

A “Rich and Unparalleled Collection”:

The Afterlives of James Bruce’s Manuscripts and Drawings

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In the previous part of this essay I examined what befell the manuscripts and drawings that James Bruce brought back from his travels. Here I want to explore their fate after his death—particularly the two copies of Ethiopic Enoch in Britain (MSS. Bodl. Or. 531 and Bruce 74). Accordingly, my account begins immediately after Bruce’s demise and culminates with the Bodleian Library’s purchase of ninety-six volumes from his oriental collections in 1843. It should be added that what is presented here has not been done before in any detail.

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Following Bruce’s death, and having outlived both his wives, Adriana Allan (1734–1754) and Mary Dundas (1754?–1785), his manuscripts passed to his surviving son by his second marriage: James Bruce (1780–1810).¹ As for the copyright to Bruce’s commercially successful *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790), this was purchased in 1802 by a group of four publishers including Archibald Constable (1774–1827), who that same year began issuing the *Edinburgh Review*.² Intending to produce a revised and expanded second edition of Bruce’s *Travels*, the publishers sought the opinion of John Leyden (1775–1811), a student of oriental languages and accomplished poet. In an undated letter from Edinburgh, probably written in 1802, Leyden reported that he had been granted an opportunity to

¹ James Bruce, *Travels*, ed. Murray (2nd ed.) 1.xxi–xxiii, clxiii, cxciv–cxcvi, ccclviii; *The European Magazine* 58 (July–December 1810) 76; M. E. Cumming Bruce, *Family Records of the Bruces and Cumyns* (Edinburgh & London, 1870) 368–69, 377–79.

² *Star and Evening Advertiser* (3 May 1800); *Caledonian Mercury* (30 June 1800); Thomas Constable, *Archibald Constable and his literary correspondents*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1873), 1.44–46; David Hewitt, “Constable, Archibald (1774–1827),” *ODNB*.

examine Bruce's papers at the family's country seat in Kinnaird, Stirlingshire. Among the "Abyssinian" manuscripts was a copy of the "Book of Enoch."³ Most likely on Leyden's recommendation the publishers then employed his friend Alexander Murray (1775–1813), an Edinburgh university-educated linguist of impoverished rural origins, to work through Bruce's jumbled documents.⁴

The "studious, timid, and reserved" Murray took up a ten-month residence at Kinnaird between September 1802 and early July 1803.⁵ Unfortunately for Murray, James Bruce the younger became increasingly frustrated and obstructive as it became apparent that he would not profit quickly from this publishing venture. Indeed, he wished to be rid of his unwelcome guest. Nonetheless, and despite bemoaning his host's conduct and ignorance in letters to Constable, Murray was able to make some headway with Bruce's correspondence and manuscripts.⁶ In October 1802 a prospectus of a new edition of Bruce's *Travels* appeared in the *Scots Magazine*. It informed readers that Bruce had returned to Europe with about seventy volumes of Arabic manuscripts together with a complete copy "in many large quartos" of all the books of the Old and New Testament in Ethiopic. In addition, Bruce had "imported several copies of the celebrated book of Enoch, a Gnostic volume, quoted by an Apostle, but, perhaps, never seen before by any learned European."⁷ Since Bruce had described *Enoch* in his *Travels* as a "Gnostic book, containing the age of the Emims, Anakims, and Egregores,

³ *The Scots Magazine* 90 (December 1822) 639–40; *The Edinburgh Magazine* 11 (December 1822) 639–40, reprinted in Alexander Murray, *History of the European Languages ... with a life of the Author*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1823) 1.lxxix–lxxxii; T. W. Bayne, revised Richard Maxwell, "Leyden, John (1775–1811)," *ODNB*.

⁴ John Reith, *The Life and Writings of Rev. Alex. Murray* (Dumfries, 1903) 37–66; T. W. Bayne, revised John D. Haigh, "Murray, Alexander (1775–1813)," *ODNB*.

⁵ Murray, *History of European Languages*, 1.lxxxiii–lxxxiv; Henry Cockburn, *Memorials of his time* (New York, 1856) 262–63.

⁶ Constable, *Archibald Constable*, 1.213–43.

⁷ *The Scots Magazine* 64 (October 1802) 819.

supposed descendents of the sons of God, when they fell in love with the daughters of men, and had sons who were giants,” the Edinburgh-based author of the prospectus had merely abbreviated Bruce’s readily available printed description.⁸

Meanwhile Murray continued at Kinnaird, completing a “Life” of Bruce—“that bold, but not infallible” Ethiopian visitor—by October 1803.⁹ This biography was serialised in the *Scots Magazine* and also appended to the second edition of Bruce’s *Travels*,¹⁰ which was published firstly at Edinburgh in seven volumes in 1804 and then reprinted in the same number of volumes the following October.¹¹ Eventually Murray’s account appeared as a distinct publication, serialised in the *New Annual Register* and issued as a single volume by Constable and his business partners at Edinburgh in 1808.¹² Intending neither “to expose the Abyssinian traveller, nor yet tell lies in his favour,” Murray initially insisted that he had acted “honourably and honestly.”¹³ Thus he balanced the merits of Bruce’s *Travels* against defects arising from a desire to make his work “agreeable and popular,” as well as an inattention to detail exacerbated by putting too much faith in the accuracy of his memory. Moreover, in Murray’s view the conversations appeared “too easy and vernacular to be the genuine production of barbarians,” while Bruce’s characters were “too refined and sentimental” when compared with stereotypical “savages.”¹⁴ In subsequent correspondence Murray was more candid still, explaining that he felt unable to write “a commentary of the most disagreeable kind” for fear of offending Bruce’s family and friends. For Bruce “certainly was not infallible

⁸ Bruce, *Travels*, 1.499.

⁹ J.J. Halls ed., *The Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt, Esq. F.R.S. &c.*, 2 vols. (London, 1834) 1.263; John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, 8 vols. (London, 1817–58) 7.120.

¹⁰ Murray, *History of European Languages*, 1.lxxv, lxxxv–lxxxvi.

¹¹ *The Times* (9 October 1805).

¹² *New Annual Register* (January 1808): 63–92.

¹³ Constable, *Archibald Constable*, 1.242–43.

