sup>75</sup>, Pasteur Institute<sup>76</sup>; then outside Paris: one Departmental Archives (Maine et Loire), sound-library of the Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme<sup>77</sup> (phonothèque, MMSH, Aix-en-Provence). Thanks to his interest always accompanied by a strong critical sense, Ahmed Adem grasped clearly what could be the benefits of

<sup>67</sup> Centre Historique des Archives Nationales: <http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/chan/index.html> (accessed on 9 November 2011).

<sup>68</sup> Centre des Archives Contemporaines: <http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/cac/fr/> (accessed on 9 November 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer : <http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/caom/fr/> (accessed on 9 November 2011).

<sup>70</sup> Archives Diplomatiques, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères : [http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/ministere\\_817/archives-patrimoine\\_3512/index.html](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/ministere_817/archives-patrimoine_3512/index.html) (accessed on 9 November 2011).

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.ica.org/> (accessed on 9 November 2011).

<sup>72</sup> Centre de Recherche sur la Conservation des documents graphiques (now Centre de recherche sur la conservation des collections, CRCC) : [www.crcc.cnrs.fr/](http://www.crcc.cnrs.fr/) (accessed on 9 November 2011).

<sup>73</sup> IFROA, now Institut National du Patrimoine: [www.inp.fr](http://www.inp.fr) (accessed on 9 November 2011).

<sup>74</sup> École nationale des Chartes: <http://www.enc.sorbonne.fr/> (accessed on 9 November 2011).

<sup>75</sup> Institut National du Patrimoine: <http://www.inp.fr/institut/presentation/> (accessed on 9 November 2011).

<sup>76</sup> Archives, Institut Pasteur: <http://www.pasteur.fr/infosci/archives/f-acs.html> (accessed on 9 November 2011).

<sup>77</sup> Phonothèque de la MMSH: <http://phonothèque.mmsh.univ-aix.fr> (accessed on 9 November 2011).

cooperation with French institutions and of building strong links with French professionals. This first visit led to a second visit, which was conducted in 2002 (21 Jan.-5 Feb.) by Mr. Akalu Wäldä Maryam, then head of the Translation and Research Team (communications, research, professional training of archivists in the record centres of the Ministries), together with Mrs. Shitaye Getahun, head of Arrangement and Classification Team (classification of historical collections, finding aids). The program focused on the following points:

- A general survey of the French Archives network and its functioning. Some of the institutions and archives centres visited by Ahmed Adem were chosen for more intensive visits and working sessions.
- Some presentations by the Ethiopian archivists of the situation of contemporary and historical archives in Ethiopia, chiefly *École Nationale du Patrimoine* and *École des Chartes*, in order to create an awareness in France about this rich cultural heritage and the task that faces NALE. It was also the occasion to make NALE more aware of the importance of better public relations.
- Small workshops in different technical and new information technologies services, to improve working methods in the field of finding aids, conservation techniques, record management.

This series of visits to France concluded in November 2002 with the participation of Ahmed Adem in the 36<sup>th</sup> CITRA (International Conference of the Round Table on Archives) in Marseilles, which was dedicated to the topic "How does the society perceive archives". Ahmed Adem presented a paper entitled "An Example of Perception of Archives by Administrative Creators", focusing on the problems encountered by institutions producing archives. In the records offices of the ministries, archive management is a responsibility performed by junior staff, badly paid and poorly trained, who are viewed as mere clerical staff performing a passive administrative support role. He also deplored the lack of written rules and procedures to standardise the daily tasks of ministerial and agency record managers.

#### Professional training in Addis Ababa on treatment of contemporary archives (2004-2005)

As an answer to the different issues discussed during the three visits to France of Ethiopian archivists, a practical training session on contemporary archives was held in Addis Ababa. It took place just before the National Archives created its record centre for collecting and treating the records coming from the ministries. The trainers were Anne-Sophie Maure, archivist at the Diplomatic Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Édouard Vasseur, curator at the Centre for Contemporary Archives. One of the reasons for the choice of these two French professionals was that their respective services work according to different methods, and were for that reason complementary; thus they could provide the Ethiopian trainees with two different perspectives and give them different answers to their questions. An initial two-week training session was conducted in October 2004 according to the following program: case study of the French legal and institutional background; who controls the past? archivists' role in appraisal; records and archives law and regulation schemes in Ethiopia; round table on the records/archives continuum; case studies in the appraisal process; preparing a records survey to control backlogs of unappraised records; workshop on appraisal of backlogs; disposal and retention schedules. The trainees, whose number grew over the two weeks from 23 to 38, were archivists from different services in NALE and records managers from different ministries.

