



Digitization of the Drewes Collection in Leiden

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On the cover, a picture from ms DRW0002 (f. 48v) from the Drewes Collection. Ph. Michele Petrone 2016.

Introduction

The fame of Abraham J. Drewes as a scholar is primarily connected with his studies devoted to the old Ethiopic inscriptions. Nonetheless, during his frequent trips to Ethiopia (from 1954 to 1957 and from 1964 to 1974) he visited also Harar and its region and stayed long in Central Ethiopia, acquiring a significant amount of Islamic manuscripts (in part only photographed, microfilmed or only studied in loco) in Arabic, Harari and Amharic. Making use of these materials, Drewes wrote several different contributions on the Ethiopian Muslim literary production and in particular a pioneering paper, “Amharic as a Language of Islam” which, for the first time ever, the Islamic literature of Ethiopia in a language mainly associated with Christianity is analyzed.

The whole Islamic material collected by Drewes in Ethiopia has been donated to prof. Harry Stroomer who welcomed the idea of digitizing it before pass it to Leiden’s University Library. At the moment of digitization, the manuscripts were still in prof. Stroomer’s house in Leiden.

A first overview of the materials has been made by Prof. Alessandro Gori and Prof. Giorgio Banti in September 2015. They identified 15 manuscripts, which have been numbered and 29 microfilms which have been later transformed into digital images 2015 by Woordvorm Publishing Services (woordvorm.nl). A second visit was then organized by Prof. Gori and Prof. Stroomer and carried out from September 12 to September 14 2016.

During this second mission to Leiden, five more Arabic and Amharic manuscripts have been identified and added to the collection which is now made up of 20 items. There have been also found different versions of Drewes’ notebooks, where he annotated all the information he had been able to gather about the Islamic manuscripts he had acquired, photographed or studied in while he was in Ethiopia. These notebooks attest a deep interest in this topic and a possible intention of publishing a larger study about Islamic literature in Ethiopia.

During the 2016 visit the digitization included all the manuscripts and the pictures printed out from microfilms (both photographs and photocopies). The latter have been taken for the purpose of making a comparison with another bunch of 17 microfilms found during the second visit. These microfilms will be digitized, together with Drewes' notebooks, by the same company which took care of the first group.

Equipment and digitization process

The photoset was assembled using a Manfrotto 90° camera stand (MT190XPRO4), a Nikon D800e camera with 50 Nikkor lens. Manuscripts were put on a black reemay non-woven black tissue. Weather conditions have been fairly good during our stay, so there has been no necessity of artificial illumination.

The good preservation status and the presence of all facilities made the digitization process easier. The only issue came from the presence of photographs printed on lucid paper. The unavoidable reflexes have been limited with the reduction of light. All other pictures have been taken at f-14 with aperture priority. White balance, color control, remains of the reflexes and other issues will be dealt with during post-processing of RAW files. A copy of the non-processed .jpg pictures has been already given to prof. Stroomer for documentation purposes.

Description of the collection

All the materials are in optimal status of preservation, kept in carton boxes in a dry room. Only some manuscripts have some signs of dirt and dust, probably originating from their former location in Ethiopia. Some microfilms (I-XII) are kept in Kodak metal containers; others are in carton boxes specifically designed for this kind of materials.

The main boxes contain also 13 envelopes preserving printed frames taken from the microfilms and several binders of Drewes' personal notes. The notes are organized according to manuscript numbers¹ and display at least 2 versions of a very first draft of a hand list of the manuscripts he had the occasion to study.

Finally in the boxes are also kept printouts of the photos taken from the microfilms (several copies of the same pages, probably photocopied from the photos and used for his work) and a copy of the *Mawlid Šaraf al-‘Ālamīn* printed in Cairo in 1947.²

Most of the Arabic manuscripts appear to come from Harar and neighbour regions. The Amharic manuscript probably originates from Central Ethiopia. A thorough analysis of his notes about the

¹ The correspondence between the notes and the materials in Leiden has still to be verified.

² *Mawlid Šaraf al-‘Ālamīn*, al-Qāhira: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1947.

manuscripts he had the occasion to study could bring more details on the provenance of the codices. A relevant exception is a list of the books formerly preserved in *al-Akādīmyā al-Šūmāliyya li'l-'Ulūm wa al-Adāb wa al-Funūn* (Somali Academy of Sciences and Arts, DWL0020, 8 ff.), that is partially typewritten and partially handwritten.

Manuscripts in Old Harari contain different texts representing the local literary tradition: eg., sections of the *Kitāb al-Farā'id* - DRW0004 and DRW0012; poems in praise of the Prophet - DRW0004, ff. 1r-61r, DRW0006, ff. 1r-66v, DRW0009, ff. 1r-16v; manuscripts in Arabic cover topics like: Qur'anic sciences, eg. *Naẓm al-Ġazariyya al-Durra al-Wahbiyya* of Muḥammad b. al-Ġazarī, d. 833/1429, on *taġwīd*, DRW0002, ff. 79r-86r); Arabic Language e.g. the *Šāfiyya fī 'ilm al-Ḥaṭṭ* of Ibn al-Ḥāġib (d. 646/1248); local history e.g. a copy of the "Chronology of Emirs of Harar", DRW00016 and two copies of the *Futūḥāt Madīnat Harar*, DRW0018 and DRW0019.

The importance of these materials relies also on their relative antiquity. Two texts in DRW0005 (an account of the Mi'rāġ, ff. 1r-15r and a praise of the Prophet in Old Harari, authored by 'Abd al-Mālik b. 'Abīd, f. 86r) are dated respectively 1135/1722 and 1336/1723 which are among the most ancient Islamic manuscripts ever found in Ethiopia.

To these materials should be added the corpus of texts that has been microfilmed by Drewes. The latter include devotional texts (in praise of local Harari saints or of the Prophet, mainly in verse), glossaries (names of plants in Old Harari and Arabic), court registries (covering various periods across the 19th century). The relation between microfilms and manuscripts formerly belonging to Drewes has still to be verified: in some cases, it appears that he reproduced as microfilm, printed picture and photocopy the same manuscript, in order to preserve the original while working on the texts.

The digitization of the Drewes collection, including his personal notes, opens new perspectives for the study of Islamic literature in Ethiopia and the general cultural landscape of the Muslims of the country.

The manuscript texts will crucially increase the number of testimonies of the main works circulating among the learned elite of the Muslim communities of Harar and central Ethiopia. This collection will enrich the IslHornAfr DataBase with texts that, in many cases, have not yet been found elsewhere in Ethiopia, giving an unparalleled contribution to the knowledge of Islamic literature of the area. Drewes' handwritten notebooks are also an essential source of information about circulation of books and ideas among Muslims in pre-revolutionary Ethiopia and can be the starting point for a wider and deeper study on this period. These will help producing a more precise

cataloging of the texts in the IslHornAfr DataBase, with information about local collections and uses of manuscripts and texts. All these materials are, finally, an invaluable witness of Drewes' long and intense interest in Ethiopian Muslim literary tradition, which deserves to be continued in the next years by other scholars following his footsteps.