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Between Heretics and Jews: Inventing Jewish Identities in Ethiopia

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Between Heretics and Jews: Inventing Jewish Identities in Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT The Beta Israel, the Ethiopian Jews, have suffered from a negative or complete misrepresentation in the written and oral sources of pre-modern Ethiopia. The term “Jew” was deliberately chosen to stigmatize heretic groups, or any other group deviating from the normative church doctrine. Often no difference was made between Jewish groups or heretic Christians; they were marginalized and persecuted in the harshest way. The article illustrates how Jews are featured in the Ethiopian sources, the apparent patterns in this usage, and the polemic language chosen to describe these people.

KEY WORDS Ethiopian Jews; Ethiopian Christianity; oral traditions and legends; anti-Jewish polemics

Introduction

“His stature was comely; and his countenance was handsome. He looked like an Israelite person. His face was delightful, and his overall (demeanour) was jovial.” (Getatchew Haile 2013, 166, tr.)

“As the Holy Spirit speaks through the holy prophets, so speaks the devil through the ungodly Jews, the unclean dogs.” (Conti Rossini 1965, 93; my translation)

These contrasting statements—both originating in pre-modern Ethiopian texts—illustrate the ambiguous image of Jews or Israelites in Ethiopian

culture.¹ Besides the Beta Israel, one of the groups of Jewish belief in Ethiopia, many groups and individuals are addressed as *Ayhud*, “Jew”, in Ethiopian sources.² Despite the church’s own strong Hebraic tendencies, many leading clerics and ambitious rulers sought to free the Ethiopian Church from foreign, and allegedly Jewish, elements. What exactly these elements were was, however, subjective, and polemical texts directed at the religious other abound. Political dissidents were just as often degraded and called “Jews”, as were religious opponents. As many monks exerted a considerable amount of influence, and as several rebel-monks are known to have challenged the Ethiopian rulers, we observe a “congruence between religious and political connotations of the word” (Kaufman Shelemay 1989, 22).

Little is known about the literary sources of Christian Ethiopia outside the field of Ethiopian Studies, and even less about the representation of Jews therein. The following article seeks to present an overview of repeating motifs found in Christian sources up to the sixteenth century, and of how Jewish identities were fashioned.

For readers not familiar with Ethiopia, I will provide a very short introduction to the country and its history. It will be followed by a list of terms used to address members of religious groups in Ethiopia, and examples of how these terms are featured in the sources.

1 Ethiopia, in the historic sense, comprises the highlands, which spread across Ethiopia and Eritrea today, and parts of the Eritrean shore. The ancient capital was Aksum, ruling over the homonymous kingdom of Aksum, which spread around it. In later centuries, power shifted southwards to the regions of Lasta, Semien, Gondär, and the area around Lake Tana. In the Middle Ages, Gondär was the royal capital for many centuries.

2 The correct spelling of their name would be Betä ʿƏsra’el, but for the sake of simplicity, I will use the above form in this article. Other groups, such as the Betä Abraham or the Qəmant, shall not be part of this investigation.

A word must be said on the matter of sources—besides written sources—which exist (in large numbers) only from the fourteenth century onward; oral history is an integral part when reconstructing the history of Ethiopia. Especially for a group like the Beta Israel, who have not written down their own history, it becomes essential to work with the stories and legends preserved in the collective memory, as stressed by Abbink: “we cannot also but emphasize the role of historical myths as *charters*” (1990, 400). Since the 1980s, the beginning of the Aliyah of the Beta Israel,³ this memory is dying out and fading away. Therefore, studies which have collected Beta Israel oral traditions before this date are of great value and function as a legitimate historical source to study the group’s history.⁴ However, there are legends and myths in Ethiopia which are so commonly known that it is impossible to pinpoint their origin or source; they are simply part of the intangible heritage of the country.

3 Especially the two mass evacuations of Beta Israel from Ethiopia are known: “Operation Moses” in 1984 and “Operation Solomon” in 1991.

4 There are narratives, such as the so called *Kəbrä Nəgəšt* (see below), which are so widespread that they have a canonical appeal to them; however, there are many legends and stories collected by individuals which are less canonical but no less important. We owe great thanks to a number of scholars who have collected Ethiopian oral tradition and preserved them for the future, among them early travellers and missionaries (Bruce, D’Abbadie, Gobat, Stern) and later scholars (Abbink, Kaufman Shelemay, Kaplan, Leslau, Quirin). Especially valuable are the works of Sergew Hable Sellasie and Tadesse Tamrat, who both collected many local traditions, unearthed rare manuscripts, and made their findings accessible to the world.

The *Kəbrä Nəgäšt*

Much of Ethiopian self-perception is centred around a historic novel called the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt* (*Glory of the Kings*).⁵ The most important part of the text elaborates a story found in the biblical books 1 Kings 10:1–13 and 2 Chronicles 9. According to this national epic of Christian Ethiopia, Judaism reached Ethiopia during the time of King Solomon. The legend holds that the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba, called the Queen of Ethiopia or Makədda in this text, travelled to Jerusalem to visit King Solomon to test his wisdom. Not only did he convert her to his faith, but he also fathered a son with her, who was born while she was returning to Ethiopia. This son, by the name of Mənilək (called Bayna Ləhkəm⁶ in the text), ventures out to meet his father in person and travels to Jerusalem, too. He is welcomed by his father and, upon his departure, is given many valuable presents. Solomon moreover decides to send the first-born sons of the city's nobility to Ethiopia along with Mənilək. These youths, depressed by having to leave their home, decide to steal the Ark of the Covenant and take it to Ethiopia (Bezold 1905). When they arrived in Aksum, the Queen abdicated in Mənilək's favour and

5 The original text was probably composed in Coptic. However, while drawing on a large number of sources, including, besides O.T. and N.T., rabbinical and midrashic lore, texts such as *Pirqe Rabbi 'Eli'ezer*, apocryphal texts such as *Book of Enoch*, *Book of Jubilees*, *Cave of Treasures*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Gosple of Nicodemus*, and many more (see Hubbard 1956 for an extensive analysis of the sources). According to the colophon of the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt* text, the novel was translated (and possibly re-shaped) from Arabic into Gə'əz by the leading ecclesiastic dignitary of Aksum, *nəbura 'əd Yəshaq*, most probably between 1324 and 1321–22 (Conti Rossini 1923–25, 506–508). The text underwent a long and complex process of editing and rewriting, but presumably reached its final text edition in the second half of the fifteenth century, a date based on the oldest known manuscript, Paris, Bibliotheque National de France, Éth. 5 (also known as 94) as proposed by Piovanelli (2014b, 689).

6 From the Arabic Ibn al-Ḥākim, 'Son of the Wise Man' (i.e. Solomon), the name Mənilək established itself in the general Ethiopian literature.

announced that no woman would ever rule the country again.⁷ To this day, the Ark is said to lie in the ancient city of Aksum in northern Ethiopia. One priest guards the Ark and is the only one allowed to enter the little chapel.

Let us leave the world of legends⁸ for what scholars accept as factual. Christianity reached Ethiopia through two Syrian-born Christians by the names Aedesius and Frumentius in the fourth century. They both became influential in raising the young Ethiopian King Ezana and later converted him to Christianity. Frumentius finally travelled to Egypt and was ordained the first Bishop of Ethiopia. Roughly by the 340s AD, the royal court and parts of the population had embraced Christianity (Munro-Hay 2003).

The cities of Aksum and Adulis were in direct contact with the Mediterranean, and were trade hubs for the entire Red Sea area. It must be expected that the cities were home to adherents of all kinds of religions (among them Jews), but evidence is scarce and it is assumed that their numbers were fairly small.⁹

By the sixth century, the strength of the Ethiopian Kingdom as well as its Christian faith was widely known even in Rome, and the Ethiopian King Kaleb was fighting as an ally of the Byzantine Emperor Justin I against the Jewish King of Ḥimyar, Yusuf As'ar Yath'ar.¹⁰ Upon his return, Kaleb is said to have brought a considerable number of Jewish prisoners back to Aksum (Kaplan 1992,

7 This is a very curious statement which seems out of context in the story. However, the circle closes later in the legends when Aksum is destroyed by an "evil" Queen, as will be seen below.

8 In fact, for certain periods sources are so scarce or non-existent that a certain amount of legendary material will always be included in the analysis conducted in this article.

9 For example, a funerary inscription for a Greek boy was found, indicating that entire families of traders from foreign regions had settled in the area (Fiaccadori 2007a).

10 Yusuf As'ar Yath'ar was responsible for massacring the Christian population of Najran, which was the trigger for the military action taken up by Justin and Kaleb (Fiaccadori 2007b).

32). Kaleb later abdicated from his rule and led the religious life of a monk.¹¹ The sources do not allow a clear image of Kaleb's succession (Brakmann 1994, 110). Apparently, Kaleb had appointed his son Betä ʿEsraʿel¹² to rule over the newly subjected regions in Ḥimyar¹³ and his other son Gäbrä Mäsqäl to rule Aksum. Following the Imperial Aksumite practice, the rule would have gone to Kaleb's first-born son, Betä ʿEsraʿel; however, it seems that Gäbrä Mäsqäl inherited the throne. According to the *Kəbrä Nägäšt*, his two sons Gäbrä Mäsqäl and Betä ʿEsraʿel met on the "Southern Sea"¹⁴ and fought against each other, with Gäbrä Mäsqäl emerging victorious:

And God will say to Gabra Maskal, "Choose thou between the chariot and Zion", and He will cause him to take Zion, and he [Gäbrä Mäsqäl] shall reign openly upon the throne of his father. And God will make Israel to choose the chariot, and he shall reign secretly and he shall not be visible, and He

11 This episode is mentioned in many hagiographies of the "Nine Saints" and in the *Martyrdom of Arethas* (s. Bausi and Gori 2006, 103-110, and §39; Brita 2010, 48, 173), but featured most prominently in the reading in the Synaxary for Ṭəqəmt 6 dedicated to the memory of Abba Pänṭälewön, one of the famous "Nine Saints". It includes the story of how Kaleb went to the Saint to ask him for his spiritual support in the fight against the Ḥimyarite Jews (here called the "country of Saba" with the "King of Judah"). After Kaleb's victorious return, he took up monastic vows with Pänṭälewön (Colin 1987, 24-25; Brita 2010, 152-153). These texts also include a reference that Kaleb handed over his kingdom to his son Gäbrä Mäsqäl without including any hint to Betä ʿEsraʿel (see the following section).

12 For the person Betä ʿEsraʿel, the correct transcription is chosen.

13 The *Kəbrä Nägäšt* calls him "king of Nagran" (ኅገሥ: ናግራን), Bezold 1905, 171, text; 137, tr.

14 This is explained as the sea gate Bab el-Mandab (Gate of Tears) between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula (Bezold 1905, 137, Piovanelli 2014b, 696). Should Betä ʿEsraʿel really have governed over Ḥimyar, he and Gäbrä Mäsqäl would indeed have met halfway.

will send him to all those who have transgressed the commandment of God. (Budge 1932, 227)¹⁵

While Gäbrä Mäsqäl became an icon for the spreading of Christianity,¹⁶ little is known about his brother.¹⁷ The traditional story interprets the names of the brothers, Gäbrä Mäsqäl “Servant of the Cross” versus Betä ʿĪsraʿel “House of Israel”, to indicate that the latter remained an adherent to the old religion (Getatchew Haile 1982a, 320). A legend has it that when Gäbrä Mäsqäl triumphed over Betä ʿĪsraʿel and his followers, they took refuge far away from Aksum in the remote highlands of the Semien mountains, an area which later became part of the heartland of the Beta Israel as a group (Getatchew Haile 1982a, 320). This could be an elaboration of the *Kəbrä Nägäšt* lines “he shall reign secretly and he shall not be visible, and He will send him to all those who have transgressed the commandment of God”.¹⁸

15 Cf. ወይቤሎ : ለገብረ: መስቀል: ጎረቤ: ለከ: እምሰረገላ: ወእምጽዮን: ወአፍተዎ : ከመ: ይንሣእ: ጽዮንሃ: ወይንገሥ: ገሀደ: ዲቦ: መንበረ: አቡሁ: ወለእስራኤልኒ: አፍተዎ: ከመ: ይጎረቤ: ሰረገላ: ወይንግሥ: በጎቡር: ወኢይትረአይ: ወይፌንዎ: ጎቦ: ከሎሙ: እለ: ተዐደወ: ትእዛዘ: እግዚአብሔር፤ (Bezold 1905, 171, text; 137, tr.); see also Piovanelli 2014b, 696)

16 Contemporary sources from his time are scarce, but Gäbrä Mäsqäl is featured in several hagiographies of the Nine Saints; he takes a special place in the hagiography of Abba Garima (s. Brita 2010). He is said to have encouraged the work of St. Yared, the inventor of the Ethiopian Ecclesiastical music (Conti Rossini 1904, 11f., text and translation), to have donated land to various monasteries (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1971, 162), and to have been buried at one of the most prominent monasteries of Ethiopia, Däbrä Dammo – even though there is a large underground stone grave in Aksum which is said to be the tomb of Kaleb and Gäbrä Mäsqäl (cf. Conti Rossini 1909–10, 6, text; 5 translation; Munro-Hay 2005).