¹⁴ Bruce, *Travels*, ed. Murray (2nd ed.), 1.clxxi, clxxiv–clxxvi.

in many respects.” When he composed his *Travels* he had become “old and indolent,” his “tale to his amanuensis” resembling “more that of an old veteran by his parlour fire in a winter evening, than the result of fresh and accurate observation.” Consequently Bruce had compiled his *Travels* “very carelessly,” above all occasionally indulging in “a vein of romance ... which debased the intrinsic merits of his performance.” Accordingly, Murray considered some of Bruce’s observations inaccurate, while several of his “adventures” were “fictitious.” Indeed the *Travels* contained:

much fact, amusement, and agreeable observation, not unseasoned with genius, nor obtained without hazard, but too much tinged with vanity.¹⁵

All the same Murray’s biography was read as both a vindication of Bruce’s character and the veracity of his *Travels*. Indeed, it was well-received by one reviewer.¹⁶ Interestingly, another reviewer, this time of the second edition of Bruce’s *Travels* (1804), not only praised the book for being “so ably edited” but also expressed the wish that the erudite Murray would undertake a translation of the book of Enoch, “however extravagant it may be.”¹⁷

Certainly Murray was well-equipped for this task. Admired for his “almost miraculous or supernatural genius for languages,” he mastered Ge’ez and to a lesser extent Amharic with the help of Hiob Ludolf’s *Lexicon* and the Polyglot Bible, subsequently envisaging the relationship between Hebrew, Arabic, and Ge’ez as similar to that between German or Dutch

¹⁵ Halls ed., *Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt*, 1.283–89, 316. Cf. Bruce, *Travels*, ed. Murray (3rd ed.) 7.73, “No cause can be assigned for that confusion [of dates] except the extreme indolence with which Mr Bruce composed his work, about sixteen years after the events which are the subject of it ... in the latter part of his days he seems to have viewed the numerous adventures of his active life as in a dream, not in their natural state as to time and place, but under the pleasing and arbitrary change of memory melting into imagination.”

¹⁶ *The Monthly Review* 60 (December 1809) 385–94; *The Edinburgh Magazine* 11 (December 1822) 641, reprinted in Murray, *History of European Languages*, 1.lxxxiii–lxxxiv.

¹⁷ *The Annual Review* 4 (January 1805) 16. For another review of the second edition of Bruce’s *Travels*, see *The Scots Magazine* (December 1805) 926–33.

to English or Swedish.¹⁸ In March 1811 he translated an Ethiopic letter addressed to George III which had been entrusted to Henry Salt (1780–1827), a traveller recently returned from Ethiopia where he had worked for the British government as an observer and representative. When Murray applied for the Professorship of Oriental Languages at Edinburgh University, a keenly contested position to which he was appointed in July 1812, Salt—along with Walter Scott—wrote vigorously in his support. In this testimonial Salt asserted that he had recommended Murray to the Foreign Secretary as “*the only person in the British dominions*” capable of translating the Ethiopic letter, which he accomplished “in the most satisfactory way.”¹⁹ Moreover, Murray afterwards translated an “abstruse” theological dissertation containing the “true doctrines of the Abyssinian faith” for the benefit of the British and Foreign Bible Society, of which he was a member.²⁰ This had been written in Arabic by Mark, Patriarch of Alexandria and then rendered into Ge’ez.²¹ His motive was doubtless to improve “the study of Oriental Languages” which in turn would facilitate “communication between the enlightened and as yet uncivilised part of mankind.”²² Given Murray’s linguistic ability coupled with a derogatory attitude to Africa—an “exceedingly curious and

¹⁸ *The Scots Magazine* 74 (1812) 509, 516–17, 531; *The Edinburgh Magazine* 11 (December 1822) 640–41, reprinted in Murray, *History of European Languages*, 1.lxxx–lxxxiii; Halls, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt*, 1.241, 244–45.

¹⁹ Constable, *Archibald Constable*, 1.295–307; Halls, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt*, 1.238–60, 341, 345–46; *Scots Magazine* 74 (1812) 507–33; *The Edinburgh Magazine* 11 (December 1822) 642; Murray, *History of European Languages*, 1.xciii–xcvi; Deborah Manley and Peta Rée, “Salt, Henry (1780–1827),” *ODNB*.

²⁰ Constable, *Archibald Constable*, 1.318–19; Halls, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt*, 1.213–14, 290, 323, 326–27, 334–35; *Scots Magazine*, 74 (1812) 521; Murray, *History of European Languages*, 1.xcvi; Cambridge University Library, British and Foreign Bible Society, BSA/B1/5, 225, 231–32, 268.

²¹ CUL, British and Foreign Bible Society, MS 194 [missing on 26 July 2019]; calendared in Maria Rosaria Falivene and Alan Jesson, eds., *Historical catalogue of the manuscripts of Bible House Library* (London, 1982), 111–12, and printed in William Jowett, *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean, from MDCCCXV to MDCCCXX* (3rd ed.; London, 1824) 180–95.

²² *Scots Magazine* 74 (1812) 531.

interesting” if relatively inaccessible continent partly populated by “barbarous tribes,”²³ his evolving view of Ethiopic Enoch is thus of particular interest.

In a lengthy note to the second edition of Bruce’s *Travels* (1804), Murray suggested that the book had originally been written in Greek, “probably by some Alexandrian Jew.” Since he knew that the German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1601–1680) had published a “large” Greek fragment of Enoch in *Oedipus Ægyptiacus* (essentially Syncellus’s excerpts with minor variants),²⁴ Murray deduced that the Ethiopic version had been translated from a manuscript formerly used by the Greek Church of Alexandria—later assuming this to be the “mother church” of Ethiopia. His conclusion accorded with Ludolf’s judgment, who had surmised that the Pentateuch in the Ethiopic Old Testament derived from the Septuagint.²⁵

According to Murray, Bruce’s copy of “Metsahaf Henoc” (MS. Bruce 74) was divided into 90 Kefal, or chapters. Although there were actually 98 chapters in this copy, such an enumeration was not unique even though it is still considerably less than the 108 chapters with which modern scholars are familiar.²⁶ Moreover, it is worth observing that while the copy Murray examined was intact, the Prussian scholar Carl Gottfried Woide (1725–1790) had thought that the Paris manuscript given by Bruce to Louis XV (BnF Éthiopien 49) contained scribal errors—including the disarrangement of certain chapters.²⁷ Indeed, in the

²³ Murray, *Life and Writings of Bruce*, 2–3, 10.

²⁴ The relationship between the fragment transcribed by Kircher at the monastery of San Salvatore, Messina (if still extant possibly now held at Salamanca) and the excerpts contained within those copies of Syncellus preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris merits close examination.

