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### Cut and Sell: Two Parchment Fragments and the Collection of Ethiopian Manuscripts in the West

Caitlin Mims  
*Florida State University*

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## 9 Cut and Sell: Two Parchment Fragments and the Collection of Ethiopian Manuscripts in the West

*Caitlin Mims*

There are three main types of manuscripts produced in Ethiopia and Eritrea (Erətra).<sup>1</sup> The most frequently occurring is the codex, called *māṣḥaf*, which is made up of folded parchment leaves collected into gatherings or quires, sewn together, and given covers made of wood or hide.<sup>2</sup> Another type of manuscript created in the region is the scroll, called *kətab* or *ṭälsäm*, which is made of one or more strips of parchment sewn together and inscribed with texts and images.<sup>3</sup> These scrolls are mostly used for protective or healing magic and are produced by a *däbtära* — an unordained, itinerant singer and healer. Two Ethiopian healing scrolls can today be found in the Blick-Harris Study Collection (BHSC) (cats. 34, 35).

The subject of this essay is the third type of manuscript produced in Ethiopia: the accordion book, or as it is known in the region, as well as throughout this essay, the *sənsul*.<sup>4</sup> This book form is the least common type of manuscript produced in Ethiopia; it is comprised of one or more pieces of parchment stitched together with parchment or leather thongs to create a long strip and that is then

folded accordion-style.<sup>5</sup> The folded book can be bound between covers made of wood or hide and is sometimes carried or suspended by a strap around the chest.<sup>6</sup> Most *sənsul* manuscripts consist of images, typically of saints, prophets, apostles, or archangels, and, beginning in the seventeenth century, scenes from the life of Christ and the Virgin.<sup>7</sup> It is less common, although not unprecedented, to find *sənsul* manuscripts that include texts.<sup>8</sup> Standard texts that appear in *sənsul* manuscripts include hagiographies of saints, hymns, and protective prayers.<sup>9</sup>

In 1975, David P. Harris purchased the *sənsul* now in the BHSC (cat. 31).<sup>10</sup> This *sənsul* is made up of fourteen rectangular sections that are painted on both sides. One side, identified here as the front, includes seven pages with the text of the Anaphora of Mary (*Qəddase Maryam*) that alternate with seven pages of single, framed miniatures (fig. 9.1). Beginning on page 2 and continuing on even-numbered pages to page 14, the Anaphora is inscribed in a single column of Gəʿəz script. Each of these pages contains ten lines of text, written

<sup>1</sup> Nosnitsin 2012 provides an introduction to these manuscript types and their production.

<sup>2</sup> Bausi et al 2015, pp. 154–74 provides an introduction to Ethiopic codicology and descriptions of the materials used for, and methods of, production of Ethiopian codices, most of which are made of parchment. Goatskin is the most commonly used material, but the skin of sheep, cows, horses, and antelopes are also said to be used. Paper was used very rarely in the region before the twentieth century.

<sup>3</sup> Nosnitsin 2012, p. 4; Bausi et al 2015, pp. 158–59. Scrolls are made with parchment, the quality of which varies. Some are very high quality, but most are coarse; the parchment used is often a by-product of the production of parchment for codices.

<sup>4</sup> Nosnitsin 2020, p. 295. *Sənsul* literally means “chain.” This manuscript type is also referred to as “leporello,” “concertina,”

or “accordion book,” as well as the more general “folding book.” The earliest known examples of this manuscript form date from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. Early *sənsul* manuscripts can today be found in the Peabody Essex Museum (Langmuir 368), the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (no. 5965-5966), and the Pontificia Università Gregoriana (Fondo Vedovato inv. N. 136).

<sup>5</sup> Bausi et al 2015, p. 158.

<sup>6</sup> Bausi et al 2015, p. 158.

<sup>7</sup> Sciacca 2018, p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> Nosnitsin 2012, pp. 4–5.

<sup>9</sup> Bausi et al 2015, p. 158.

<sup>10</sup> On October 21, 1975, Harris paid \$295 for the “sixteen Ethiopian Parchment Pages,” with “two separated pages,” which the seller described as “all over 100 years old.” See figure 9.3.



Figure 9.1. *Sənsul* manuscript (cat. 31), front. Photo: Brad Hostetler.



Figure 9.2. *Sənsul* manuscript (cat. 31), back. Photo: Brad Hostetler.

primarily in black ink, with important scriptural names and phrases in red ink. The reading of an Anaphora is a standard part of the liturgical service, or *qəddase*.<sup>11</sup> It is the part of the service in which the bread and wine are consecrated for communion; in the western tradition the comparable rite is the Eucharistic Prayer.

Alternating with the text of the Anaphora are full-page, framed miniatures, which illustrate a portion of the text in which the Virgin is compared to figures from the Old Testament. In the twenty-ninth verse of the Anaphora, the priest speaks directly to Mary, asking “with whom or with what likeness shall we liken thee?”<sup>12</sup> Verses thirty-five and thirty-six list the comparisons:

The golden omer of Elijah, the cruse of Elisha, the virgin conception of which Isaiah prophesied, the first giving birth without intercourse of which Daniel (also spoke), the mountain of Pharan of Habakkuk, the closed house in the east of Ezekiel, the place in

Bethlehem from which the law goes forth, the land of Ephratah of Micah, the tree of life of Silondis, the healer of Nahum’s wounds, the rejoicing of Zechariah, the clean hall of Malachi.<sup>13</sup>

In our *sənsul*, each of these comparisons is illustrated and each figure is identified by *Gə’əz* naming inscriptions placed outside the lower edge of the frame. The final illuminated page on the front, page 13, departs from this pattern; it depicts the Annunciation of the Virgin.

On the other side of the *sənsul*, referred to here as the back, all fourteen pages contain full-page framed miniatures that depict scenes from the Passion of Christ (fig. 9.2). The cycle follows the scriptural order of the Passion, beginning with the Flagellation of Christ on page 15 and ending with the Resurrection on page 28.

Two parchment fragments were bundled together with the *sənsul* by the dealer, suggesting that the dealer assumed that the fragments were once part of

<sup>11</sup> Daoud and Hazen 1959, pp. 104–21. There are two parts to the *qəddase*: the preparatory service and the reading of an anaphora. The preparatory service consists of prayers over the liturgical vessels, the reading of Psalms, verses, and prayers, and the preparation of the Eucharist. Following the preparatory service, the priest leads the congregation through an anaphora. The Church has 14 different anaphora, each celebrated on specific days. The Anaphora of Mary is celebrated on most

feast days of the Virgin, as well as on January 6 (the day preceding the Nativity), April 7 (the day of the Annunciation), and October 12 (the feast day of Saint Cyriacus (Həryaqos), Bishop of Behnesa, who is believed to have written the text of the Anaphora.

<sup>12</sup> Daoud and Hazen 1959, p. 107.

<sup>13</sup> Daoud and Hazen 1959, pp. 107–08.

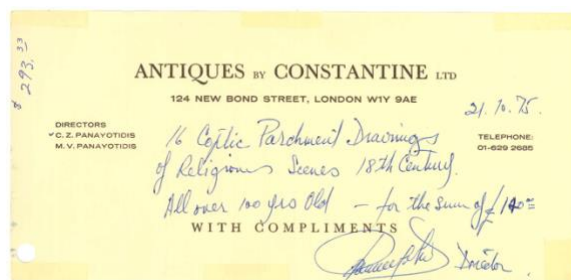


Figure 9.3. Receipt from Antiques by Constantine, London, dated October 21, 1975. BHSC.

the *sənsul* manuscript (fig. 9.3). These fragments and this connection with the *sənsul* are the focus of this essay. I question whether the fragments were a part of the *sənsul*, or if they originate from a separate manuscript or manuscripts. I describe the fragments and compare their formal qualities to those of the *sənsul*, focusing first on the color patterns, then on the narrative qualities, and finally on the inscriptions. I conclude by contextualizing these manuscript pieces in the larger tradition of cutting manuscripts into individual leaves for sale, as well as in the history of western desire for, and collection of, Ethiopian manuscripts.

### The Parchment Fragments: Description

The first fragment features full-page framed miniatures on both sides (cat. 33). On each, a group of three men is depicted; all six wear striped mantles over red tunics and hold prayer staffs with T-shaped finials in their left hands.<sup>14</sup> On the front these men are depicted as being young, with black hair and beards, and hold in their right hands bound books with crosses on the covers (fig. 9.4). Naming inscriptions in Gəʿəz, placed outside the frame and below each figure, identify them as Yaʿəqob, Pəṭros, and Yoḥannəs — the apostles James, Peter, and John.<sup>15</sup> On the back, the men depicted are older,

<sup>14</sup> See the essay by Madison Gilmore-Duffey (ch. 10). Prayer staffs such as those seen on this page are used in Ethiopia to support the clergy during lengthy church services, as well as to mark rhythm during dances. An example of this form of staff finial can be found at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, no. 97-19-4, <https://africa.si.edu/collections/objects/12402/prayer-staff-finial>.

with white hair and long, white beards; they hold small crosses in their right hands (fig. 9.5). Naming inscriptions to the left of the figures' heads identify each as an *abunä* — Arägawi, Alef, and Afše, three of the Nine Saints who came to Ethiopia to Christianize the Aksumite Empire.<sup>16</sup> For this essay, this fragment is identified as the “Apostle/*Abun* leaf;” the Apostle side is referred to as the front and the *Abun* side as the back.<sup>17</sup> The front and back of the fragment was established by matching the colors of the figures' skin to that used for figures depicted in the *sənsul*, the color pattern of which is described below. The use of front and back for the leaf is not intended to privilege one side over the other, only to provide clarity for the reader.

The second parchment fragment also features full-page framed miniatures on both sides (cat. 32). The front depicts the Dormition of the Virgin — the moment of her death and the assumption of her spirit into heaven (fig. 9.6). An inscription at the lower edge, outside the frame, describes the scene: “how our lady died from the toil of this world.” The Virgin lies horizontally at the bottom of the frame. On the left, a group of male mourners gather around her, while on the right Christ holds her infant-like soul. The back of this fragment seemingly presents two episodes from the life of the Virgin (fig. 9.7). To the left, Mary spins thread, an iconography associated with the Annunciation. Interrupted in the act of spinning thread, she holds a spindle in her right hand and a ball of unspun fibers in her left. On the right, the archangel Phanuel (Fanuʿel), identified by an inscription in Gəʿəz above his head, stands holding a paten and chalice, attributes which may refer to the Entrance of the Virgin into the

<sup>15</sup> All of the Gəʿəz-to-English translations for this essay were generously provided by Felege-Selam Yirga and Birhanu T. Gessese, both of whom I thank.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the Nine Saints and their role in the Christianization of Ethiopia, see the essays by Gilmore-Duffey (ch. 10) and Neal Sobania (ch. 5).