17 Or even his two brothers, as the information found in inscriptions and coins indicate that Kaleb had three sons, Betä ʿĪsraʿel (in various spellings), Gäbrä Mäsqäl, and Gäbrä Krəstos—his existence is, however, the most disputed (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972a, 159, 161). The only reliable information on Betä ʿĪsraʿel lets us pinpoint his rule to a time at least fifty years after Kaleb’s abdication (Piovanelli 2014b, 698).

18 There are chronicles which continue this point of Betä ʿĪsraʿel ruling over the invisible world and state that he became the leader of the Zār possession cult (Sergew Hable

The form of Christianity prevalent in Ethiopia from its beginnings to recent times is moulded by strong biblical-Hebraic influences, sometimes also called Jewish influences (Kaplan 1992, 17-20).¹⁹ It is, however, wrong to see this as a direct influence of Jews on Ethiopian Christianity; rather, it must be understood as a combination of the interpretation of the Bible, the prevalence of certain scriptures, such as the Books of Enoch and Jubilees, and local customs often interpreted to be of Jewish origin.²⁰ The exact understanding of rules, especially from the Old Testament, was not undisputed in Ethiopia. Christological disputes are known to have troubled Ethiopian Christians for centuries. One might count the rivalry of Gäbrä Mäsqäl and his brother Betä Ǝsra'el as the first great schism of Ethiopia, although not enough sources exist to validate this claim. The interpretation of rules changed centuries later under the influential rulers such as Amdä Şəyon I or Zär'a Ya'əqob. Recurring topics of doctrinal debates were the observance of the Saturday Sabbath and the veneration of Mary, over which deadly disputes erupted.²¹ From Amdä Şəyon's time onwards, in the

Sellasie 1972a, 160). Since the first reliable references to the Zär-cult originate only in the sixteenth century, the aforementioned chronicles must be of a far more recent date than the sixth to seventh centuries (Rodinson 1964a, 239).

- 19 Edward Ullendorff was probably the most prominent scholar to support the idea that Ethiopian Christianity was "impregnated with strong Hebraic and archaic Semitic elements" (1956, 216). In contrast, August Dillmann and Maxime Rodinson underlined that the presence of Hebraic elements in the Ethiopian Church originated not through direct contact with Jews, but through imitation of the Old Testament, and that these elements were especially promulgated in the fifteenth century under Zär'a Ya'əqob. Rodinson further demonstrates that the association of Ethiopian Christianity with Jewish-Hebrew influences only arose with the arrival of Jesuit missionaries to Ethiopia in the sixteenth century (1964b, 11).
- 20 One example is the circumcision of boys, which is not only prevalent in other Christian Churches (Coptic), but found in African cultures more generally; other examples include dietary and purity laws (Rodinson 1964b, 14).
- 21 The term Saturday Sabbath as opposed to Sunday Sabbath is explained below. These doctrinal disputes were such a frequent topic in the history of the Ethiopian Church that

fourteenth century, enough written sources were passed down which now allow us to analyse the description of Jews in Ethiopia.

The Beta Israel and the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt*

It is important to briefly explain how the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt* was accepted among the Beta Israel themselves. The last chapters of the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt* (95–117) described Jews in a very hostile way as “vanquished people, degraded and eternally subjected” (Abbink 1990, 410). Nevertheless, Beta Israel history understands its people to possibly have originated in the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt*, because, just like the Solomonic dynasty, “by associating themselves with the Solomon-Sheba legend the Beta Israel were claiming to be part of Ethiopia’s cultural elite” (Kaplan 1993, 652).

Some oral traditions have formed which added additional information to the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt*, even forming two different streams of legend. The first claims that the group of first-born sons from Jerusalem’s elite, responsible for stealing the Ark, were the ancestors of the Beta Israel. It is through them that the group inherited its Jewish faith, customs, and literature.²²

In the second oral legend elaborating on the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt*, besides the group of firstborn sons, a group of artisans also accompanied Mənilək back to Ethiopia. They later formed the Beta Israel, who, due to the inflicted landlessness, specialized in handicrafts (Krempel 1973, 24). It is true that

Getatchew Haile writes: “There is in fact not a single new heresy in the writings of Zär’a Ya’əqob known to me that has not been mentioned before his time” (1981, 102). See, for example, a number of hymns concerning the Sabbath questions in Getatchew Haile (1983a, 38–39).

22 Probably the first European to collect this oral tradition was James Bruce (1791, 122; Stern 1862, 184–185).

there was a moment in time when Beta Israel were sought-after artisans and helped construct the royal castles of Gondär (Pankhurst 1995, 81), yet this legend can be seen as pejorative, as it was used by the Christians to manifest the landless state of the Beta Israel (Krempel 1973, 26–27). Despite the short period in which the Beta Israel were allowed to work as free artisans, they were limited to despised tasks for centuries, such as weaving, pottery, and smithing (Quirin 1992, 40–88; Kaplan 1993, 647; Pankhurst 1995, 92).

Introducing the Terms

Ethiopian sources use a plethora of terms to refer to the religious other, the heretic, the Jew or Muslim. It becomes obvious that Jews often appear in the sources in a negative way. They are featured amongst idolaters, magicians and sorcerers, heretic Christians, Muslims, and pagans. The texts are typically of a highly polemical nature, intentionally using negative terminology to create an image of religious opponents, often using the reference to Jews as a way to discredit the opposing group. Only in rare cases are the actual Jewish groups addressed, more often than not fictitious facts are employed to create an imagined identity. The references are not limited to religious arguments, as will be seen below; certain physical traits are also connected to persons of allegedly “Israelite” background.

There are no direct rules as to which word designates which religious identity (adherent of which belief), but when comparing a large number of sources, patterns become obvious, as will be seen in the following presentation of terms.

- Hebrews/(H)*əbraist*/(H)*əbrawian* (ዕብራይስጥ/ዕብራውያን): The term has a positive Biblical connotation, it is used in the sense of Hebrew origin or

Hebrew language and usually found in Scriptures²³ rather than indigenous Ethiopian sources

- Israelites/*ጌሳራዊያን*²⁴ (እስራኤላዊያን): In the understanding of Christians, this term does not designate the Beta Israel, but rather refers to those of Solomonic descent. The positive aspects of this term are not only religious or hypothetical, but are also perceived in relation to physical form; we find in the Acts of Abuna Yoḥannes from Däbrä Zämmädo a description of his good looks: “His stature was comely; and his countenance was handsome. He looked like an Israelite person. His face was delightful, and his overall (demeanour) was jovial.”²⁵

- Jew/*Ayhud* (አይሁድ): Simply the word for “Jews”, as in the Hebrew *Yehudim*, but in medieval Ethiopia, it turns into an insult and designates everybody that is viewed somehow heretical. It is often rather used in a political or polemic rhetoric instead of indicating the clear affiliation of an individual to Jewish faith.²⁶ In general, no group would refer to itself by the name *Ayhud* because of the clearly negative connotation (Kaplan 1993, 653). The Beta Israel never referred to themselves as Jews prior to contact with Jewish missionaries in the nineteenth century (Abbink 1990, 403; Kaplan 1992, 10).

23 Most prominently the Epistle to the Hebrews (Ethiopic title: መልእክተ፡ ጎበ፡ ሰብእ፡ ዕብራውያን፡, *Mäläktä habä säb’ə ʿEbrawəyan*, published in Platt 1830, no page numbers).

24 Also in the plural *ጌሳራዊያን*.

25 ወከመዝ፡ ውእቱ፡ ሥርዓቱ፡ አዳም፡ ቆሙ፡ ወሠናይ፡ ራእዩ፡ ወይመስል፡ እስራኤላዊ፡ ብእሱ፡ ወገጹ፡ ላህይ፡ ወፈሥት፡ ከሰንታሁ፡ (Getatchew Haile 2013, 37, text; 166, tr.). An affirmation of the connection between the leading Solomonic Dynasty and their “Israelite” descent is found in the *Vita* of Saint ጂታፋኖስ. When he is summoned to court to explain why he refused to bow before Zär’a Ya’əqob, he answers that the king should be honoured for being a Christian, not for being Israelite. (s. Annex 1).

26 Emperor Zär’a Ya’əqob often insults Jews in his works, without a reference to a specific Jewish person: ወይእኩኒ፡ ሰምዑ፡ ከሰንታሁ፡ ማኅበረ፡ አይሁድ፡ ሰቃልያን፡ ወልደ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ሕያው፡ ... ለምንትኬ፡ ተጎይጥዎሙ፡ ለሕዝብ፡ ክርስቲያን፡, “Now listen, all you Jews, you who have crucified the son of the living God ... why do you want to tempt the Christian people?” (Wendt 1962, 6, text and tr.).

Thus, when a chronicle claims that “some parts of the chronicle are old, and to some extent authentic” (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972b, 114), and at the same time states that Queen Judith²⁷ proclaimed: “I am a Jewess and my husband also is a Jew,”²⁸ it is most probably a modern interpolation.

– *Arami* (አራሚ): A word for “pagan, non-Christian, infidel”.²⁹ The term is mostly used for non-Christian Oromo,³⁰ and especially for Muslims—just as the term *Ayhud* became a clear denomination for Christian heretics and Jews, *Arami* is interchangeable with Muslim.³¹ A non-pejorative term for Muslim would be *Tənbalat* (also *Tənbalatawi*, ትንባላት and ትንባላታዊ; Solomon Gebreyes 2016, 37). There are cases where the word *Arami* refers to Greeks, as well.³²

27 A legendary “evil Queen”, see below.

28 እስመ: አነ: ኮንኩ: አይሁዳዊት: ወብእሲየኒል አይሁዳዊ: ውእቱ: (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972b, 114).

29 Most probably referring to heretic Christians or Jews are these lines: ወዘኒ: ዘይቤ: በእንተ: አብአ: አረሚ: በልዎ: ኅድግሰ: አረሚ: እለኒ: ይብሉ: ክርስቲያን: በአፉሆሙአ: ወእመ: ኢሐሩ: በአሰረ: ሕጉ: ኢናስተሳትፎሙ: ውስተ: ምሥዋዒነአ።, “As to what he has said about bringing *arāmi* (into church), tell him, let alone the *arāmi*, even those who say (they are) Christian with their mouth, we will not let to take part in our sacrifice...” (Getatchew Haile 2006, 62, text; 53, tr.).

30 The largest ethnic group in Ethiopia traditionally followed their own religion and later often converted to Christianity and Islam. They migrated in large numbers to the Christian highlands of Ethiopia in the sixteenth century and are often mentioned by Christian sources in a derogatory way (Gebissa 2010).

31 Equalling *Arami* (here *Aramawəyan*) with Muslims, and moreover giving a historic reference to the Muslim conquest of Ethiopia, is the prophecy of *Abuna Yoḥannəs* of Däbrä Zämmädo: እስመ: ይመጽኡ: አረማውያን: ወያጠፍኡ: ኩሎ: ክርስቲያን: ወያመዘብሩ: ኩሎ: አብያተ: ክርስቲያናተ።, “The Arāmis will come and destroy all the Christians and lay all the churches waste” (Getatchew Haile 2013, 69, text; 207, tr.). A *Sälam*-hymn to two Saints who died while proselytizing among Muslims reads: በቅድመ: አረሚ: ርኩስ: ሶባ: ስመ: ክርስቶስ አግሐዱ።, “When they revealed the name of Christ before the unclean *Arāmi*” (Getatchew Haile 1983a, 23, a similar reference also on page 24).

32 This is mostly true for translation of Biblical books, such as John 7,35: ውስተ: ብሔረ: አረሚኑ: የሐውር: እንሃ: ወይሚህሮሙ: ለአረሙ።, “Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?” (s. Dillmann 1865, 730 for list of references).