²⁵ Bruce, *Travels*, 1.489; Bruce, *Travels*, ed. Murray (2nd ed.) 2.411–12, 423–26 note; Halls, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt*, 1.290, 326; *A catalogue of a valuable collection of Oriental literature, collected by James Bruce, of Kinnaird, ... which will be sold by auction, by Mr. George Robins* (London, 1842) 4–6.

²⁶ R. H. Charles ed., *The Ethiopic Version of the Book of Enoch edited from twenty-three MSS.* (Oxford, 1906) xviii. I am grateful to Ted Erho for clarifying this point.

²⁷ Bodleian Library, MS Clar. Press d. 10, fols. 3r–6r; Johann David Michaelis, *Literarischer Briefwechsel*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1794), vol. 3, 91–94.

words of Ethiopic Enoch's first English translator Richard Laurence (1760–1838), there were 'some occasional and manifest variations' between the two copies he was initially able to scrutinise.²⁸ Bruce's copy also contained a short preface—modelled on an Arabic original—that was omitted from another version formerly in his possession that had been deposited in the Bodleian Library roughly between June 1788 and April 1789 (MS. Bodl. Or. 531).²⁹

Murray provided both an English rendering of this preface and the opening lines of the first chapter:

In the name of God, the merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of great mercy and holiness. This book is the book of Henoch the prophet. May his blessing and help be with him, who loves him for ever and ever, Amen.

Chap. I. The word of the blessing of Enoch, with which he blessed the chosen and the righteous, that were of old. May it be in the day of temptation a protection against all the evil and wicked. And Enoch lifted up his voice and spake, a holy man of God, while his eyes were open, and he saw a holy vision in the heavens, which the angels revealed to him. And I heard from them every thing, and I understood what I saw.³⁰

It appears that while working directly from the original Ge'ez Murray may have consulted a published Latin translation by Antoine Isaac, Baron Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838).³¹ Besides this brief English translation Murray supplied a synopsis, dividing Ethiopic Enoch into six parts. This can be summarised as follows:

Chapters 1–18:

²⁸ Laurence, *Book of Enoch*, viii, xlvi, 21, 25, 37, 45, 60, 64, 133, 163. Laurence consulted MS Bodl. Or. 531 and Woide's transcript of BnF Éthiopien 49 (now Bodl., MS Clar. Press d. 10, fols. 10r–133v).

²⁹ I owe to Ted Erho the observation that this formulaic preface derives from the Arabic tradition, from which it was translated into Ge'ez and repurposed in a variety of settings. Erho also notes that variants of this preface occur in eighteen of his sample of eighty manuscript copies of Ethiopic Enoch, with just three examples dating before the eighteenth century.

³⁰ Bruce, *Travels*, ed. Murray (2nd ed.) 2.424–25 note.

³¹ Cf. Antoine Isaac, Baron Silvestre de Sacy, "Notice du Livre d'Énoch," *Magasin Encyclopédique* 6 (1800) 375, 382.

The descent of the angels from heaven; copulation with the daughters of men; birth of the giants; instructing humans in the arts of war, peace and luxury; God's intention to destroy these angels.

Chapters 18–50:

Enoch is led by Uriel and Raphael through a series of visions; he saw the burning valley of the fallen spirits, the paradise of the saints, the utmost ends of the earth, the treasures of the thunder and lightning, winds, rain, dew, and the angels presiding over these; Enoch then led into the place of general judgment where he saw the ancient of days on his throne and all the kings of the earth before him.

Chapters 52–58:

Noah is alarmed at the enormous wickedness of mankind and fears vengeance; Enoch tells him that a flood of waters would destroy mankind, while a flood of fire would punish the angels.

Chapters 59–61:

The subject of the angels is resumed; twenty are named, appearing at the head of the fallen spirits, and give fresh instances of their rebellious disposition.

Chapters 62–69:

Enoch gives his son Mathusala a long account of the sun, moon, stars, the year, months, the winds and similar physical phenomena.

Chapters 70–90:

The history of the deluge and Noah's successful preparations for it; the destruction of all flesh, excepting Noah's family; the execution of Divine vengeance on the angels and their followers.³²

Murray concluded by dismissing Ethiopic *Enoch* as an “absurd and tedious” work and was subsequently censured by Laurence, not only for his “hasty and prejudiced” view but also for presenting an “imperfect and inaccurate” summary of the book's contents.³³ Clearly Murray's outline does not correspond to a modern division of the text, or indeed the manuscript from which he was working.³⁴ Even so, while he may not have realised that *I Enoch* was a composite work Murray nonetheless appreciated that it consisted of discrete sections.

³² Bruce, *Travels*, ed. Murray (2nd ed.) 2.425–26 note. I have sometimes paraphrased Murray here.

³³ Laurence, *Book of Enoch*, x note.

³⁴ I owe the latter point to Ted Erho.

Furthermore, in his *Life of Bruce* (1808) Murray softened his position somewhat: *Enoch* was just an “absurd and romantic” book.³⁵

Following Bruce the younger’s premature death Constable wrote to Murray on 2 December 1810 informing him both that his *Life of Bruce* had sold “extremely well” (more than 300 copies) and that Bruce the younger’s widow, Elizabeth née Spicer (1773–1867), was thinking of selling her father-in-law’s collection in one lot to either the British Museum or the Royal Society of London.³⁶ This is partly confirmed in the minutes and papers of the British Museum trustees’ standing committee, which records receipt of a letter “offering for sale the Library & Museum” of the Ethiopian traveller.³⁷ Accordingly, Murray was prevailed upon to return to Kinnaird although poor health and other commitments prevented him from going there until the beginning of May 1811—by which time Mrs. Elizabeth Bruce had, for the present, “changed her intention” to dispose of her inherited collection.³⁸ Murray’s purpose was to re-examine Bruce’s letters and papers in preparation for a third edition of the *Travels* and, in anticipation of their imminent sale, to catalogue the oriental manuscripts more thoroughly than he had been able to accomplish during his previous residence.³⁹ Mrs. Bruce proved more hospitable than her late husband, although Murray considered her ideas “narrow” and her “fears of being injured numerous.” Murray himself hoped the collection

³⁵ Murray, *Life and Writings of Bruce*, 299 note, repr. in *The Annual Review and History of Literature* 7 (1808) 269.

