

1: Beta Israel - Wikipedia

The Black Jews of Ethiopia examines the past of the Ethiopian Jews, or Beta Israelites, in order to understand their present life in Israel. A must for any library supporting African or Judaic studies.

The conventional theory among historians today attributes the origin of the Ethiopian Jews to a separatist movement that branched out of Christianity and adopted Judaism between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries e. Quirin, a, b; Shelemay, ; Kaplan, The theory essentially holds the Ethiopian Jews to be the descendants of indigenous non-Jewish Ethiopians, and their belief in ancient Jewish descent to be just a matter of myth and legend. Consequently, scholars, and historians in particular, have been steered to ignore the compelling evidence for the ancient origins of the group. This study reinforces recent reviews of the DNA studies of the Ethiopian Jews Entine, that have already pointed to major flaws in the traditional historical perspective. Furthermore, the latest research further suggests a strong historical affiliation between the Ethiopian Jews and Northern Sudan that is little discussed in literature. The paper analyzes the history of the Jews of Ethiopia in context of their peripheral geography in the Lake Tana area and the Semien. The Beta Israel Until they were forced to leave Ethiopia in the s, Ethiopian Jews lived in small villages scattered in the northwestern region of the Ethiopian plateau around Lake Tana and in the Semien mountains area. Thus, the term Beta Israel will be used throughout this article to label the community. Today, the Beta Israel show closest resemblance in external cultural characteristics to their surrounding Habash, i. And although both the Habash-Christians and the Beta Israel claim royal descent from the time of King Solomon and Queen Sheba, an important difference exists Entine, , p. While the Christians claim descent from King Menelikâ€™the offspring of Solomon and Sheba in Ethiopiaâ€™the Beta Israel claim descent from first-generation Israelites from the tribe of Dan who some believe accompanied Menelik as guards of honor. To start with, the geographical definition of Ethiopia in historical sources must be addressed for it has distorted major studies on the history of the region. On the other hand, the geographical area that encompasses the modern country of Ethiopia had in the past housed the ancient kingdom of Aksum, which developed in the northern parts of the plateau, and was sometimes referred to as Abyssinia. It is also worth mentioning that all of the Biblical, and a significant portion of the ancient, references to Ethiopia, or Kush, predate the establishment of Aksum in the first century CE. As I have argued in a former paper Omer, a , analyzing the history of the Beta Israel within the boundaries of the contemporary country of Ethiopia is a problematic approach. That is because the political boundaries of the modern day countries of Sudan and Ethiopia were only defined towards the early twentieth century. The political boundaries between the two states had remained, for the longest part of history, fluid and undefined in many areas. It was mostly the twentieth century borderline that defined the contemporary identity of the Beta Israel population as Ethiopian, and distinguished them from the populations of the flat plains of the Sudan, to the west. The hypothesis is best argued by Quirin a and Kaplan Lack of neutral analysis to the shared similarities between the religious traditions of the Beta Israel and that of the Ethiopian Church has been a major problem in the study of the group. Having said this, it should be noted that Ethiopian Christianity appears to be more influenced by Judaism than vice versa. Gatatchew Haile as cited in Tibebu, , p. Only a Christianity of a nation or community that first practiced Judaism would incorporate Jewish religious practices and make the effort to convince its faithful to observe Sunday like Saturday. In short, the Jewish influence in Ethiopian Christianity seems to originate from those who received Christianity and not from those who introduced it. The Hebraic-Jewish elements were part of the indigenous Aksumite culture adopted into Ethiopian Christianity. Also, as Kessler points out, the theory does not indicate how the Beta Israel gained intricate comprehension of Jewish material encompassing pre-rabbinical principles based on the books of Enoch and Jubilees. In essence, the sum of Christian influences in Beta Israel religious traditions, which we should take great care not to exaggerate, may reflect nothing much more than the struggles of a Diaspora Jewish community at preserving whatever was left of its steadily vanishing heritage. Poverty, instability, persecution, and illiteracy across the centuries would have certainly caused the loss of any significant authentic Jewish scriptures. However, this should not deny the survival of the fundamental aspects

of the Jewish identity and religion among the Beta Israel. Moreover, a basic question that Kaplan and Quirin do not address is: Why would Christians become Jews? As Teferi explains, converting to Judaism requires the abandonment of the essence of Christianity p. The only reasonable suggestion, Teferi indicates, as to why Christians would have become Jewish is if they were forced to p. Worth mentioning are the accounts of the sixteenth century Christian monks, Abba Saga and Abba Sabra, which have been of major importance to proponents of the traditional Christian origin theory. Quirin as well as Kaplan present the two monks as central figures in establishing the religious institutions of the Beta Israel. This is based on the idea that the monks must have been responsible for introducing monasticism and the clergy system found within the Beta Israel traditions. This aspect of the argument is problematic for three reasons. First, there is nothing concrete to confirm the historicity of the two monks. Second, a different sixteenth century report suggests that many Beta Israel practiced monasticism prior to the alleged arrival of the two monks Teferi, , p. This is not only important because of the geographical relevance between the Beta Israel and Kush, but also because of the immense evidence that link between the two. The history of the Beta Israel in context of their neighboring ancient land of Kush, in what is today Northern Sudan, has surprisingly not been the subject of a serious investigation. References to Kush appear in the Bible as well as in extra-Biblical narratives and traditions. The Bible mentions directly the presence of Jews in Kush; the book of Zephaniah states note that Ethiopia in ancient sources referred to Northern Sudan, not to the modern country of Ethiopia: Also, the Bible identifies a number of important Biblical characters as Kushite. Stranger, this land is called Libya [Africa]. It is inhabited by tribes of various peoples, Ethiopians [Kushites], black men. One man is the ruler of the land: He rules the state, judges the people, and is priest. Twenty-seven years old was Moses when he began to reign over Cush [Kush], and forty years did he reign. And the Lord made Moses find grace and favor in the sight of the children of Cush, and the children of Cush loved him exceedingly. Rabbi David ben Solomon ibn Zimra, the sixteenth century Chief Rabbi of Egypt, whose acknowledgment of the Beta Israel as rightful Jews has later been of significant importance in their recognition by the world Jewry, states: The identification of the Beta Israel with Kush is best illustrated in the writings of Jewish scholar and traveler Eldad Ha-Dani in the ninth century. He also identified himself as being of an Israelite origin from the tribe of Dan, and thus his last name Ha-Dani. The fact that Eldad identifies his people with Kush, and not with Aksum, demonstrates the very strong historical identity bond that ties between the Beta Israel and Northern Sudan. And although scholars commonly view the affiliation with the tribe of Dan in context of other world myths about the ten lost tribes of Israel e. Segal, ; Schwartz, , p. Hence, tribal Israelite descent amongst the Beta Israel is not unlikely. A third, no less significant source, is the fifteenth century scholar, Obadiah ben Abraham of Bertinoro, who discusses trade relations between the Beta Israel and Kush: Furthermore, archeological findings indicate strong communication ties and travel between Aksum and Kush, starting from the early stages of the Aksumite kingdom Fattovich, , ; see also Phillipson, , p. As mentioned previously, the civilization of Kush predates that of Aksum with more than fifteen hundred years. While Kush was already a flourishing kingdom by BC, and rose as a Mediterranean empire in the eighth century BC, Aksum did not emerge as a recognizable kingdom until the first century CE. Although the archeology of pre-Aksum, in what is today Ethiopia, reflects a dominant South Arabian culture, the later archeology of Aksum shows stronger and direct cultural influences from Kush Pirenne, ; Fattovich, , Starting from around the first century, constructions included numerous hafirs and other water sources Welsby, , p. Kessler has identified a number of traditional Beta Israel crafts and production practices that are historically associated with the people of Kush; those are domestically made pottery, cotton weaving, basketry, and leatherwork. Being rich in ore, the Kushites employed iron in all the different industries of the kingdom including agriculture Asante, , p. Given all these indications, the possibility that the Jews who entered the kingdom of Aksum, which did not mature until the first century CE, came from Kush becomes likely. Even though such speculations seem to still fall short of explaining the exceptional affiliation between the Beta Israel and Northern Sudan in medieval references, they pose crucial inquiries regarding the origin of this group. Finally, in context of our search for the historical, and possibly genealogical, connections between the Beta Israel and Northern Sudan, an important point regarding the physical features of the group must be made. Contrary to what is commonly assumed, and as I stressed