- *ጃለው* (ዕልው):³³ The term indicates infidels and heretics, but the tendency is again to designate pagans and Muslims, not Jews and Christian heretics.³⁴ Its clear negative connotation becomes obvious when considering the other translations of the term: “crooked, perverse, evil, perfidious, iniquitous, disobedient, rebellious, rebel, apostate, heretic, heretical, copy” (Leslau 1987, 62). It is also found in the statement that Queen Judith was from the “tribe of heretics” (እምነገድ: ዕልዋን; Perruchon 1893, 370).

Combining the three terms *Ayhud*, *Arami* and *ጃለው* and clearly distinguishing them from one another is demonstrated in this sentence from the *Senodos* (a canonical-liturgical book on church law):³⁵ “If there is one who is nominated for the office of a priest, who out of the fear of man, of Jews, of infidels and heretics denounces the name of Christ, he shall be expelled.”³⁶

Besides terms composed of a single word, we also find nominal compounds in reference to Jews. We encounter rather specific descriptive terms like “Jews the Crucifiers [of Christ]” (አይሁድ: ሰቃልያን);³⁷ “Jews the

33 Plural: ዕልዋን (*ጃለው*).

34 ሰላም: እብል: ለዐምድ: ጽዮን: መኅዲ: ዕልዋን::, “Hail, I say to ‘Amdä Şəyon destroyer of ‘əlawān (=Muslims/revolters),” (emphasis in the original, Getatchew Haile 1983a, 43). In a similar matter, also this line: በብጽሐተ: መስቀል: መምዑ: ዘዕልዋን: አንገድ::, “The infidel tribes [Muslims] were terrified by the arrival of the Cross” (insertion in the original, *ibid.*, 48).

35 One must admit, however, that most of the *Senodos* was composed in pre-Islamic times, probably already in the fourth century (cf. Bausi 2006); thus the terms cannot stand for Muslim. The text of the *Senodos* contains further similar references to Jews, heretics, and infidels.

36 አሐዱ: እምሥዩማን: ለእመ: ከሕደ: በእንተ: ፍርሀተ: ሰብእ: አው: እምአይሁድ: አው: እምአረሚ: ወዕልዋን: ለእመ: ኮነ: ውእቱ: ስመ: ክርስቶስ: [...] ይሰደድ: (Bausi 1995, 135, text; all translations are mine unless otherwise mentioned).

37 This is a frequent phrase, as an example see Wendt 1962, 6, 59. Or in a variant: ከመ: አይሁድ: እለ: ሰቃልዎ: ለእግዚእነ: “like the Jews which crucified our Lord” (Conti Rossini 1965, 76).

murderers [of our Lord]” (አይሁድ፡ ቀታልያን፡, Bausi 1995, 105, text), and “Enemies of Christ” (ጸሩ፡ ለክርስቶስ፡, Getatchew Haile 1991, 16, text).³⁸

- *Käḥadi* (ክሓዲ): The term can be translated as “infidel, ungodly or faithless”, and is often used as an epithet for Jews, Muslims, heretics, and pagans, “all who have not converted to the true faith of Christ” (Dillmann 1865, 825, my translation). Often the word is added to emphasize the negative aspect of a certain group. Especially in the writings of Zär’a Ya’äqob, the words “Jew” and “ungodly” go hand in hand.³⁹ In contrast to many of the other terms mentioned, it is not immediately clear if it addresses one group in particular; often the term is used as ሕዝብ፡ ክሓዲያን፡, “people of infidels” (Solomon Gebreyes 2016, 142, text and 216, translation).

- *Falasha/Fälasī* (ፈላሲ): The exact origin of the word or when it was used for the first time to designate the Beta Israel is not known with certainty. The translation of the word can be “landless person, an exile, stranger, monk, or ascetic”. A decree of unclear date, but allegedly issued by the fifteenth-century King Yəshāq, states: “He who is baptized in the Christian religion may inherit the land of his father, otherwise let him be a *Fälasī*” (Taddesse Tamrat 1972, 201).⁴⁰ By the sixteenth century, the word was used to designate the Beta Israel in Gə’əz (Old Ethiopic), Arabic, and Hebrew

38 In a similar manner: አውጽዎ፡ እምማእከልከሙ፡ [...] ጸረ፡ ወልድዮ፡ ወስቅልዎ፡ ዮም፡ በዛቲ፡ ዕለት፡ እስመ፡ ኢኮነ፡ ክርስቲያናዊ, “Take away from your midst [...] the enemy of my son, and hang him today, this very day, because he is not a Christian” (text and translation in Getatchew Haile 1986, 196).

39 በከመ፡ መንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ይትናገር፡ በላዕለ፡ ቅዱሳን፡ ነቢያት፡ ከማሁ፡ ይትናገር፡ ሰይጣን፡ በላዕለ፡ አይሁድ፡ ክኅድያን፡ ርኩሳን፡ ከለባት።, “As the Holy Spirit speaks through the holy prophets, so speaks the devil through the ungodly Jews, the unclean dogs” (text in Conti Rossini 1965, 93; my translation). On the same page: አይሁድስ፡ ክሓዲያን፡ መረራን፡ እሙንቱ፡, “The Jews are ungodly and evildoers”.

40 Tadesse Tamrat refers here to an Ethiopian paper manuscript which includes this passage. Quirin (1992, 12, 217) adds that this chronicle was most probably composed much later than the events it recorded. Quirin (218) also suggests that the manuscript was digitized as EMMML no. 7334 (fol. 28b). Kaplan (1992, 183) adds that there is a marginal note in the

sources (Kaplan 1985, 279; Quirin 1992, 12, 217). The term, especially in its later form *Fālaša/Falasha*, is derogatory and rarely used by the Beta Israel themselves (Kaplan 2003).

What becomes obvious is the contrasting differentiation in the Christian sources between pagans and Muslims, on the one hand, and Christians and Jews, on the other. The mutual heritage of the latter is clearly understood, whereas the Abrahamic origin of Islam is not considered. One should be very careful in reading the sources and understanding that there is an actual difference between Beta Israel (as a real group of Ethiopia) and Jews (as characters in literary sources).

Jews Featuring in Hagiographies

Hagiographic literature is very popular among Ethiopian Christians.⁴¹ The first collections of Saints' *Vitae* were translated as early as Aksumite times.⁴² In the fourteenth century, many more hagiographies enriched Ethiopian literature. The core was translated from Christian Arabic *Vorlagen*, but the texts themselves can be traced to the broader Mediterranean Christian world.⁴³ In this same period, many hagiographies of local saints and holy

manuscript stating, "Since then, the Beta Israel have been called *Falasoč*", but indicates the problematic state of this source.

41 The Beta Israel literary corpus also contains hagiographies (texts such as the *Testaments of Isaac, Jacob, and Abraham* could be considered hagiographies, as well as the narrative about Abba Sabra, which exists only in oral form), which are, however, not relevant for the present discussion.

42 It is usually assumed that the *Vita* of St. Anthony, the founder of monasticism, was translated from Greek into Gə'əz in Aksumite times (Brakmann 1994, 167; Meinardus and Kaplan 2003).

43 The story of *Barlaam and Josaphat* can be traced back as far as to Gautama Buddha (Cerulli 1964). See Kaplan's extensive monograph *The Monastic Holy Man* (1984) on the

men and women were composed in Ethiopia itself, or, alternately, foreign stories were enhanced and adapted.⁴⁴

The most prominent example is the *Miracles of Mary* (*Tä'ammärä Maryam*), which originated in twelfth-century France and gained rapid popularity.⁴⁵ In the fourteenth century, it was translated into Gə'əz (Old Ethiopic), most probably under the auspices of Emperor Dawit II. Under his son, Zär'a Ya'əqob, the *Miracles of Mary* were ennobled to liturgical status, when he decreed that three miracles should be read during the Sunday liturgy. Also under his patronage, many new miracles were composed and added to the corpus, the Emperor even featuring in some of them.⁴⁶ Being so popular, *Miracles of Mary* manuscripts are found in nearly every church or monastery in Ethiopia; they can contain anything from a few to several hundred miracles. A full set should contain 366 miracles, one for every day of the year, plus an extra miracle for leap years (Budge 1923, xxviii; Colin

spread of hagiographies in Ethiopia.

- 44 See Brakmann's (1994) book on the Christianization of Aksum for the early stages of hagiographic literature, and Kaplan's (1984) and Taddesse Tamrat's (1972) studies for the medieval period, and Heyer (1998) as general overview.
- 45 "The origin of the nucleus of the legends of the Virgin lies in France. In the beginning of the twelfth century—from 1128–29 AD—a serious epidemic raged in France and vast areas were devastated and depopulated. On pilgrim sites which were consecrated to her name, legends about the aid of the Virgin sprang up and became very popular. They were soon spread all over Europe and due to the narrative and entertaining character of these stories poets and minstrels felt encouraged to compose new ones according to what they had heard and the environment where they lived. The tales were rendered into the languages and idioms of the respective countries and therefore it happened that by the route of the Crusaders, the stories eventually reached Palestine. And from the Holy Land it was then just a short way to Egypt, where the Arabic version which later was taken as the *Vorlage* for the Gə'əz text, was produced" (Six 1999, 54).
- 46 His father Dawit and later monarchs are also featured in a few stories, which turns mere hagiographic material into valuable historic sources (Cerulli 1943, 79–93 on King Dawit, 94–125 on the cycle of Miracles connected to Zär'a Ya'əqob; Getatchew Haile 1992, especially 149–203; Perruchon 1893, 75–76).

2002, 17).⁴⁷ Today around 640 different narratives are known to exist.⁴⁸ *Miracles of Mary* are read in the daily liturgy, in the Sunday service, and on the 32 Marian feasts each year (Six 1999, 53; Fritsch 2001, 62–64).

The veneration of Mary has the highest importance in Ethiopia even today: “Ethiopian imagination ... takes for granted that fiction may turn into reality, because it is established in the *Tä’ammärä Maryam*” (Six 1999, 59). Most probably, this tradition originated from Zär’a Ya’əqob’s personal preferences.⁴⁹ He was the Emperor who contributed the most to theological discussions, and was a zealous fighter for the cause he deemed correct. The three topics most central to his agenda all affected the image of Jews, as will be seen below: the veneration of Sabbath, the veneration of Mary, and his attempt to purify the Christian faith from all “evil” influences.

In addition to their function to provide religious teachings, these narratives tend to have an entertaining character, which probably adds to their popularity. Mary saves the souls of all kinds of savages, a cannibal eating his wife and children (Budge 1923, 94–97), thieves and murderers, an “evil-living Persian Knight” (Budge 1923, 138–140), adulterers, a drunken monk (Budge 1923, 135–137, 172–176), as well as a few Jews and Muslims (Budge 1923, 287–289).⁵⁰ Despite the huge variety of venerated saints, there are certain *topoi* which reoccur frequently; among them is the

47 The Ethiopian calendar follows the old Alexandrian calendar, dividing the year into 12 months of 30 days and an additional month with five days (six in leap years).

48 Budge translated 110 Miracles in 1923, Colin published 213 in 2004, see also Cerulli (1943), and see the bibliography in Balicka-Witakowska and Bausi 2010). As presented by Veronika Six (2005, 275), the absolute number of Miracles can hardly be established; in fact, some editors or translators took the freedom to divide some Miracles into two, thus raising the number of existing Miracles. In addition, a couple of Miracles were created in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and are of no use for historical analysis.

49 The legend holds that he was only born after his mother prayed to the Virgin Mary (Getatchew Haile 1992, 1).

50 That Mary “saves” this Muslim obviously indicates that he converts to Christianity.

conversion of Jews to the “true faith”, often also through the intercession of Mary.

We read about a Marian icon which “sees” “one who gobbles Jewish meat” and starts to cry (Getatchew Haile 1986, 195). When asked what the reason was, the icon starts to speak and denounces this man as an enemy of herself and her son Jesus, as one who is not a Christian.⁵¹ The Miracle actually describes the faith of one of Zär’a Ya’əqob’s opponents, but it also provides information about dietary rules that prevailed in Ethiopia. Christians, Muslims, and Jews each have their own rule for slaughtering animals and are all usually restricted from eating of the other group’s meat (Salamon 1999, 100–103).⁵²

It is unfortunate for scholarly interests that only a very small number out of the many Marian Miracles have been edited;⁵³ the number of text translations is higher, but lack the support of the original text. The following stories are therefore only presented in translation to give an idea of the general way in which Jews feature in Marian Miracles.