<sup>17</sup> *Abun* is the form used when there is no name following the title, while *abunä* is used when a name does follow.



Figure 9.4. *Sonsul* fragment (cat. 33), Apostles Ya'eqob, Petros, and Yoḥannās. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Figure 9.5. *Sonsul* fragment (cat. 33), Abunās Arāgawi, Alef, and Afše. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

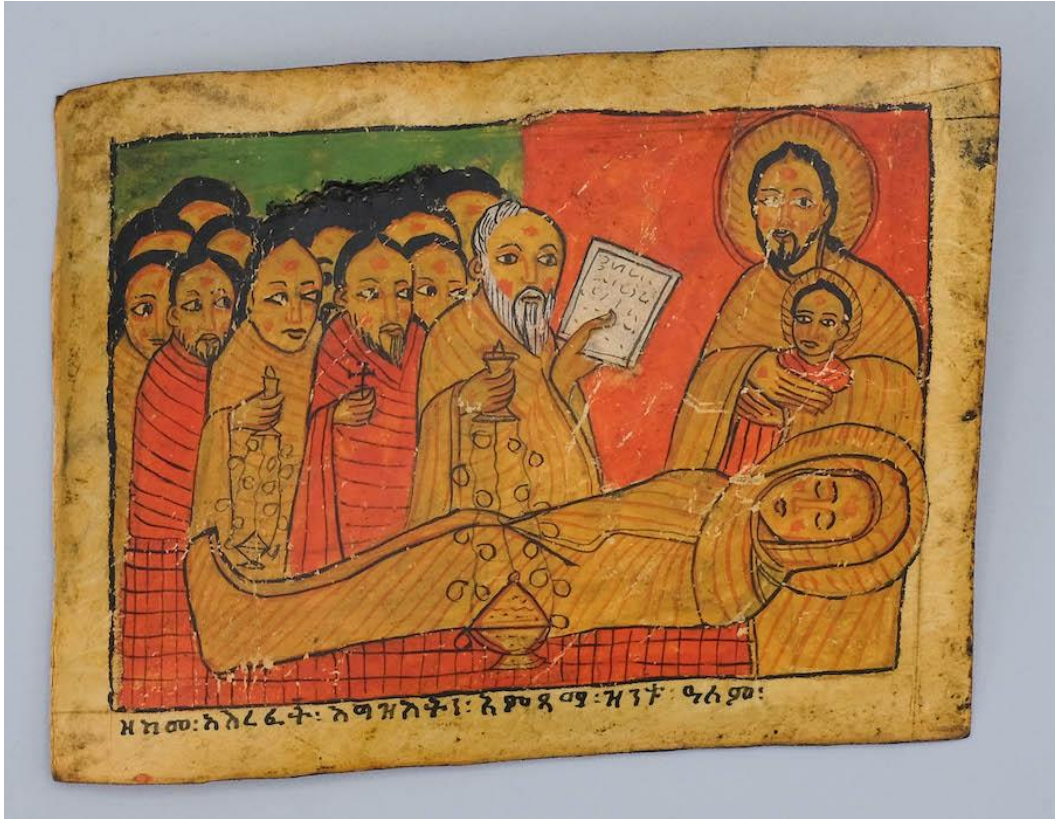


Figure 9.6. *Sonsul* fragment (cat. 32), Dormition. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Figure 9.7. *Sonsul* fragment (cat. 32), Annunciation/Presentation. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Figure 9.8. *Sənsul* fragment (cat. 32), detail of the Dormition side. Photo: Brad Hostetler.

Temple.<sup>18</sup> For this essay, this fragment is identified as the “Dormition/Annunciation leaf”; the front (Dormition side) and back (Annunciation side) were designated via the same method previously described for the other fragment.

Close physical examination of these fragments conducted by Erika Loic revealed details about their production and original context, namely that both leaves were cut from *sənsul* manuscripts.<sup>19</sup> Loic identified a small strip of parchment with a parchment thong still stitched to, and folded over, the Apostle/*Abun* leaf, on the front (Apostle side), along the right edge. The parchment thong would have originally attached this fragment to another piece of parchment. On the left edge of the Apostle

side, the parchment curls in the opposite direction from the folded and stitched piece. These details reveal that originally this Apostle/*Abun* leaf would have been located between at least two other accordion-folded sections, making it part of a *sənsul*. The Dormition/Annunciation leaf is similarly revealing: the left edge of the front (Dormition side) has a triangular overhang (fig. 9.8). This triangular piece of parchment was left behind when the fragment was cut — likely with scissors — from its connecting section. This left edge of the leaf curls to the right, toward the Dormition. The page that was removed must have been folded accordion style. This fragment was thus also originally part of a *sənsul*.

<sup>18</sup> Gnisci 2020. The archangel Phanuel is venerated in the Ethiopian church and is known from the book of Enoch. Phanuel can often be seen on healing scrolls and alternates with Gabriel in representations of the Annunciation. The Entrance of the Virgin into the Temple is celebrated on December 12. According to tradition, for the twelve years she

resided in the temple, the Virgin was fed by angels. The possible conflation of the Presentation and Annunciation on this page and, therefore, use of continuous narrative offers an interesting avenue for future inquiry into the iconography of this fragment.

<sup>19</sup> See the essay by Erika Loic (ch. 4).

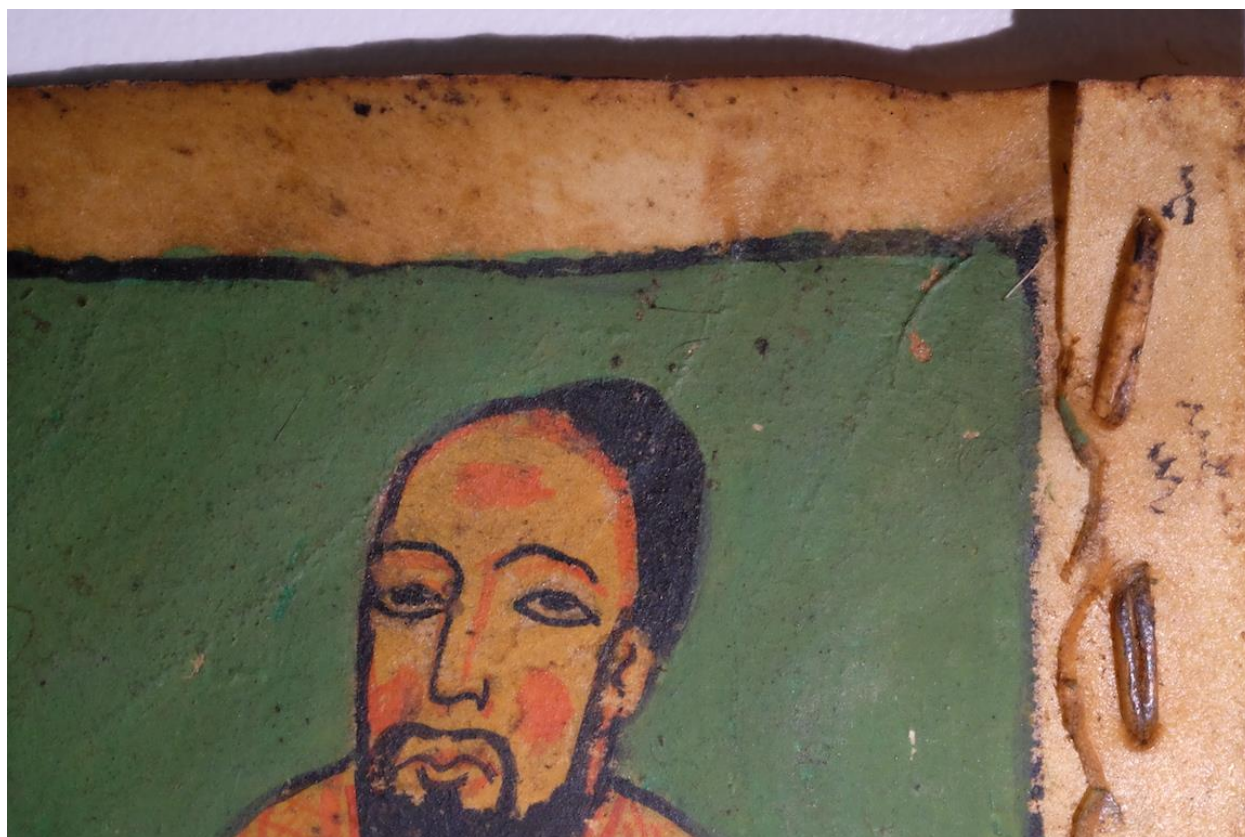


Figure 9.9. *Sansul* fragment (cat. 33), detail of the Apostle side. Photo: Brad Hostetler.

The fact that both fragments were originally part of a *sansul* would seem to suggest that the dealer from whom Harris purchased these works was correct, and that the leaves were once part of the *sansul* in the BHSC. There are, however, certain incongruities between the two leaves that call into question their association with each other and with the *sansul*. As we shall see, neither of the fragments were originally part of the *sansul* in the BHSC; instead, they belong to separate manuscript(s), which may have been produced by the same artist or workshop. Both fragments were likely removed from their original contexts when the *sansul* manuscripts entered the art market, as dividing the manuscripts into individual leaves would increase the seller's profit.

### Color Patterns

The *sansul* has a specific layout of colors consistent across its miniatures. On the front side,

the backgrounds of the miniatures consist of a field of two colors: red on the left and a deep green on the right. The skin color of all figures on this side is provided by the parchment, with red highlights applied to the cheeks and foreheads. On the back side of the *sansul*, the background of the miniatures is similarly made up of a field of two colors: red on the left and green on the right; however the green used on this side is lighter and brighter than that on the front. On this side the color of the figures' skin tone is also different; it is rendered in a rich brown pigment.

The background colors of the fragments do not perfectly match those of the *sansul*. The background of the Dormition side of the Dormition/Annunciation leaf is comprised of green on the left and red on the right, a reversal of the color placement used on the *sansul*. Incorporating this leaf into the *sansul* would therefore disrupt the color pattern used throughout the manuscript. One



possible explanation for this shift in the color pattern is that it cued a narrative shift or called attention to certain images; however, as discussed in the next section, this is unlikely.

