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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



Ms. Naomi Meulemans

Naomi Meulemans holds a Master's degree from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. In 2012, she specialized in the contemporary art market in New York at KU Leuven. Currently, Naomi leads The Ethiopian Art Conservation Program, collaborating with Bahir Dar University (Ethiopia) and the University of Antwerp (Belgium) to promote scientific education in art and heritage conservation in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, through an MA program in art conservation. As an entrepreneur, she is involved in various projects to foster a free and inclusive future in culture.

Ethiopian Art Conservation Program: Challenges and Positive Outcomes

Abstract

In this presentation, Naomi Meulemans, Founder of the Ethiopian Art Conservation Program, will highlight the challenges and positive outcomes of the organization's first four years. Ethiopian Art Conservation Program aims to preserve and conserve Ethiopian art and culture by empowering Ethiopian art conservators. Established as an official NGO in Ethiopia and Belgium in August 2021, EACP works towards building capacity and creating sustainable opportunities for art conservators in Ethiopia. The organization aims to raise awareness about the rapid degradation of heritage sites in Ethiopia and facilitate collaboration between Ethiopian and international art conservation communities. Through education, EACP tries to map tangible and intangible cultural heritage, such as Ethiopian culture, traditions, historical art objects and heritage sites. EACP specializes in working directly and solely with Ethiopian communities and universities but tries to serve as a platform for national and international professionals in the field. EACP addresses ethical concerns related to the conservation of Ethiopian artifacts and aims to protect the voice of the Ethiopian art conservator. A key objective of EACP is to amplify these voices in discussions, workshops, and conservation campaigns – this is with the prospect of building a guide in deontology and ethics for working in and with Ethiopian heritage and culture.



Prof. Alessandro Bausi



Alessandro Bausi (1963, MA 1988 University of Florence, PhD 1992 Naples Oriental Institute) is a Full Professor of Ethiopian Studies at Sapienza Università di Roma, Faculty of Humanities (November 2023–). Editor of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (2010–2014), Chair of the Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies networking program (2009–2014), and head of the Project 'TraCES. He is now heading the long-term project of the Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Hamburg 'Beta maṣāḥəft' (2016–2040). He is a member of several scholarly associations; the *Academia Europaea*, the *Accademia Ambrosiana*, the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences, the Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Hamburg, and the *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*. He has extensively published on Ethiopian and Eritrean textual and manuscript cultures.

Caves in Ethiopia and Eritrea: A Philologist's Perspective

Abstract

While evidence for the use of caves as places of worship and settlement in the Horn of Africa dates back to prehistoric times, a central vocation of the cave in Christian Ethiopia and Eritrea is that of housing monastic settlements, of uncertain date but probably as early as Late Antiquity, and churches, both carved into the rock and truly 'in the cave'. As is well known, these churches, of both types, bear witness to a local tradition of extraordinary vitality that continues to the present day. Of both the first and second types, Ethiopia has impressive examples that are among the most remarkable in terms of the complexity of their construction. While the best-known examples of the former are undoubtedly the rock-hewn churches of the Gar'altā district in the Taḡrāy region, and even more so the rock-hewn churches of Lālibalā, the result of a centuries-long process of settlement and construction, no less remarkable are the cave churches, of which the most famous for its exquisite artistic quality is the medieval (12th/13th centuries) church of Yəmraḥanna Krəstos. While the previous lectures in the series have mostly focused on the actual archaeological investigation of the practice of medieval rock-hewn architecture, I would like to approach the existence of connections between caves and textual evidence and the literary motif of the cave from the perspective of someone interested in the textual tradition.



Prof. François-Xavier Fauvelle

François-Xavier Fauvelle is Professor of History and Archaeology of the African Worlds at the Collège de France, and the Director of the French Research Center in Jerusalem. A world-renowned historian and archaeologist, he is a specialist in medieval African societies and their political, cultural, religious, economic and technical interactions with the societies of the Islamic and Christian worlds. He has conducted research in several African countries (South Africa, Ethiopia, Morocco, Guinea, Mali). His work in Ethiopia has led to the discovery and excavation of several Islamic cities from the Middle Ages. He is the author of over twenty books, including *The Golden Rhinoceros: Histories of the African Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 2018), translated into some fifteen languages, including Arabic and Chinese.

King Lalibela's Dream: The Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem as a Rupestrian Site

Abstract

As the story goes, King Lalibela had a vision of Jerusalem that inspired him to build the rock-hewn site in Ethiopia that now bears his name. It is well known that the rupestrian complex of Lalibela is considered a metaphorical Jerusalem. But is it more than just a metaphor? The answer hinges on several perplexing questions, such as: when were the various components of the Lalibela site carved from the rock? And what was the original architectural intention or program? What exactly was modeled after an original in Jerusalem? Setting these questions aside for the moment, this paper argues that the study of Lalibela can, in turn, raise new questions about the Holy Sepulchre itself, particularly in highlighting a now-obscured aspect: its rupestrian nature.