³⁶ Constable, *Archibald Constable*, 1.286–87; Reith, *Life and Writings of Murray*, 68–69. James Bruce the younger died at Edinburgh on 9 July 1810. He had married Elizabeth Spicer of Mount Wear House, Devon on 9 June 1798. See *Star and Evening Advertiser* (21 June 1798); *The European Magazine* 58 (1810) 76; Cumming Bruce, *Family Records*, 379, 650, 652.

³⁷ British Museum Central Archive, CE 3/9, 2469 (10 November 1810); BM, CE 4/3, 988 (2 December 1810).

³⁸ Constable, *Archibald Constable*, 1.288–302; Halls, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt*, 1.260; BM, CE 4/3, 988; BM, CE 3/9, 2473 (8 December 1810).

³⁹ Bruce, *Travels*, ed. Murray (2nd ed.) 2.416–18 note, 7.410–11, 413–17; cf. Murray, *Life and Writings of Bruce*, 297–300; Bruce, *Travels*, ed. Murray (3rd ed.) 2.406–8 note, 7.426–27, 429–33.

would “fall into the hands of some liberal and public encourager of Oriental literature” and that “for the good of mankind, and of Africa in particular,” knowledge of Ethiopian literature would be promoted. Indeed, in Murray’s view constant communication with “a nation such as the British” could prevent Ethiopian Christians from “falling into perfect barbarism.” For “gross ignorance” had always been extremely harmful in that country:

They imagine that religion consists chiefly in fasts, penances, and renunciation of the duties of life; and the morals of the community at large are sacrificed to alternate fanaticism and licentiousness.⁴⁰

Then in August 1811 Henry Salt sent Murray five Ethiopic manuscripts. The best of them Salt thought was a copy of the “Book of Enoch” known as the “Book Yereed.” But on examining the Ge’ez text Murray clarified that it was a collection of hymns called the “Psalter of Yaréd.”⁴¹ On 17 March 1812 Salt wrote to Murray again, this time concerning the wish of some members of the British and Foreign Bible Society to furnish Ethiopians with partially printed copies of the Scriptures in their native tongue.⁴² The Society, however, then lacked complete manuscript copies of the Ethiopic Bible and could only readily access an Ethiopic Gospel of John held in Cambridge University Library (MS. Oo.I.41) and a Psalter in the Bodleian (MS. Poc. 3). To that end Salt wondered if Mrs. Bruce could be persuaded to part with “duplicates” of the Ethiopic Scriptures or else loan them for a price. But she refused, perhaps being advised that a published Ethiopic Bible based on the Kinnaird manuscripts would lower their value.⁴³ Salt added that Mrs Bruce had also discussed the sale

⁴⁰ Halls, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt*, 1.260–65, 279, 335; Constable, *Archibald Constable*, 1.300–4.

⁴¹ Halls, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt*, 1.274, 276, 289–90; Henry Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia* (London, 1814), between pages 302–3; cf. Falivene & Jesson, eds., *Catalogue of manuscripts of Bible House Library*, 104.

⁴² Halls, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt*, 1.322; CUL, British and Foreign Bible Society, BSA/B1/5, 215.

⁴³ Halls, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt*, 1.322, 326, 330–31, 346–47; CUL, British and Foreign Bible Society, BSA/B1/5, 225, 268; Jowett, *Christian Researches*, 196; Rochus Zuurmond, *Novum*

of the entire collection with the trustees of the British Museum, but had broken off negotiations at an early stage—supposedly either because she had “given up the idea” of parting with the manuscripts or else had decided not to dispose of them “during the minority of her only child.” Ten days later Murray responded, informing Salt that Bruce the younger had died with large debts and that his widow faced difficulties from her late husband’s creditors. Apparently she had asked for the enormous if unrealistic sum of £20,000 which deterred the Museum’s trustees from pursuing the matter further. Consequently Mrs. Bruce departed for Sidmouth (Devon), just over fifteen miles from her family home of Mount Wear House, Exeter.⁴⁴

On 15 April 1813, little more than two months after penning the preface to the expanded eight-volume third edition of Bruce’s *Travels* and long afflicted by “asthmatic complaints,” Murray died of tuberculosis.⁴⁵ As for Bruce’s oriental manuscripts, it appears that they were still held at Kinnaird about 1814—by which time news had spread of Murray’s detailed catalogue, and with it mention of the book of Enoch contained within a five-volume set of an Ethiopic Old Testament lacking the Psalms that had been transcribed for Bruce on vellum in a “clear and beautiful” character by scribes at Gondar.⁴⁶

Testamentum Aethiopicum, Part 2: *Edition of the Gospel of Mark* (Äthiopistische Forschungen 27; Wiesbaden, 1989) 229–30. In 1817 Salt would help distribute 220 Ethiopic Psalters by way of Alexandria to Ethiopia, while a complete Amharic translation of the New Testament was published in 1829. See CUL, British and Foreign Bible Society, BSA/B1/6, 109, 120, 171; *The Missionary Register for MDCCCXVII* (London, 1817) 352–54, 501–04; *The Sixteenth Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society; M.DCCC.XX* (London, 1820) 161–63, 167; Jowett, *Christian Researches*, 198–204; William Canton, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, 5 vols. (London, 1904–10) 1.140, 2.23–24; Edward Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible* (Oxford, 2006 [1967]) 62–66.

⁴⁴ Halls, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt*, 1.322, 329–31; A. Abrahams, “The MSS. of Bruce of Abyssinia,” *Notes and Queries* (25 October 1924) 296.

⁴⁵ Constable, *Archibald Constable*, 1.334–36; Halls, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt*, 1.334, 356–57; Murray, *History of European Languages*, 1.lxxxvi.

⁴⁶ Salt, *Voyage to Abyssinia*, 485 note; William Beloe, *The Sexagenarian*, 2 vols. (2nd ed.; London, 1818 [1817]) 2.46–47; *The Literary Gazette* 28 (2 August 1817) 67; Antonia Forster, “Beloe, William (1758–1817),” *ODNB*.