formally in an essay Omer, , p. As a Northern Sudanese myself, I was able to notice that most of the Beta Israel look closer to the people of Northern Sudan in physical appearance, than they do to the non-Jewish Ethiopians. In other words, although a non-Jewish Ethiopian can easily be distinguished from a Northern Sudanese by looks, no distinction can mostly be drawn between an Ethiopian Jew and a Northern Sudanese. The majority of them do not look like the non-Jewish Ethiopians. To start with, it has been confirmed with certainty that Judaism in Aksum predates the introduction of Christianity, in the fourth century. As a result of this, the influence of Judaism in the Ethiopian Orthodox church has been overwhelming and has no counterpart in the contemporary Christian world. Traditions including circumcision on the eighth day of birth Ullendorff, , the historical upholding of the Saturday Sabbath Ullendorff, , p. Additional evidence comes from the sixth century reign of Kaleb, the fervently Christian king of Aksum who adopted vigorous policies to convert the non-Christian inhabitants of the kingdom. In the early decades of the century, he restored Christianity to South Arabia by defeating its Jewish king. Unfortunately there are no sources to elaborate on his domestic policies towards the Jews; however, a few but significant sources provide crucial indications for the origins of the Beta Israel settlements in the Lake Tana area and the Semien. In this account, it seems that the name Beta Israel was used as propaganda to symbolize the disobedience of the Jews to conversion. Of course the idea that Kaleb himself was a Beta Israel is also subject to speculation. By the mid sixth century, Aksum began to decline and struggled to control its northern and peripheral territories. By the late decades of the century, the frontier regions to the north and west of Lake Tana were mostly independent and may have already been inhabited by Jews. From the seventh to the fourteenth centuries, the mentioned areas remained isolated from Aksum, which seemingly explains the decline in references to Jews in Aksumite sources. The Christian Zagwe dynasty that succeeded Judith to the throne and ruled until the late thirteenth century is widely described as being of Jewish roots Briggs, , p. Given the various references for Jewish presence in the region across the centuries, there appears to be no persuasive reason to assume that the Beta Israel have emerged as recently as the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. It is also very unreasonable to suggest that all such historical references to Jewish presence in the designated regions, which greatly correspond with the historical and cultural context of the contemporary Beta Israel, are coincidental. Genetic evidence In recent years, DNA studies have shown the conventional historical theory endorsed by Kaplan and Quirin b to be very much unreliable. An in-depth analysis of genetic research by Entine , p. The Falasha may have been a rump group that remained true to its historical roots when the Ethiopian king converted to Christianity in the fifth century. For centuries, the Black Jews maintained separate traditions from their Christian countrymen. While most Ethiopians ate raw meat, drank heavily, and rarely washed, the Falasha cooked their meat and were scrupulously sober and relentlessly hygienic. Although the precise relationship between the ancient Jews of Aksum and the contemporary Beta Israel community has not been clearly understood by geneticists, studies have already confirmed some historical continuity within the group Entine, interview, July 7, Thus, the widely accepted theory among geneticists, as proposed by Entine and supported by research and subsequent studies Saey, ; Ostrer, , suggests that the group was formed as early as the fourth to sixth centuries period. The fact that studies found the Beta Israel to be genetically so diverged from other Jewish communities e. Moreover, despite the fact that the genetic distance between the Beta Israel and other contemporary Jewish groups is large, studies have already cited cases of Ethiopian Jews with genetic markers common in other Jewish populations Hammer, et al. The wide range of historical evidence available on the Beta Israel points to the survival of an ancient Jewish heritage within the group. Furthermore, sources suggest the establishment of the Beta Israel settlements in their contemporary Lake Tana locations to be much earlier than the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries period some historians have suggested. In addition, the African ethnicity of the Beta Israel appears to be more complicated than just Ethiopian, and seems to reflect a strong Northern Sudanese element as corroborated by the wide range of mentioned historical observations and the peripheral geography of the population.

2: Ethiopian Jews Seek Unity With All Black Jews – www.enganchecubano.com

Other Ethiopian Jews who appeared in the Mediterranean world over the succeeding centuries and persuaded rabbinic authorities there that they were of Jewish descent, and so could if slaves be ransomed by Jewish communities, join synagogues, marry other Jews, etc, also referred to the Mosaic and Danite origins of Ethiopian Jewry.

Origins of Ethiopian Jews The People of Ethiopia, Jewish and Christian, share the belief that they are descendants of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, through their son Menelik, who returned to Ethiopia with his attendants after studying in Jerusalem. Supposedly, they brought with them the original tablets of the law of Moses, purloined from the temple of Solomon, which are hidden in the city of Axum. The evidence for this is rather tenuous. What is certain is that Ethiopian Christianity has many Hebrew elements see Kessler, for a review of theories of origin. It is also obvious that Kaplan is correct that regardless of the origin of Ethiopian Jews, their customs and culture cannot only be understood in the context of Ethiopia, and have many Ethiopian elements. Genetic studies have failed to find evidence for genetic closeness between Ethiopian and other Jews, with the possible exception of Yemenite Jews. There is no direct written evidence for the existence of the Falasha or Ethiopian Jews prior to the 14th century. It is claimed, and likely, that Muslim invasions prior to that period destroyed their records, as they destroyed much of Ethiopian culture. In their own language they are not always referred to as "Jews" ayhoud a term that may also be used to refer to Christian heretics. Ethiopian Jews are called "Beta Yisrael" or a somewhat derogatory term " Falasha. Religious practices of the Ethiopian Jews The Jews of Ethiopia were evidently cut off from the main body of the Jewish faith prior to the writing of the Talmud and developed their own oral tradition instead, based on the Orit Torah and the book of Ezra and several apocryphal books such as the book of Enoch and Barch, plus their own holy books which may or may not have an ancient Jewish origin. The last named book seems to have an origin in similar books of the Christian tradition. Shelemay, pp In the past the day was called Mehella - similar to an Ethiopian Christian holiday. The acts of bowing and supplication are still known as mehella. Sigd celebrates the giving of the Torah and the return from exile in Babylonia to Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah. In Ethiopia, the Sigd was celebrated on hilltops outside villages. The Kessim, equivalent to rabbis or elders of the community, drew a parallel between the ritual mountain and Mount Sinai. Another source described Sigd calling it Amata Saww as a new-moon holiday, after which the Kessim withdrew for a period of isolation. Ethiopians observe Kashrut Kosher laws and ritual bathing. They do not eat food that was prepared by gentiles. However, there are many variations in the observances of various customs. Ethiopian Jewish family in Ethiopia History of the Ethiopian Jews Following the conventional narrative, Jews had been established in Ethiopia since some time after the destruction of the first temple. Originally the Jews of Ethiopia had their own independent kingdom and were apparently quite numerous, coexisting with pagans and converting them. Christianity arrived in Ethiopia in the fourth century and as it became established, the fortunes of the Jewish community declined. As late as the 17th century there were as many as half a million Jews in Ethiopia Kessler, p. Our knowledge of the history of Ethiopian Jews is sketchy and comes mostly from their rare contacts with the outside world as well as from the records of their persecutors. Toward the end of the 9th century, the Jews of Kairouan in Tunisia were visited by a man called Eldad son of Mahli, the Danite. Various versions exist of the tales of Eldad, who was variously supposed to be of Ethiopian or Yemenite origin. He is said to be the author of a book of travels, which exists in different versions. According to one version, Eldad the Danite claimed to be the lone survivor of a shipwreck. He was described as having dark skin and speaking only a strange sort of Hebrew and no Arabic. In other versions, his Hebrew was mixed with Arabic. He claimed to be a Jew of a pastoral tribe residing in the land of Havilah beyond the river "Kush" - perhaps the Nile. According to the accounts, Eldad the Danite claimed the Children of Moses lived beyond a river of grinding stones. They were impossible to visit, except on the Sabbath day when the river ceased its grinding, very likely referring to the legendary Sambation. The tribes were pastoralists and mighty warriors. They were ruled together by a king assisted by a learned Torah judge-prophet. They did not know of the Talmud, but had their own traditions written down in Hebrew. Eldad the Danite supposedly displayed these to the rabbis of Tunisia and Egypt. They concluded that

