

## **The Study of the Ethiopic Manuscripts of St Catherine’s Monastery: A Report on the Visit 12-18 February 2023**

Denis Nosnitsin

Dorothea Reule

Dr Denis Nosnitsin and Dorothea Reule, MA, researchers of the Project ‘Beta maṣāḥəft: manuscripts of Ethiopia and Eritrea’, worked in the monastery St Catherine on the Sinai Peninsula in the period of 12-18 February 2023. The aims of the visit were to complete descriptions of the Ethiopic manuscripts kept in the monastic manuscript library for the database of ‘Beta maṣāḥəft’ and to look for further, yet undescribed, Ethiopic materials.



Fig. 1. View of the monastery’s eastern wall and “Round Tower” (Photo: Denis Nosnitsin)



Fig. 2. Entry to the library (Photo: Denis Nosnitsin)

Six Ethiopic manuscripts preserved in St Catherine are already well known to the scholarly community (Sinai Ethiopic 001-006), having been microfilmed by Library of Congress in cooperation with the American Foundation for the Study of Man and Farouk I University (1950) and catalogued by the Egyptian Ethiopianist Murad Kamil (1957). The collection has been recently expanded by one more manuscript (Sinai Ethiopic 007) which is a private gift. The small collection is heterogeneous; one of the manuscripts can be dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Sinai Ethiopic 006) and two (Sinai Ethiopic 005 and 004) to even earlier times. The manuscripts contain a few interesting texts, and show peculiar codicological features. In the recent years, the microfilms have been digitized and made accessible online

<https://www.loc.gov/search/?fa=partof%3Amanuscripts+in+st.+catherine%27s+monastery%2C+mount+sinai%3A+microfilm+5015%3A+ethiopic&st=image&c=200>). Despite this fact, the Ethiopic manuscripts of St Catherine have been rarely used by scholars; one of the reasons for that may be the quality of the images is sufficient mainly only for text studies.

Following the collapse of a tower and the ensuing restoration work, further manuscripts and fragments were discovered in the monastery in 1975. Ethiopic manuscripts had been mentioned summarily as being among them, but have been neither described nor studied yet. During the stay, it was possible to consult these new findings. They include three old codices (two on parchment,

one on paper) and several codices fragments (of both parchment and paper), containing mostly prayers and chant works whose early development is known from a small number of witnesses only. Digitization of these manuscripts will facilitate a deeper study of the respective textual traditions.



Fig. 3. Digitization in progress (Photo: Father Justin)

Due to the restricted opening hours of the library, it was not possible to carry out all intended codicological analyses during this stay. A further stay in the library is planned in the future to allow for deeper study of the manuscripts' materiality (completion of codicological descriptions, ink study etc.).

Our cordial thanks go to Father Justin, who facilitated our visit. He assisted us in every possible way and allowed us an utterly agreeable research stay at the library. We also thank the kind employees of the monastery's guest house and restaurant.





Fig. 4. All codices of the collection (Photo: Denis Nosnitsin)



Fig. 5. Denis Nosnitsin consulting one of the manuscripts (Photo: Dorothea Reule)