On 8 August 1820 Mrs Elizabeth Bruce's brother, Colonel William Spicer (*d.*1855), wrote to Joseph Planta (1744–1827), principal librarian of the British Museum. Recounting their conversations about seven years previously, Spicer again offered Bruce's "valuable" collection of oriental manuscripts to the Museum. In the event that the British Museum declined to purchase them, however, then Spicer would publicise their sale by auction.⁴⁷ By summer 1821 this "rich and unparalleled collection" had been transported from Scotland and deposited under Spicer's care at Chelsea Hospital (London), where he served as deputy treasurer.⁴⁸ Consisting of ninety-seven volumes—twenty-four Ethiopic manuscripts, one Coptic, one Persian, the remainder Arabic—written on "vellum, oriental paper and papyrus, many of them of large size," all in the "highest state of preservation," and amassed at "considerable" expense and trouble, the collection was deemed exceedingly valuable. Indeed, the sum of 1000 guineas was reportedly offered and refused for two or three items among the Ethiopic manuscripts.⁴⁹ Most likely these prized Ethiopic documents were the Old Testament in five volumes including the "long lost and very rare Book of Enoch," the New Testament, and perhaps also the *Chronicle of Axum*.⁵⁰

Evidently acting on Mrs Bruce's behalf, Colonel Spicer wanted to avoid breaking up the collection by selling pieces separately. Instead on 7 February 1822 he once more offered this "unique and unequalled" collection in its entirety to the British Museum. Emphasising the "extraordinary exertions, imminent dangers" and "very great" cost of procuring "accurate

⁴⁷ Abrahams, "MSS. of Bruce of Abyssinia," 296; P. R. Harris, "Planta, Joseph (1744–1827)," *ODNB*.

⁴⁸ BM, CE 3/10, 2771 (13 January 1821); BM, CE 4/5, 1703–04, 1705, 1707; cf. *The London Literary Gazette* 221 (14 April 1821) 232; *The Literary Gazette* 256 (15 December 1821).

⁴⁹ BM, CE 4/5, 1703r-v; *Classical Journal* 31.61 (1825) 150–51; *The Asiatic Journal* 20 (1825) 346; *Caledonian Mercury* (17 October 1825); *The Literary Chronicle* 6 (29 October 1825) 698; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 95 part i (1825) 66; *Classical Journal* 32 (1825) 154, 185–86; *The Museum of Foreign Literature and Science* 8 (1826) 89.

⁵⁰ BM, CE 4/5, 1703r-v.

transcripts of those Books the originals of which were too highly prized to be parted with,” Spicer presented the manuscripts as “splendid evidence” of James Bruce’s “Taste, Labours, and Public Spirit.”⁵¹ The details of this attempted transaction, however, would only be disclosed publicly some years later during the proceedings of a Parliamentary select committee appointed by the House of Commons to investigate the Museum’s “condition, management and affairs.”

The key witness was Sir Henry Ellis (1777–1869), Planta’s successor as principal librarian of the Museum.⁵² During his examination between 18 May and 19 June 1835, Ellis recalled that he had been instructed by the Museum’s trustees to consult the two “highest authorities in the kingdom”: Richard Laurence, then Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford University, and Samuel Lee (1783–1852), then Professor of Arabic at Cambridge University.⁵³ About August 1821 they closely examined the manuscripts at Chelsea. Their focus was on the Ethiopic volumes since so few were held in European libraries and because they thought them of more importance for the study of biblical literature.⁵⁴ Thereafter the two men engaged in correspondence with Ellis, impressing upon him the “high” literary worth of the manuscripts but steadfastly refusing to estimate their monetary value.⁵⁵ On 14 February 1822 Laurence wrote to Ellis from Christ Church, Oxford “respecting the merit and intrinsic value” of the manuscripts collected in Ethiopia by Bruce. The scribal copy of the New

⁵¹ BM, CE 3/10, 2771; BM, CE 4/5, 1703–04; BM, CE 1/5, 1188 (9 February 1822).

⁵² Michael Borrie, “Ellis, Sir Henry (1777–1869),” *ODNB*.

⁵³ *Report from the Select Committee on the condition, management and affairs of the British Museum* ([London], 1835) 12, 42, 112–13. Lee had been appointed Professor of Arabic at Cambridge in March 1819 and reportedly had knowledge of eighteen languages including Syriac, Coptic, Persian, Hindustani, Malay and Ge’ez. See *Missionary Register for MDCCCXVII*, 502; Samuel Lee, “A Brief History of the Church of Abyssinia,” in Samuel Gobat, *Journal of a Three Years’ Residence in Abyssinia* (London, 1834), 1–48; Thomas Hamilton, revised John D. Haigh, “Lee, Samuel (1783–1852),” *ODNB*.

⁵⁴ BM, CE 4/5, 1704, 1705, 1707.

⁵⁵ *Report from Select Committee on British Museum*, 12, 42, 112–13.

Testament he judged to be of “higher antiquity” than the other manuscripts and hence of “greater authority.” As for the book of Enoch, to Laurence’s knowledge Bruce had obtained three transcripts:

the one in the present collection, a second which he deposited in the Royal Library at Paris, & a third which he presented to the Bodleian. This book perhaps is rather a curious, than a valuable, part of the collection.

Concluding with the hope that this “valuable collection” would remain in Britain, Laurence recommended publication of the Ethiopic New Testament from Bruce’s manuscripts.⁵⁶

On 23 February 1822 Lee wrote to Ellis from Queen’s College, Cambridge. He agreed with Ellis that the book of Enoch was “of but little value”:

the work itself is a mere fabrication, and one of the most silly description. Besides the copy would not be of much value, as there are others in the Royal Library at Paris, and in the Bodleian at Oxford. Of the latter Dr. Laurence has, some time ago, published a translation and notes.⁵⁷

In Lee’s estimation, the “truly valuable” aspect of Bruce’s collection was the Ethiopic scriptures even though the copies were not ancient. While parts of the Old Testament were to be found throughout Europe – Laurence possessed Isaiah and all but one of the Minor Prophets, while Lee himself held a roughly 400-year old Ethiopic Octateuch written on vellum – the “critical value” of the New Testament copy was “very great.” But as to the collection’s monetary value, it was impossible to say. Even so, Lee had reason to believe that should the Museum’s trustees decline purchase of what would be “a great national acquisition” then another body would offer between £1000 and £1200 for the collection.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ BM, CE 4/5, 1705–06; BM, CE 1/5, 1190; BM, CE 3/10, 2808. Afterwards Laurence was consecrated Archbishop of Cashel at Dublin on 21 July 1822.

⁵⁷ The first edition of Laurence’s *Book of Enoch* had been published in mid-May 1821, some nine months previously.

⁵⁸ BM, CE 4/5, 1707–09; BM, CE 3/10, 2808; BM, CE 1/5, 1192. The copy of Isaiah mentioned here = Bodl., MS Hunt. 626; the Minor Prophets = Bodl., MS Hunt. 625; and the Octateuch = CUL, British and Foreign Bible Society, MS 169. I am most grateful to Ted Erho for this information.