Eldad the Danite was indeed a Jew. Zemah claimed that the differences of his practice from their own were legitimate forms of customary law for the Jews of Havilah. In the early modern period, the variations from Rabbinic law which he practiced and obeyed were supposedly still cited by Rabbinic authorities as precedents. He is also identified as a Yemenite Jew. It is also difficult to understand how, through all his supposedly harrowing escapades, Eldad had managed to somehow preserve a Hebrew document of Halachic law, as is claimed. Sometime in the eleventh century the Falasha supposedly had a queen named Judith who had defeated the Christian monarchy and ruled a relatively powerful Ethiopian Jewish kingdom for a while. The evidence for this queen is sketchy. The first written citation in Ethiopian records that might refer to the Falasha or Ethiopian Jews is in records dating from the 14th century, when the Solomonic dynasty was renewed in Ethiopia, under Amda Seyon who fought a "people like Jews. Baeda Mariam eventually quelled the rebellion and the apostates were forced to return to Christianity. In the 16th century Portuguese missionaries began arriving in Ethiopia. They focused on encouraging the Ethiopian kings to persecute the Jews, rather than on converting Ethiopian Christians to the Roman Catholic rite. The Jews switched sides, hoping to gain greater freedom by alliance with the Muslims. However, the Ethiopian Christians were aided by the Portuguese, who also brought firearms. The Muslims and the Jews were eventually defeated. Encouraged by the Portuguese and their Jesuit missionaries, the Christian kings pursued an active policy of conversion. This war was continued by Sarsa-Dengel or Sarsa Dengel. About the latter engaged in battle with the Abatis, a Falasha tribe, at Waina-Daga, and exterminated them. Two years later he made an expedition into Semien, seized and carried him off to Waj. Supposedly, as many as 4, followers died with Gweshan. He made an alliance with one Amdo against the monarchy. To save further bloodshed, Gideon agreed to surrender Amdo. The Christian monarch however, reneged on his truce pledge and sometime between and committed a great pogrom of the Jews living between Lake Tana and the Semien mountains. Gideon was killed, and Falasha independence seems to have died with him. The motive for the massacre was apparently religious as well as political. James Bruce, a Scot who visited Ethiopia in the 18th century and published a travelogue account *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* in , reported that a few Jews had escaped the massacre and survived under the rule of Phineas Pinhas who had succeeded Gideon. The children of those slain were sold for slaves and all the Falasha in the Dembea and the low countries under the power of the king were forcibly converted and made to plow on the Sabbath. The king thought, wrongly, that he had managed to extinguish Judaism. Their murder and forcible conversion, like many similar incidents in Europe and some in Muslim countries as well, is an exemplary lesson to those Christians who cannot understand why conversion is a sensitive subject to Jews. In an interview given in and published in the *Jews Chronicle*, Antoine Abbadie claimed that there was a Jewish kingdom in the south of the country, and likewise resounded that he had met a young Ethiopian Jew who expressed the desire to visit Europe to acquire the "correct notions" on Judaism. Abbadie promised that he would inform the Jewish community. Luzatto died young, but his work inspired a mission by the Alliance Francais Israelite. Joseph Halevy travelled to Ethiopia with a British Army expedition in , leaving the expedition and striking out on his own, and bringing back two young Ethiopians who were to be educated in the Jewish faith. By the end of the 19th century, the Ethiopian Jewish population had been considerably reduced, as Ethiopia had suffered an invasion of Muslim dervishes from the Sudan, and an invasion of Christian missionaries, and most especially a converted Jew named Cohen. Two further expeditions were undertaken, one by Jacques Faitlovitch in and a later one in by Haim Nahum and a Dr. Faitlovitch, a student of Halevy, was sent under funding of the Baron Rothschild, and the Alliance claims him as well, though evidently he did not agree with the approach of the "official" Alliance expedition. Faitlovitch also brought back two young Ethiopian Jews to be trained in Judaism as well as European subjects in his expedition. Faitlovitch a Zionist, settled in Tel Aviv and continued to work on behalf of Ethiopian Jews, to get them recognized as Jews and to integrate their customs and culture with the mainstream. Faitlovitch noted that the Ethiopian Jews were not at all defensive about maintaining their old ways, and were anxious to learn about the proper customs of the Jews, recognizing that they had been cut off from the mainstream. Depending on who is to be believed, the Alliance Israelite was either favorably disposed or in total opposition to this effort. It testifies that Zionism was not an artificial invention of European Jews at the end of the 19th century, but an

organic part of the culture of Jewish people everywhere, even in the remotest reaches of the mountains of Africa. It is necessary to emphasize this because ignorant racists including Jewish bigots and anti-Zionists have tried to make a case that Ethiopian Jews are all pretenders who are trying obtain Israeli citizenship and prosperity under false pretences. This letter was reprinted in the Paris Journal Asiatique Vol. God be praised, Lord of Israel, Lord of all spirit and of all taht is flesh; this letter is sent by Abba Sagga, may it reach the priest of Jerusalem, Kaka Yusef [evidently one Rabbi Joseph Schwartz], the chief priest of all the Hebrews; Kaka Yusef, may it reach you by the hand of Buronkosa [probably Bronkhorst, a missionary. Peace to you, our brother Hebrews! The first letter which you sent by the hand of Daniel, son of Ananya, father of the Muse [Moses. Daniel and his son Moses had journeyed to Jerusalem in to learn of the customs of the Jewish mainstream, but it is not clear if the letter was sent to Daniel or by Daniel to Gondar. Has the time arrived that we should return to you, [to] our city, the holy city of Jerusalem? For we are a poor people and have neither prince nor prophet, and if the time has arrived send us a letter which will reach us, because you are in a better position than us. Tell us and inform us of all that will happen to us. As for you, Bironkos, man of God, as we love you, so go take for us that letter to our brother Hebrews. Peace to you, peace to you, with much peace, our brother Hebrews, you who are in the Law of the Torah which God gave to Moses his servant on Mount Sinai! I who have sent this letter, Abba Sagga, I send it to you in seven thousand, three hundred and fifty four, your of the word [] in the second month. The letter is finished. The letter was given to Bishop Gobat, who did did not deliver it to its intended recipient, if he know who it was. It reached the hands of Rabbi Yaakov Safir of Jerusalem, author of "even Sapir" who transmitted it to Hermann Zotenberg, who published it. Unfortunately, in the meanwhile a great multitude of Jews set out eastward to reach the sea. They got as far as Axum, in great disarray. Many died on the way. Eventually they returned to find their homes occupied by gentiles.

3: Ethiopian Jews in Israel - Wikipedia

In Ethiopia, black Jews practised the earliest forms of Judaism, which existed in the pre-Judaic Culture of early Israelites, and pre-Talmudic Judaism. Ethiopic, also referred to as Axum or Ge'ez, was the language spoken by the early black Jews.

Now they speak Amharic and Tigrinya , both Semitic languages. Oral traditions[edit] Many of the Beta Israel accounts of their own origins stress that they stem from the very ancient migration of some portion of the Tribe of Dan to Ethiopia, led it is said by sons of Moses, perhaps even at the time of the Exodus, or perhaps due to later crises in Judea, e. Though all the available traditions [33] correspond to recent interpretations, they reflect ancient convictions. According to Jon Abbink; three different versions are to be distinguished among the traditions which were recorded from the priests of the community. The Falashas [sic] migrated like many of the other sons of Israel to exile in Egypt after the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians in BCE the time of the Babylonian exile. This group of people was led by the great priest On. They remained in exile in Egypt for few hundred years until the reign of Cleopatra. When she was engaged in war against Augustus Caesar the Jews supported her. When she was defeated, it became dangerous for the small minorities to remain in Egypt and so there was another migration approximately between 39â€”31 BCE. Some of the migrants went to South Arabia and further to the Yemen. Some of them went to the Sudan and continued on their way to Ethiopia , helped by Egyptian traders who guided them through the desert. Some of them entered Ethiopia through Quara near the Sudanese border , and some came via Eritrea. Later in time, there was an Abyssinian king named Kaleb , who wished to enlarge his kingdom, so he declared war on the Yemen and conquered it. And so, during his reign there arrived another group of Jews to Ethiopia, led by Azonos and Phinhas. The legend relates that Menelik, as an adult, returned to his father in Jerusalem, and later resettled in Ethiopia. He took with him the Ark of the Covenant. However, the "royal gifts" are interpreted by some as sexual contact. The loss of the Ark is not mentioned in the Bible. Hezekiah later makes reference to the Ark in 2 Kings The Kebra Negast asserts that the Beta Israel are descended from a battalion of men of Judah who fled southward down the Arabian coastal lands from Judea after the breakup of the Kingdom of Israel into two kingdoms in the 10th century BCE while King Rehoboam reigned over Judah. Although the Kebra Nagast and some traditional Ethiopian histories have stated that Gudit or "Yudit", Judith; another name given her was "Esato", Esther , a 10th-century usurping queen, was Jewish, some scholars consider that it is unlikely that this was the case. It is more likely, they say, that she was a pagan southerner [40] or a usurping Christian Aksumite Queen. According to the Kebra Nagast, Jewish, Christian and pagan kings ruled in harmony at that time. Furthermore, the Zagwe dynasty claimed legitimacy according to the Kebra Nagast by saying it was descended from Moses and his Ethiopian wife. Most of the Beta Israel consider the Kebra Negast to be legend. As its name expresses, "Glory of Kings" meaning the Christian Aksumite kings , it was written in the 14th century in large part to delegitimize the Zagwe dynasty, to promote instead a rival "Solomonic" claim to authentic Jewish Ethiopian antecedents, and to justify the Christian overthrow of the Zagwe by the "Solomonic" Aksumite dynasty, whose rulers are glorified. The writing of this polemic shows that criticisms of the Aksumite claims of authenticity were current in the 14th century, two centuries after they came to power. Many Beta Israel believe that they are descended from the tribe of Dan. Tribe of Dan[edit] To prove the antiquity and authenticity of their claims, the Beta Israel cite the 9th-century CE testimony of Eldad ha-Dani the Danite , from a time before the Zagwean dynasty was established. Eldad was a Jewish man of dark skin who appeared in Egypt and created a stir in that Jewish community and elsewhere in the Mediterranean Jewish communities he visited with claims that he had come from a Jewish kingdom of pastoralists far to the south. The only language Eldad spoke was a hitherto unknown dialect of Hebrew. Although he strictly followed the Mosaic commandments, his observance differed in some details from Rabbinic halakhah. Some observers thought that he might be a Karaite, although his practice also differed from theirs. He carried Hebrew books that supported his explanations of halakhah. He cited ancient authorities in the scholarly traditions of his own people. From there they moved southwards up the Nile into Ethiopia.

