Field work on Ethiopian Islamic manuscripts
Reflections on the first IslHornAfr mission

Alessandro Gori

IslHornAfr (EU 7th Framework Programme, ERC Advanced Grant 322849)

Dept of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies
University of Copenhagen
Karen Blixens Vej 4
2300 Copenhagen S
Email: frd322@hum.ku.dk

www.islhornafr.eu
IslHornAfr: Project framework

- Financing by the European Research Council Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) Advanced Grant no. 322849
- Period of financing: 01/07/ 2013-31/06/ 2018
- Originally based at the University of Florence (01.07.13)
- Transferred to the University of Copenhagen on 01.02.14
- Now based at the Institute of Cross-cultural and Regional Studies/University of Copenhagen
IslHornAfr: Staff

Principal Investigator: Alessandro Gori
Associated Researchers:

- Dr. Sara Fani
- Dr. Adday Hernandez
- Dr. Michele Petrone
- Dr. Anne Regourd
- Mr. Orhan Toy
IslHornAfr: main aim

- Mapping the Islamic literature in the Horn of Africa (in Arabic and in local languages) and
- Its production, circulation and usage

Data collection:
- Printed books and manuscripts

Database:
- Storage and evaluation of the data
Islamic manuscript tradition of Ethiopia

Steps of the research:
• Localization
• Digitization
• Description
• Evaluation

Further interventions:
• Preservation
• Conservation
Islamic manuscripts in Ethiopia: easy localisation

In established institutions
  • Public libraries: e.g. Institute of Ethiopian Studies
Public museums:
  • Harari national Museum; Jimma Museum
Private libraries/museums
  • ‘Abdullah Sharif Private Museum (Harar)
International collectors
European libraries
Private possession of European scholars (the late Prof. Drewes, Leiden)
Islamic manuscripts in Ethiopia: difficult localisation

Sufi shrines
- Guardians; successors of the founder
- Zāwiya

Madrasas

Koranic Schools

Qāḍī courts

Private learned men

Family legacy

«Diaspora» (Somali, Harari)
Organizing fieldwork in Ethiopia

Network of acquaintances

- Students of the Philology programme at the university of Addis Ababa
- Local learned men and scholars

Normal procedure followed

- Create reciprocal trust
- «Do ut des» relationship
- Creation of infrastructure
- Dissemination of skills
- Support in local cultural activities
Organizing fieldwork in Ethiopia

Relationships with the central authorities
- Ministry of Culture
- University
- Institute of Ethiopian Studies
- University Departments

Authorizations
- Letters of support
- Institute of Ethiopian Studies
- Department of Linguistics
Ethiopia: general framework

Local authorities and administrators

Ethiopia: federal republic
  • Ethnic federalism

Administrative units:
  regional states and chartered cities, zones, wäräda (districts) and qäbäle (wards)
Agreements achieved

Governmental/political authorities (second level)
Administrative authorities (second level)
Local cultural offices (regional state)
Authorization needed
Authorization of the of the Oromo Regional State

Copenhagen, 25 February 2015
Dias 11
Open issues and problems

Conflicts among different level of power
  • Federal (central) vs. regional state

Cultural authorities vs. Administrative authorities

University vs. political administration

Relationships with guides and «facilitators»

Copenhagen, 25 February 2015
Dias 12
Open issues and problems

Local owners relationship with:
  • Administration/university
  • Researchers

Payment issue:
  • baḥšīš, standard salary, gifts

Support in developing skills and capacities
Advantages of working in an Islamic environment

- No church hierarchy
  - Patriarchate
  - Central administration of monasteries
- Secular clergy vs monastics
- Possibly less bureaucratization
Field work on Ethiopian Islamic manuscripts
Reflections on the first IslHorn Afr mission

Alessandro Gori

IslHorn Afr (EU 7th Framework Programme, ERC Advanced Grant 322849)

Dept of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies
University of Copenhagen
Karen Blixens Vej 4
2300 Copenhagen S
Email: frd322@hum.ku.dk

www.islhornafr.eu