The background color pattern of the Apostle side of the Apostle/*Abun* leaf also calls into question its possible affiliation with the *sansul*. Presently, the color pattern matches the *sansul*, but there is evidence this was not always true. In-person examination of the leaf conducted by Loic revealed evidence of restoration to the background of the Apostle side.<sup>20</sup> Originally the right half of the miniature was painted the same light, bright green used in the Passion miniatures of the *sansul*. This pigment was covered at a later date with the current darker green color. Looking closely at the frame in the upper and lower right corners, Loic observed that remnants of the light green can be seen beneath the black border of the frame, suggesting the light green was applied first (fig. 9.9). The darker green pigment covers the light green and overlaps portions of the black frame and the outlines of the figures, providing evidence that it was added last. The solid, even tone of the darker green also suggests that it was not applied contemporaneously with the rest of the pigments, which have begun to flake. When the Apostle page was first painted, it did not match the background color pattern of the *sansul*. It would have therefore disrupted the pattern of the manuscript in the same way as the Dormition page.

On the basis of color pattern, both fragments challenge the dealer's assumption that they were part of the *sansul*. Further issues with this assumption emerge when the narrative qualities of the leaves are compared to the *sansul*.

### **Narrative**

In terms of narrative content, the front of the Dormition/Annunciation leaf does not raise any

immediate issues when compared only to the front of the *sansul*. Although the background colors are reversed, the Dormition could be appended to either end of the *sansul* as the subject matter of the fragment seems, at first glance, to fit. On the front side of the *sansul*, a portion of the Anaphora of Mary is inscribed and illustrated. A scene from the life of the Virgin does not seem out of place with this text. There is, however, no explicit reference to the death of the Virgin in the Anaphora, which is primarily focused on appealing to the Virgin for her intercession. In terms of narrative, it is inconclusive whether the Dormition side of the fragment would fit with the *sansul*.

The back of this fragment — the side featuring the Annunciation — is more revealing. As we have seen, the back of the *sansul* is filled with an extensive illuminated cycle of the Passion of Christ, which is rendered in sequential narrative from the Flagellation to the Resurrection. Placing the Annunciation into this cycle would make it the first page in the cycle, and would leave a large gap in the chronology between the depiction of the Annunciation and that of the Flagellation. While there could certainly be more pages missing from the *sansul* that would fill this gap, the necessary scenes to match the degree of detail given to the Passion cycle would result in a very long *sansul*.<sup>21</sup>

If we ignore the previously described problems with the color patterns and attempt to match the front side of the Dormition/Annunciation leaf to the back side of the *sansul* and vice versa, narrative issues still remain. This flipping would result in two Annunciation scenes on the front side of the *sansul*, a repetition that disrupts the chronological narrative. Placing the Dormition into the Passion cycle on the back side of the *sansul* signals multiple missing scenes. On the basis of narrative the Dormition/Annunciation leaf can thus be discounted from belonging with the *sansul*.

can vary a great deal. To my knowledge of published or digitized *sansul* manuscripts, they range from 50 to 130 centimeters when unfolded. The *sansul* in the BHSC is approximately 180 centimeters when unfolded.

<sup>20</sup> See the essay by Loic (ch. 4).

<sup>21</sup> Sciacca 2018, p. 93 states that “the number of panels created by folding can range widely from four to at least forty-eight.” It is not clear from this assertion what the dimensions of a *sansul* traditionally are when unfolded; the width of each panel



Figure 9.10. *Sənsul* manuscript (cat. 31), Elisha and Isaiah (page 3). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Figure 9.11. *Sənsul* manuscript (cat. 31), Daniel and Habakkuk (page 5). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

Moving to the Apostle/*Abun* leaf, we encounter a different problem: the static frontality of the figures on this fragment does not match the sequential narrative and expressive gestures found throughout the *sənsul*. On the front side of the *sənsul*, Old Testament prophets are depicted on six illuminated pages and the Annunciation is depicted on the seventh. In each miniature, at least one figure is depicted in movement: on page 3 the prophet Isaiah points at a star in the background (fig. 9.10), on page 5 Daniel holds his face in a gesture of sorrow (fig. 9.11), and so on. This depiction of movement can also be seen on the back of the *sənsul*. The miniatures on this side depict for the viewer moments in the progression of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection. In the scene of the Flagellation, on page 15, whips are shown in mid-air, leaving the viewer to imagine their trajectory as they descend and strike Christ (fig. 9.12). On pages 19 and 20, blood streams from Christ's wounds as he hangs on the cross (fig. 9.13). This depiction of movement and action in the *sənsul* stands in sharp contrast to the motionless frontality of the figures on both sides of the Apostle/*Abun* leaf.

### Inscriptions

One final factor must be briefly considered as we compare the *sənsul* to the fragments: the *mise-en-page* of the inscriptions. Throughout the *sənsul*,

inscriptions are written outside of the frame and are placed at the bottom of each page. On both of the fragments, however, inscriptions appear inside the frame: in the Annunciation an inscription can be seen to the left of the Virgin's head and another above Phanael. On the other fragment, a naming inscription is written to the left of each *abun*'s head. The other sides of both fragments have naming inscriptions outside the frame.

### Conclusion: Contextualizing the Cutting and Selling of Pages

On the basis of color pattern, narrative, and inscriptions, the formal qualities of the parchment fragments suggest that they were not originally part of the *sənsul* now in the BHSC. If the fragments do not belong with this *sənsul*, what then can we determine about their original contexts? Their folded and curled edges confirm that they were at one point integrated in *sənsul* manuscripts and that they were cut from these manuscripts at some point after their initial production. The narrow sample size of two fragments, however, makes it impossible to determine conclusively whether both leaves were disassembled from the same *sənsul*, or if they originated in different manuscripts. It is unfortunately also impossible to determine when the manuscript(s) was disassembled. In the remainder of this essay, I provide some



Figure 9.12. *Sənsul* manuscript (cat. 31), the Flagellation (page 15), the Crowning with Thorns (page 16). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

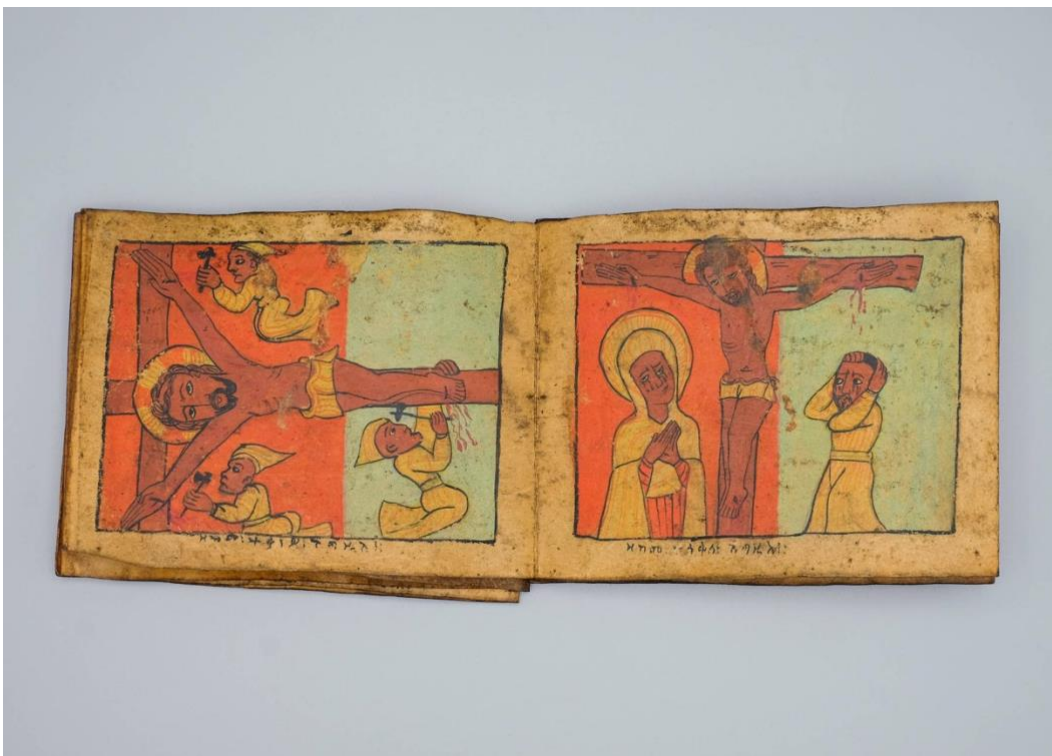


Figure 9.13. *Sənsul* manuscript (cat. 31), Christ Nailed to the Cross (page 19), the Crucifixion with Mary and John (page 20). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

contextualizing information about the most likely — but not the only possible — scenario in which the fragments were removed.

Manuscripts have been cut up and used for new purposes since the origin of the codex.<sup>22</sup> Christopher de Hamel — speaking on the subject of western medieval manuscripts — demonstrates that since the fourteenth century manuscripts have been divided for the re-use of their illuminations. These could then be pasted into new codices or, as was common practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, collected and displayed in albums.<sup>23</sup> De Hamel establishes that around 1900 collection practices shifted; illuminations were no longer cut from folios, instead whole leaves were disassembled and sold.<sup>24</sup> In England in the 1960's — only one decade before Harris purchased the *sensul* and fragments in London — the cutting and selling of folios by art dealers flourished.<sup>25</sup> It is in this commercial context that we must consider the fragments.

The leaves were most likely cut from the *sensul(s)* to which they belong once they entered the art market. Dealers frequently acquired manuscripts, disarticulated the leaves, and sold them as parts. Catalogs issued in the 1960s advertised loose pages as “matted, ready for framing.”<sup>26</sup> De Hamel demonstrates the ways in which this practice resulted in increased profits for the seller. A complete manuscript could be sold for \$1,000; split it in two and each half could sell for \$900, in fourths

and each quarter might sell for \$800, and so on.<sup>27</sup> While scholarly perception of the disarticulation and sale of European manuscripts has evolved and art historians now challenge the practice, Ethiopian manuscripts are still disassembled and sold.<sup>28</sup>

The division and sale of these manuscripts into individual leaves fits into a larger tradition of western desire for Ethiopian manuscripts, which were displaced to Europe as early as the fifteenth century. Individual collectors, pilgrims, and missionaries collected small numbers of manuscripts, which they then bequeathed to various European institutions upon their death.<sup>29</sup> In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, European colonial powers, including Germany, France, and Britain, conducted expeditions with the explicit intention to acquire ethnological and cultural objects from Africa, including manuscripts from Ethiopia.<sup>30</sup>

Manuscripts were also taken from the country following armed conflict, the most (in)famous of which is the 1868 British Expedition to Mäqdäla. Ostensibly a rescue mission for British citizens being held in the royal fortress of Emperor Tewodros II (r. 1855–68), the conflict was also used by Britain to loot works of art.<sup>31</sup> The then acting director of the British Museum joined the expedition in order to select objects from the royal treasury which would be taken and sent back to Britain.<sup>32</sup> Two hundred mules and fifteen elephants are said to have been required to transport the loot, which included three

<sup>22</sup> De Hamel 1996, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> De Hamel 1996, pp. 10–11.

<sup>24</sup> De Hamel 1996, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> De Hamel 2000.