The Beta Israel say this confirms that they are descended from these Danites. Eldad the Danite speaks of at least three waves of Jewish immigration into his region, creating other Jewish tribes and kingdoms. The earliest wave settled in a remote kingdom of the "tribe of Moses": Another tradition asserts that the Jews arrived either via the old district of Qwara in northwestern Ethiopia, or via the Atbara River , where the Nile tributaries flow into Sudan. Some accounts specify the route taken by their forefathers on their way upriver to the south from Egypt. As mentioned above, the 9th-century Jewish traveler Eldad ha-Dani claimed the Beta Israel descended from the tribe of Dan. He also reported other Jewish kingdoms around his own or in East Africa during this time. His writings probably represent the first mention of the Beta Israel in Rabbinic literature. Despite some skeptical critics, his authenticity has been generally accepted in current scholarship. His descriptions were consistent and even the originally doubtful rabbis of his time were finally persuaded. Obadiah ben Abraham Bartenura wrote in a letter from Jerusalem in I myself saw two of them in Egypt. With the rise of Christianity and later Islam , schisms arose and three kingdoms competed. Eventually, the Christian and Muslim Ethiopian kingdoms reduced the Jewish kingdom to a small impoverished section. The earliest authority to rule this way was David ben Solomon ibn Abi Zimra â€” , who explains in a responsum concerning the status of a Beta Israel slave:

4: Being black and Jewish: Ethiopians bear the brunt of Israeli state racism | Middle East Eye

This book is one that I believe should be in every Jewish library, synagogue, and yeshivah. It puts the reality of the current social issues into an understandable format. The book also is impressive in the fact that it is a social study of the Ethiopian Jewish community and its transition from Ethiopia to Israel.

History[edit] First wave

The first Ethiopian Jews who settled in Israel in the modern times came in along with the Yemenite Jews from Italian Eritrea. The Beta Israel immigrants in that period were mainly very few men who have studied and came to Israel on a tourist visa and then remained in the country illegally. Several of their supporters in Israel, who recognized their " Jewishness " decided to assist them. These supporters began organizing in associations, among others under the direction of Ovadia Hazzi, an Eritrean-born Yemeni Jew who married a Beta Israel woman in Israel. Several of the illegal immigrants managed to get their status with the Israeli authorities regularized through the assistance of these support associations. Some agreed to "convert" to Judaism, which helped them regulated their personal status and remain in Israel. People who get their regularization often brought their families to Israel as well. The rabbi, citing a rabbinic ruling from the 16th century David ben Solomon ibn Abi Zimra , asserted that the Beta Israel are descended from the lost tribe of Dan , and eventually acknowledged their "Jewishness" in February This ruling was initially rejected by the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren , who eventually changed his opinion on the matter in The Chief Rabbinate of Israel did however initially require them to undergo pro forma Jewish conversions , to remove any doubt as to their Jewish status. In the governor of Gondar region, Major Melaku Teferra was ousted as governor and his successor removed restrictions on travel. Following the poor conditions in camps, many refugees died of disease and hunger. Among these victims, it is estimated that between 2, and 5, were Beta Israel. There two immigration waves were: This operation was followed by the a few weeks later, which was conducted by the U. The second operation was mainly carried out due to the intervention and international pressure of the United States. Fourth Wave

Operation Solomon: In , the political and economic stability of Ethiopia deteriorated, as rebels mounted attacks against and eventually controlled the capital city of Addis Ababa. Worried about the fate of the Beta Israel during the transition period, the Israeli government along with several private groups prepared to continue covertly with the migration. Over the course of the next 36 hours, a total of 34 El Al passenger planes , with their seats removed to maximize passenger capacity, flew 14, Beta Israel non-stop to Israel. Again, the operation was mainly carried out due to the intervention and international pressure of the U. Rick Hodes, an American doctor who emigrated to Ethiopia, was the medical director for Operation Solomon. It was a difficult two days as he covertly arranged for a number of very ill people to be transported on these planes to Israel. During these years, the Qwara Beta Israel emigrated to Israel. Falash Mura

present: From onwards, an irregular emigration began of Felesmura , which was and still is mainly subjected to political developments in Israel. These immigrants are required to convert to normative Judaism. Similarly to other groups of immigrant Jews, who made aliyah to Israel, the Ethiopian Beta Israel have faced obstacles in their integration to Israeli society. However, with successive generations, Ethiopian Israelis have climbed in Israeli society. A youth group arrived in Israel in the s to undergo training in Hebrew education and returned to Ethiopia to educate young Beta Israeli community members there. Also, Ethiopian Beta Israel had been trickling into Israel prior to the s. The numbers of such Ethiopian immigrants grew after the Israeli government officially recognized them in as Jews, entitled to Israeli citizenship. The first was prepared in , a year after the arrival of the first wave of immigrants. The second updated the first in response to the second wave of immigration in from Ethiopia. The first Master Plan contained an elaborate and detailed program. It covered issues of housing, education, employment and practical organization, together with policy guidelines regarding specific groups, including women, youths, and single -parent families. Like earlier absorption policies, it adopted a procedural approach which assumed that the immigrants were broadly similar to the existing majority population of Israel. The Plans were created with a firm belief in assimilation. As noted in this section, results have been disappointing and suggest that much greater attention needs to be paid to issues of ethnicity. More than half the population