Accordingly, in February 1822 Ellis wrote to Colonel Spicer requesting him to name a price. After seventeen months consideration and having consulted some “distinguished patrons of literature” and assorted oriental scholars, on 9 July 1823 Spicer asked for the exorbitant figure of £25,000.⁵⁹ The trustees naturally declined, while Ellis thought the manuscripts were worth scarcely a tenth that amount. During his examination Ellis was also asked specifically about Enoch. Vindicating his conduct and judgment, Ellis belittled it as merely a “fabulous book.” Moreover, in his estimation Bruce’s copy was not valuable. It was not unique, since Ellis was aware that Bruce had presented one copy to Louis XV and one (indirectly) to the Bodleian which, had the trustees desired, could have been transcribed for “a moderate price.” Nor was it old, because Ellis was sure it was a “modern transcript made in Abyssinia.” When pressed on the latter point Ellis retorted that after his return from Ethiopia Bruce had temporarily deposited his manuscripts at the British Museum, where they were “well known” to his predecessor Planta and other colleagues; “had the manuscript of the Book of Enoch been ancient” Ellis would have been informed.⁶⁰

With the failure to persuade Ellis and the trustees of the collection’s financial worth, preparations for its auction as one lot were begun by placing notices in the press from November 1826. The news even reached France. James Christie the younger (1773–1831) was appointed auctioneer with the sale to take place on 17 May 1827 at his premises on No. 8 King Street, St James’s Square (London). Prospective purchasers could apply to inspect the manuscripts and obtain a printed catalogue from Christie’s office.⁶¹ This abridged listing derived from Murray’s inventory, where he had provided a full description of Bruce’s copy

⁵⁹ BM, CE 4/5, 1835–36; BM, CE 1/5, 1213.

⁶⁰ *Report from Select Committee on British Museum*, 12, 42, 112–13.

⁶¹ *Morning Post* (1 November 1826); *Morning Post* (25 December 1826); *Morning Post* (5 January 1827); *Morning Post* (11 January 1827); *Christian Observer* (27 February 1827); *Journal des Savans* (February 1827), 126.

of “The Book of the Prophet Enoch” preserved within the fourth volume of an Ethiopic Old Testament and preceding the book of Job. Occupying 32 leaves, “beautifully and closely written,” this “highly curious” document was supposedly divided into 96 chapters containing 19 sections. These sections, however, had no connection with the chapters, but seemed:

arbitrarily made, without regard to the subject of the work. The language is the purest Ethiopic; and the whole book has a peculiar dignity of style and manner, which imposes on the reader, and impresses on his mind ideas of its great antiquity.

Reiterating his opinion that it was a pre-Christian work derived from a long-lost Greek original but revising his reckoning as to the number of chapters (96 instead of 90, but still two short of the actual total), Murray here essentially repeated his summary of Ethiopic *Enoch*'s contents, adding a flourish perhaps meant to stimulate interest from a buyer:

The subject of the book is a series of visions, respecting the fallen angels, their posterity, the giants, the crimes which occasioned the Deluge, the mysteries of heaven, the place of the final judgment of men and angels, and various parts of the universe seen by Enoch, and related by him to his son, Mathusala. The narrative is wild and fabulous, but highly expressive of the sentiments and character of those speculative enthusiasts who blended the Chaldaic philosophy with the sacred history of the Jews. As a literary relic it merits attention; and as an Ethiopic book written in the purest Geez, and venerated by the Abyssinians as of equal authority with the writings of Moses, it deserves to be laid before the public.⁶²

On 28 February 1827, less than three months prior to the auction, Colonel Spicer responded to a written enquiry from the obsessive collector Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792–1872). Here Spicer maintained that as a patriotic and “highly honourable” Englishwoman his sister was anxious that the “unique” collection she had inherited would not become the “Property of a Foreign Country.” Phillipps, who had indebted himself through extravagant

⁶² I have used the fuller description communicated to Laurence and compared it with that provided in a later auction catalogue, see Lawrence, *Book of Enoch*, x–xi note; *Catalogue of valuable collection of Oriental literature ... sold by auction ... Robins*, 5; cf. *A List of the very rare and valuable Æthiopic and other Oriental Manuscripts, collected by the celebrated traveller, James Bruce, esq. of Kinnaird* (1827), 3, 5.

purchases, responded by offering £5000, to be guaranteed by his bond and paid over a minimum of three years—which was swiftly rejected. He also provided an alternative explanation for why the British Museum had declined to pay £25,000: it seemed to Phillipps that for less than a quarter that amount they could have sent “an intelligent person to Abyssinia to collect precisely the same works in Manuscript,” the majority of which would only differ by about fifty years from those transcribed for Bruce.⁶³ The Museum would indeed obtain about 350 codices directly from Ethiopia, including at least seven copies of Ethiopic *Enoch*, but only as a consequence of a successful British military expedition which culminated in April 1868 with the release of missionaries and other Europeans held captive in a fortress at Magdala [modern Amba Mariam].⁶⁴

In these circumstances Bruce’s manuscripts were brought under the hammer on 17 May 1827 with “several booksellers and literary men” present. The reserve price was £5500. Yet according to the collector Francis Douce (1757–1834), despite an “elaborate eulogium” by Christie during which he notified the assembled company that this extraordinary collection ought to be purchased by the nation, “no bidding or advance took place, and they were of course withdrawn.”⁶⁵ Later that same month one newspaper reported that behind the scenes

⁶³ Alan Munby, *The Formation of the Phillipps Library up to the year 1840* (Cambridge, 1954), 56–58; Alan Bell, “Phillipps, Sir Thomas, baronet (1792–1872),” *ODNB*. I am grateful to Ted Erho for pointing out that although Phillipps failed to buy Bruce’s collection he did acquire several Ethiopic manuscripts (Phillipps MSS 1053, 16809, 22401, 23451, 23452, 23610). See *Bibliotheca Phillippica. Medieval Manuscripts: New Series: Fourth Part. Catalogue of Persian, Turkish and Arabic manuscripts, Indian and Persian miniatures, from the celebrated collection formed by Sir Thomas Phillipps Bt.* (London, 1968) 19–21; *Bibliotheca Phillippica. Medieval and Oriental Manuscripts: New Series: Ninth Part* (London, 1974) 52–55.