<sup>26</sup> De Hamel 2000, p. 55.

<sup>27</sup> De Hamel 1996, p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> Mauk 2014. Elaine Treharne, Sandra Hindman, and Eric Johnson are just a few of the art historians who have, in the past 20 years, worked to bring public awareness to the practice and to curtail it. See also the essay by Loic (ch. 4); and the work by the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, <https://hmml.org/about/global-operations/ethiopia/>.

<sup>29</sup> Wion 2012. For instance, until 1900, Germany's collection of Ethiopian manuscripts comprised of bequeathments from European travelers, including Hiob Ludolf (1624–1704), J.M.

Wansleben (1636–79), and Theodorus Petraeus (ca. 1630–72), as well as donations from Protestant missionaries.

<sup>30</sup> Wion 2012. Germany sent Felix Rosen in 1905 and Enno Littmann in 1906 to Ethiopia; both collected on behalf of the Royal Library in Berlin. France sent Antoine Thomason d'Abbadie in 1837; the manuscripts he acquired were sent to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. One of the earliest explorers/collectors sent by Britain was James Bruce, who traveled to Ethiopia in the late eighteenth century. Bruce's Ethiopian manuscript collection is now in the Bodleian Library.

<sup>31</sup> Pankhurst 1985, pp. 233–35.

<sup>32</sup> Woldeyes 2020. Comparable examples of targeted robbery of cultural patrimony by colonial powers are discussed in Hicks 2020.

hundred and fifty-six manuscripts for the museum.<sup>33</sup>

The last of these state-sponsored collecting missions took place in the 1930's, but individuals continued to collect both loose pages and entire manuscripts. Today the movement of Ethiopian-produced manuscripts out of the country continues as a result of the tourist trade.<sup>34</sup> It is in this commercial context that we must view both the *sənsul* and the fragments today in the BHSC. These works represent at least two — and possibly three — Ethiopian *sənsul* manuscripts. These manuscripts were at some point in their history taken from their country of origin, at which point they were disassembled and sold.

As a result of the long-term western desire for, and collection of, Ethiopian manuscripts, there are now

large collections of these objects in institutions in Europe and North America. Amsalu Tefera counts 6,928 Ethiopian manuscripts currently held outside Ethiopia; this figure does not include privately held or unofficial collections.<sup>35</sup> Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes demonstrates the ways in which the foreign collection of these objects impacts Ethiopia, namely “the denial of access to knowledge, Eurocentric interpretation of Ethiopian manuscripts, and the handling of Gəʿəz manuscripts as artefacts from the past.”<sup>36</sup> Woldeyes argues that these manuscripts are living sources of knowledge. In the words of one Gondärine scholar: “they are creations of Egziabher (God), like all of us. Keeping them in institutions is like keeping living bodies in graveyards.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Pankhurst 1985, p. 236.

<sup>34</sup> Delamarter 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Tefera, 2019, p. 41.

<sup>36</sup> Woldeyes 2020 details each of these three impacts. First, he argues that the traditional school system in Ethiopia suffers from a lack of available Gəʿəz manuscripts, which are used to teach students the language. He also suggests that the collection of Ethiopian manuscripts in western institutions has resulted in a greater amount of scholarship on the objects produced by western scholars than by Ethiopian scholars.

Woldeyes describes this as “epistemic violence whereby local knowledges are used as raw materials to produce Eurocentric knowledge, which in turn is used to teach Africans as though they had no prior knowledge.” Finally, he argues that, when in western collections, Ethiopian manuscripts are viewed as artifacts of the past, while in Ethiopia they are understood as living persons. He concludes “African’s intellectual and cultural heritage, these living bodies locked away in graveyards, must be put back into the hands of Africans.”

<sup>37</sup> Woldeyes 2020. Egziabher = ፲ጊዝ'abəḥer.

### 31. *Sənsul* Manuscript

Ink and paint on parchment

Page 1:  $3\frac{7}{8} \times 5\frac{1}{8}$  in. (9.8 × 13.0 cm)

Unfolded length:  $69\frac{1}{4}$  in. (175.9 cm)

**CONDITION:** There is some flaking on the illuminations throughout; a tear on page 1 has been stitched and painted over, as has a tear that bridges the external fold between pages 3 and 4.

**PROVENANCE:** Purchased by David P. Harris from Constantine Z. Panayotidis (Antiques by Constantine Ltd.) in London on October 21, 1975. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.189.1).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/668/>

This manuscript is a *sənsul*, also referred to as a “leporello,” “concertina,” or “accordion book,” all terms which reference its folded format.<sup>1</sup> It consists of three pieces of parchment stitched together and folded in rectangular sections. Each section features a painted miniature or text on each side, which we designate as a page. When unfolded, the *sənsul* includes 14 rectangular pages on one side of the stitched parchment, and 14 on the other. For clarity, and to reflect the way in which the *sənsul* is viewed, we have numbered the pages on one side 1–14, and those on the other side 15–28.<sup>2</sup>

Pages 1–14 alternate between full-page miniatures (odd-numbered pages) and text (even-numbered pages). The text, written in Gəʿəz, is the Anaphora of Mary (*Qəddase Maryam*).<sup>3</sup> Each of these text pages contains ten lines of script, written primarily in black ink, with important scriptural names and phrases in red ink. In the twenty-ninth verse of the Anaphora, a priest speaks directly to Mary, asking “with whom or with what likeness shall we liken thee?”<sup>4</sup> The next eight verses compare the Virgin to figures from the Old Testament. In the thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth verses the Virgin is compared to:



Cat. 31A. *Sənsul* manuscript. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

the golden omer of Elijah, the cruse of Elisha, the virgin conception of which Isaiah prophesied, the first giving birth without intercourse of which Daniel (also spoke), the mountain of Pharan of Habakkuk, the closehouse in the east of Ezekiel, the place in Bethlehem from which the law goes forth, the land of Ephratah of Micah, the tree of life of Silondis, the healer of Nahum’s wounds, the rejoicing of Zechariah, the clean hall of Malachi.<sup>5</sup>

The full-page miniatures that alternate with the text pages illustrate this portion of the Anaphora. Each figure is identified by a Gəʿəz inscription located outside the lower edge of the frame. On page 1, an angel is shown touching Elijah’s forehead and gesturing toward two jars. On each of the next five illuminated pages, two of the prophets mentioned in the Anaphora are illustrated, each with an identifying attribute. On page 3, Elisha gestures toward three vases, while Isaiah points toward a star. Two lions can be seen at Daniel’s feet, and a mountain rises behind Habakkuk on page 5. On page 7, Ezekiel and Micah are separated by a built structure resembling a *tukul*, a type of traditional

Ethiopian construction. Silondis and Nahum are similarly separated on page 9, this time by a tree toward which they both gesture. On page 11, Zechariah and Malachi face a central *tukul*.

The final illuminated page on this side, page 13, departs from this pattern; it depicts the Annunciation of the Virgin. Mary stands outside of a stepped *tukul*, next to the left edge of the frame. God is shown in bust at the center, inside an abstracted cloud border, accompanied by a dove. On the far right, the archangel Gabriel points upwards with his right hand and gestures toward the Virgin with a branch, held with his left hand. This is one of two standard representations of the Annunciation in Ethiopian art; the branch is a reference to the tree of Jesse.<sup>6</sup>

Pages 15–28, on the other side of the *sənsul*, consist of fourteen full-page miniatures with scenes from the Passion of Christ, each identified by a Gəʿəz inscription placed outside the lower edge of the frame. The cycle begins with the Flagellation of Christ on page 15 and continues on 16 and 17 with the Crowning with Thorns and Christ Carrying the Cross. On page 18, Christ is depicted being stripped of his garments. The next four pages (19–22) depict moments from the Crucifixion: the Nailing to the Cross, the Crucifixion with Mary and John, the scene with the Piercing of his Side and the Offering of the Sponge, and the Division of the Garments. The next three pages (23–25) show the events following Christ’s death: the Deposition, the Preparation of the Body, and Burial. Page 26 depicts the Descent into Hell, and page 27 the Resurrection. On the final page (28) is a representation of Mary Magdalene greeting the resurrected Christ.

The color palette of the *sənsul* consists primarily of red, green, and brown. The backgrounds of all miniatures are divided vertically into color fields, with red on the left and green on the right. On pages 1–13, the figures are outlined in black; their skin tone is unpainted, and thus the color of the parchment. On pages 15–28, the green of the background is more thinly applied, resulting in a lighter tone. The figures on this side of the parchment are also outlined in black, and their skin

is painted a rich brown. The clothes worn by the figures are similar on both sides. The prophets on pages 1–11 and Christ and Mary on pages 13, 20, 26–28 wear red tunics beneath striped mantles; the other figures are shown in various striped outfits.

Ethiopia and Eritrea have a long tradition of manuscript production, stretching back to the Aksumite Period (ca. 80 BCE – ca. 940 CE).<sup>7</sup> *Sənsul* manuscripts have been created in the region since the late fifteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Of the three types of manuscript production — the others being codices and scrolls — *sənsul* manuscripts are the least common. They typically functioned as private devotional books and could be carried by their owner in a case or displayed on an altar.<sup>9</sup> In this way, they have characteristics of both manuscripts and icons.

This *sənsul* emits a strong fragrance. It would require a significant amount of time and/or exposure to imbue the parchment to this degree with the smell of incense.

CEM

1. Bausi et al 2015, p. 78.
2. Pages are numbered sequentially according to reading direction, following the conventions that scholars use for other screenfold traditions, for example Mesoamerican painted books; see Boone 2007.
3. A translation of the Anaphora can be found in Daoud and Hazen 1959, pp. 104–21. For an explanation of the role of the Anaphora in Ethiopian liturgy, see my essay (ch. 9) in this volume.
4. Daoud and Hazen 1959, p. 107.
5. Daoud and Hazen 1959, pp. 107–08. An omer is a unit of measurement, and a cruse is an earthenware jar.
6. Gnisci 2019, p. 81.
7. Nosnitsin 2012, pp. 1–2.
8. Nosnitsin 2012, pp. 4–5.
9. Sciacca 2018, p. 93.



Cat. 31B. *Sonsul* manuscript, Elijah and the angel (page 1). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31C. *Sonsul* manuscript, excerpt from the Anaphora of Mary (page 2), Elisha and Isaiah (page 3). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.