A popular story, found in a few slight variations, recounts how a young Jew from Tyre accompanies a few Christian friends to church and offers praise to Mary. When his father hears about his son’s behaviour, he throws the young man into a fiery furnace to burn him. Thanks to the intervention of Mary he is unharmed, and his father is scorched instead. The rest of the family becomes Christian and lives happily ever after (Budge 1923, 156–158).⁵⁴

51 Unfortunately, Getatchew Haile (1986, 195–196) does not provide the Gə’əz text here.

52 In times of great famine, this rule is of course ignored (Kaplan 1992, 149).

53 An Ethiopian print of the Gə’əz and Amharic text by Täsfa Gäbrä Səllase exist but are difficult to obtain, and moreover are not critically edited, cf. Six 199, 55, and *Ead.* 2005, 275.

54 The Gə’əz text of this Miracle has not been published.

In a variant of this story, a young Jew is herding cattle with Christian friends. When he wants to sit down with them to share their meal, they deny it to him unless he gets baptized. The Jew agrees and the others sprinkle water over him in Baptism, and the young man accepts his new faith. When he returns home, “one saw a great light on him, and smelled an aroma that was more pleasant than that of any other scent, and it was sweeter than the smell of wine or unguent; and he sat down and the people became drunk through the smell of his perfume” (Budge 1923, 217). The story continues as in the other version, with the boy being thrown into a furnace from which he escapes unharmed due to Mary’s intervention, and with the conversion of the rest of the family.

Not all miracles have such a positive touch to them, as they tend to be more brutal in showing how “evil” Jews can be and in teaching a lesson to anybody who “defiles” the Christian faith, as in the following story: A Jew and a Christian in Constantinople were great friends, but the Jew hated the Christian faith from the bottom of his heart. One day he accompanied his friend to church, where he caught sight of an icon of the Virgin Mary, which appeared in all beauty and splendour in his eyes. He inquired with his Christian friend who this woman was. When he learned that it was Mary, he became furious and went on a rampage in the church. He snatched the icon and threw it into a latrine. Immediately a devil appeared, tore out the Jew’s tongue, and rushed him away into hell. The Christian was terrified by this act and went into the latrine to retrieve the icon. He cleaned and washed it, scented it and put it in a new place. Suddenly pure oil started to run out of the icon and everybody who anointed himself with it was instantly healed from every sickness whatsoever (Budge 1923, 241–242).

The genre of Miracles stories is prone to strong anti-Jewish polemics;⁵⁵ Jews are often used as a manner of showing and warning against the “wrong” lifestyle.⁵⁶ Not all Miracle story-cycles are as detailed as the Marian Miracles, however. The *Miracles of Jesus* (*Tä’ammärä Iyäsus*) features stories which portray Jews negatively, but these episodes are usually simply extended versions of the Passion narrative rather than an independent elaboration of “evil Jews”.⁵⁷

Comparable terms are also found in the miracles of St. Zär’a Buruk; Jews are described as transgressors of faith, evil Jews, and crucifiers of Christ (Ricci 1979, 94). In a praise poem, Saint Zär’a Buruk is invoked as “born among thousands of righteous [...] destroyer of the food for the soul of his enemies (nemesis) the Jews.”⁵⁸

References to Jews in Theological Works

The early fifteenth-century church scholar Giyorgis of Säglä dedicated an entire elaborate work, the *Mäṣṣhafä Məṣṣṭir* (*Book of Mystery*), to the fight against heretic thoughts which he perceived to have infiltrated the church. The text is divided into thirty homiletic treatises “to be read on the

55 This is not a phenomenon particular to Ethiopia, but was introduced (along with local anti-Jewish feelings) through translating Marian Miracles from Europe; see examples for Marian narratives from Toledo (Cerulli 1943, 301–305).

56 See Annex 2 for further examples.

57 As with the *Miracles of Mary*, the corpus of *Miracles of Jesus* is not unified; one of the oldest known manuscripts (Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Cerulli Etiopico 238) contains 25 miracles, while modern Ethiopian editions contain over 130 miracles (*Tä’ammärä Iyäsus*, anon., 2001/02; cf. Witakowski 1995, 280).

58 እምነ፡ አእላፍ፡ ቅዱሳን፡ ዘርእ፡ ቡሩክ፡ ወሉድ፡ ያጥፍኡ፡ እስከ፡ ነፍሶሙ፡ ለአጽራሪክ፡ አይሁድ፡ (from the manuscript Ethio-Spare Nəḥbi, Nəḥbi Qəddus Mika’el, NSM-015, fol. 74ra), cf. Ricci (1979, 166).

major feasts of the liturgical year,” (Bausi 2007, 942) each treaty exposing one heretical doctrine. Chapter 10 directly confronts one of Giyorgis’ contemporaries, called Bitu, about whom he writes: “Bitu, on the other hand, claims to be a Christian, but in his heart he is not a Christian. In his mind he says, ‘I am baptized’, but in his religious belief he is not baptized.”⁵⁹ The word Jew is never used by Giyorgis, but his polemic creates a clear image of Bitu as one who never truly embraced Christianity, i.e. a Jew.

Several of the Ethiopian liturgical texts (*Anaphoras*)⁶⁰ include short negative mentions of Jews or Muslims. In the *Anaphora of St. Jacob of Serug* is written, “At that time on Friday the evil Jews crucified thee on the tree of the cross in the likeness of the sign of the cross [...]” (Marcos Daoud 1954, 223).⁶¹ In the *Anaphora of St. Mary* it reads, “Now we hear the wicked Jews and the unrighteous Ishmaelites, who, being without understanding, say God is one person and one body, they are of a blind heart” (Marcos Daoud 1954, 111).⁶² The Amharic commentary on this *Anaphora* features another polemic stating, “[You shall cause] fear in the demons, the heretics and the Jews,”⁶³ again equating Jews with the most negative forms.

59 ወቢቱስ፡ ይሰሚ፡ ርእሱ፡ ክርስቲያናዊ፡ ወበሕሊና፡ ሁሰ፡ ኢክርስቲን። ይብል፡ በሕሊናሁ፡ ጥሙቅ፡ አነ፡ ወበሃይማኖቱስ፡ ኢጥሙቅ። (Yaqob Beyene 1990, 184, text; 111, tr.).

60 Twenty different *Anaphoras* exist in the Ethiopian Church in total, more than in any other church.

61 ዓርብ፡ አሜሃ፡ እኩያን፡ አይሁድ፡ ዲበ፡ ዕፅ፡ ሰቀሉከ፡ በአምሳለ፡ ዝንቱ፡ ትእምርተ፡ መስቀል፡ [...] (*Mäṣḥafä Qəddase* 1957/58, 156).

62 ናሁ፡ ንሰምዖሙ፡ ለአይሁድ፡ እኩያን፡ ወለእስማኤላውያን፡ ጊቶን፡ እለ፡ ይብሉ፡ ፩ዱ፡ ገጸ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ወ፩ዱ፡ አካል፡ በኢለብዎቶሙ፡ ዕውራካ፡ ልብ፡ እሙንቱ። (*Mäṣḥafä Qəddase* 1957/58, 68).

63 መፍራት፡ በአጋንንት፡ በመናፍቃን፡ በአይሁስ፡ (Böll 1998, 125, tr.; 297, text).

In a homily in honour of Saturday Sabbath by Zär'a Ya'əqob, the author accuses Jews of being friends of heretics: "O you heretic, enemy of the truth, friend of the Jews, why do you deny the personhood of Trinity?"⁶⁴

Mythical References to Jews in Quasi-historical Notes or Mytho-legends

Besides the stories found in the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt* about the Queen of Sheba, Solomon, and their son Mənilək, there is another important legend which centres around Aksum, its religious identity, and around a woman.

Around the year 960, the power of the Aksumite Kingdom came to an end. As is often the case for this period in Ethiopian history, only few sources exist; only three originate in Ethiopia and cannot be dated with certainty. Two streams of legendary material are interwoven to explain the rapid loss of importance of Aksum. Sources from the outside help shed some light on actual historic events.

Three Ethiopian inscriptions report of the victory of Haḍani Dan'el over the last Aksumite ruler and how the former subjugated the latter into vassal status.⁶⁵ Dan'el, who probably originated from regions south of the Askumite Kingdom, ruled the region for some time from his newly found capital Ku'bar.⁶⁶ The Aksumite Kingdom suffered losses in other areas, as

64 አዐላዊ፡ ፀራ፡ ለጽድቅ፡ ዐርኮሙ፡ ለአይሁድ፤ ለመንጎ፡ ትክክል፡ ግጽዌ፡ ሥላሴ፡ እንዘ፡ ጥሙቅ፡ አንተ፡ በሰሙ፡ ሥላሴ። (Getatchew Haile 1982b, 196, text; 220, translation).

65 The inscriptions are crudely written and are partly illegible, yet the information they provide is of crucial importance (Krencker and von Lüpke 1913, 59f. ["Thron Nr. 23"]; Littmann 1913, 42-48, nos. 12-14; Bernand, Drewes, and Schneider 1991, 278-84, nos. 193, 194 [Tome 1]; Fiaccadori 2005).

66 There is no convincing identification of this town, and different later towns have been suggested (Ankobär, Gondär, Roha/Lalibäla). The city is, however, mentioned from the

well; for example, the Red Sea trade had been taken over mostly by Muslim merchants living in coastal areas. Through the shift of the capital to Ku'bar, Aksum city and Adulis lost their role as trade posts, and the minting of coins (Kaplan 1992, 42) had long ended.⁶⁷ The church also suffered from this demise and had to survive without a consecrated Bishop for over fifty years.⁶⁸ At some point, there must have been three contestants to the see, Peṭros, Fiqṭor, and Minas, none of whom was accepted in Aksum or actually officiated the position.⁶⁹ At the same time, and this is when the negative

tenth century onwards by Arab writers (Tadesse Tamrat 1970, 88; Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972a, 223; for an extensive bibliography see Muth 2007).

- 67 Aksumite coinage was of relatively high value, some exemplars were even found in South India, indicating their usage also in long-distance trade. Moreover, due to the inscriptions on the coins, it is possible to establish royal succession, the change from pagan to Christian beliefs, as well as the decline of the usage of the Greek language in Aksum (Hahn 2003).
- 68 Since Frumentius had been ordained Metropolitan of Ethiopia by the Coptic Patriarch in Alexandria, the Ethiopian Church depended on the Coptic. New bishops, Abuna (or Pappas), had to be sent from Egypt, a service which often cost Ethiopian rulers a lot of money (cf. Levi 1992, 245). But without this Abuna, the Ethiopian Church was leaderless and could not appoint new clergy or consecrate new churches. In addition, the Emperor was crowned by God's grace through the Abuna.
- 69 Peṭros was apparently the only one officially sent by the Patriarch in Alexandria; however, Fiqṭor and Minas both presented forged letters accusing Peṭros of being an imposter. Peṭros was deposed by Minas and Fiqṭor, and for some time Minas acted as Abuna. However, a later, real letter from Patriarch Cosmas revealed Minas' treason, he was unseated and executed. Peṭros had died in the meantime, and Cosmas refused to send a new Abuna. The king (whose name remains unknown) forced Peṭros' assistant to take the position, which further enraged Cosmas, and caused a deep breach in the relations of Aksum and Alexandria, which lasted for a few centuries. Between the years 921 and 979, five consecutive Patriarchs had refused to ordain a new bishop for Ethiopia (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972a, 223; Levi 1992, 246-249, see 338-340 for the Appendix 1 for the Gə'əz text of this story; Munro-Hay 2005b; Tadesse Tamrat 1972, 39-40). Finally, the new Patriarch Philotheus (ca. 989-1003) send a new Abuna, by the name Dan'el, after he had received pleading letters from the Ethiopian monarch to have mercy and send a new Abuna. This letter was included in the Ethiopian Church's Hagiographic Calender

character of Jews resurfaces in legends, the country was suffering from yet another disaster.

Since sources are once again scarce, it is even more interesting to note how the tradition accused a Jew, and above all a Jewess, of being responsible for the decline of the Aksumite kingdom. The legend holds that ሄሳታ,⁷⁰ also known as Queen Judith/Gudit, was “a resident of Aksum, perhaps a member of the royal family reduced to prostitution. She was tricked by a local priest, who sought to have sexual relations with her. Disgraced and mutilated, she left Ethiopia. She met a Jewish ruler whom she married and convinced to destroy Aksum in revenge for the indignity she had suffered” (Kaplan 2005, 376).⁷¹ She ruled for about thirty to forty years.⁷²

It is often stated that the Judith legend is a counternarrative to the Queen of Sheba. Where the latter was a pious virgin, Judith was the opposite; some sources even claim that she became a prostitute. The Queen of Sheba venerated the Ark, and Judith wanted to destroy it (Kaplan and Salamon 2002). Finally, Makædda’s verdict that no woman should ever reign over Ethiopia again was contradicted by Judith (Abbink 1990, 421; Levi 1992, 242; Kaplan 2005, 376). A tradition collected by James Bruce even states that Judith killed all the princess from the Solomonic lineage imprisoned at Däbrä Dammo, some 400 in number, thus completely erasing the Solomonic line (Bruce 1791, 167).⁷³ We hence have the confrontation of

“Sänkæssar” (Synaxarium) for ሁዳር 12 (November 20) (Perruchon 1893b; Colin 1988, 288 [56]-291 [59]; Andersen 2000, 34-35).