⁶⁴ Trevenen Holland and Henry Hozier, *Record of the Expedition to Abyssinia*, 2 vols. (London, 1870) 2.396–98; William Wright, *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscripts in the British Museum acquired since the year 1847* (London, 1877) 7–9, 11, 14–16, 19; T. M. Erho and L. T. Stuckenbruck, “A Manuscript History of *Ethiopic Enoch*,” *JSP* 23.2 (2013) 98–101.

⁶⁵ *The Morning Chronicle* (18 May 1827); *The Literary Chronicle* 418 (19 May 1827); *Gentleman’s Magazine* 97.i (1827) 466; *Christian Review and clerical magazine* 1 (1827), 535; *Christian Observer* 27 (June 1827) 366–67; *Literary magnet* 4 (July 1827) 122; *New Monthly Magazine*, part iii (July 1827) 298; *The Christian*

the government was negotiating the purchase of Bruce's "valuable" manuscripts and that if successful they would be deposited in the British Museum.⁶⁶ But no agreement was reached. By way of comparison, in May 1825 the British Museum had acquired 802 oriental manuscripts—mainly Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Syriac—together with coins and antiquities formerly belonging to Claudius James Rich (1786–1821) for £7500. On recommendation of a committee who sought advice from expert witnesses, this collection was purchased by authority of Parliament with money supplied by the government.⁶⁷

Nearly nine years after the first auction, on 13 May 1836 James Bruce's grand-daughter and heiress Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Cumming-Bruce (1799–1873) wrote to Josiah Forshall (1795–1863), keeper of manuscripts at the British Museum, enclosing a "literal copy" of Murray's catalogue of Bruce's oriental manuscripts.⁶⁸ That same day a letter from Mary Elizabeth's husband Charles Lennox Cumming-Bruce (1790–1875) was read to the Museum's trustees.⁶⁹ Cumming-Bruce stated that within the last two years he had refused £5,000 for the whole collection as well as £1,200 for the Ethiopic Bible specifically. Accordingly, he sought £8,000 for the oriental manuscripts but was prepared to allow arbiters

Advocate 5 (1827) 421; *Christian Journal* 12 (January 1828) 27; *The Christian Observer* 29 (1830) 419; William D. Macray, *Annals of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, A.D. 1598–A.D. 1867* (London, Oxford, 1868) 267.

⁶⁶ *The Standard* (23 May 1827); *The Standard* (29 May 1827).

⁶⁷ *Classical Journal* 31 (March 1825) 152; *House of Commons Papers* (1825) 5.152; J.R. Fawcett Thompson, "The Rich Manuscripts," *The British Museum Quarterly* 27 (1963) 18–23.

⁶⁸ Montague Rhodes James, *Supplement to the catalogue of manuscripts in the library of Gonville and Caius College* (Cambridge, 1914) 6; P.R. Harris, "Forshall, Josiah (1795–1863)," *ODNB*; cf. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Literature* 1.7 (1835–36) 83; *The Literary gazette* (12 March 1836).

⁶⁹ Mary Elizabeth had married Charles Lennox Cumming-Bruce on 21 June 1820. She died at Kinnaird House on 23 April 1873. See *Dundee Courier* (29 April 1873); Cumming Bruce, *Family Records*, 379, 476–77; David R. Fisher, "Cumming Bruce, Charles Lennox (1790–1875), of Roseisle, Elgin and Kinnaird, Stirling," *The History of Parliament*, <<https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/cumming-bruce-charles-1790-1875>>.

to settle a sum between £5,000 and £10,000.⁷⁰ On 14 June 1836 Forshall reported to the trustees that he had carefully examined the manuscripts; the Arabic with the help of Friedrich August Rosen (1805–1837), and the Ethiopic assisted by Thomas Pell Platt (1798–1852), sometime librarian of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and Eduard Rüppell (1794–1884), who two years previously had returned from Ethiopia with a copy of *Enoch*. As a result the trustees declined to purchase these manuscripts and the secretary was directed to write to Cumming-Bruce informing him that the Ethiopic manuscripts in Bruce’s collection had been “much diminished in importance and value” since Rüppell had deposited a complete copy of the Ethiopic scriptures in the public library at Frankfurt am Main.⁷¹ Having admitted that he had been unaware that further Ethiopic manuscripts had been recently brought to Europe,⁷² in May 1837 Cumming-Bruce attempted to interest the Museum’s trustees in buying what were believed to be James Bruce’s architectural drawings (mainly of Roman remains in North Africa), together with several memoirs and papers. To that end, Cumming-Bruce had these “beautiful drawings” exhibited at meetings of the Graphic Society (10 May 1837) and the Institute of British Architects (15 May 1837).⁷³ The price was either £5,000 or a figure to be determined by arbitration. Although the trustees were “strongly impressed” by the judgment of two experts regarding the quality of the drawings, they were not prepared to recommend Parliament that the drawings be purchased for the nation at the price stated. Despite the drawings and memoirs being “objects of so much curiosity interest

⁷⁰ BM, CE 1/6, 1505 (14 May 1836).

⁷¹ BM, CE 3/15, 4292; Lazarus Goldschmidt, *Die Abessinischen handschriften der Stadtbibliothek zu Frankfurt am Main (Rüppell’sche Sammlung)* (Berlin, 1897); Stanley Lane-Poole, revised J.B. Katz, “Rosen, Friedrich August (1805–1837),” *ODNB*; G. Le Norgate, revised Gerald Law, “Platt, Thomas Pell (1798–1852),” *ODNB*; Erho and Stuckenbruck, “Manuscript History of *Ethiopic Enoch*,” 94.

⁷² BM, CE 3/15, 4310.