As indicated in the mission report<sup>78</sup> this first training had very positive results. First, it caused archivists from NALE and records managers from the ministries to meet for an intensive working session. Then, after this training, the appraisal process was defined by NALE, and selection committees in the federal institutions were set up. But still questions remained and a second mission was planned. It took place in November 2005, and was held by the same French archivists.

Over two weeks, some fifty professionals from the National Archives and record management centres participated in this training session<sup>79</sup>. Only fifteen of them, mostly from NALE, had attended the first training. Once again, the difference of professional background between archivists from NALE and record managers from ministries record offices was considerable, but the communication between the two professional groups proved very dynamic. The audience's participation was so active as to modify the content of the program, introducing new topics. The four issues dealt with were: current and intermediate records; electronic archives; archival description (ISAD(G) and ISAAR); and preservation. The management of current and intermediate records was the main topic, developed throughout the first week. The others topics led to the following conclusions. In the field of electronic archives, some young professionals appeared highly interested and competent, and it was suggested that they receive a specific training on this issue<sup>80</sup>. In the field of archival description, the trainers learned to their surprise that most Ethiopian professionals were not aware of international standards and that the International Standard Organisation (ISO) official documents, which are quite expensive, had not yet been purchased. The trainees were very much interested in this matter, discovering for instance the possibilities of metadata exchanges. Finally for the last concluding section on preservation, fifteen librarians joined the group. On this topic, a real need for training was expressed by the persons present. Given the political context at that very moment, many questions were raised about appraisal, emergency transfer and safeguarding of crucial governmental records.

## *II.2 Cooperation in the field of libraries*

### Conservation and preservation

The question of preservation and conservation has been raised repeatedly over the years as one of utmost importance. As a consequence, an Ethiopian curator attended a profes-

<sup>78</sup> Maure and Vasseur, 2005.

<sup>79</sup> Let us here pay tribute to the commitment and bravery of both trainees and trainers, as well as the Alliance Éthio-française's staff and director, for the first day of the training was November 7<sup>th</sup> 2005, when the city of Addis Ababa was still living under the "general strike" protest movement. No cars, taxis, minibuses or buses were running and gun-shots could be heard all over the city. Nonetheless, some people did not hesitate to walk, sometimes long distances, to come to the Alliance Éthio-Française, where they had the pleasure of finding that the compound was open and the French trainers were present.

<sup>80</sup> This was done in October 2006, when Dereje Tadesse, archivist from NALE, came to Paris and Aix-en-Provence. The main themes were electronic archives and sound archives.

sional training session in France (October 2004), and thereafter a training session for a wider audience was held by two French experts in Addis Ababa (Jun. 2006).

The first step was the coming to France of the chief librarian of the Ethiopian studies and manuscripts section, Ms. Helina Seyum in October 2004. She participated in a one-month international professional training organised by the French National Library (27 Sept. – 22 Oct.) and including some fifteen curators from different countries. The ultimate aim of this tutorial was to give trainees the ability to direct a full conservation policy. It was devoted to conservation, restoration and preservation of different types of material: paper, leather, parchment, microfilm, photographs, digitised items, and so on. Because of the small number of trainees, participants were able to ask very specific questions about their particular situation; therefore questions about NALE's collections were raised.

During her stay in Paris, Helina Seyum had meetings with institutional heads interested in supporting further co-operative activities: head of the manuscripts department, French national Library; Senior Programme Specialist of the Information Society Division at UNESCO, Memory of the World program; representative of Foreign Affairs, Direction du Livre et de la Lecture (DLL), Ministry of Culture; head of IFLA(PAC). It was then planned that a training session would take place in NALE to continue this first training and to respond to questions that Helina Seyum and her colleagues would face when applying what she had learned in France. After discussion, it was suggested that a sanitary consultation be conducted together with the training session. This thus involved a double advantage: first to inspect the sanitary conditions of the collections before the moves; second to associate the trainees with a real and exhaustive examination of the collections. The main part of NALE's collections were about to move in a new building and the transfer of the collections has to be prepared with great care. The consultation was carried out in June 2006 by two young experts, Anne Lama, in charge of preventive conservation in the Centre Historique des Archives Nationales (CHAN) and Caroline Laffont, chemist working for the Conservation department of the French National Library.