70 Clearly a mythical name, which translates as “the Fire”.

71 The report uses very neutral vocabulary here, *ወኅደገት፡ ክርስትና፡ ወኮነት፡ አይሁዳዊት፡ እስመ፡ አይሁዳዊ፡ ውእቱ፡ ብእሲሃ።*, “She denied Christianity and embraced Judaism, because her husband was a Jew” (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972a, 228, 229).

72 Tadesse Tamrat (1972, 40) calculates the date of Judith’s assumption of power to ca. 945.

73 In later times it was a custom in Ethiopia to imprison sons and other relatives of monarchs to avoid any trouble for possible contestants to the throne.

a good Israelite from the Solomonic line and a violent Jewish campaigner. In the *Book of Light*, Zär'a Ya'əqob stated later that Queen Judith “learned from Satan”.⁷⁴

Despite, or perhaps because of, her bad reputation, the Beta Israel did accept her as one of their ancestors. She might have been an “evil woman”,⁷⁵ but she represented the victory of “Jewish” people over the ruling Solomonic dynasty and was thus idealized by many. Judith was not only perceived as an ancestor; the name also seems to have become the title for later Beta Israel “queens”, or wives of Beta Israel leaders, and appears in many chronicles (Quirin 1992, 75–76, and especially 243, fn. 186; Bruce 1791, 124; Stern 1862, 186).⁷⁶

Jon Abbink calls this episode “First Echoes of History in the Oral Tradition of the Beta Israel” (Abbink 1990, 420), to which one could add “and in the oral tradition of the Christian population, too”. What may be established with a fair degree of certainty is that there was a successful ruler by the name of Haḍani Dan'el who ruled over the Aksumite kingdom, but he was defeated by a female warrior-queen “of the South”, often

74 ወእስተቃስሞኒ፡ ብዙኅ፡ ሀሎ፡ ዘይገብርዎ፡ ሰብእ፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡ በበ፡ ሀገሮም፡ ዘያውፅእ፡ እምእምልኮቱ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር፡ በከመ፡ መሀረቶም፡ ጉዲት፡ በከመ፡ ትምህረት፡ ይእቲ፡ እምሰይጣን፡ (Conti Rossini 1965, 51, text), “There are many divinations which the people of Ethiopia practise, each in his country, which distract one from the worship of God, as Gudit taught them who in turn learnt from Satan” (cf. Getatchew 1980, 207).

75 ወእምድኅሬሁ፡ ነግሥት፡ እኪት፡ ብእሲት፡ ወዐማዲት፡ ትውልድ፡ ዕሉት፡ (Perruchon 1893, 365) “After him reigned an evil and unjust woman, from the tribe of infidels”; Evil but “a woman of great beauty, and talents for intrigue” (Bruce 1791, 167; cf. Kaplan 1992, 46; Levi 1992, 87; Anderson 2000, 39).

76 The male counterpart is often called Gedewon/Gideon, and is also traced back to famous ancestors in the oral traditions. In Christian sources, St. Yared's uncle and teacher was called Gedewon (Conti Rossini 1904, 8, text; 7, translation; Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972a, 165; for an overview of the sources see Quirin 2005). In Beta Israel legends, St. Yared is sometimes of “Jewish” birth himself, and son of a Gedewon, who was forced to convert to Christianity; interviews conducted by Quirin (1992, 25, and 223, fn. 91).

identified with Banū I-Hamwiyya from the kingdom of Damot to the south-west of the Aksumite Kingdom.⁷⁷ Finally, there are two sources, foreign but contemporary, which confirm the story. The Arab geographer Ibn Hawqal ventured out on several missionary and trading trips between the years 943 and 977, reporting that “the country of the Abyssinians has been ruled by a woman for many years: she has killed the king of the Abyssinians who was titled Haḍani. Until today she rules with complete independence over her own country and the bordering areas of the territory of the Haḍani in the southern part of Abyssinia. It is a vast limitless country, with secluded [areas] and deserts difficult to cross” (Kramers and Wiet 1964, 56).

To this, the *History of the Three Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church* adds the report that during the reign of Patriarch Philotheus (989–1003), “the King of Abssinia (al-Ḥabash) sent to the king of Nubia (al-Nūba) a youth whose name was George (Girgis), and made known to him how the Lord has chastened him, he and the inhabitants of his land. It was that a woman, a queen of Banū I-Hamwiyya had revolted against him and against his country” (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972a, 223; cf. Kaplan 1992, 45; Anderson 2000, 34–35).⁷⁸ The letter further underlines the dire position the former powerful Aksumite kingdom was in: “[the lands] are abandoned without a shepherd, and our bishops and our priests are dead, and the churches are ruined...” (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972a, 224; cf. Taddesse Tamrat 1972, 41).

77 Of the Damoti Kingdom it is known that there were female leaders (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972b, 121; Kaplan 1992, 45 and especially 179, fn. 54).

78 It is often stated that Sawirus Ibn al-Muqaffa' (Severus, Bishop of el-Ashmunayn) was the author of the *History of the Patriarchs*, but this is only partly true. Sawirus began compiling the reports on the lives of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church, but only reached the year 849 (and the fifty-second Patriarch, Joseph). Afterwards, the recordings were continued by other authors. Michael of Damru, bishop of Tinnis, was responsible for the report of the life of Philotheus, the sixty-third Patriarch (Swanson 2011, 84–88).

Another analysis of the sources on Judith is given by Knud Tage Andersen. As mentioned earlier, the statement in the *Kəbrä Nəgāśt*, that Makədda declared “no woman should rule over Ethiopia again”, appears to be a later addition to the text. Similar “anti-female” interpolations are also found in this letter of the Ethiopian king, who approached the Egyptian Patriarch Philotheus. The letter features two surprising references to the queen of the Banū I-Hamwiyya, which might not have been part of the original story but later interpolations. “If one were to remove these two passages from the text it would not give the impression that anything is missing at all. On the contrary, the text seems smooth and coherent with a natural integrity” (Andersen 2000, 35).

Andersen claims that the entire Judith story was fashioned by later Amhara⁷⁹ rulers to establish their own legitimacy by proving the illegitimacy of their predecessors, the Zagwe (Andersen 2000, 36). He further speculates that as a member of the Aksumite nobility, and here he is following the Judith legend again, the queen herself might have been part of the succession struggle and killed her unsuitable and corrupt elder brother (or other relative), known from the history of Minas and Peṭros (Andersen 2000, 41). In a predominantly patriarchal society, this claim to the power by a woman might have caused the creation of such an anti-female legend. Having her convert to Judaism just adds to her negative identity.

The entire Judith-episode suffers from several inconsistencies. It is curious to note in the legend that despite her alleged Jewishness, Judith was said to have tried to destroy the Ark of the Covenant (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972b, 113). The story completely ignores the fact that the Ark would have been of incredible importance to Jews. In accordance with this account, we

79 Amhara is both a region and an ethnic group in Ethiopia, south of the former Aksumite kingdom, bordering Lake Tana. Amhara became the centre of many important monasteries and was also populated by a considerable number of Beta Israel at a later time.

know from other oral traditions, admittedly from a much later period, that the Beta Israel were proud of the Ark of the Covenant, and some legends even claim that the Beta Israel are actually the only ones with access to it: “the walls [of the sanctuary] magically open if a Jew approaches” (Gobat 1834, 322–323).⁸⁰ Steven Kaplan points out that the “claim that Judith intended to extirpate the Solomonic line is highly questionable in light of contemporary evidence that her primary adversary was the Haḏani, who had already sharply curtailed the Aksumite king’s power” (Kaplan 1992, 46). In addition, should Judith and the queen of the Banū I-Hamwiyya be one and the same person, another problem comes up. The latter name clearly suggests an Arabic, possibly Islamic, background, as also stated by Andersen: “but since the Amharans regarded this queen as cruel and unchristian one cannot but wonder if, at a much later time, they would have thought of her as the queen of an Arabic/Muslim people that more or less successfully had fought for independence and freedom in its relation to the Ethiopian kingdom” (Andersen 2000, 37).

As tempting as it is to believe in Judith’s Jewish faith, it “rather serves to emphasize her unChristian behaviour, in this case both rebellion against the Christian kingdom and denial and destruction of the Christian faith” (Levi 1992, 88).

After Aksum sunk into oblivion, a new, powerful dynasty emerged, the Zagwe, famous for the rock-hewn churches of Lalibäla. The transition of

80 A similar oral tradition, from Gobat, is reported by Qes Asres Yayehe (1995, 63), who states that a number of Beta Israel monks had a vision prophesizing that they were the real Israelites: “If the Aksum Tsion Tabot, the Ark of the Covenant (believed by Ethiopians to be in the Aksum Church) is truly the one that Moses received from the Lord G-d, nothing can hinder us from repossessing it. The Lord G-d will now hand it over back to us”. A group of Beta Israel set out to travel to Aksum, marching around the Church of the Ark in secret for seven nights, hoping to receive a divine sign, but to no avail; most of them starved on their way back to their home regions.

power was described in several king lists, and the following passage from a *Kəbrä nägäśt* manuscript underlines the fact that those who came after the Aksumites were usurpers and not of noble Israelite birth:

ወእምድኅሬሁ፡ ተሐይደ፡ መንግሥት፡ ለሕዝብ፡ እለ፡ ኢኮነ፡ እምነገደ፡ ዳዊት፡ ወሕዝበ፡ እስራኤል።
በከመ፡ ይቤ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ አነ፡ አቀንዖሙ፡ በዘኢኮነ፡ ሕዝብ።⁸¹

“After this, the rule was taken away [and given to] people which are not from the lineage of David and people of Israel. As the Lord says: ‘I will move them with jealousy with those that are not a people’⁸²”.

We thus have different explanations for the decline of the Aksumite kingdom. All are said to be non-Israelites or non-Solomonids, with the difference that the Zagwe are undisputed Christians and Judith was allegedly Jewish.⁸³

The Zagwe dynasty lasted only from 1137 to 1270, and their entire rule was affected by violent fights over succession. Yet all their kings and queens came to be depicted as devout Christians, often even called Saintly-Kings.⁸⁴ Within the literature of this period, strife with Jews was not

81 Manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque National de France, Éthiopien 146, fol. 61ra. The king list is given at the end of a *Kəbrä Nägäśt* text, but these lists are very common and found in numerous manuscripts. Slight variations occur in each of them, compare for example Conti Rossini 1895, 4: ተሐይደሰት፡ መንግሥት፡ ኅበ፡ ካልእ፡ ሕዝብ፡ እለ፡ ኢኮነ፡ እምነገደ፡ እስራኤል፡ —“The rule was renewed with another people, which are not from the lineage of Israel”, and Dillmann (1853, 349) who adds to this quote: እለ፡ ዛጌ። – “which were the Zagwe”, cf. a similar line in Sergew Hable Sellasie (1972b, 122). For obscure reasons, most secondary works on this episode omit the original text, providing only a translation (e.g. Dillmann 1853, 349; Bassett 1882, 98 (tr.); Conti Rossini 1895, 4).

82 Deut. 32, 21.

83 It can be assumed that Haḳani Dan’el was a Christian (Fiaccadori 2005, 84).

84 In a twelfth-century chronicle, wrongly attributed to Abu Ṣālih, it is stated that “all the kings of Abyssinia are priests, and celebrate the liturgy within the sanctuary” (Fiaccadori 2010, 212), which might allude to the faithfulness of the Zagwe rulers.

a common topic. Thus, conflict between Christians and Beta Israel or any other group which might have been identified as Jews does not appear to have been a central concern at the time.

The Amhara lord Yəkunno Amlak is said to have overthrown the Zagwe dynasty in 1270 and presented himself as a powerful representative of the old elite, and as having re-established the Solomonic dynasty after the Aksumite demise. His claims to belong to the Solomonic line were weak, however, and others in the northern province of Təgray tried to prove that they had better claims, which probably resulted in the shaping of the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt*. Suddenly the Solomonic origin of the Ethiopian royalty became more important than ever before. Regardless of Yəkunno Amlak's intentions, Emperor Amdä Şəyon (r. 1314-1344) is the one monarch recognized to have founded the Solomonic state (Kaplan 1992, 54).