⁷³ *The Architectural Magazine, and Journal of Improvement in Architecture, Building and Furnishing*, 4 (1837) 264, 360; *The Literary Gazette* (1837) 322, 401–03; Charles Lennox Cumming-Bruce, *Memoir regarding Bruce’s Journies and drawings in Northern Africa* (London, 1837).

and value,” by early December the Chancellor of the Exchequer had intimated that the Treasury would decline the purchase. Cumming-Bruce’s effort to sell the drawings and papers to the French government also proved unsuccessful.⁷⁴

Consequently, preparations were made to dispose of Bruce’s oriental manuscripts through a second auction, this time to be held by Mr George Robins at his “great room” in Covent Garden (London) on 30 May 1842. Elaborate notices were placed in the press and a “literal copy” of Murray’s catalogue printed, priced at one shilling.⁷⁵ But again, for “all the eloquence of that most moving of auctioneers” no bid was forthcoming that matched the expectation of the seller.⁷⁶ So the following month Robins offered this “extraordinary collection” as three separate lots: twenty-five Ethiopic volumes (including *Enoch*); seventy Arabic; and one Coptic (*Codex Brucianus*). Yet once more there was no buyer for these “invaluable records” of “historical, religious, scientific, and poetical literature.”⁷⁷

In 1843, nearly fifty years after Bruce’s death, the Bodleian Library purchased ninety-six volumes of his oriental manuscripts for £1000.⁷⁸ The circumstances of this acquisition were recalled in a letter dated 19 January 1852 from Bodley’s Librarian Bulkeley Bandinel (1781–1861) to Sir Henry Ellis:

You will no doubt be surprised at the price we gave for the Bruce manuscripts. I think I was once asked as much as £4,500, and when that sum being named as final, the negotiation ceased. Some few years afterwards, in 1843, I learned from [Thomas] Thorpe that Colonel [William] Spicer was about to send them abroad for sale and proposed trying to get them for £1,000. To this as you may suppose, I readily

⁷⁴ BM, CE 1/6, 1564–66; BM, CE 3/16, 4529, 4560, 4592–93, 4628–29, 4636–38.

⁷⁵ *The Times* (21 April 1842); *The Standard* (23 April 1842); *The Times* (26 May 1842); *The Literary Gazette* (1842), 373; *Catalogue of ... Oriental literature ... sold by auction ... Robins*.

⁷⁶ Macray, *Annals of Bodleian Library*, 267.

⁷⁷ *The Times* (13 June 1842); *Morning Post* (20 June 1842); Abrahams, “MSS. of Bruce of Abyssinia,” 297.

⁷⁸ Bodl., Library records c. 930, no foliation [register of purchases], “The Bruce MSS – £1000” in 1843; Falconer Madan, *A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford*, 7 vols. (Oxford, 1895–1953) 4.655–57.

agreed—and for that sum they were handed over to me in Thorpe’s shop, and I gave Colonel Spicer a cheque upon Hammersley, a sad falling off from £25,000 to £1,000.⁷⁹

Containing—like the other volumes in this collection—an armorial bookplate of “Bruce of Kinnaird,” Bruce’s copy of Ethiopic *Enoch* was eventually assigned the shelf mark MS. Bruce 74. It joined the copy he had previously donated indirectly to the Bodleian (now MS. Bodl. Or. 531), which had served as the basis for Laurence’s English translation. Both are recorded together with Bruce’s remaining Ethiopic manuscripts in a catalogue by August Dillmann (1823–1894) published in 1848.⁸⁰ Some twenty years later MS. Bodl. Or. 531, written on 40 leaves of vellum in triple columns, was placed in a glass case and exhibited like an exotic cultural trophy near the Library’s entrance.⁸¹

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Evidently, for those contemporaries who put a price on manuscripts the monetary value of James Bruce’s remaining copy of Ethiopic *Enoch* was determined by three main factors: rarity, antiquity and accuracy. To take rarity first: MS. Bruce 74 was not unique. Indeed, its financial worth was diminished by the existence of MS. Bodl. Or. 531 and BnF Éthiopien 49. Doubtless it would have cost even less to purchase had buyers been aware of Bruce’s “fourth” manuscript copy of Ethiopic *Enoch* (Vat. et. 71).⁸² Moreover, we have seen that its value fell still further after Eduard Rüppell deposited a complete copy of the Ethiopic scriptures in the public library at Frankfurt. Hence we should not be surprised that Samuel Lee reckoned it to be “of but little value.” Secondly, with regard to antiquity we have also

⁷⁹ Abrahams, “MSS. of Bruce of Abyssinia,” 297; Mary Clapinson, “Bandinel, Bulkeley (1781–1861),” *ODNB*.

⁸⁰ August Dillmann, *Catalogus Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae Oxoniensis. Pars VII. Codices Aethiopici* (Oxford, 1848) 5.

⁸¹ Macray, *Annals of Bodleian Library*, 266–68.

⁸² G. Boccaccini, “James Bruce’s “Fourth” Manuscript: Solving the Mystery of the Provenance of the Roman Enoch Manuscript (Vat. et. 71),” *JSP* 27 (2018) 237–63.

seen that older manuscripts were considered to have greater authority than newer versions of the same text. Since it was common knowledge that Bruce had commissioned scribes to copy Ethiopic manuscripts—contemporaries were unaware that MS. Bruce 74 had been acquired at Adwa—it was believed that the documents that Bruce had brought back to Europe were not old. Thus Sir Henry Ellis was sure that MS. Bruce 74 was a “modern transcript made in Abyssinia,” while Richard Laurence considered it a “curious” rather than “valuable” part of Bruce’s collection of oriental manuscripts. Thirdly, it was even doubted whether MS. Bruce 74 was an entirely accurate transcript of Ethiopic *Enoch*. So much so, that on 11 March 1822 Alleyne FitzHerbert, Baron St Helens (1753–1839), one of the British Museum’s trustees, wrote to Ellis expressing scepticism as to whether local scribes working hurriedly and paid a pittance in “salts” could have produced an entirely faithful copy. Ellis concurred, doubting the accuracy of Bruce’s copies on the grounds that his transcribers were paid on “such close calculation.” He also speculated that the ancient originals had been destroyed by white ants.⁸³

While rarity, antiquity and accuracy were key factors in determining the monetary value of MS. Bruce 74, it is also clear that it was more prized—by missionaries, scholars, private collectors and chief librarians alike—when incorporated within a multi-volume manuscript set of the Ethiopic Bible rather than as an individual document. But as for its cultural worth, Ethiopic *Enoch* was generally held in low esteem; at least by the figures under discussion here. We have seen that a literary critic called it “extravagant.” Alexander Murray initially deemed it “absurd and tedious,” later dismissing its narrative as “wild and fabulous.” Yet at the same time Murray commended the whole book for possessing “a peculiar dignity of style and manner.” Samuel Lee thought it “a mere fabrication, and one of the most silly description,” while Henry Ellis disparaged it as a “fabulous book.” The only exception was Richard Laurence. What prompted him to translate the entirety of Ethiopic *Enoch* into

⁸³ Abrahams, “MSS. of Bruce of Abyssinia,” 297–98.

English, as well as the early reaction to that endeavour, will be explored in a subsequent essay.