Cat. 31D. *Sonsul* manuscript, excerpt from the Anaphora of Mary (page 4), Daniel and Habakkuk (page 5). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31E. *Sonsul* manuscript, excerpt from the Anaphora of Mary (page 6), Ezekiel and Micah (page 7). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31F. *Sonsul* manuscript, excerpt from the Anaphora of Mary (page 8), Silondis and Nahum (page 9). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31G. *Sonsul* manuscript, excerpt from the Anaphora of Mary (page 10), Zechariah and Malachi (page 11). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31H. *Sonsul* manuscript, excerpt from the Anaphora of Mary (page 12), the Annunciation of Mary (page 13). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31I. *Sonsul* manuscript, excerpt from the Anaphora of Mary (page 14). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31J. *Sonsul* manuscript, the Flagellation (page 15), the Crowning with Thorns (page 16). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31K. *Sonsul* manuscript, Christ carrying the Cross (page 17), Christ is Stripped of his Garments (page 18). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31L. *Sənsul* manuscript, Christ Nailed to the Cross (page 19), the Crucifixion with Mary and John (page 20). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31M. *Sənsul* manuscript, Piercing of Christ's Side and the Offering of the Sponge (page 21), the Division of Christ's Garments (page 22). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31N. *Sənsul* manuscript, the Deposition (page 23), the Preparation of the Body (page 24). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31O. *Sənsul* manuscript, and Burial (page 25), the Descent into Hell (page 26). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31P. *Sonsul* manuscript, the Resurrection (page 27), Mary Magdalene greeting the resurrected Christ (page 28). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 31Q. *Sonsul* manuscript, Christ Nailed to the Cross (page 19), the Crucifixion with Mary and John (page 20). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

## 32. *Sənsul* Fragment

Ink and paint on parchment

4 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 5 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (10.3 × 13.0 cm)

CONDITION: There is some flaking on both sides; a tear near the upper center has been stitched and painted over.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from Constantine Z. Panayotidis (Antiques by Constantine Ltd.) in London on October 21, 1975. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.189.2).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/1514/>

This parchment leaf features full-page framed miniatures on both sides.<sup>1</sup> On one side is a depiction of the Dormition of the Virgin, known in the western tradition as the Assumption. Her body lies horizontally in the lower half of the miniature. On the left, a group of male mourners gather around her, while on the right Christ holds her infant-like soul.

The scene on the other side of the leaf seemingly presents two episodes from the life of the Virgin. To the left, on the red background, Mary spins thread, an iconography associated with the Annunciation. To the right, on the green background, is the archangel Phanuel (Fanu'el), identified by a naming inscription, holding a paten and chalice.<sup>2</sup> This iconography is associated with the Presentation of the Virgin to the Temple. The Annunciation and the Presentation are depicted on facing folios in an Ethiopian manuscript now at the British Library (Or 481, ff. 99v and 100r).<sup>3</sup> Our miniature seemingly conflates these two events, compressing important moments in the life of the Virgin to fit the format of the *sənsul* of which this leaf was once a part, and evoking both for the viewer.

The color palette of red, green, and brown is similar to that of the *sənsul* (cat. 31) and the other parchment leaf (cat. 33). The backgrounds of both miniatures on this leaf consist of a field of two



Cat. 32A. *Sənsul* fragment, Dormition. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

colors; on the side with the Dormition, the left background is green and the right is a bright red. On the other side these colors are reversed, and the green is lighter. In the scene of the Dormition, the figures are outlined in black and their skin tone is provided by the color of the parchment. In the scene of the Annunciation/Presentation, the skin tone of the figures is a rich brown.

This leaf originally belonged to a larger manuscript and was, at some point, disarticulated.<sup>4</sup> The edges of the parchment curl in opposite directions, providing evidence that it was cut out of an accordion-folded *sənsul*.

CEM

1. Further discussion of this parchment can be found in my essay (ch. 9) in this volume.
2. Many thanks to Birhanu T. Gessese for his identification of the archangel Phanuel.
3. British Library, Or 481, [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=or\\_481](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=or_481)
4. Further discussion can be found in the essays by Erika Loic (ch. 4) and myself (ch. 9).





Cat. 32B. *Sonsul* fragment, Dormition. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 32C. *Sonsul* fragment, Annunciation/Presentation. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

### 33. *Sənsul* Fragment

Ink and paint on parchment

4 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 5 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (10.3 × 13.0 cm)

**CONDITION:** A tear near the center of the upper edge has been stitched; there is evidence of restoration to the green paint on the apostle side and flaking of paint on the *abun* side.

**PROVENANCE:** Purchased by David P. Harris from Constantine Z. Panayotidis (Antiques by Constantine Ltd.) in London on October 21, 1975. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.189.3).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/1515/>

This parchment leaf has full-page framed miniatures on both sides. A group of three men is depicted on each side; all six wear red tunics beneath striped mantles and hold prayer staffs in their left hands. On one side, the men depicted are young with black hair and beards, and hold bound books with crosses on the covers in their right hands. Naming inscriptions in Gəʿəz outside the lower frame identify them as Yaʿəqob, Pəṭros, and Yoħannəs — the apostles James, Peter, and John.<sup>1</sup> On the other side, the men depicted are older, and are shown with white hair and long, white beards; they hold small crosses in their right hands. Naming inscriptions to the left of the figures' heads — Arägawi, Alef, and Afşe — identify each as an *abun*, a title used for priests, bishops, and monastic holy men.<sup>2</sup>

The color palette of the leaf consists primarily of red, green, and brown. The backgrounds of the miniatures are a field of two colors: red on the left and green on the right. On the apostle side of the leaf the figures are outlined in black and their skin tone is provided by the color of the parchment. On the *abun* side the skin tone of the figures is painted a rich brown.



Cat. 33A. *Sənsul* fragment, *Abunas* Arägawi, Alef, and Afşe.  
Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

This leaf was originally part of a larger manuscript and was, at some point, disarticulated.<sup>3</sup> A small strip of parchment, with a parchment thong still stitched to it, is folded over one lateral edge of the leaf. The parchment thong would serve to attach this leaf to another. Along the opposite edge, the leaf curls in the opposite direction. These two edges reveal that the adjacent pieces of parchment originally attached to this leaf were folded in opposite directions, making the manuscript to which this leaf belonged a *sənsul*.

CEM

1. Many thanks to Birhanu T. Gessese for his translation of the inscriptions on this leaf.
2. Further discussion on the use of *abun* can be found in the essay by Madison Gilmore-Duffey (ch. 10) in this volume.
3. Further discussion can be found in the essays by Erika Loic (ch. 4) and myself (ch. 9).



Cat. 33B. *Sənsul* fragment, Apostles Ya'əqob, Pətroṣ, and Yoħannəs. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 33C. *Sənsul* fragment, *Abunäs* Arägawi, Alef, and Afše. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

### 34. Fragment of a Parchment Scroll

Ink on parchment

6<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 3<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (17.5 × 9.8 cm)

CONDITION: There is damage to both sides of the parchment, particularly on the upper half of the back side, which was exposed, and therefore more vulnerable when the scroll was rolled closed. The lower edge has a series of punctures.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris possibly from Maria Teresa O’Leary (Nuevo Mundo) in Alexandria, Virginia on February 28, 1976. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.208).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/669/>

This fragment of parchment is likely the upper portion of a healing scroll. The upper edge of the parchment is straight and has two horizontal slits, which could be threaded with a string to keep the scroll rolled closed. This scroll would have been created by a *däbtära* using the same ritual described for the other healing scroll (cat. 35).

This fragment retains an image of an angel, brandishing a sword in his right hand and holding a scabbard in his left. The figure is outlined in black, with pink used for the skin, and for details of the tunic and scabbard. The face is abstracted and dominated by large eyes, which gaze outward at the viewer. The figure’s long neck is marked by three horizontal lines. Both the scabbard and the lines of the angel’s tunic continue beyond the torn lower edge of the scroll. There are no inscriptions that identify the figure; it could be any of the seven archangels venerated in the Ethiopian Church, or an unnamed guardian angel.<sup>1</sup>

The angel motif is standard on healing scrolls, the iconography of which alternates between geometric designs, magical letters, and figural images of archangels, angels, and saints.<sup>2</sup> These figures threaten demons by brandishing weapons or being depicted fighting demons. The large eyes are a



Cat. 34A. Fragment of a Parchment Scroll. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

typical feature of healing scrolls. The angel’s gaze is meant to both deter demons and to focus the healing power of the scroll on the person who gazes at it.<sup>3</sup> Scrolls are rarely unrolled and viewed; instead they are more often kept, tightly rolled, in cylindrical leather cases. The owner wears the case daily around their neck or chest as a protective measure.<sup>4</sup> Both scrolls in the BHSC were likely used in this way, as the parchment remains tightly rolled today.

CEM

1. Mercier 1979, p. 55.
2. Chernetsov 2006a, pp. 95–96.
3. Mercier 1979, pp. 94–95.
4. Nosnitsin 2012, p. 4.



Cat. 34B. Fragment of a Parchment Scroll. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 34C. Fragment of a Parchment Scroll, back. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

### 35. Healing Scroll (*tälsäm* or *yäbranna kətab*)

Ink on parchment

46 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 3 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (117.0 × 9.5 cm)

CONDITION: A portion is missing from the upper edge of the scroll; remnants of the pink ink used on the missing illustration(s) are visible. The upper edge also has a series of pinpricks, with a row of spun thread still attached. There is extensive damage to the left side of the scroll — and less severe damage to the right — likely a result of wear and tear as the scroll was rolled closed for daily use.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris possibly from Maria Teresa O’Leary (Nuevo Mundo) in Alexandria, Virginia on February 28, 1976. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.209).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/670/>

This parchment scroll was created for a woman, either to enhance her fertility or offer protection for herself and her unborn child. The scroll’s prophylactic function is created by the specific combination of texts and images inscribed on it.<sup>1</sup>

The text begins with an opening standard in Ethiopian protective scrolls, “In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God,” and then details the object’s purpose: to capture demons and protect the mother and fetus from their threats.<sup>2</sup> Several prayers for protection against the Evil Eye and a *historiola* — a type of spell which describes a mythical or religious narrative in order to provide a precedent for the spell’s request — are also included on this scroll.<sup>3</sup> The *historiola* describes the story of Sissinios, an Orthodox saint who killed his sister when she was possessed by a demoness and attempted to murder her own children.<sup>4</sup>

The scroll is comprised of three sheets of parchment stitched together with parchment thongs.<sup>5</sup> The uppermost edge of the scroll is torn and contains traces of a pink ink, suggesting an image was originally at the top opening of the scroll.<sup>6</sup>



Cat. 35A. Healing scroll, detail of talismanic image. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

The rest of the scroll is filled with single-columned lines of Ge’ez text and two talismanic images, one near the center of the scroll and the other at the lower edge. Both images are executed in pink and black pigments.

These images do not illustrate the text, but rather are talismans that supplement the scroll’s protective function. The central image depicts the heads of four angels, each projecting from a side of a central rectangle. The angels are outlined in black and painted pink. Each features a set of large eyes which gaze out at the viewer; the facial features are indicated by black lines. A set of two pink wings, also outlined in black, surrounds each angel’s head. The central rectangle is filled with a wash of pink ink and features a face, similar to that of the angels, with large eyes and eyebrows, as well as a nose and mouth.