The first week was devoted to the training on preservation and preventive conservation. The main topics were: overview of deterioration factors (environmental, physical, chemical, biological); main preventive and curative measures; presentation of neutral material and protective enclosures; creating and implementing a preservation plan; disaster preparedness and sanitary assessment methodologies; and recommendation for an exhibition. The trainees were seventeen, from NALE, the National Museum and the library of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Patriarchate, all of them department heads or subdivision leaders. A small number of trainees was requested in order to do practical work in the repository, handling items and evaluating concrete problems. The trainees were selected from amongst the team leaders, who would then transmit their knowledge to workers in their respective institutions. The second week was devoted to the examination of the sanitary and environmental situation in NALE, in close association with the team leaders. A detailed sanitary consultation was held on the collections according to different methods (visual examination; physico-chemical analysis of samples; data loggers and insect traps). The findings were mainly positive, for there were no dangerous insects such as termites, or active degradations such as fungus or mildew. The main problems were the presence of dust and the lack of space, which can sometimes create mechanical degradations. The French experts

then evaluated the environmental conditions of the different buildings. They detected minor problems and discussed the reallocation of some rooms.

A second monitoring two weeks mission was planned at this time, to be conducted by the same experts, after the moving into and installation in the new building. It took place in December 2007. Apart from the implementation of what was already discussed, this was the occasion for leading a complementary training session on climatic control, as well as to seek pragmatic solutions to the question of professional packaging.

Cataloguing methods according to international standards

As a result of a research program conducted in France in 2003-05, I conducted a one-week training session (17-21<sup>th</sup> October 2005) on cataloguing manuscripts for NALE professionals as well as curators and professionals from other patrimonial institutions in Addis Ababa (National Museum, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Library of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Patriarchate). The trainees had different expectations, coming as they did from very different departments. There were librarians having mostly to deal with printed materials, archivists interested in learning about international standards used for the description of complex and unique documents such as manuscripts, and heads of manuscripts departments from different institutions. In spite of their different backgrounds, all of the trainees proved interested and enthusiastic due to the nature of this material with its roots in the Ethiopian past. The confrontation between a still-living ancient Ethiopian culture, on the one hand, and high technology and international descriptive standards, on the other, led to fruitful discussions.

The training was thus divided as follows:

- describing a manuscript, the codicological aspects;
- intellectual contents and typologies of Ethiopian manuscripts (liturgical manuscripts, religious texts, secular texts, charters and deeds, illuminated manuscripts);
- characterising manuscript collections: monastic libraries in Ethiopia, public libraries worldwide and in Addis Ababa<sup>81</sup>, private collections, microfilm collections, and the topic of property transfer of manuscripts;
- cataloguing manuscripts, including a brief history of the western traditions in cataloguing and of the Ethiopian practices; presentation of some Christian Oriental manuscript catalogues; the case of Ethiopian manuscripts;
- uses of catalogues by scholars and curators;
- cataloguing in the third millennium: XML and the different languages of description, the choice of EAD (Encoded Archival Description) at an international level, Open Archives Initiative;
- prospects for catalogues of Ethiopian codices: digitisation, project for a collaborative platform of descriptions of Ethiopian manuscripts.

The final part of this training was the result of a two-year feasibility study, called “Na-

<sup>81</sup> This was followed soon after by an on-line inventory and guide to Ethiopian manuscript collections world-wide, see Wion – Derat – Bosc-Tiessé, 2006.

tional Archives and Library of Ethiopia: millenary traditions in the digital era”, conducted<sup>82</sup> under a grant from the CNRS and the Ministry of Research, in the framework of the Information Society Interdisciplinary Program (2003-05)<sup>83</sup>. Its aim was to determine the best tools for describing Ethiopian manuscripts, according to different scientific requirements. Corpora of manuscripts are always identified according to institutional collections; nonetheless, historical and literary links between items scattered in different locations should be taken into account. The current growing interest in the exchange of meta-data<sup>84</sup> provides the first elements of an answer to this problem of dispersion. Concretely, the construction of finding aids describing Ethiopian manuscripts using international standards will make it possible to request information on all the collections involved. As this trend is very much in process in most of European and American libraries, it seemed appropriate that the Ethiopian National Library could benefit from this movement too and share data concerning the Ethiopian heritage worldwide. A second scientific requirement is that the describing tools should not separate oral documents from written documents, for they are complementary vectors in the transmission of knowledge and history. The design of a describing tool has to be based on the nature of the sources it describes. And there is indeed a need to renew the classical approach to written sources and to consider them as documents produced within a historical and intellectual context, in their materiality as well as in regard to their content. The inter-textuality of these documents has to be examined.