The entire period from the end of the Aksumite Kingdom to the emergence of Amdä Şəyon's mostly stable state is full of contradictions in the perception of individuals. "Solomonic, or Israelite" elements were highly valued by the Christian elite, but at the same time everything evil which plagued their kingdom was seen as Jewish. Christians, like the Zagwe, who lacked this Israelite background were perceived as equally wicked, as enemies and destroyers of the Aksumite culture.

Up to this point, the images of Jews dealt with here do not actually refer to real Jews present (or rather not present) at the time and place of the origin of the stories. This changes in the fourteenth century.

More (or Less) Precise References to Jews From the Fourteenth Century on - First Real Traces of the Beta Israel?

The Beta Israel present a special case in the Ethiopian history. Even though their liturgy and other ritual services were based on written scriptures, nothing has come down to us written by their own hands to tell anything about their history; no historical texts, no legal documents, not even hagiographies of their most revered holy men.⁸⁵ If the opinion of almost all scholars can be trusted, they themselves did not even know how to write, but rather commissioned their manuscripts from their Christian neighbours.⁸⁶ Thus, when reconstructing the history of the Beta Israel, scholars are forced to rely on the written documents of the neighbours of the Beta Israel and the Beta Israel's own oral traditions.

In ca. 1332, we have “the first clear mention of Judaized groups around Lake Tana in the chronicle of the war of Amdä Şeyon” (Kaplan, 1992, 55), when the king sent out troops to fight the rebels “which resemble the crucifiers of Christ, the Jews, which are the inhabitants of Samien, Waggera, Şalamt and Wägade.”⁸⁷ “They used to be Christians but now they deny

85 One of the very few exemptions is a short note on a religious dispute from a Beta Israel probably written in the nineteenth century, though referring to events a few centuries earlier (Leslau 1946-47). As a matter of fact, it is within the scope of the JewsEast project (see acknowledgments) to examine Beta Israel manuscripts for possible notes regarding their history. Oftentimes, marginal notes in manuscripts have been ignored, but they are known to contain valuable information on the environment of their composition.

86 Bruce (1791, 125) mentions this fact already, followed by many modern scholars (Kaplan 1992, 3). For a detailed article on the manuscript culture, see Pankhurst (1995).

87 Marrassini (1993, 69), editing the same text, notes “Şagade”.

Christ, like his crucifiers, the Jews”.⁸⁸ They are described as “the wicked Jew who sold the Lord.”⁸⁹

For the first time, a “Jewish” group is described living in areas congruent with areas which were evidently inhabited by Beta Israel in later times. Under the rule of Amdä Şeyon and his sons, the borders of the kingdom were enlarged and the power of their rule within was strengthened. This expansion was accompanied by the spread and new foundations of churches and monasteries.

Such information is found in the *Vita* of the thirteenth/fourteenth-century Saint Gäbrä Iyäsus, in which a Jew (the leader of a larger group of Jews) by the name of Zena Gabo is mentioned.⁹⁰ According to the text, the Jews had fled the destruction of the Second Temple under Titus (Conti Rossini 1937/39, 446) and now lived in the region of Enfraz. Gäbrä Iyäsus was sent there to proselytize, and subsequently founded the monastery of Däbrä San in the region. Zena Gabo, a Beta Israel dignitary, was the first to turn to the Christian faith. He was followed by his daughter, who was healed by the saint from a “snake in her stomach”, and who was so beautiful that the king fell in love with her and married her. Several of their children are supposed to have become monks or priests in the convent of Däbrä San. In the manuscript of the *Vita of St. Gäbrä Iyäsus*, which was admittedly only written in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, a curious element is found. Instead of the Christian trinitarian formula “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”, the final paragraph is initiated with the Beta Israel formula “blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel”. This has led to the

88 Cf. Kropp 1994, 15 (tr.). See also further below in this article.

89 ቤተ-ክርስቲያን፡ ጽሑፍ፡ ሠዕጤ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ (Marrassini 1993, 69, text).

90 Conti Rossini 1937/1939, 445–449. The text, however, was written centuries after the life of the Saint. Unfortunately, Conti Rossini provided only a translation into Italian and not the original text. See Annex 3 for a summary of the account.

speculation that a certain Beta Israel influence was still felt in Däbrä San (Conti Rossini 1937/39, 451). Unfortunately, despite the quite lengthy story of Zena Gabo and his conversion, we do not get any precise information about the Jews of the region or their lifestyle.

The language and overall tone towards the Jews is extremely negative in this text.⁹¹ Jews are compared to dogs, their religion is literally said to be “inferior to that of dogs”.⁹² Jews are presented as weak in their original faith and as easily convinced to drop their religion and convert to Christianity.

Interestingly, Gäbrä Iyäsus was himself part of a minority group, the *Ḥwostateans*,⁹³ which suffered from the persecutions of hegemonic Christians since around the year 1300. The group was considered as heretic and “Jewish” by the ruling clerics and for around a century after their emergence, the *Ḥwostateans* presented a serious threat to established doctrines. “Despite the violent opposition of kings, bishops, and other Church leaders, the *Ḥwostatian* movement flourished in the frontier areas of the north where they enjoyed local support” (Kaplan 1984, 39). Other dissident groups, like the Stephanites, had a slightly more positive image of Jews, as will be shown below. There is, however, also the account by *Gädlä Gäbrä Masiḥ*, another member of the Stephanite movement, which describes how a Beta Israel (here called Falasha) saved the life of the Saint.⁹⁴ Gäbrä Masiḥ was close to starving, due to extreme fasting, when

91 See Annex 3.

92 “Quel Giudeo rise, e disse: ‘Forse che la mia religione è peggiore della religione d’un cane? e forse che la religione d’un cane è migliore della religione mia?’ Gli disse il padre nostro, custode della legge: ‘Sì, è peggiore la tua religione, ed è migliore la religione del cane’ (Conti Rossini 1937/39, 447).

93 He was one of the disciples that accompanied *Ḥwostatewos*, the founder of the movement, into exile to Armenia, where they stayed for fourteen years, see Lusini (1993, 116).

94 This *Vita*, probably written in the sixteenth to seventeenth century, is the first Ethiopian source to connect the words Jew and Falasha (Kaplan 1985, 278).

the Jew Arämawi found and nourished him for months until he recovered from his exertion (Kaplan 1985). The story is very neutral in its tone, contrary to the Gäbrä Iyäsus account.

Another narrative is frequently featured in the sources which contrasts the Gäbrä Iyäsus story in many ways. It claims that it is a heretic Christian who turned towards the Beta Israel, became a Jew, and introduced monasticism to them or functioned as a writer of their holy scriptures. The phrase “a Jew who was a Christian before”, as well as the *topos* of a Christian converting to Judaism, is found on several occasions in chronicles, in the texts by Zär’a Ya’əqob, in the *Vita Yafqərännä Əgzi’*, in the *Miracles of Mary*, in the Beta Israel oral tradition on Abba Sabra and Şägga Amlak, and in many more sources.⁹⁵

Chronologically speaking, the first of such figures was Qozmos, about whom we know from the fourteenth-century *Vita* of the Christian monk Yafqərännä Əgzi’, who lived during the reign of king Dawit II (r. 1388–1412). Qozmas was a Christian monk who fell into disgrace with his community due to his extreme ideas on asceticism and his refusal of all cooked food including the Eucharist. He fled their persecution into deserted areas in which people with Jewish faith, “*Haymanote ayhudi*”, lived.⁹⁶ Since he was

95 ትካትሱ: ክርስቲያን: እሙንቱ: ወይእዜሱ: ክሕዱ: ክርስቶስሃ: ከመ: አይሁድ: ሰቃልያን። “Formerly they were Christians, but now they deny Christ like the crucifying Jews [lit. the Jews Crucifiers]” (cf. Kropp 1994, 11, text, and Marrassini 1993, 68, text). አይሁዳዊ: ቀዲሙሰ: ነበረ: ክርስቲያናዊ: “A Jew who was however, first a Christian”, Getatchew Haile 1986, 197; The author presents an entire miracle of Mary here, which elaborates the story of Christians converting to Judaism and being punished for it. For further references see also Getatchew Haile (1980, 194), Quirin (1993, 303).

96 Abbink 1990, 431, Wajnberg 1936, 57. The Jews are depicted here in the most negative form: ወሰብአ: [...] ይነብሩ: በሃይማኖተ: አይሁድ: ወእኩያን: ፈድፋድ: ወቀሊላነ: ልብ: እሙንቱ። ወሰብ: ርአይዎ: እሙንቱሰ: ዕልዋን: ለቆይሞስ: “the people [in these regions] lived in the faith of the Jews, they were very evil people and light at heart [lightheaded]. When these heretics saw Qozmos” (Wajnberg 1936, 56, text).

a learned man and knew how to write, he was welcomed with open arms and translated the *Orit* (Octateuch) for them. He became something of a messianic figure, and later led them against the Christian ruler Dawit II in open rebellion.⁹⁷ The Beta Israel managed to score some victories but were finally defeated by the king's troops, and Qozmos was killed in battle (Wajnberg 1936, 50–59).

It is noteworthy that scholars have readily adopted the story of Qozmos as a historical indication of the development of the Jewish community, probably because it has been transmitted in written form. In the Beta Israel tradition, he seems to be unknown; when we examine the oral traditions collected in interviews, it turns out that Qozmos is rarely (if at all) featured in them.⁹⁸

Emperor Amdä Şəyon was the renovator of the Solomonic dynasty and had engaged in some doctrinal disputes, for example with the Əwostəteans. They struggled around the veneration of the Sabbath, which, however, was not the main goal for Amdä Şəyon. His son Dawit II was also less interested in theological debates and cared about religious dissident groups like the *Ayhud* mostly when they threatened his rule, not his faith. One of the subsequent rulers, Yəshaq, son of Dawit II, on the other hand, was known for his “harsh treatment of religious dissidents” (Kaplan 1992, 57).⁹⁹ However, he tried to include different ethnic (and religious) groups into his feudal system. At some point in time he had appointed the “Jew”

97 ወእሙንቱሰ፡ ጽልሕዋን፡ ሕዝብ፡ ተበሐሉ፡ በበይናቲሆሙ፡ እንዘ፡ ይብሉ፡ ዝኑ፡ እንጋ፡ ዘይቤሉ፡ ነቢያት፡ በእንቲአሁ፡ ይመጽእ፡ ሠረቃዊ፡ ወልደ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡። “When these evil people discussed among them: ‘Is it him that the prophets spoke about: That the son of God will raise from the East?’” (Wajnberg 1936, 56, text).

98 Cf. for example the works by Krempel (1973), Leslau (1974), Quirin (1988, 1993), Kaufmann Shelemay (1989).

99 The Arabic chronicler Maqrizi calls Yəshaq responsible for “rooting out utterly all the Muslims living in Abyssinia” (cited after Tadesse Tamra 1972, 154).

Bet Ajer as governor over Semien and other areas. Soon there was a fight, when Bet Ajer punished one of Yəshāq's own nephews and refused to show up before of the king to explain himself. He was hunted down by Yəshāq's soldiers and decapitated. Some Beta Israel groups that remained faithful to the king were rewarded fiefs for their cooperation (Tadesse Tamrat 1972, 200). On the other hand, Yəshāq was aware of Beta Israel's different religious orientation and sought to bring this "chronic problem" to an end by imposing Christianity on the "rebellious infidels" (Tadesse Tamrat 1972, 201). He passed the decree that "he who is baptized in the Christian religion, may inherit the land of his father; otherwise let him be a *Falasi*."¹⁰⁰ A marginal note to this passage in the manuscript reads, "Since then, the Beta Israel have been called *Falashoch*" (Kaplan 1992, 183, fn. 22).

What is probably the largest number of negative mentions of Jews is found in the fifteenth-century writings of Emperor Zär'a Ya'əqob. In his chronicle, the king is frequently called "equal to the righteous disciples" as well as "destroyer of the Jews".¹⁰¹ Zär'a Ya'əqob is said to have authored a number of texts himself, and additional texts were composed under his authority in the royal scriptorium.¹⁰² In his *Book of the Nativity* (*Mäṣḥafä Milad*) and the *Epistle of Humanity* (*Ṭomarä təsbə'ət*), polemics against Jews are found on almost every other page.¹⁰³ Calling Jews "idolaters" or "cursed

100 *Falashoch* "A landless wanderer" (Tadesse Tamrat 1972, 201).

101 ዘውገ፡ ጎሩዮን፡ ተልሚድ፡ ወሥራዊሆሙ፡ ለአይሁድ፡ (Perruchon 1893a, 103; cf. also Dillmann 1884, 34).

