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Ethiopian Heritage Authority

ቁጥር: 01/1-9/012
Ref No:

ቀን: 14 SEP 2020
Date:

To:- Mr. Hugo Wetscherek
INLIBRIS Gilhofer Nfg.
Rathausstr. 19
1010 Vienna, Austria

Dear Mr. Hugo Wetscherek,

It has come to the attention of the Ethiopian Heritage Authority (EHA) that INLIBRIS has put up for sale in Abu Dhabi an important historical Ethiopian manuscript. This Gondarine Gospel which was part of Emperor Tewodros' collection was looted by British forces from Magdala in 1868 as your provenance data clearly demonstrates.

Dr Alula Pankhurst a member of the Ethiopian National Heritage Restitution Committee wrote to you 3 September on behalf of the EHA requesting that the manuscript be removed from the sale. As the Director General of the EHA that is mandated to register, preserve, display and promote Ethiopian cultural heritage under the Ministry of Tourism I am writing formally to repeat this urgent request.

In your response to Dr Pankhurst you suggested that there are no legal provisions to enforce the restitution of this manuscript to Ethiopia since existing laws are not retrospective to the 19th century and since the manuscript has been sold on several previous occasions.

However, there are clear moral grounds for art dealers to avoid selling items which are established as having been looted. In the case of Magdala there is no doubt that the British forces plundered and sold many precious artefacts including this manuscript which was acquired by the

expedition's commander Sir Robert Napier, as you clearly acknowledge, and several auctions have already been cancelled through the intervention of the EHA.

In this day and age, in which restitution matters have become increasingly important in international relations, it is considered morally unethical and raises serious reputational risks for famous art dealers such as INLIBRIS to be involved in the sale of items that are unquestionably looted.

Furthermore, to allow such as sale to go ahead also does not reflect well on the Austrian government, the country where INLIBRIS is based and the Emirati government where the sale is taking place.

Moreover, we believe that public museums that are aware of this manuscript's controversial history and the objection of the Ethiopian authorities with considerable media attention are unlikely to purchase the manuscript. Likewise, private collectors may be reticent to consider such a purchase both on ethical grounds and in terms of the probable limited resale value of a manuscript which has been acknowledged to be looted and about of sale of which the Ethiopian authorities have registered their objection.

This Gospel manuscript is of great historical and cultural importance for the people of Ethiopia and deserves to be repatriated to our country from where it was wrongfully looted and to be put on view for the people of Ethiopia in our National Museum.

We very much hope and trust that INLIBRIS will consider this matter very carefully and believe you will take the right decision to remove the manuscript from the sale and allow sufficient time to work out an acceptable settlement with institutions willing to facilitate the repatriation of the manuscript.

Yours sincerely,



Abebaw Ayalew (Ass.Prof)
Ethiopian Heritage Authority
Director General