could not hold a simple conversation in the Hebrew language. Unlike Russian immigrants, many of whom arrive with job skills, Ethiopians came from a subsistence economy and were ill-prepared to work in an industrialized society. Since then much progress has been made. Through military service most Ethiopian Beta Israel have been able to increase their chances for better opportunities. Advocates for the Falash Mura noted that although the quota was set at per month in March, , actual immigration has remained at per month. The first contact with Israel generally led to a culture shock amongst many of the new immigrants. Many of the Beta Israel immigrants, especially those who came from remote villages in Ethiopia, had never used electricity, elevators, flush toilets or televisions. In addition, the adaptation to the Israeli cuisine was difficult. The breakup of many of the close and extended families after being brought to the various integration centers in Israel, as well as the initial integration with the Israeli society was very difficult for many of the new immigrants. The Israeli authorities originally gave many of the new immigrants Hebrew given names , Hebrew names, and required them all to have family names , which did not exist in the Ethiopian society. These name changes created a two tier system, in which old and new names were used by the new immigrants. The immersion with the Hebrew language was not easy for the new immigrants, and the majority of the new immigrants never managed to master the language, even after living many years in Israel, resulting in a strong social marginalization. Finally, the questioning of their traditional religious practices by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel led to great confusion amongst the new immigrants. They are however not recognized as rabbis and do not have the authority to perform marriages. Nevertheless, a new generation of rabbis of Ethiopian origin trained in Israel are gradually taking over. With few exceptions, when they first arrived to Israel they had no useful training for a developed economy like that of Israel, and in addition to that they did not know Hebrew. Regarding the recent immigration of Falash Mura, NGOs such as the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry have attempted to provide those who have been waiting for years in Ethiopia their immigration basic useful training for immigrants in Israel, as well as basic common concepts in Hebrew. Despite this, in , students graduated of higher education institutions, and 1, others graduated at the university. Low educational attainment, modest standards of living, and the occasionally isolated habitat may explain the development of delinquency among the Beta Israel youth: One such program was Prof. Started in , with the help of Yedid, [24] the established pearl jewelry designer based in Jerusalem decided to open up a school to teach a class of Ethiopian students the tricks of the trade, as well as help them with Hebrew and English language courses and provide them with valuable personal finance lessons. Upon the completion of the program, the graduates are placed in jobs within the Israeli jewelry industry. This program has been so successful that it Yvel receives hundreds of applicants every year, although it only has space for 21 students per class. In , Shas , a party representing Haredi Jews of Sephardic and Middle Eastern background, included an Ethiopian rabbi from Beersheba , in its list for the Knesset in a conscious attempt to represent diverse geographic and ethnic groups. Shas was not the only party attempting to appeal to the Ethiopian vote. Herut and Kadima both had Ethiopians on their lists. According to the foreign minister of Israel, this represents an important milestone in fighting racism and prejudice. The majority of the Beta Israel immigrants continue to speak in Amharic primarily and Tigrinya at home with their family members and friends. Relations with Ethiopia[edit] Although some non-Jewish Ethiopians expressed bitterness towards the Beta Israel emigration out of Ethiopia, [27] the Ethiopian Jews have close ties with Ethiopian people and tradition. The Ethiopian government is also an important ally of Israel on the international stage. Israel often sends expertise assistance for development projects in Ethiopia. Strategically, Israel "has always aspired to protect itself by means of a non-Arab belt that has included at various times Iran, Turkey and Ethiopia. Ethiopian Beta Israel Synagogue in Netivot.

5: Falasha | people | www.enganchecubano.com

LIKE, POST & SHARE! WATCH [VIDEO] The Black Jews of Ethiopia & Biblical Sabbath?! Ask #RasTafari Rabbi @LOJSociety SUBSCRIBE, JOIN OUR SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKIN.

The influential book he published from his journals, *Falasha Anthology*, has become the source of much of the secondary literature on this subject. He observed that every Friday all work in the village stopped early in the afternoon so that the cooking, cleaning, and baking needed for the Sabbath could be completed before sunset. Their synagogues were humble, austere structures having at best a Star of David on display. Inside, the rooms were divided into two sections: Like the Levitical Priest of old, they sacrificed kosher animals on small alters built in front of their synagogues. Unlike the Levites, however, their positions were not hereditary; aspiring clerics had to study, apprentice, and live exemplary lives in order to be selected for the office. Once initiated, the priests wore a white cotton headdress that distinguished them from other Ethiopians. Some devotees have attempted to lead lives of solitude and quiet contemplation as nuns and monks. All marriages were arranged by parents and elders. Individuals who married outside the group and women who were not virgins at the time of marriage could be banished. They used a solar calendar for secular activities and a lunar calendar to calculate all Biblical festivals such as Passover, Shavuot, and the Day of Atonement. For example, the Feast of Tabernacle was celebrated in the seventh month with palm branches and weeping willows. However, some have adopted the practice of female circumcision from their neighbors. Special blessings were said before and after eating and performing other rituals. But unlike Samaritans, Falasha women spend their menstrual periods in separate huts. Circles of stones mark a perimeter around those tukuls beyond which men may not pass. Additional huts are built for women to live in during their forty or eighty days of impurity after childbirth; these are burned afterwards. From his perspective in the twentieth century, the menstrual huts and animal sacrifices must seem barbaric and a sure sign of ignorance. What he fails to recognize—or perhaps is ashamed to acknowledge—is that the customs of the Beta Israel today are a reflection of what the ancient Israelite must have looked like when they offered burnt offerings, incense, and libation to the same God that we as Jews worship today. Perhaps on some level this is unsettling. It is not often that a people can be confronted with their past in the present. Or, because Judaism outside of Ethiopia has changed so much over the centuries, those without the proper historical reference may not recognize their roots when they see them. Well, if that is true, then that is who, where, and how our Judaism evolved. I argue that rather than accept these possibilities, many scholars have blinded their eyes to these implications and have attempted to distance and disassociate themselves from the Beta Israel by discrediting their culture. Despite all the evidence that has been adduced about the history and origins of the Beta Israel, there has been a profound, and often irrational, reluctance to accept that their claim is plausible. Nonetheless, many of these scholars seem incapable or unwilling to apply the same standards to their examination of the Beta Israel. Leslau in particular, seemed intent on dismissing the very evidence he presented. After all, Hebrew had ceased to be the lingua franca of Israel long before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A. Would a traveler in the Holy Land at that time be correct in assuming that those Greek-speaking Jews never spoke Hebrew? However, the following words only appear in Falasha texts: It also does not require a great leap of faith to assume that if they know these words now, then they probably knew more words in the past—since the tendency is for words to be lost over generations. In the following passage, Dr. Leslau not only states his candid opinion of the Beta Israel, but he shares his insights into what many of his colleagues in the historical profession believe as well: Very few of the western scholars who have dealt with the problem of the Falashas are of the opinion that they are ethnically Jews. Most of them think that they are a segment of the indigenous Agau population which was converted to Judaism. How and when they were converted is a problem for which historical evidence is lacking. To dismiss a body of evidence that points in one direction in favor of another position for which there is no evidence. Yosef Ben-Jocannan took issue with Dr. Leslau's dubious reference to ethnic Jews. Ben-Jochannan and others have raised. Those who use this term assume that we know what it is. They can spot one when they see one and they know who looks Jewish and who does not. However, we need to examine

more closely what is meant by these terms and how they are used. Naomi Zack defined and clarified terms such as this in her recent book, *Thinking About Race*. She argues that race and ethnicity are nebulous concepts into which and out of which a host of meanings can be put in order to socially construct an identity. As such, neither of these constitutes a fixed, universal, or objective reality; i. She points out that what masquerades today as the building blocks of ethnic identity language, common origin, shared culture, etc. This is not because physical characteristics are not a part of ethnicity; they often are, instead it seems that whiteness helps to make one ethnic. Although she focused on explaining this phenomenon within the United States, I argue that how one defines American Jews, who are essentially European Jews transplanted, is to a large extent the standard against which all other Jews will be judged—since American Jews are the largest, wealthiest, and most influential group of Jews in the world. And these American Jews have, despite rigorous resistance, become white folks. Brodtkin recognizes this racial dimension to how Jews are perceived and how they often perceive themselves. There are many who would argue that Jewishness does not conform to the ethnoracial paradigm that defines other groups. They might argue that Judaism is a religion that people of all ethnoracial backgrounds can and do practice. Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin have tried to carve out just such an exception. Their tact is a very interesting one. All the forgoing notwithstanding, they argue that conversion to Judaism not only changes one's religion, it miraculously changes one's genealogy as well. In the case of male converts, circumcision alters them physically so that they now look like other Jews. In other words, by this process a convert is not someone of another ethnoracial group who has chosen to practice Judaism, he is in fact and genealogy as Jew. The convert is adopted into the family and assigned a new "genealogical" identity, but because Abraham is the first convert in Jewish tradition, converts are his descendants in that sense as well. There is thus a sense in which the convert becomes the ideal type of the Jew. Well, that certainly would make being Jewish different from being black, white, or Asian—if it were true. However, if the Boyarins mean that all Jews are members of the same Jewish race in the eyes of God, then it would not help us to see how Jews view each other—particularly those who started out as members of other races. In the 1980s, Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan advocated another way of thinking about Judaism. His movement led to a new denomination of Judaism in the United States called Reconstructionist Jews. Walter Benn Michaels has studied the relationship between cultural groups and race. He began by looking at how social critics and historians such as Melville J. Herskovits attempted to define black people in America in purely cultural terms. Herskovits was interested in understanding what role, if any, African cultures and American culture had on the development of what might be called African-American culture. This included such things as art, music, literature, speech—anything except race. Michaels, who deplores racial classifications or distinctions, found that most groups that define themselves as a culture rely on things that are inherently racial in nature for defining membership in their culture. Therefore, the term culture may sound race neutral, but often it is not. In the case of African-Americans, it was fairly easy to prove, at least rhetorically, that most of the cultural connections that were being made between people in one place and people in other place were based on the premise that both peoples were of the same race; i. Michaels noticed that the racial underpinnings of group cultures were not always as obvious as the example, but they were usually present. Our race identifies the culture to which we have a right, a right that may be violated or defended, repudiated or recovered. Race transforms people who learn to do what we do into thieves of our culture and people who teach us to do what they do into the destroyers of our culture; it makes assimilation into a kind of betrayal and the refusal to assimilate into a form of heroism. Without race, losing our culture can mean no more than doing things differently from the way we now do them--the melodrama of assimilation disappears. The racial elements are what usually allow members of the group to explain why this is mine and that is yours. If we are all participants in something then that thing is de facto a part of our shared culture. We are what we do. Race allows us to claim or deny connections based on who we are, not what we do. Like African-American culture, Jewish culture implies that this Jew and that Jew have something in common that goes much deeper than the matzo balls. It was obvious and undeniable that the Beta Israel were doing Jewish things. By Michaels non-racial standards, people who do the same things share the same culture unless a racial claim is made; ergo Beta Israel are part of Jewish culture unless white folk say there not. However, we recall that the Boyarins asserted that Jews are people who are