Prof. Julien Loiseau

Julien Loiseau is a professor in Islamic history at Aix-Marseille University (France). He has extensively published on the history of Egypt and the Middle East in the later Middle Ages. Since one decade, he has focused his researches on the history of Islam in Medieval Ethiopia. In 2018-2019, he led an Ethiopian-French archaeological mission in Eastern Tigray, in the framework of the European (ERC) research project HornEast (2017-2023).

The Ethiopian Qur'an. Quranic Quotations on Funerary Stelae from Medieval Tigray (10th-14th centuries)

Abstract

The recent discovery of medieval Muslim cemeteries in the vicinity of Qwiḥa and Arra (Eastern Tigray) has significantly increased the corpus of Arabic funerary epigraphy from Medieval Ethiopia. With respectively 42 and 43 funerary stelae engraved with Arabic epitaphs, the epigraphic corpuses of Bilet cemetery (Qwiḥa) and Ḥabera mountain cemeteries (Arra) represent the largest collection of Arabic inscriptions from the Horn of Africa after the corpus of the Dahlak Islands. When entirely preserved, the epitaph usually includes, after the introductory formula (the basmala), the quotation of one or several verses of the Qur'an. These quotations offer unprecedented insights into the knowledge Ethiopian Muslims had of the Qur'an in the 10th-14th centuries, as well as into the verses they favoured to be displayed on funerary stelae. The Arabic funerary epigraphy from Eastern Tigray hence bears a unique testimony to the faith and knowledge of Ethiopian Muslims in the Middle Ages.



Prof. Gabriele Castiglia

Gabriele Castiglia is an Associate Professor of "Early Christian Archaeology" at the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology (PIAC) in Rome. His research primarily focuses on the material impact of Christianity in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, in both urban and rural settings. Over the past twenty years, Gabriele Castiglia has conducted excavations in various regions of Italy and abroad, directing missions in Liguria, Tuscany, Calabria, Eritrea, and Palestine. He has authored several monographs and edited works, with numerous articles published in scientific journals and conference proceedings. From 2017 to 2020, he directed the excavations of the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology at Adulis, which have been published in various editorial venues, including the Journal of African Archaeology, Antiquity, and Antiquité Tardive, among others.

Excavating a Multilayered Site: Investigations at Adulis, Between Old Data and New Interpretations

Abstract

Excavations conducted between 2017 and 2020 by the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology in Rome have shed new light on the long-term urban evolution of Adulis. A specific focus was dedicated to two of the three churches known so far in the city, which revealed significant information and new data not only about Christian architecture in the Aksumite kingdom but also about the peak and final stages of Adulis' history.



Prof. Samuel Robinson

He was born and grew up in Ethiopia, He studied languages, history, and theology in Lund, Sweden and Tübingen, Germany. In addition to Lund University where he has been Professor of Church History since 1999, He has been doing research and taught in Cairo, Jerusalem, Göttingen, Kiel, Oslo, and Bergen. I am also part of an Ethio-Swedish project on the conservation of the Ethiopian medieval churches in the Lalibela area and in Tigray.

“The cross-cultural character of Christian monastic texts – the Gi’iz evidence”

Abstract

Next to the biblical texts the texts emerging from the early monastic movement in Egypt and Palestine are the most widely attested Christian texts. They were rapidly translated from Greek to Coptic, Syriac and Latin and then to Arabic, Gi’iz, Armenian, Georgian and Slavonic. The same texts were thus not only read and reflected upon, but also constituted basic ethical and moral education across cultures extending from India to Spain and from Ethiopia to Russia. The talk will present tools for cross-cultural and cross-linguistic analyses of their material in order to trace the transmission and transformations of the texts including the Gi’iz versions.



Prof. Samantha Kelly

Samantha Kelly is Professor of History at Rutgers University in New Jersey, USA and a Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America. After more than a decade researching the history of late-medieval Italy, she obtained a Mellon New Directions Fellowship in 2011 to train in Gə'əz language and premodern Ethiopian history. Her research since then has focused on Ethiopian diasporic settlement and relations with Latin Europe from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. In addition to authoring a number of articles and essays on these subjects, she has edited the award-winning *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea* and published a recent study of the Ethiopian monastery in Rome, *Translating Faith*. Since 2021 she has co-directed the monthly virtual seminar series "Ethiopian Studies of North America."

An Ethiopian Monastery in Latin Europe

Abstract

The Ethiopian Orthodox pilgrim hostel and monastery of Santo Stefano, established in Rome in the years around 1500, is among the most important and well-documented examples of Ethiopian diasporic settlement in the early Solomonic period. Dozens of Gə'əz manuscripts belonging to Santo Stefano in the sixteenth century survive. So do a wide range of European archival and literary sources concerning Santo Stefano. Both kinds of documents present interpretive challenges, due to their fragmentary nature or the European biases and misconceptions they reflect. This presentation explores the ways such sources can be collated with each other, and compared to a corpus of Ethiopian Orthodox texts and traditions produced outside Europe, towards three ends: to reconstruct the history of Santo Stefano as an Ethiopian community; to document its members' intellectual and educative undertakings; and to counter the characterizations of Santo Stefano found in earlier twentieth-century European scholarship that have long discouraged its further study.