The lower edge features a cruciform design. At the center is a pink rectangle with a similar face: large eyes and features that are delineated by black lines. The cross is made of two intersecting arms of equal length, each outlined in black (exterior) and pink (interior) lines. The terminals of each arm curl away from each other. Each arm has a decorated central strip, composed of pink and black wavy lines ending in a terminal conical shape, in which there is a single tear-drop design. Four double-armed crosses, each

made of a single black line, extend from the junction of the cross-arms.

Both of the extant images on this scroll are variants of an image commonly found on healing scrolls: magical geometric designs.<sup>7</sup> These designs are intended to trap demons, sealing them inside the scroll. They are said to derive from the seal of King Solomon, which was revealed to him by God and used to command and trap demons.<sup>8</sup> Together, the designs supplement the healing power of the text, in order to confront and trap demons.<sup>9</sup> Similar motifs can be seen on healing scrolls in the collections of the Bodleian Library (MS Aeth. f. 4 and MS Aeth. f. 10) and the Menil Collection (CA 64051.02).<sup>10</sup>

The oldest surviving Ethiopian healing scroll dates to the early sixteenth century, but they are believed to have been first produced in the Aksumite period (ca. 80 BCE – ca. 940 CE).<sup>11</sup> The scrolls are produced by *däbtära* — itinerant, unordained clerics.<sup>12</sup> A *däbtära* was traditionally a teacher and scribe until the education reforms of Ḥaylā Šəllase I in the early twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> Today, they serve as singers and musicians in the church and as healers outside the church.<sup>14</sup>

Each scroll is tailored to the needs of a specific client, and is created according to a standard ritual. The process begins with the selection and sacrifice of an astrologically determined animal. The client is then purified by being washed with the animal's blood.<sup>15</sup> The animal's skin is then used to produce the parchment for the scroll. Healing scrolls typically consist of three strips of parchment, stitched together to create a scroll equal in height to the client. This ensures the client is protected from head to toe.<sup>16</sup> The scrolls are then inscribed with the owner's name and a collection of texts and designs that together provide its protective role. While the majority of extant scrolls were created for women, to aid in conception and pregnancy, they can be produced to counteract any ailment. The *däbtära* selects appropriate prayers and protective spells and inscribes them in black ink on the scroll. The baptismal name of the client, incipit phrases of prayers, and important words from scripture are then inscribed in red ink.<sup>17</sup> These scrolls can then be

worn by the client in a cylindrical case or hung from the walls of their home until they have served their purpose.<sup>18</sup> Once the client is healed, the scroll can be stored in case the ailment returns.<sup>19</sup>

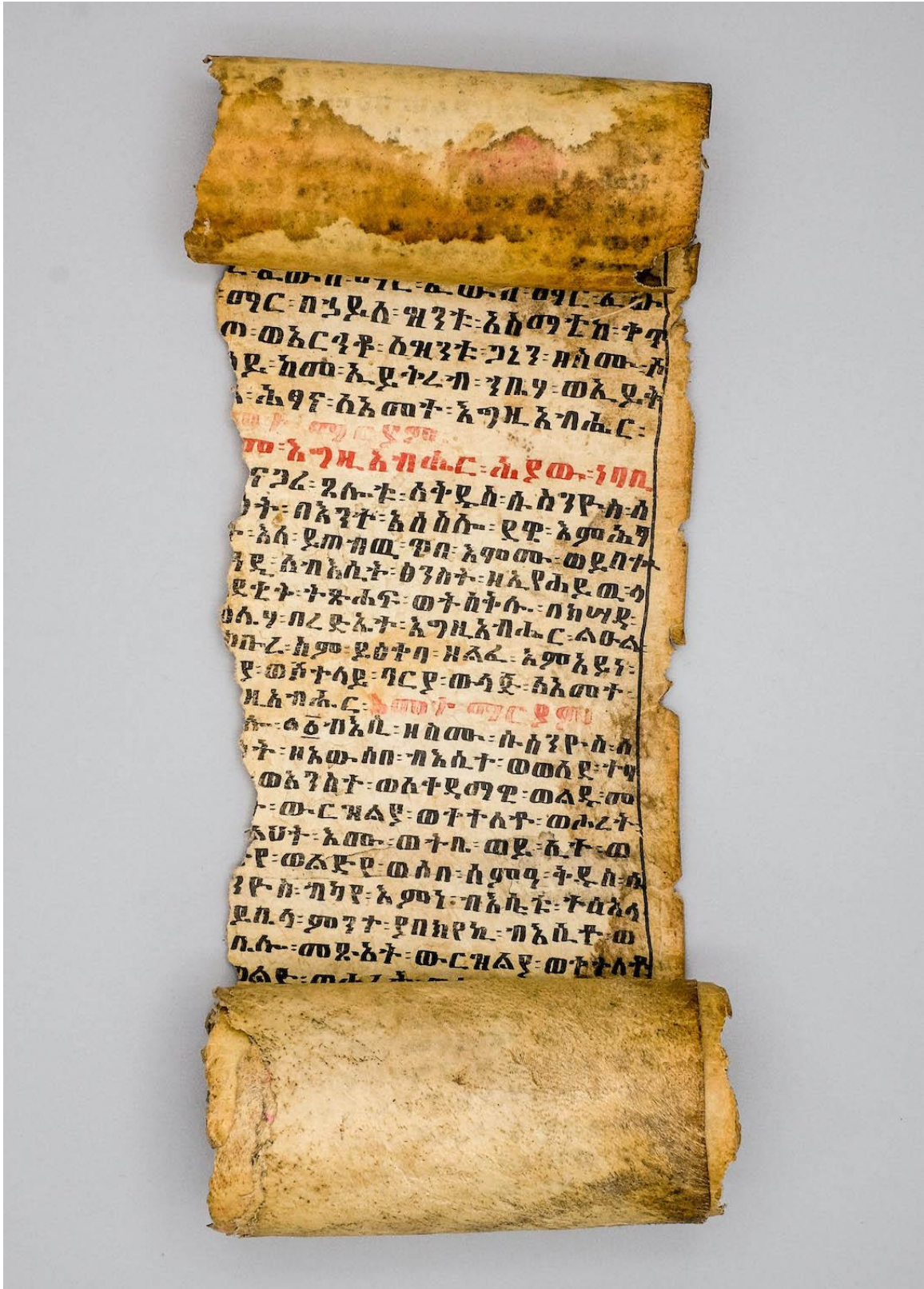
## CEM

1. Major sources to consult on the creation and function of Ethiopian healing scrolls include Mercier 1979; Mercier 1997; Chernetsov 2006a; Levene 2019.
2. This incipit is termed the “usual invocation” in Levene 2019, p. 109.
3. I am extraordinarily grateful to Felege-Selam Yirga for his translations of the Gə'əz text on this scroll and his assistance throughout the research process.
4. Chernetsov 2006a, p. 101. The Ethiopian legend of Saint Sissinios seems to have been borrowed from Coptic Synaxaria. Parallel stories exist in the Greek, Armenian, Romanian, Slavonic, Arabic, Syriac, and Hebrew traditions, although the spelling of the saint's name and the name of the child-killing demon varies. In the Ethiopian tradition the demon is called Wərzəlyā.
5. The uppermost section measures 12 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (31.5 cm) in length, the central section 22 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (56 cm), and the lower section 12 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (31 cm).
6. See Chernetsov 2006a, p. 97, and Levene 2019, p. 109. Most scrolls open with a protective image before the text; the most common opening motif is an angel with a sword.
7. Chernetsov 2006a, pp. 95–96. Other types of images are iconic figures, typically saints or angels, and magical letters or marks.
8. Mercier 1979, p. 113.
9. Mercier 1997, pp. 94–95.
10. Levene 2019. The Bodleian Library, MS Aeth. f. 4, <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/b924ffc6-3b6d-40d7-99c3-f11a86f456df/> and MS Aeth. f. 10, <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/9ef8942d-f4d0-4aae-968f-cc21705c5b48/>; and the Menil Collection, CA 64051.02, <https://www.menil.org/collection/objects/4265-healing-scroll-talsam-or-ya-branna-ketab>.
11. Mercier 1997, p. 41.
12. Munro-Hay 2002, p. 52.
13. Munro-Hay 2002, p. 52.
14. Finneran 2003, p. 144.
15. Mercier 1979, p. 16. Goat and sheepskin are the most frequently used.
16. Horowitz 2001, p. 118.
17. Mercier 1997, p. 46.
18. Mercier 1997, p. 46.
19. Windmuller-Luna 2015.