Jewish by birth or conversion and who do Jewish things. Therefore, by the latter racialized definition, people who are not recognized as being Jewish first, can do all the Jewish things they want for as long as they can and it will not make them Jewish—it can only make them persistent, exhausted, and ultimately frustrated Jewish imitators. Beta Israel, and black Jews in other areas, are discovering that neither who they are nor what they do guarantees their membership or acceptance within a racial context. Jacques Faitlovitch was given a grant by Baron Edmond de Rothschild and the blessings of the Chief Rabbi of Paris, Zadok Kahn, to go to Africa and investigate persistent rumors of there being black Jews in Ethiopia. Unlike his predecessors, Dr. Faitlovitch was steadfastly committed to winning recognition for the Beta Israel. For the rest of his life he worked tirelessly on three continents and through two world wars to remedy the plight of black Jews in Ethiopia. Although his methods and actions are open to scrutiny, his sincerity and dedication are not. The first major victory that Faitlovitch won for the Beta Israel came in 1904. Because the Beta Israel were frequently forgotten, they have been repeatedly rediscovered—most recently again during the dramatic airlift of fifty thousand Ethiopians to Israel in the 1980s. However, individuals like Faitlovitch consistently tried to keep the Ethiopian issue on the agendas of major Jewish organizations. In March of 1900, just prior to the outbreak of World War One, Faitlovitch established the Pro-Falasha Committee as a lobbying group solely dedicated to this cause. They had officers in several European countries and one in New York City. Faitlovitch favored classical academic training. In many ways, their disagreement over the best way to help the Ethiopians parallels the debate between Booker T. DuBois over the best way to help black people in the United States—Washington favoring vocational and DuBois, liberal arts—though in both cases the differences should not be exaggerated.

6: Falasha () - IMDb

Ethiopian Jews Seek Unity With All Black Jews. Rabbi Sholomo Ben Levy. In June we received a letter from two prominent Ethiopian leaders in Israel: Chief Kess, Rafael Takoya Hadane and his son Yosef Hadane—who is the Ethiopian Israeli Chief Rabbi. They congratulated Chief Rabbi Capers Funnye on his inauguration, reaffirmed Africa's ancestral connecti.

Show comments Here in Israel, the Jewish-Palestinian conflict has been a kind of red flag for everyone. The idea that we have an external enemy has injected fear into the public consciousness that has constrained Jewish citizens from real protest, because everything else - economy, health care or other civic issues that every normal society confronts - shrinks into insignificance in comparison to the supposed security threat. Despite this, the racism against Mizrahi Jews — or Jews who come from the Middle East and North Africa as opposed to Ashkenazi Jews from Europe — has received more attention in recent years. The discrimination faced by the Jews of Ethiopia, the only black group to arrive in Israel by virtue of being Jewish, however, has remained largely unheard. Yet our experience should oblige the public and the establishment in Israel to grapple more seriously with the issue of racism in Israeli society in its entirety. Immigrant society Jewish Israeli society is a society of immigrants from almost everywhere in the world. The coming together of these groups in Israel has given rise to many conflicts, a large subset of which are driven by discrimination against one group and control by another. Our experience should oblige the public and the establishment in Israel to grapple more seriously with the issue of racism in Israeli society in its entirety As in many other places, the Europeans have had the upper hand, and in the second and third generation they still do. Israel was ruled early on by a relatively small group of immigrants from Eastern Europe, who founded the state in accordance with their own worldview not having read, say, Edward Said and who came from Europe at a time when racism, anti-Semitism and colonialism were accepted as common sense there. During the s, there was a massive wave of immigrants to Israel from Arab countries. They arrived in a country in which Eastern European Jews had already taken up positions of power and cultivated their connections, while the last to arrive, those from North Africa, the Middle East and Yemen, were pushed to the margins of society in every way, quickly becoming the hewers of wood and the drawers of water in the young nation. These processes are still evident and continue even now: Legitimacy and recognition It was only in — when Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef made a ruling that recognised Ethiopian Jews as Jewish, making the community eligible to immigrate to Israel — that the Jewish people paid attention to our group. Prior to this ruling, Ethiopian Jews were threatened with deportation on arrival in Israel. History provides clear evidence for how Judaism cannot be racist, but how the state of Israel, as a Jewish state, has been racist by definition But relations between Ethiopian Jews and European Jews had in fact been established long before. In , Rabbi Azriel Hildshimer, head of the Orthodox community in Germany, made a call to save the Ethiopian Jews from misery and persecution. In , Rabbi Kook, the head rabbi of Jaffa in Ottoman Palestine, corresponded with other rabbis to promote the cause of Ethiopian Jews. But none of this helped the state of Israel to accept Ethiopian Jews into Jewish society. This history provides clear evidence for how Judaism cannot be racist, but how the state of Israel, as a Jewish state, has been racist by definition. Since our arrival, Israeli racism has expressed itself not only through racial profiling by the police and by putting Ethiopian Jews into government-designated ghettos, but also in the way the state has related to the Judaism of Ethiopian immigrants. The racism did not end there. Many of these children were sent to Orthodox boarding schools, cut off from their parents, revealing two key assumptions: These kinds of policies broke the structure of the Ethiopian community and its spiritual leadership. The religious Jewish establishment in Israel has been unable to digest the idea of black Jews and this may be the real heart of the crisis between Ethiopian Jewish Israelis and the state of Israel. In other words, a lot of unpersuasive explanations. Let us be clear-eyed and understand how the establishment diverts the attention of Israelis from issues of real consequence to the day-to-day lives of the populace. Her writing confronts issues of historiography, racism and the lack of opportunities for POC in the Jewish society in Israel. The views expressed in this article belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of Middle East

Eye.

7: Ethiopian Chapter

For the black Jews of America, the existence of Ethiopian Jews was living proof that black people have a connection to Judaism that is as old as any claimed by Europeans. They called themselves Beta Yisrael because for centuries they believed that they were the last remnant of the ancient Israelites.