The feasibility study made it possible to examine different international standards for describing Ethiopian documentary heritage. Three standards using XML language were examined: TEI (Text Encoding Initiative)<sup>85</sup>, which proved efficient for encoding plain text as well as for constructing finding aids<sup>86</sup>; MASTER<sup>87</sup>, which was a DTD created especially for describing medieval manuscripts using TEI as a basis, but which proved too specific and for which funding

<sup>82</sup> I assumed the directorship of this project, coordinating a team composed of Denise Ogilvie, head curator, Historical Centre of National Archives, Claire Bosc-Tiessé, CNRS, art historian specialist in Ethiopian art, Wendy MacKay, CNRS, computer specialist and psychologist and Olivier Tourny, CNRS, musicologist, specialist in Ethiopian music.

<sup>83</sup> The global title of this interdisciplinary program was: “Recording and Documentary Heritage. Contributions of Information and Cognition Sciences”. It was funded by the CNRS and the French Ministry of Research and fourteen projects have been accepted in 2003.

<sup>84</sup> See Open Archives Initiative: <http://www.openarchives.org/> ; Dublin Core : <http://www.loc.gov/standards> and <http://dublincore.org> (all accessed on 9 November 2011)

<sup>85</sup> TEI (Text Encoding Initiative) official website: <http://www.tei-c.org/> (accessed on 9 November 2011)

<sup>86</sup> It has been the choice of some important libraries such as *Digital Scriptorium*, using TEI for encoding metadata and data: [www.scriptorium.columbia.edu/](http://www.scriptorium.columbia.edu/) In the field of Ethiopian studies, one attempt has been made to encode text with TEI, in Mainz University, see: <http://www.uni-mainz.de/Organisationen/TLA/info/index.html> (accessed on 9 November 2011)

<sup>87</sup> MASTER (Manuscripts Access Standard Through Electronic Records)

was abandoned<sup>88</sup>; EAD (Encoded Archival Description)<sup>89</sup>, created at first for describing archive collections held in libraries, which proved itself very much adaptable to multi-levels descriptions and flexible enough for the description of manuscript material<sup>90</sup>. I therefore collaborated with the French National Library adjusting the international standard EAD (Encoded Archival Description) to the description of its manuscript collections, working on examples from the Ethiopian collection in the library<sup>91</sup>.

These two years of feasibility studies have yielded a good understanding of technological issues and made it possible to build up a professional network. The next step of this program has been funded by the Agence Nationale pour la Recherche. It provides funding for an international team for the next four years. This project, called “Writing the history of the Horn of Africa (13<sup>th</sup>- 21<sup>st</sup> c.): texts, networks, societies”, is divided into different sub-projects and one transversal project dedicated to the creation of a database for ancient Ethiopian archival documents.

### *Oral archives*

One of the goals of proclamation 179/1999 was the creation of a sound archives department to develop, make accessible and preserve the rich oral heritage of Ethiopian cultures<sup>92</sup>. The cooperative activities planned in June 2001 on oral archives were divided into the following three points: training, equipment, and assistance in gathering and describing the existing<sup>93</sup> and forthcoming collections.

During their stay in France in 2002, the Ethiopian archivists visited some of the French institutions specialising in oral sources and had the occasion to conduct practical work. Akalu Wäldä Maryam, Shitaye Getahun, Denise Ogilvie and I visited Jean Doresse for two days in his home in the south of France to conduct interviews with him. Mister Doresse, an historian from C.N.R.S., born in 1914, began his career in Egypt<sup>94</sup>. In the 1950's, he moved to Ethiopia. He was

<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless some scientific projects and libraries have implemented MASTER quite successfully. See the discussion at the conference „Die Katalogisierung mittelalterlicher Handschriften in internationaler Perspektive“, at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, October 2005.

<sup>89</sup> EAD (Encoded Archival Description) official website : <http://www.loc.gov/ead/> (accessed on 9 November 2011)

<sup>90</sup> See for instance the collective catalogue hosted at Yale, encoded with EAD: <http://webtext.library.yale.edu/finddocs/aboutead.html>; Medieval manuscripts catalogue of the Bodleian Library, encoded with EAD: <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/online.htm> (accessed on 9 November 2011)

<sup>91</sup> Workshop of the AFNOR CG46/CN357/GE3 group, French National Library

<sup>92</sup> The NALE has to “operate as a national repository centre of (...) tradition and oral history audio recordings, video recordings, audio-video recordings and other documentary heritage; endeavour, by making use of state-of-the art technology, to preserve them for study and research purposes” Proclamation 179/1999, part II, art. 8 (2).

<sup>93</sup> Almost 4500 audio-tapes and CD, obtained through legal deposit.