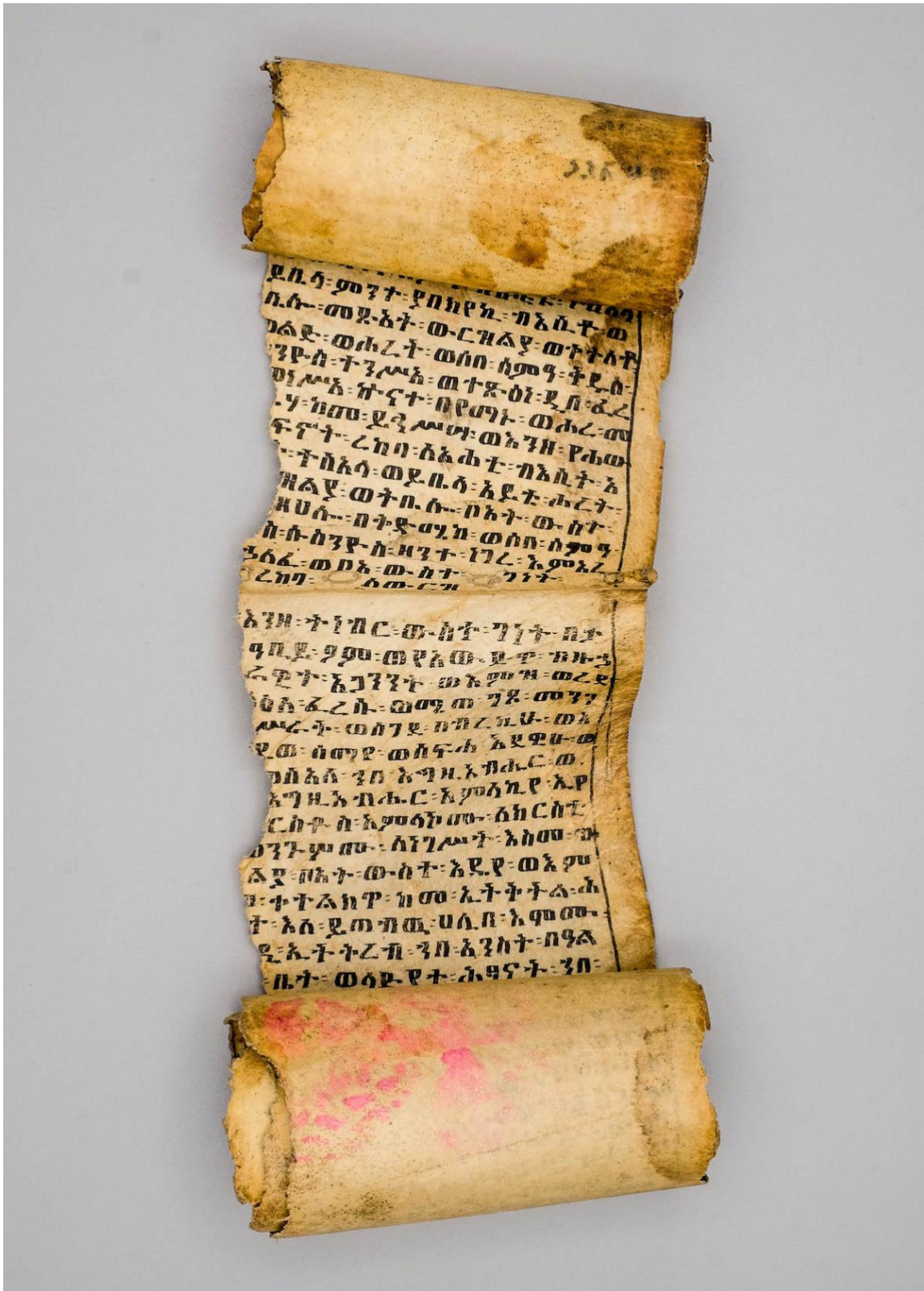




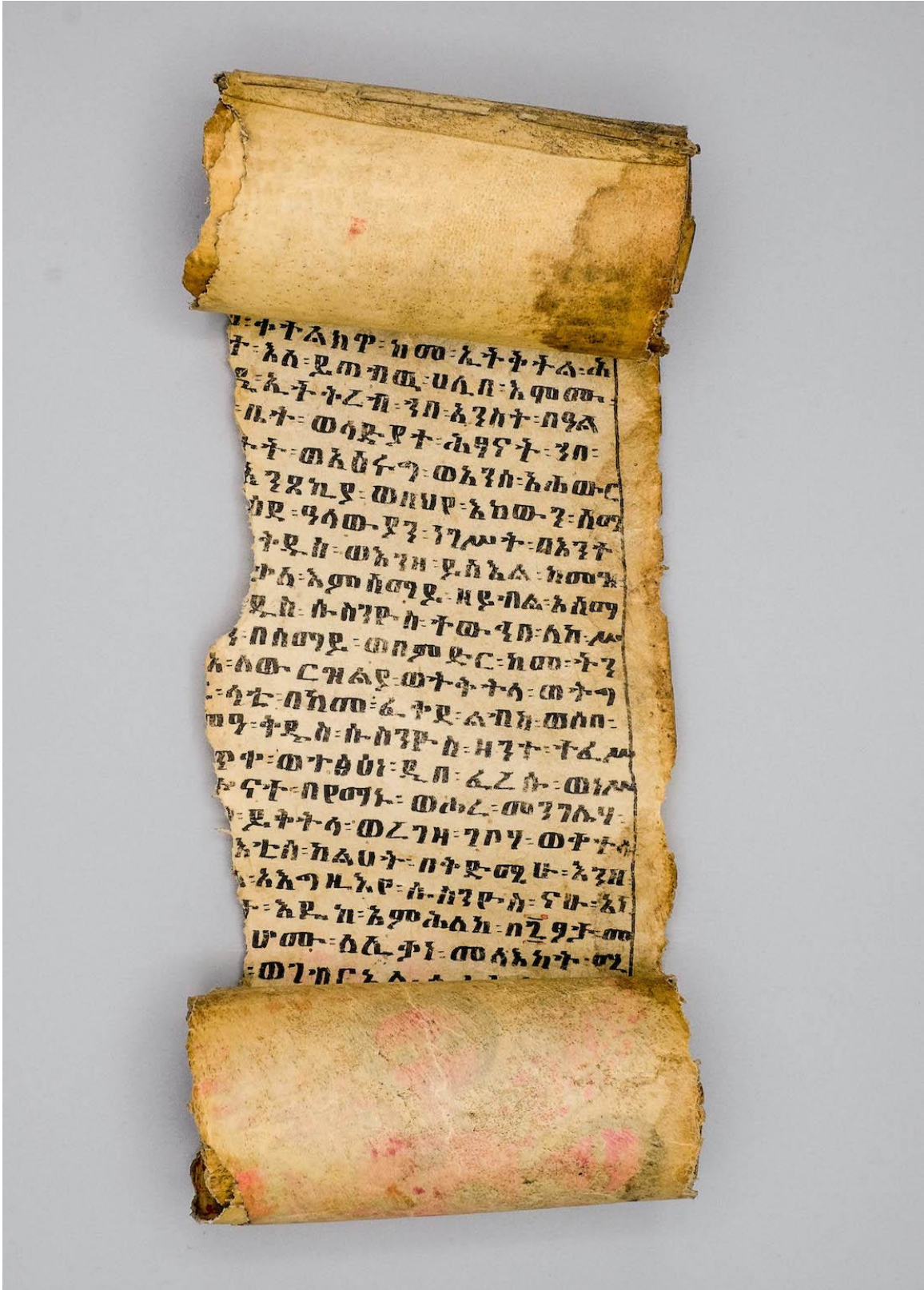
Cat. 35B. Healing scroll, part 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 35C. Healing scroll, part 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



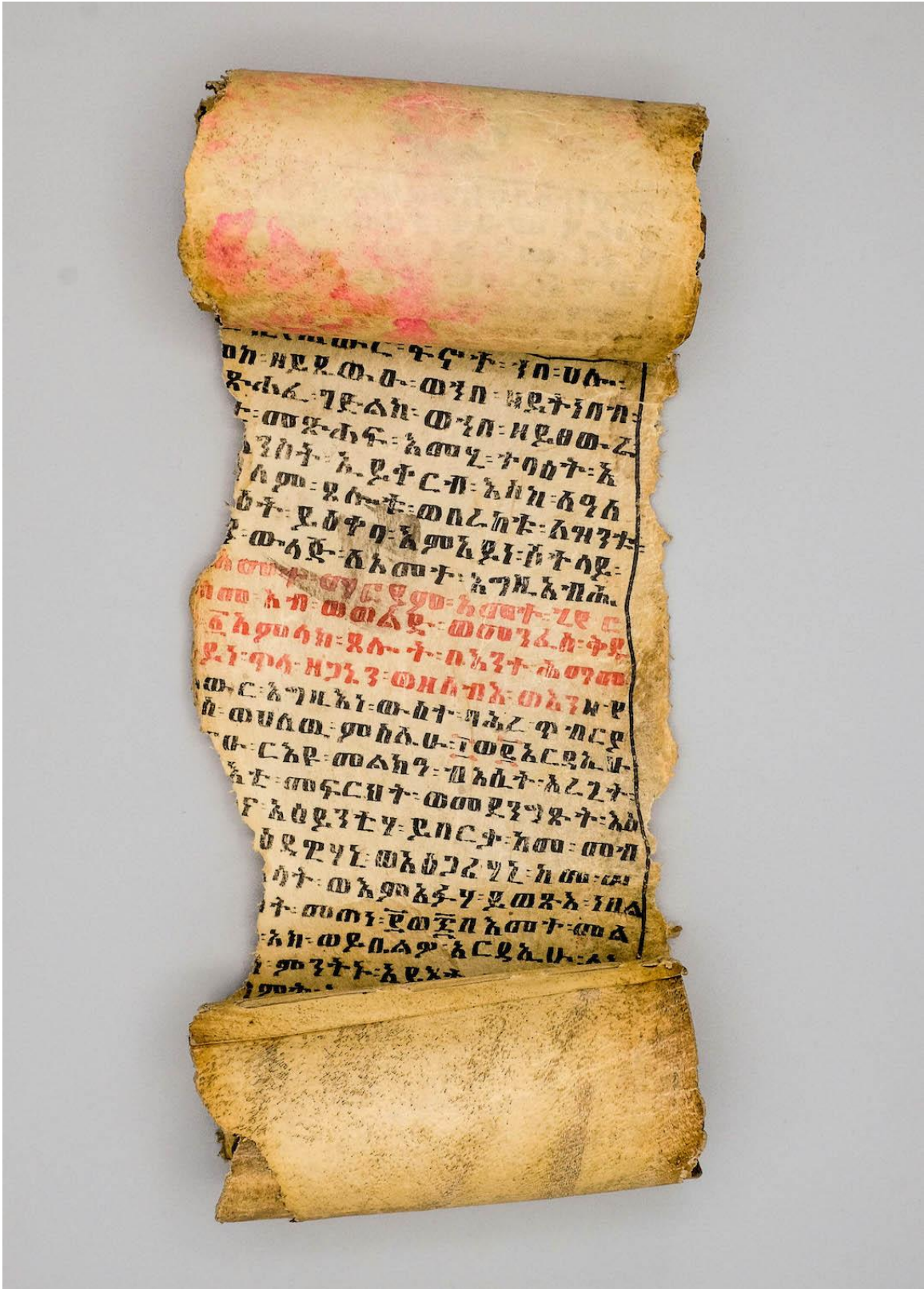
Cat. 35D. Healing scroll, part 3. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



