

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)

announces an Informal Talk

by

Prof. Dr. Samantha Kelly

Rutgers University

**The Library of Santo Stefano degli Abissini, Rome: History, Culture,
and Intercultural Contact of an Ethiopian Monastic Community in
Sixteenth-Century Europe**

The monastery of Santo Stefano degli Abissini was an unusual institution in the world of the sixteenth century: a community of Africans who came to, traveled in, and occasionally left Europe of their own volition; an outpost of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity located in the capital of Catholicism, and indeed supported financially by the papal see; and an instance of the more intensive global connectivity for which the sixteenth century is known, but in terms that are the reverse of most such examples, consisting in this case of Africans' "discovery" of, adaptation to, and cultural preservation within Europe.

While scattered data on Santo Stefano can be found in Vatican archives and in the comments of European scholars who visited and studied at the monastery, the richest source of information on the community is its library. Some seventy codices now housed in the Vatican Library have been identified as coming from Santo Stefano, thanks largely to the pope's closure of the monastery (by then depopulated) and acquisition of all its manuscripts in 1628. Six more manuscripts that probably belonged to Santo Stefano are now found in the Ambrosiana in Milan, and a handful of others may be scattered in other European collections. A careful census of the manuscripts identified with Santo Stefano has yet to be done, nor have they been systematically studied as a corpus. At the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures I would like to present the research project I am developing on this collection, with particular attention to some of the promising avenues of research it will open up: articulation of the religious culture of the community, based on the number and typology of the texts it owned; prosopographical study of the community's members, including their regional origins, monastic affiliations, and roles at Santo Stefano; and assessment of the monks' interest in or adoption of aspects of European culture, including experimentation with European languages, collation of the European and Ethiopian calendars, involvement in print technology, and use of European woodcuts and engravings to illustrate their own Ge'ez codices.

Wednesday, 9 December 2015 at 4 pm

Room 0001, CSMC