<sup>94</sup> In 1947-48, while working in the Cairo French Institute of Archaeology, he was one of the first

among the first members of the Archaeological Section of the National Library in Addis Ababa, and was thus one of the initiators of French cultural cooperation with Ethiopia<sup>95</sup>. Afterwards he performed different jobs for the Ethiopian Ministry of Information during both the Imperial Era and the Derg, and was entrusted by the French government with directing a variety of projects. Hence, recording his life-history was of real interest both for the Ethiopian archivists and for us. During this visit we recorded on DAT a couple of hours of interviews about his life and work in Ethiopia. Back in Addis Ababa, Akalu Wäldä Maryam processed these data and Jean Doresse's interview came out in the newspaper "The Reporter" on Wednesday, February 13, 2002.

The French cooperation with NALE gained further support from a scientific program directed by the ethno-musicologist Olivier Tourny, (CNRS), under the auspices of UNESCO from 2005 to 2009. The program is called *Ethiopia. Traditional Music, Dance and Instruments. A systematic survey*. It is an ethno-musicological training programme for Ethiopian and overseas students and teachers focusing on the collecting, recording, analysis, publication, and preservation of musical traditions from Ethiopia. Olivier Tourny followed the first steps of the French cooperation with NALE very closely, for since 2001 he has been conducting a preparatory survey, building up partnerships and the necessary scientific background, and participated in the feasibility study funded by CNRS from 2003 to 2005.

In October 2006, Dereje Tadesse, archivist from NALE, came to France for a two-week preparatory study to draw up a training session in Addis Ababa<sup>96</sup>. This training session was then conducted by Véronique Ginouvès, head of the sound-library of the Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme (phonothèque, MMSH, Aix-en-Provence), in May 2007<sup>97</sup>.

## Conclusions

The Ethio-French cooperation in the field of archives and libraries has brought improvements and new ideas to all its participants. Indeed both Ethiopian and French participants in joint activities have learned from each other, which is one of the fruitful aspects of this program. The initial objectives defined in June 2001 have been partly fulfilled, and some new activities have found their way into the program. There might be various reasons for the success of this program. One is the high level of the Ethiopian professionals' expectations, which has always favourably impressed French counterparts. There is also the scientific quality of the reports, produced at the conclusion of each mission, that help in sustaining a coherent and demanding program. Another reason is the great interest in Ethiopia developed by the French ex-

to understand the importance of a text coming from the Nag Hammadi corpus and consequently called it to the attention of the scientific community.

<sup>95</sup> Doresse, 1958, 1966, 1969, 1970.

<sup>96</sup> Dereje Tadesse, 2006.

<sup>97</sup> Ginouvès, 2007.

perts, for whom this program was an occasion to discover a country, its cultures, its history and its generous hospitality. We could also mention friendship and trust, even if this is not supposed to appear in a scientific paper. This cooperation program has opened a true dialogue between scholars and professionals in charge of patrimonial collections, which has proved both rich and enlightening.

In his inauguration speech on 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1944, Haile Selassie asked for “the help of all our friends, of scholars and of students from all over the world” in the building of the “national heritage” preserved in the National Archives and Library of Ethiopia. He concluded with these words, at a time when the Second World War was still raging: “In the present terrible situation in the world today it is perhaps with special pleasure and hope that we open this library. It is of some inspiration for the future and for our hopes in peace to recall that what is highest in human achievement has got its interest beyond mere geographical boundaries. The world of library is the world of knowledge. The world of knowledge is the search after truth. It is a world that is truly international”<sup>98</sup>. Having opened this paper with the dangers of globalisation, let us close it with this thoughtful statement about the potential wholesomeness of international relationships.

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<sup>98</sup> Quoted by Wright, 1945:17.

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### *Sigles*

The world of archives, libraries and international agencies is full of initials. Here are the ones used in this article.

ARCCH : Agency for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage

BnF : Bibliothèque nationale de France (French national Library)

CAC : Centre des Archives Contemporaines

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CHAN : Centre Historique des Archives Nationales (Historical Centre of National Archives)  
CITRA : International Conference of the Round Table on Archives  
CNRS : Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique  
DAF : Direction des Archives de France (French Archives Direction)  
ICA : International Council for Archives  
IES : Institute of Ethiopian Studies  
IFLA (PAC) : International Federation of Library Associations (Preservation and Conservation)  
IFROA : Institut Français de Restauration des Œuvres d'Art  
MMSH : Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme  
NALE : National Archives and Library of Ethiopia  
SCAC : Service de Coopération et d'Action Culturelle  
EAD : Encoded Archival Description  
DTD : Document Type Definition  
MASTER : Manuscript Access Standards Through Electronic Records  
TEI : Text Encoding Initiative  
XML : eXtended Markup Language