102 The authorship of most sources cannot be established sufficiently. It is known that Zär'a Ya'əqob authored many texts himself, but many were composed by his ካህናተ፡ ደብተራ፡, "the Clergy of the (Royal) Camp", whose names remain unknown (Getatchew Haile 1992, 3).

103 He wrote not only against Jews, but against idol worshipping, the veneration of evil demons and spirits, magic actions, and much more. Getatchew Haile describes the writings of the emperor in this way (1980, 226): "Like most of Emperor Zär'a Ya'əqob's writings, the *Ṭomarä təsbə'ət* was written because of one particular problem. The Emperor

Jews” are among the milder epithets in his work, in contrast to the following passage in his *Book of Light (Maṣḥafä Bərhan)*: “But you, o Jew, you fetid and rotten mouth, eater of his sons and daughters like Hyenas, and eaters of excrements¹⁰⁴ like a dog [...]”.¹⁰⁵

Zär’a Ya’əqob’s father Dawit II already promoted the cult of Mary, but his son excelled him in his zealous fight for the correct veneration of Mary. Moreover, he was striving to cleanse the Christian Church of Ethiopia from alleged Jewish and heretic influences as well as magic and otherwise unwanted elements.

Ethiopian Church history in this period becomes very complex, as there was a good number of groups which refused to accept the innovations of the emperor and some groups split from official church doctrine. Severe punishment and persecution of these groups were the result, and the alleged “Jews” were among those who suffered most from the emperor. In his text *Ṭomarä täsba’ət (Epistle of Humanity)*, which is fully dedicated to the fight against heretics, a Jew is always associated with a magician and an idolater (Getatchew 1980, 212). Furthermore, in the *Ṭomarä täsba’ət*, Zär’a Ya’əqob describes the punishment for idolaters and wrong-doers: “And when you die, your lot will be in the fire of hell. If you are a priest, your priesthood will be nullified, and although you are a Christian, you will be called a Jew and an idolater.”¹⁰⁶

was convinced that his opponents were using satanic power to destroy him and take his throne. Although the homilies of *Ṭomarä täsba’ət* seem to address themselves to the general problem of superstition and magical practices in Ethiopia, they were actually written against his personal enemies to justify their execution [...]”

104 This could be a reference to 2 King 18:27.

105 ወአንተሰ፡ አይሁዳዊ፡ ጽዮአ፡ አፍ፡ ወስሕቡብ፡ በላዔ፡ ደቂቁ፡ ወአዋልዲሁ፡ ከመ፡ ዝእብ፡ ወበላዔ፡ ኩስሕ፡ ከመ፡ ከልብ፡ (Conti Rossini 1965, 8, text).

106 ወሰብሂ፡ ትመውት፡ ይከውን፡ መከፈልትከ፡ ውስተ፡ ገሀነመ፡ እሳት፡ እመኒ፡ ኮንከ፡ ካህነ፡ ትሥዕረ፡ ከሀነትከ፡ ወለእመኒ፡ ኮንከ፡ ክርስትያናዊ፡ ተሰመይከ፡ አይሁዳ፡ ወመጠዓዌ፡ (Getatchew 1991, 97,

For the emperor, Jews, magicians, and sorcerers presented the same level of wickedness and are usually equated in his texts. Despite this, he distinguishes between magicians, who cast spells and predict the future, and Jews, who refuse to prostrate in front of Mary. Among these are counted the Stephanites, the followers of their spiritual leader Ἐστίφανος. In his *Book of Light*, the emperor writes: “Those children of Ἐστίφα [Stephan] truly are Jews, they refuse to prostrate to Mary the twofold Virgin, and to the cross of the only begotten Son.”¹⁰⁷

This rhetorical association between the Stephanites, whom Zār’a Ya’əqob considered to be heretical, and Jews is also reflected in the writings of the Stephanites themselves. In a text by an anonymous follower of Ἐστίφανος, it becomes obvious that for the Stephanites themselves, it was clear that they were neither Jews nor heretics, but rather defenders of the true orthodox faith: “He [the king] smote down our father St. Ἐστίφανος and tortured him very much and imprisoned him until he finished (his combat), just because he taught the Orthodox Faith [...]. He [the king] severely tortured his [Ἐστίφανος’] followers too, after him, and called them enemies of Mary, likening them, for the public, with the Jews, because of their refusal to prostrate themselves before the king, and so he executed them” (Getatchew 1980, 227).¹⁰⁸

In the beautiful, poetic canticle in honour of Mary, *Maḥlete Şege* (*Canticle of the Flower*), further reference to the equation of Jews and Stephanites

text; 78, tr.).

107 ወእሙንቱስ፡ ደቂቀ፡ እስጢፋ፡ በአማን፡ አይሁድ፡ እሙንቱ፡ እለ፡ አበዮ፡ ሰጊደ፡ ለማርያም፡ ድንግል፡ በክልኤ፡ ወለመስቀለ፡ ወልድ፡ ዋክድ። (Conti Rossini 1965, 48).

108 This text excerpt is a translation provided by Getatchew Haile (1980, 227) on the basis of the manuscript Collegeville, Mn, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, EMLL no. 4, ff. 159v-161v. Unfortunately, no further information about the author is provided by Getatchew Haile (most probably it is not provided in the manuscript either), nor the Gə’əz text published.

is found. In stanza 38 it reads: “The Christian who says [to Mary] “I love you”, but doesn’t love your Miracles, is not a true Christian; he is a Jew and an enemy of your Son the Saviour.” A look into the apparatus of the critical edition by Adolf Grohmann from 1919 reveals that a number of manuscripts have the variant “...is a Jew and offspring of Ἐσθῆφανος the Liar”.¹⁰⁹

In the *Vita of Abba Ezra*—Abba Ezra was a member of the Stephanite movement as well—we find notes on the image the court officials had about the “heretic” Stephanites. The blame for leading the Stephanites astray was indirectly put on the Jews: “there are Falashas concealed among the disciples of *Abba Yonas*; which do not bow down in front of Mary or the cross of the ‘Special One’”.¹¹⁰ And it is further remarked: “There arrived here monks that are neither Jews nor heathens, but who do not believe in the Trinity, who do not bow in front of Mary or the cross, who do not have a *tabot* (Altar), who do not celebrate the Eucharist, and when they pray they neither say the Lord’s Prayer nor the Creed.”¹¹¹

The author of the *Vita* was well aware that Jews did not perform these rituals, but in his understanding, there was no reason that the mere rejection of these rituals automatically equated the Stephanites with Jews. However, to the clerics defending the prevailing doctrine, and to mutual enemies of the Stephanites and the Beta Israel, every act that deviated from the norm posed a potential threat. Thus, using polemic language was the easiest way to discredit the Stephanites. The imagined identity of

109 ዘሰ፡ ይብል፡ አፍቅረኪ፡ ወኢያፈቅር፡ ተአምረኪ፡ ክርስቲያናዊ፡ ኢክርስቱን፡ ውእቱ፡ አይሁዳዊ፡ ወፀረ፡ ወልድኪ፡ ማሕየዊ፡ [ወሠር፡ እስጢፋ፡ ሐሳዊ፡] (Grohmann 1919, 84, text; 85, translation).

110 ይብሉ፡ ሀለዉ፡ ዝየ፡ ፈላሳ፡ ተሰዊሮሙ፡ በደቂቀ፡ አባ፡ ዮናስ፡ እለ፡ ኢይሰግዱ፡ ለማርያም፡ ወለመስቀለ፡ ዋሕድ፡ (Caquot 1961, 75, text; 97, translation).

111 ናሁ፡ መጽኡ፡ ዝየ፡ መነኮሳት፡ እለ፡ ኢኮኑ፡ አይሁድ፡ ወአረሚ፡ ወአልበሙ፡ አሚነ፡ ሥላሴ፡ ወኢይሰግዱ፡ ለማርያም፡ ወኢለመስቀል፡ ወአልበሙ፡ ታቦተ፡ ወኢይቄርቡ፡ ቍርባነ፡ ወእንዘ፡ ይጻልዩ፡ ኢይብሉ፡ አቡነ፡ ዘበ፡ ሰማያት፡ ወጸሎተ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ (Caquot 1961, 76, text; 100, translation).

Jews was so negative that referring to someone as a “Jew” caused outright rejection.

In the time of Zär’a Ya’əqob, there lived two men whose memory is preserved in Beta Israel written sources. Besides possible references to them in the writings of Zär’a Ya’əqob, their names feature frequently in prayers and commemorative notes by Beta Israel.¹¹² Playing a similar role to that of Qozmos, and held in the highest esteem among the Beta Israel, are Abba Sabra, who introduced monasticism to the Beta Israel, and his disciple Şägga Amlak.¹¹³ The latter is said to have been one of the sons of Zär’a Ya’əqob, formerly called Asqal (Quirin 1988, 97), who rebelled against his father and became a Jew (Perruchon 1893a, 96–97; Quirin 1988, 94).¹¹⁴ For the first time, this indicates a clear overlap of persons being called *Ayhud* by Christian authors and simultaneously being identified as members of their own group by Beta Israel.

112 See Quirin (1988, 104, fn. 48) for a list of texts. The Beta Israel manuscript *Soṭa, Soṭa Däbrä Sälam Qəddus Mikä’el Mädhane ‘Aläm*, SDM-021, fol. 55v, collected by the ERC project ETHIO-SPaRe: Cultural Heritage of Christian Ethiopia Salvation, Preservation, Research, must be added to this. The manuscript is accessible through the project’s database under the call number SDM-021.

113 Abba Sabra is the number one figure for basically all achievements of the Beta Israel. Besides introducing monasticism, he is said to have composed their liturgical music (see here a similar motive as St. Yared; cf. Kaufman Shelemay 1989, 225) and introduced the group’s purity laws. He is also the possible author of some religious texts (Kaplan 2010, see also Krebs and Kribus, in this volume).

114 The royal chronicle of the king reports of some of his children rebelling against him and even states that some left the Christian faith and embraced Judaism. Some of his children are referred to by name, but those who embraced Judaism are not. The name Asqal is not found in Zär’a Ya’əqob’s sources, only in oral traditions of the Beta Israel. The *Tomarä təsbə’ət* mentions “his brother-in-law Gälawdewos the Jew [...] That Gälawdewos became a Jew forsaking his Christianity and Christ” (ሐሙሁ፡ ገላውድዮስ፡ አይሁዳዌ (...) ወውእቱስ፡ ገላውድዮስ፡ ኮነ፡ አይሁዳዌ፡ ሐዲጎ፡ ክርስትናሁ፡ ወክሒዶ፡ ክርስቶስሃ፡። Getatchew Haile 1991, 67, text; 54, translation), and “while it is tempting to try to connect this to the traditions about Şägga Amlak, the reference almost certainly refers to his rebellious political behaviour” (Kaplan 1992, 187, fn. 75).

Zär'a Ya'əqob's ambitious battle against the Jews is especially felt in his fight over the correct observance of the Sabbath. The question of the veneration of the Christian Sabbath in the Ethiopian Church has long been debated,¹¹⁵ but in 1450, Zär'a Ya'əqob summoned a church council to settle the issue, after which the view prevailed that both days—Saturday, called "*Sabbath of the Jews*", and Sunday—should be observed, though the Sunday Sabbath requires greater strictness.¹¹⁶

With the arrival of the Jesuits in the sixteenth century, doctrinal debates, including who was a Jew or what their appropriate status should be, were no longer an inner-Ethiopian issue.¹¹⁷ Ethiopian rulers and clerics were confronted with other, new challenges, which is why the analysis of the identity and images of the Beta Israel ends here.

Conclusion

Over the centuries, there have been many Christians rulers who have mistreated Jews in their country. An entire polemic rhetoric was created over the course of time which underscored Jews' role in the crucifixion of Jesus, marked them as political rebels, and linked them with demons, Muslims, sinners, and heretics of all kinds. The positive or negative value assigned to Jewishness in Christian Ethiopian texts depended on the agenda of a given author.

115 Amdä Şəyon struggled with the Əwostəteans already regarding the Sabbath veneration. The issue was contested in Ethiopia for centuries, and many suffered severely in occasional eruptions of violence.

116 A full analysis of the "role of the Sabbath" in Ethiopia is given by Hammerschmidt (1963).

117 It was never exclusively an inner problem, as the Abunas from Alexandria brought foreign elements into the country, too. However, it stayed within the borders of oriental Christianity.

