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Types of discrepancy, types of text

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Relocating Ethiopic manuscripts in time: mistakes affecting dates in the colophons

Abstract – Dates transmitted in the colophons of Ethiopic manuscripts often pose some difficulties of interpretation and, consequently, they affect the correct positioning of a text and/or of its support in time. These difficulties can be due to mistakes originating from: (1) palaeographical reasons, because of the similarities between some Ethiopic numbers which are often confused and exchanged; (2) complex and multiple systems in the computus of the Ethiopian calendar, which makes the calculation of the dates a source of uncertainty for the philologists and a source of errors for the scribes as well; (3) mistakes made by the copyists who do not verify the accuracy of the dates during the process of copy and rather tend to (mis)interpret or to mechanically reproduce what is transmitted in the model, even if uncorrect. The aim of the paper is to present some case studies to show how complex the process of locating Ethiopic manuscripts and texts in time can be, and which is the role in this played by scribal errors and palaeographic features.