Nevertheless, traditional business models are no longer sustainable and high-quality publications, like ours, are being forced to look for new ways to keep going. Unlike many other news organizations, we have not put up a paywall. We want to keep our journalism open and accessible and be able to keep providing you with news and analyses from the frontlines of Israel, the Middle East and the Jewish World. As one of our loyal readers, we ask you to be our partner. At the time of the epic Operation Solomon, I was living in Russia. By the time I made aliya, the majority of the Ethiopian Jews were already in Israel. Be the first to know - Join our Facebook page. This is how one day, while reading a journey diary written in by the prominent European scholar Jacob Faitlovitch, I read his account of an encounter with a group of Falashas residing in the highlands of North Shewa region of Ethiopia, an area between Gondar, where most Jews lived, and the capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. It took Faitlovitch some time to win the trust of these Falashas, to get any information from them. The secret Jews of Ethiopia In his account, Faitlovitch discussed the difficulties they faced, which pushed them to pretend to be Christians. Only rarely some of them succeed to move away secretly from the Shewa and to return to their homeland, where they will live again in the Falasha community as Jews. More than two generations passed since that time. Fortunately nowadays, access to information is much easier than at the time of Faitlovitch. With the help of the Internet, I contacted a group of Jews in the Kechene neighborhood of the northern part of Addis Ababa, who claim to be descendants of Beta Israel who migrated from Gondar to North Shewa. I went on a long journey, not only a geographically but also in time. He recounts that when the Northern Kingdom tribes of Israel went to war against the Southern Kingdom tribe of Judah, the Danites, who were renowned as skilled warriors, refused to fight against their kinsmen and left Israel for Egypt. They continued their journey until they reached the land of Cush where they finally settled. Menelik II needed them for their skills in crafts to build his palaces and produce weapons. However, recently a group of young people of Kechene have decided to disclose their faith. They have opened a synagogue right in the heart of Kechene, creating serious tensions between the youth and the elders. Thanks to modern technologies, these young Jews have learned about the world Jewish community and modern Jewish practices. In their synagogue, they combine pre-Talmudic practices of their forefathers that trace back to the times of the First Temple and modern rabbinical Jewish practices which they have learned about from the Internet and from visitors. The chazan of Bet Selam synagogue in Ethiopia photo credit: Men mainly work as weavers and blacksmiths and the women work as potters. Their neighbors believe that they are humans at day and hyenas by night. They believe that eye contact with Bal Ej can bring illness or even death. Suspicions remain even among those who are educated, like civil servants and university professors. They avoid approaching Kechene attach a clove of garlic to their arm to protect them from the evil eye if they have to visit the neighborhood. A piece of pottery in Kechene. Instead, they are forced to sell their items through Christian merchants, which causes them to lose as much as 80 percent of the product price. However the difficulties that people of Kechene are going through, cannot be compared to those experienced by craftsmen from the community who still live in towns and villages of North Shewa. I visited Morat, a small town of North Shewa, where the Beta Israel community first settled when they migrated from Gondar. Most of them are blacksmiths and potters. Almost every month, a member of the community is murdered or has property is destroyed since the Christian neighbors believe each time a person gets sick or dies, it is because of the curse of the "hyena people. Most of the crimes committed against Bal Ej of North Shewa remain unpunished. The police allows murderers to escape or simply fail to investigate the crimes. Life in this town is a life of fear since nobody knows who will be the next victim. To reduce the danger to some degree, community members pretend to be Christians. They go to church on Sunday, but attend hidden synagogues on Saturday. A weaver in Kechene. To protect their secret, I pretended to be an American visitor, since the word Israel itself can raise eyebrows. The biggest

challenge was garnering a visit to the synagogues. The locations kept under strict secrecy and visitors are not welcome. It took a long time to build the trust and confidence of elders in order to gain permission to visit a few. The synagogues are located deep in the mountains and getting there requires a long, tiring and sometimes dangerous trek. This strategy of building synagogues in remote and inaccessible places has protected the community for centuries. The compound does not contain Jewish symbols. This is for two reasons. The first is to stave off unwelcome attention from hostile neighbors. The second is that most modern Jewish symbols, such as the Star of David, are simply unknown to the members of the community. A young member of the community looking over a synagogue in North Shewa. Surprisingly, the spoken language of many community elders is Quarenya, a language of an area near Dembiya. Another interesting feature of the synagogues is that they are always located near a river because the Jews of North Shewa strictly observe the Biblical laws of ritual purity, or niddah. To observe the laws of niddah, a menstruating woman stays in a separate house for seven days. After the seven days she immerses in the river and can then join the rest of the community. The members of the secret synagogues practice pre-Talmudic Judaism, and therefore practice of animal sacrifice for Passover and other occasions. I had a chance to witness the process of sheep slaughter, which corresponds to the laws of Kashrut. It was reminiscent of the traditions of other ancient Jewish communities, such as Bukharian Jews of Central Asia. Even though the community has strong historical evidence of their connection to the Beta Israel of Gondar as well as a remarkable resemblance to their traditions, the community remains unknown to the most of the Jewish world. The chances of the Beta Israel of North Shewa gaining recognition from the Israeli government seems slim. Currently, 6, Falash Mura are still waiting to emigrate to Israel, some for 10 to 20 years at the compound near the Israeli embassy in Addis Ababa. To generate awareness of this amazing community, I decided to make a documentary about this community - their culture, traditions, music and struggle to survive and preserve their identity. The film is called Bal Ej: The hidden Jews of Ethiopia and it is due to be released at the beginning of The Beta Israel of North Shewa are as important to us as we are to them. It is now our turn and obligation to bring the remaining Jews of Ethiopia back to Israel and ensure that both their lives and traditions from Ethiopia are not endangered. For more information about the upcoming documentary Bal Ej:

8: The plight of Ethiopian Jews in Israel - BBC News

Ethiopian Jews in Israel are immigrants and descendants of the immigrants of the Beta Israel communities of Ethiopia, who now reside in Israel.. Most of the community made aliyah from Ethiopia to Israel in two waves of mass immigration assisted by the Israeli government: Operation Moses () and Operation Solomon ().

Israel has a significant population of Ethiopian-born Jews. Since leaving active duty in , he has been a willing reservist, ready to be called up whenever necessary. He will be joined by about of his fellow Ethiopian reservists, according to a Hebrew-language petition he shared with Newsweek. If you give us our rights, we will do the obligation. They complain of police brutality, a lack of good jobs and discrimination from employers. In August, the Israeli government passed a budget allocating funds to pay for processing the return of 1, of the 9, Jews in Ethiopia identified as eligible for emigration, or aliyah, by The arrival of thousands of more Ethiopians is likely to exacerbate the current tensions, and members of the Ethiopian minority say the Israeli government must improve conditions for Ethiopian Jews in Israel to avoid further conflict. The ancestors of the present-day Ethiopian Jews are thought to have converted under duress to Christianity in the 19th and 20th centuries. Jews in Ethiopia are collectively referred to as Falash Mura, an Amharic term meaning outsiders. The name is considered derogatory by the communityâ€”it prefers to be known as Beta Israel, or House of Israel. In the two decades that followed the ruling, the Israeli military, assisted by American intelligence agents, carried out several rescue operations, flying thousands of Jews out of Ethiopia and neighboring Sudan. The process climaxed in May â€”as the Ethiopian government collapsed, Israeli planes airlifted more than 14, Jews out of the country in under 36 hours, a mission they called Operation Solomon. Following sporadic waves of immigration over the past 25 years, there now are some , Ethiopian-born Jews in Israel. Ethiopian Jews arrived in a country already divided along ethnic and social lines. Many Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, who came from Spain and the Middle East, respectively, have long said they face discrimination. Ethiopians often say they are treated even worse. Israeli officials claimed the incidence of HIV infection was about 50 times higher among Ethiopian immigrants than in the wider Israeli population, a charge Ethiopian Israelis denied. The health ministry later confirmed the practice but denied allegations by rights groups that the policy was aimed at controlling the growth of the Ethiopian population in Israel. More recently, thousands of Ethiopian Jews took part in sometimes violent protests in May after a police officer was filmed beating Damas Pakada, an Israeli soldier of Ethiopian descent. The police force suspended the officerâ€”identified only as Sergeant Major Y. In June , then-Israeli Attorney General Yehuda Weinstein ruled that the officer should not be charged, on the basis that Pakada had initiated the exchange. Weinstein said racism was not the motive for the beating and closed the investigation. Ethiopian Israelis are among the poorest people in Israel. When entering the workforce, they earn up to 40 percent less than Arab-Israeli citizens, who tend to have a lower household income than Jewish Israelis.

9: Timeline of Ethiopian Jewish History

Falashas, the black Jews of Ethiopia, are of uncertain origin. It has been said, however, that their lineage can be traced to the people of Jerusalem who accompanied Menelik -- the son of King.