Another issue in understanding the ways in which Jewish identity is represented in pre-modern Ethiopian sources is the question of Solomonic descent. The adverse associations with non-Solomonic origins cast the Zagwe, who were just as non-Solomonic as the Beta Israel (at least in the eyes of those who considered themselves part of this “elite” lineage), in a prejudicial light—which was one of the reasons for the shaping of the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt*. For the Zagwe, their non-Solomonic origin was equated with an illegitimate claim to the throne by members of the Solomonic dynasty (Kaplan 1992, 48). The Hebraic elements, such as the Saturday Sabbath—within the doctrine of the Church, however—were cherished, or defeated when necessary.

Polemic nomenclature was used to fabricate a Jewish identity where there was none by a ruling group to taint a minority. “From these vague traditions in which truth and fiction are inextricably jumbled together, the inquirer does not gain much trustworthy information on the history of Ethiopia, and the settlement of the Jews in that country” (Stern 1862, 185). The place of the Beta Israel, as found in the sources, is that of one of the heretic groups of pre-modern Ethiopia, struggling against doctrinal changes imposed on them by fanatic Christian rulers.

Heretic groups, deemed “evil” by the ruling elite, were associated with Judaism, although they themselves would never have identified with Jewish belief. Also, even though Abba Sabra and Şägga Amlak are holy to the Beta Israel and can be recognized in some of Zär’a Ya’əqob’s references to “*Ayhud*”, this does not imply that the Beta Israel thought of themselves as Jews. Unfortunately, no written documents which would reveal the perspective of the Beta Israel in the past have been uncovered as of yet. Since the eighteenth century, we possess accounts of Western travellers who already clearly called the Beta Israel “Jews”, but as late as the early twentieth century, this was not a term used by the Beta Israel themselves.

From a scholarly point of view, the Jewishness of the Beta Israel is repeatedly debated, too. It is often stated that Beta Israel's literary corpus consists only of the Books of the Bible and de-Christianized, non-canonical writings (such as *Ardə'ət*, the *Testaments of the Three Patriarchs*, etc., Brakmann 1994, 47). This claim may be true; however, it is also true that the Beta Israel erased all Christian traces from these texts in a deliberate act.¹¹⁸ Moreover, they draw clear lines between their Christian and Muslim neighbours, keeping their own strict purity laws in order not to commit any sin or defile their beliefs.

Despite the many decades of research, there are still several elements of Beta Israel culture which deserve deeper study, such as their monastic movement (see Krebs and Kribus in this volume), their settlements in the Semien mountains, and their manuscript tradition and literary corpus, both written and oral. Such comprehensive research would provide the basis on which to elaborate a proper methodology, apply theories of otherness, and engage in socio-linguistic studies in the Ethiopian context.

118 Martin Heide, who edited the *Testamente Isaaks und Jakobs* as well as the *Testament of Abraham*, all three of which were venerated by the Beta Israel, gives a few examples of the translation and adaptation praxis the Beta Israel scribes applied. Given the philological rule by Karl Lachman that even younger manuscripts may carry the oldest text, Heide included the Beta Israel texts in his edition focussing on the Christian text (Heide 2012, 27). In general, the Trinitarian Formula of the Christian texts is replaced by the Beta Israel Formula (ይጉባርክ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ አምላክ፡ እስራኤል፡, "Praised be God, the Lord of Israel"); furthermore, references to Christian church fathers are rendered or omitted (Heide, 2012, 50-51). However, there are many cases where this adaptation process was not performed thoroughly, and references such as to Jesus Christ and others survive in the Beta Israel texts (Leslau 1951, 9, "and Enoch will be there until the Saviour comes"). In particular, quotes from biblical texts can be found in Beta Israel literature; see Leslau's list of "scriptural references", which includes several New Testament quotes (Leslau 1951, 196-197).

Annex 1

The fifteenth-century monk ጄጅፕፍኖስ started a monastic movement, the Stephanites, which suffered from great tribulations of the normative church under king Zär’a Ya’əqob. The king “demanded from the faithful that they prostrate themselves to the ground whenever three names are mentioned: Jesus, Mary, and Zär’a Ya’əqob” (Getatchew Haile 1992, 2), which the Stephanites refused to do (Getatchew Haile 1983c, 96).¹¹⁹ ጄጅፕፍኖስ was summoned on several occasions; during one of these, the following dialog is supposed to have occurred. The discussion centres around the word “Israelite”; the implication of ጄጅፕፍኖስ is that an Ethiopian could not refer to himself as an Israelite, and that, moreover, this designation is inferior to that of being a Christian:

ወይቤሎ፡ ዝኩ፡ ሰኃጢ፡ አንተሰኬ፡ ንጉሥኒ፡ ኢታአምር። ወይቤ፡ ቅዱስ፡ አአምር፡ ንጉሠ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ ክርስቲያናዊ፡ በጽድቅ፡ ይዕቀብ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ መንግሥቶ። ወይቤ፡ ዝኩ፡ ኅሣሣ፡ ምክንያት፡ አንሰ፡ እብሎ፡ እስራኤል። ወይቤ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ወአንሰ፡ እብሎ፡ ክርስቲያናዊ። ወተሰእሎ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ለዝክቱ፡ ብእሲ፡ ወይቤሎ፡ ንግረኒ፡ እስኩ፡ ሰብ፡ እብል፡ ክርስቲያናዊ፡ ዘትብል፡ እስራኤላዊ፡ ስመ፡ እስራኤልኩ፡ የዐቢ፡ ወሚመ፡ ስመ፡ ክርስቲያናዊ፡ ወይቤ፡ ዝኩ፡ ስሑት፡ ስመ፡ እስራኤል፡ የዐቢ። ወአውሥኦ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ወይቤ፡ አልቦ፡ ስመ፡ ክርስቲያናዊ፡ የዐቢ። ወእስራኤልሰ፡ ተወሊዶመ፡ በሥጋ፡ ይሰመዩ፡ እስራኤል፡ ወስመ፡ ክርስቲያናዊ፡ ተወሊዶመ፡ በልደት፡ ሰማያዊት፡ በመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ይሰመዩ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ ወበእንተዝ፡ ትትሌዐል፡ ስመ፡ ቅዱስት፡ ቤተ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ እንተ፡ ላዕለ፡ ኸሉ፡ ጉባኤ፡ ዘሐዋርያት። (Getatchew Haile 2006, 34-35)

That deceiver [the saint’s prosecutor] said to him, “But you do not recognize even the king.” The saint said, “I do recognize the king of the

119 Refusing to prostrate to these names is only one of the many doctrinal rules which separated the Stephanites from the main church (see Getatchew Haile 1983c).

Christians; he is a Christian in truth. May God preserve his kingdom.” That seeker of a pretext [his prosecutor] said, “I call him Israel.” The saint said, “I call him Christian”. The saint asked that man, saying, “Now, tell me, seeing that you say ‘Israelite,’ when I say ‘Christian,’ is the name of Israel or the name of Christianity greater?” That misguided one said, “The name of Israel is greater.” The saint answered, saying, “No, the name of Christianity is greater. Israelites are called Israel being born of flesh. As for the name of Christianity, they are called Christians being born by a heavenly birth by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the name of the holy catholic apostolic Church is greater.” (Getatchew Haile 2006, 30)¹²⁰

Annex 2

The *Miracles of Mary* are to be read during the daily services, on every Sunday, and in addition on each of her thirty-two yearly feast days.¹²¹ On some occasions, the readings may be preceded by “The Address which is to be read by the Reader of the Miracles of the blessed Virgin Mary to the Congregation in Church”. This text starts with blessings and praise of Mary, in the middle section it curses and “warns” Jews, and it ends again with praising and venerating lines towards Mary. This is the middle section:

አይሁድ፡ ምዝቡራን፡ ስመ፡ መሪራን፡ ለኃዲር፡ ይረዱ፡ ታሕተ፡ ዕመቀ፡ ደይን፡ አሜን።

120 The translation of the last sentence is a bit far from the Gə‘əz text, which should rather be translated: “Therefore, the name of the holy Church is superior to the apostolic assembly,” meaning the church as an institution is above earthly matters but shaped, or supported, by the apostolic assembly.

121 Budge (1923, xlvii-xlviii) provides a list of these days.

አይሁድ፡ እኩያን፡ ሰሙ፡ ዚአኪ፡ እለ፡ ኢይፈቅዱ። ድንግልናኪ፡ እለ፡ ይክህዱ። በሰይፈ፡ ሚካኤል፡
ይትግዐዱ። በሥቃዩ፡ እሳት፡ ይንድዱ። ታሕተ፡ ዕመቀ፡ ደይን፡ ለኅዲር፡ ይረዱ። አሜን።

አይሁድ፡ ሐሳውያን፡ ድንግልናኪ፡ እለ፡ ያሰቁርሩ። በሰናስለ፡ እሳት፡ ይትግሠሩ። ታሕተ፡ ደይን፡ ወግዕ፡
ይንበሩ። አሜን።

አይሁድ፡ ዓማፅያን፡ ድንግልናኪ፡ እለ፡ ይረግሙ። በሰይፈ፡ ሚካኤል፡ ይትግዘሙ። በሥቃዩ፡ እሳት፡
ይሕምሙ። ታሕተ፡ ደይን፡ ዘአልበ፡ ሙግዕ፡ ይትሐተሙ። አሜን።

አይሁድ፡ ዝልጉሳን፡ ወጽዮን፡ ድንግልናኪ፡ እለ፡ ይፀርፉ። በአደ፡ ሚካኤል፡ ይትቀሰፉ። ገሀነሙ፡ እሳት፡
ይትግፀፉ። ታሕተ፡ ደይን፡ ይትወ ረዉ፡ ወይፅደፉ። አሜን። (Budge 1900, 6)

“May the Jews, who are doomed to perdition, whose name stirrth up wrath,
go down and have their habitation in the lowest depths of the place of
judgment. Amen!

May the wicked Jews who will [hear] thy name and who deny thy virginity
be mown down by the sword of Michael, may they be burnt in the torment
of fire, and may they go down and have their habitation in the lowest
depths of the place of judgment. Amen!

May the lying Jews who hold thy virginity in abhorrence be fettered and
bound in chains of fire; and may they dwell [in the lowermost depths] of
the place of judgment and destruction! Amen.

May the evil-doing Jews who curse thy virginity be cut down by the sword
of Michael, may they suffer pains in the torture of the fire, and may they
be shut in down in the depths of the place of judgment whence there is
no escape. Amen.

May the leprous and filthy Jews who blaspheme thy virginity be punished by the hand of Michael, may they become involved deeper and deeper in the Gehenna of fire, and may they be hurled down headlong and cast into the depths of the place of judgement! Amen. (Budge 1923, lv-lvi)

Annex 3

“Converting the Jews of Enfraz”

Translated summary of Conti Rossini 1937/1939, 445–447.

Our father Gäbra Iyäsus went out on a long trip, traveling only with his dog as his loyal companion. When our father retreated into solitude to spend his days in prayer, his dog was the one taking care of him; he brought food to his master from a remote monastery, which the monks there had bound on his back.

One day, on his way to his master, the dog encountered two Jews herding cattle. These Jews were from that tribe of Jews that had fled the destruction of Jerusalem under Vespasian and Titus and had migrated to Ethiopia. Now, when the Jews saw the dog with the food on his back, they desired to take it from him. The dog tried to escape, but in doing so the food fell off his back into a river.

The dog was ashamed to disappoint his master and did not dare to return to him. Rather, he was hiding in nearby huts. The leader of the Jews, Zena Gabo, found the dog and wanted to take care of him. He provided the dog

with milk and bread thinking he would appreciate the food, however, the dog refused to touch any of it. Zena Gabo went to our father Gäbrä Iyäsus asking for an explanation. The saint told him, the dog would not eat the food of humans, as dogs only eat human excrements and drink turbid water. Also, the dog was full of hate and disgust towards the Jews, who deny the true faith, who have a heart of stone, and who would 'take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs' (Mk 7:27). Thus, it shows how the Jews have become like the dogs, and the dogs have become like the sons of God.

Zena Gabo was surprised and asked our father again, "Why will he not take the food?". Our father replied, "How can he accept your food when you have no religion?" Zena Gabo inquired, "But is my religions inferior to that of the dog?", which Gäbrä Iyäsus confirmed, stating, "Yes, your religion is worse than that of the dog, the dog's religion is superior to yours!" And through these words Zena Gabo was convinced that the Christian faith was superior to Judaism, he asked our father Gäbrä Iyäsus to baptize him in the name of the Holy Father.

Also he asked the saint to heal his daughter, who was possessed by a snake demon in her stomach. Gäbrä Iyäsus successfully cast the snake from the girl and she received baptism like her father. After this, their entire group converted to Christianity, filling our father Gäbrä Iyäsus with joy and happiness.

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