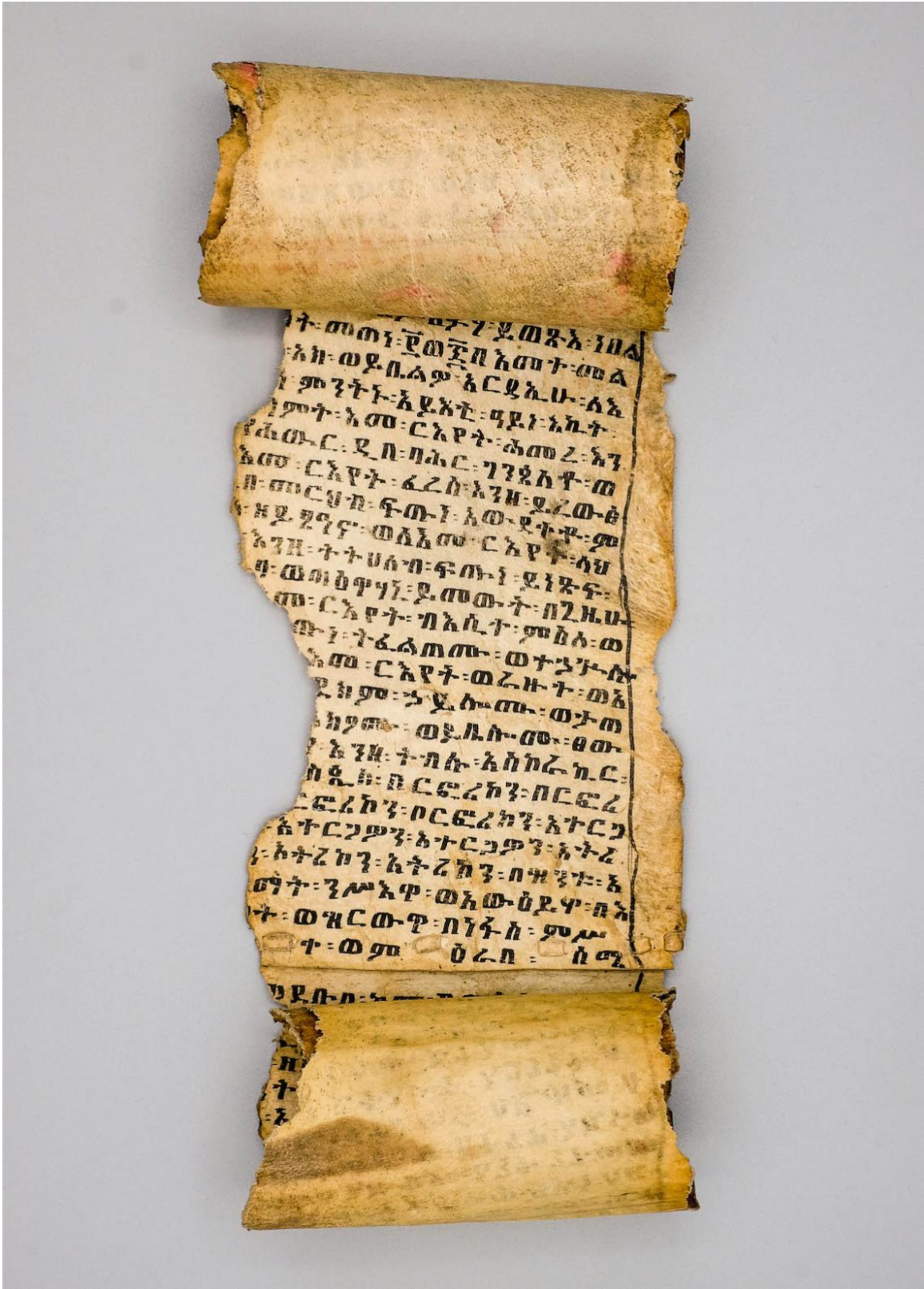
Cat. 35E. Healing scroll, part 4. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



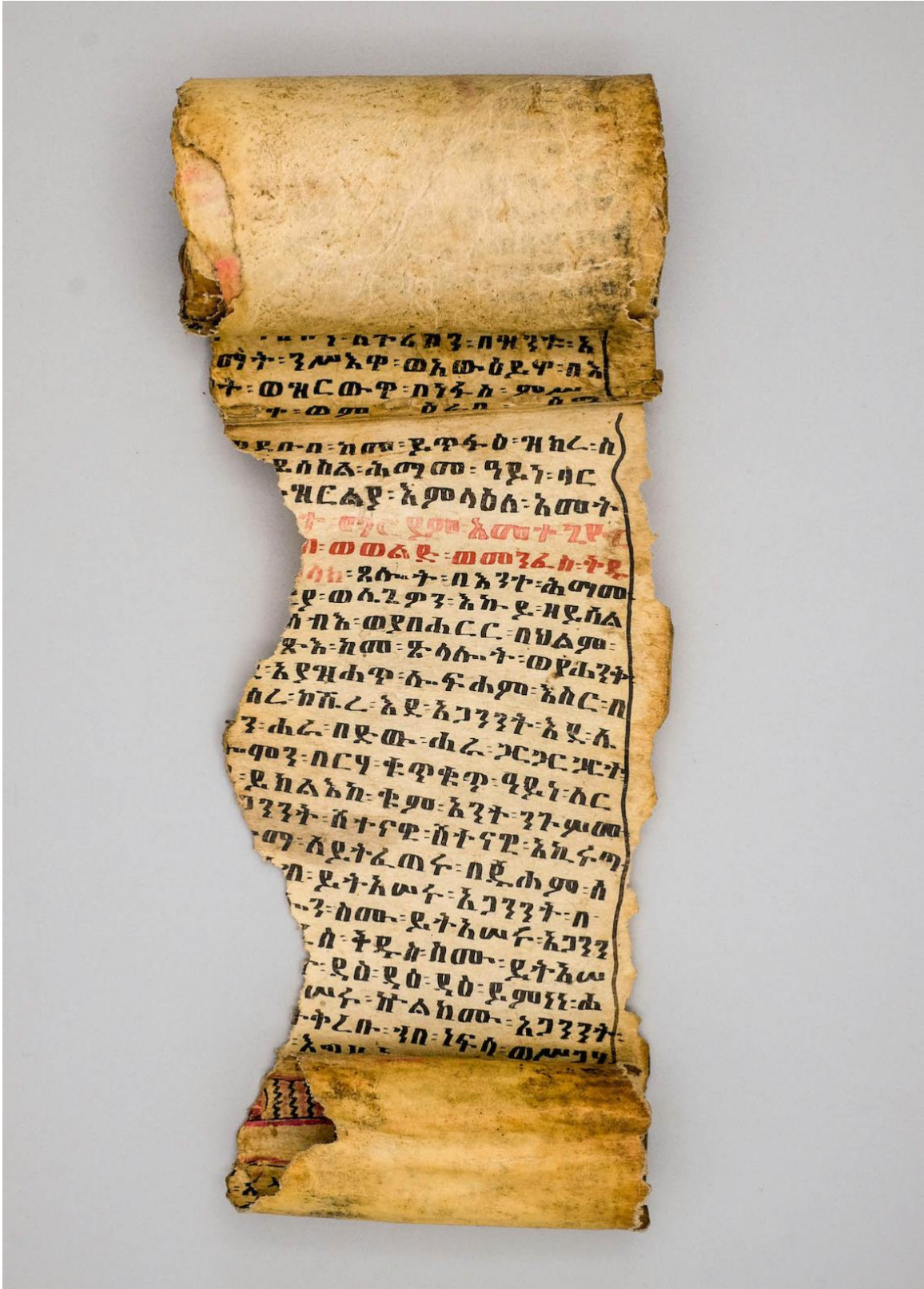
Cat. 35F. Healing scroll, part 5. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 35G. Healing scroll, part 6. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

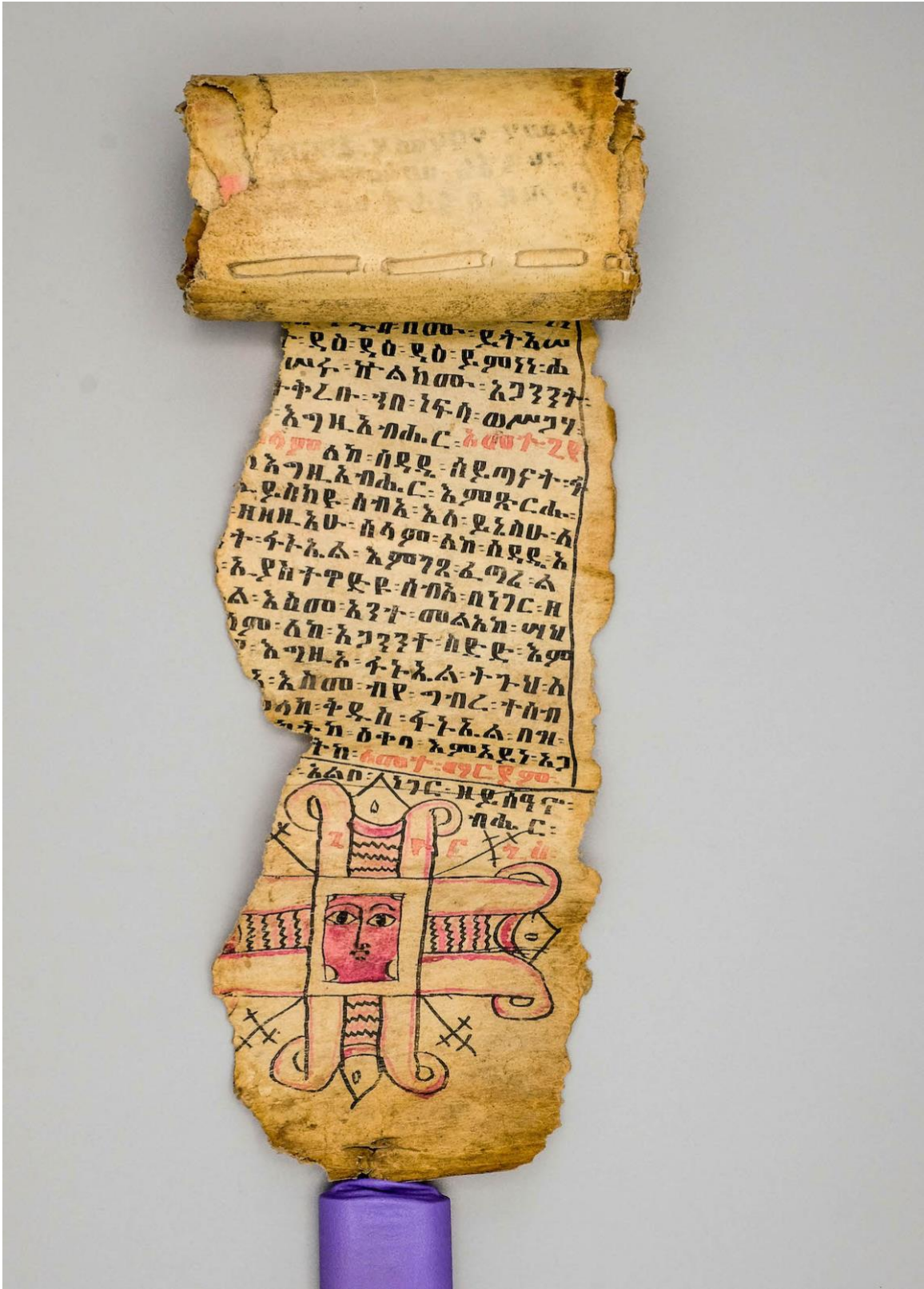


Cat. 35H. Healing scroll, part 7. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 35I. Healing scroll, part 8. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.





Cat. 35J. Healing scroll, part 9. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 35K. Healing scroll,  
front. Photo: Brad Hostetler.



Cat. 35L. Healing scroll,  
back. Photo: Brad Hostetler.

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