By the 7th century, however, Islam had surpassed Christianity and had separated Ethiopia from its Christian African neighbors. Prior to this, the Beta Israel had enjoyed relative independence through the Middle Ages. Their reign was threatened in the 13th century CE under the Solomonic Empire, and intermittent fighting continuing for the next three centuries with other tribes. In , the Beta Israel fought what would be their last battle for independent autonomy against Portuguese-backed Ethiopians. A graphic eyewitness account described the battle: Those Jews captured alive were sold into slavery, forced to be baptized, and denied the right to own land. The independence of the Beta Israel was torn from them just as it was from their Israeli brethren at Masada centuries before. Modern Contact The first modern contact with the now oppressed community came in , when Scottish explorer James Bruce stumbled upon them while searching for the source of the Nile River. His estimates at the time placed the Beta Israel population at ,, already greatly decreased from an estimate from centuries before of a half-million. Little additional contact was made with the community, but in their stability was greatly threatened as the Italian army marched into Ethiopia. Selassie returned to power in , but the situation for the Beta Israel improved little. In , Ethiopia and Israel established consular relations, which were improved in when the two countries established full diplomatic ties. Positive relations between Israel and Ethiopia existed until , when, in the wake of the Yom Kippur War, Ethiopia and 28 African nations broke diplomatic relations with Israel under the threat of an Arab oil embargo. In , Begin asked President Mengistu to allow Ethiopian Jews to leave for Israel aboard an Israeli military jet that had emptied its military cargo and was returning to Israel. Mariam agreed, and that may have been the precursor to the mass exodus of Operation Moses. Kes were harassed and monitored by the government. Forced conscription at age 12 took many Jewish boys away from their parents, some never to be heard from again. Ethiopia was forced to ask Western nations for famine relief, including the United States of America and Israel, allowing them both to exert a modicum of pressure for the release of the Beta Israel. Over 8, Beta Israel came to Israel between and Operations Moses and Joshua As Ethiopian Jews congregated in Sudanese refugee camps, the Mossad decided to accelerate their evacuation to Israel by sea. The Mossad turned Arous into a resort where agents taught diving and windsurfing while using it as a cover for rescue operations. The agents would go to Khartoum to meet groups of Ethiopian Jews smuggled out of refugee camps and transport them to a beach near the resort where they were picked up by Israeli navy special forces. After the operation was nearly exposed in March , the Mossad decided to airlift the Jews on C Hercules planes from a landing spot in the desert. After two airlifts, the Sudanese authorities became suspicious and the Mossad was instructed to find another airstrip. They found a spot in the desert near Gedaref and another 17 clandestine flights of cargo planes packed with Jews made the trip to Israel. The famine in Sudan at the end of prompted the Mossad to accelerate the evacuations. Vice President George Bush asked the Sudanese leader, Jaafar Nimeiri, to allow Israel to fly the Jews directly from Khartoum with the caveats that they remain secret and travel via Europe rather than directly to Israel. The rescue was codenamed Operation Moses. The operation had been conducted under a news blackout for security reasons, but news leaks blamed primarily on a December 6, , article in the Washington Jewish Week and full page advertisements placed by the United Jewish Appeal , forced the mission to end prematurely on January 5, , as Arab nations pressured the Sudanese government to prevent more Jews from using Sudan to go to Israel. Sudan ordered an end to the flights and Nimeiri denied colluding with Israel. He was already under domestic pressure unrelated to the rescue operation and was overthrown by army officers on April 6, The Mossad was subsequently ordered to evacuate the resort and six agents left on a C that landed in the desert. Throughout the operation, the Israelis had continued to run the diving resort and entertain the guests. Arous Village even turned a profit, which was partially used to finance the rescue. Shortly after the agents left, the resort shut down. They were comprised almost entirely of women, young children, and the sick, since only the strongest members of the community were encouraged to make the harrowing trek

to Sudan where the airlift would actually occur. In addition, many young boys were encouraged to make the dangerous trek to freedom due to the low age of conscription, often as young as age twelve. Those least capable of defending themselves are now facing their enemies alone. But in the following five years, a virtual stalemate occurred in the rescue of Ethiopian Jewry. All efforts on behalf of the Beta Israel fell on the closed ears of the Mariam dictatorship. Meanwhile, those Jews who did escape during Operation Moses were separated from their loved ones while attempting to adjust to Israeli society. Suicide, all but unheard of in their tukuls in Ethiopia, even claimed a few of the new arrivals due to the anxiety of separation and departure.

Operation Solomon - The Fulfillment of a Dream The grim prospect of thousands of Jewish children growing up separated from their parents in Israel almost became a reality. Little could be done to persuade the Mariam government to increase the trickle of Jews leaving Ethiopia in the years between Operations Joshua and Solomon. But in November, Ethiopia and Israel reached an agreement that would allow Ethiopian Jews to move to Israel under the context of family reunification. It soon became clear, however, that Mengistu was willing to allow Ethiopian Jews to leave outside of the guise of reunification. November and December, showed increased numbers of Ethiopians leaving for Israel. The Ethiopian Jews were finally ready to come home. In early, Eritrean and Tigrean rebels began a concerted attack on Mengistu forces, meeting with surprising success for the first time since the civil war began in. With the rebel armies advancing each day, Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam fled his country in early May. Rebels claimed control of the capital Addis Ababa shortly thereafter, and the situation of the Beta Israel took top priority in Israel. On Friday, May 24, and continuing non-stop for 36 hours, a total of 34 El Al jumbo jets and Hercules Cs seats removed to accommodate the maximum number of Ethiopians began a new chapter in the struggle for the freedom of Ethiopian Jewry. Operation Solomon, named for the king from whom one of the theories suggest that the Beta Israel draw their lineage, ended almost as quickly as it began. Timing was crucial, since any delay by Israel could have allowed the rebels to hold the Jews as bargaining chips with Israel or the United States. A total of 14, Ethiopian Jews were rescued and resettled in Israel, a modern exodus of the grandest design. Operation Solomon rescued nearly double the number of Jews as were saved during Operation Moses and Joshua, and it did so in a mere fraction of the time. More than 36, Ethiopian Jews now live in Israel and despite both economic and social hardships, their community has an integral part in Israeli society. There are still many problems within the Ethiopian community in Israel - poverty, lack of education, etc - but large strides are being made every day. Four main theories exist concerning the beginnings of the Beta Israel community: In, Daniel ben Hamdya, a member of the Beta Israel, was the first Ethiopian Jew to visit Israel, meeting with a council of rabbis in Jerusalem concerning the authenticity of the Beta Israel. We are obliged to speed up their immigration to Israel and educate them in the spirit of the holy Torah, making them partners in the building of the Holy Land. You are true Jews. The Beta Israel were ready to come home. Indeed, the Beta Israel were strictly observant in pre-Talmudic Jewish traditions. The women went to the mikvah, or ritual bath, just as observant Jewish women do to this day, and they continue to carry out ancient festivals, such as Seged, that have been passed down through the generations of Beta Israel.

Jewish Apathy and its Defeat The struggle to free the Beta Israel was not fought solely against the Ethiopian government. Much like some timid Jewish leaders during the Holocaust, some recent Jews sought to prevent a shanda fur de goyim an embarrassment in front of the non-Jews by not stirring up waves over Ethiopian Jewry. As with many struggles to free oppressed Jewry around the world, many advocated and vocalized opposition to those responsible for the lack of action on their behalf. Others, however, argued for a more quiet diplomacy, void of the public demonstrations and arrests that marked the struggle for Soviet Jewry. On one hand, they are well off where they are, while their development and mental outlook is that of children; they could fall an easy prey of exploitation, if brought here without any preparation. On the other hand, being a backward element, they would be and it would take several years before they could be educated towards a minimum of progressive thinking. Graenum Berger, as criticizing those who sought any delay in the rescue of the Beta Israel. And, the same people who controlled their immigration then are controlling it now. These are the same people who gave instructions to the Israeli Embassy in Ethiopia not to issue immigration visas to any Jew from Ethiopia. The first flight brought new Ethiopian immigrants. In July, the government decided to increase the rate of aliyah from Ethiopia to per

month over the proceeding 10 months. I see this as a moral obligation. Bal Ej means craftsman in Amharic, the local language. Their neighbors refer to them as buda, or evil-eyed, and believe through superstition that they take the form of hyenas at night. Members of the Bal Ej community are often hunted down and killed by people from neighboring villages, who blame their own hardships on them. The group faces economic exploitation based on false accusations and unsubstantiated claims, and cannot sell products that they make directly to consumers. Members of the community adhere to strict religious doctrine, including observing Biblical laws of purity and engaging in animal sacrifice. To the right, please find the trailer for a documentary made on the Bal Ej Jewish community by filmmaker Irene Orleansky. This announcement comes two years after Israeli government officials claimed that no Jews remained in Ethiopia. It is estimated that this proposal approved the entry into Israel of approximately 9, Ethiopian Jews, most of whom were at the time living in refugee camps in Adis Ababa and Gondar. The first group of this new wave of Ethiopian immigration to Israel arrived eleven months after the initial announcement, on October 9, Knesset members and other government officials met the group of 63 Falash Mura Jews at Ben Gurion Airport, to welcome them to their new lives. Israeli President Reuven Rivlin visited Ethiopia with a delegation of business and community leaders in May , the first ever Israeli Head of State to do so. On September 17, , Israel announced plans to accept 1, more Ethiopian Jews out of an estimated population of 8, They were chosen because they have children in Israel; the fate of the remainder is uncertain. Israel has repeatedly pledged to bring all the Ethiopian Jews to Israel, but each time it thinks it has done so, thousands more appear claiming to be Jews. Many Ethiopians see immigration to Israel as a way to escape their situation in Ethiopia and Israeli officials have expressed skepticism about their connection to Judaism.

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