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THE QUESTION OF JEWISH IDENTITY AND ETHIOPIAN JEWISH ORIGINS

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“All families are presumed to be of legitimate descent . . . if a man casts aspersions upon other people’s descent, alleging that that certain families or individuals are of blemished descent or calling them bastards, there is justified suspicion that he himself might be blemished or bastard. . . .”

———Rambam, *Mishneh Torah* 19:17

Before the opening of the recent international conference on Ethiopian Jews held at the University of Addis Ababa*, where I delivered the keynote address, Ethiopia’s Ambassador to Israel rightly highlighted to the media that Ethiopia and Israel are two ancient, interconnected lands. In fact, these two historic lands have an amazing array of cultural legacies in common.¹

The questions of Jewish identity and of Ethiopian Jewish origins are both “hot topics” these days. How do they relate to each other? When offering answers, we ought never to lose sight of a guiding axiom. Attempts to define “Who Is A Jew” from a historical, halachic, or genetic perspective, and to apply these definitions to various Jewish groups, should not be allowed to distract from what as Jews—white, black, or brown—unites us: the central concern for the great revelation on Mount Sinai from which our common values ensue. We are one people, and let us be proud of our unity through the beauty of our diversity.

Huge groups that contend with each other over questions of religious identity, such as Sunnis versus Shiites, or evangelical versus mainstream Protestants, can afford this folly.

But when the tiny Jewish population militates against itself in judging who is a genuine Jew and who is a counterfeit Jew, the noise of self-destructiveness pollutes the Jewish future. This is no Puccini opera. World Jewry cannot afford to go further down the road of separating Jews into real Jews and aspirational Jews—first and second-class Jews. Such a separation effort would have been a strange anathema to our Jewish prophets. Rambam/Maimonides considered it a transgression to subject a Jew to such identity examination.

The *aliyah* of Ethiopian Jews to Israel was a most remarkable event in modern Jewish history that heightened the sense of ingathering and Jewish unity.² The spectacle of pinkish-white-skinned Ashkenazim of post-industrial Jewish culture, light-brown-skinned Sephardim and Middle Eastern Jews of medieval culture, the varied but often medium-brown-skinned Yemenite Jews of late Second Temple period culture, and the coffee-brown-skinned Beta Israel Ethiopians of First Temple period culture all working together and sharing the burdens and exaltations of defending the Jewish homeland—all this deflated the pernicious international charge that Israel is racist. This extraordinary mosaic (or Mosaic!) was like some ancient prophecy coming true.

But human nature's ingrained xenophobia still threatens to tear apart this precious Jewish unity. Negative reports and pictures of Ethiopian Jews have in the recent years become all too familiar. The story of their ancient Jewish roots, their long history and culture, and their place within world Jewry have been presented as the chronicle of an anomalous or enigmatic people by those who know the subject of Ethiopian and Jewish history only superficially.

Even after the wave of those two great *aliyah*—Operations Moses and Solomon—the demands by Israel's Ethiopian' community for complete recognition remain beclouded. The religious authorities have been forthcoming—witness the 1973 Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's historic responsa to Rasar Hazi Ovadia pertaining to the Beta Israel as well as the more recent strong letter in support of even the *Falas Moira*, converts to

Christianity who want to return to Judaism, by Sephardic Chief Rabbi Amar.³ Yet many secular academics and politicians, with half-baked theories about Judaism, have been studies in ambivalence and resistance.

What then can we legitimately say about Jewish identity in relation to the Beta Israel, the Jews of Ethiopia? What is the standard by which we measure Jewish authenticity? On my first visit to a synagogue when I arrived as a student in the USA, some people greeted me with: “Are you Jewish? But you do not look Jewish!” I am sometimes still asked that question, and sometimes respond to the delight of everyone: Ethiopia [land of Black People] is mentioned in the Bible over 50 times, but Poland not once.

Who is a Jew? Shall we perhaps decide by clothing attire, musical modes, knowledge of Hebrew language and its ancient pronunciations, ethnicity? What about food preferences? The foods of the Mishnah and Talmud are those Yemenites and Ethiopians eat—figs, etrogs, pomegranates, lentils, fenugreek, lamb, fish, and pita like bread, not borscht, bagels, braided *hala*, or gefilte fish! Attempts to define Jewishness in terms of culinary and many other ethnographic criteria risk being either trite or absurd.

As Steven Kaplan has written, “studies of Beta Israel can be crudely divided between those that have sought to understand them primarily as Ethiopians . . . and those *that have viewed them as Jews*.”⁴

A leader of the first camp was the Anglo-German Ethiopisant E. Ullendorff, according to whom the Beta-Israel’s “so-called Judaism is merely the reflection of those Hebraic and Judaic practices and beliefs which were implanted on parts of south-west Arabia in the first post-Christian centuries and subsequently brought into Abyssinia.” [*Ethiopia and the Bible*, OUP, London, 1968, p.117] Wolf Leslau propounded somewhat similar views, namely that Ethiopian Judaism has an accidental, adventitious lineage; that it is of much more recent origin than the Ethiopians themselves believe, arriving long after the Biblical period; and that it was something like a subversive cult that persisted despite an official program to destroy it (cf. *Coutumes et Croyances des Falachas*, Paris 1957.)

In parallel fashion, Maxime Rodinson of the Ecoles des Hautes Etudes argued that the marbling of mainstream Ethiopian culture with strong Jewish elements was not from any early communication between Judea and Ethiopia, but rather from nothing more than a nationwide attempt to venerate and imitate the Hebrew Bible.⁵

Rodinson's treatment of the deep Judaizing element in Ethiopian culture is analogous to a linguist arguing that, though Romanians speak a Latin language despite their Slavic milieu, this is historically inauthentic masquerade, produced by an artificial and deliberate state policy to imitate the glory of Rome. Or, as Kay K. Shelemay does, [*Music, Ritual, and Falasha History*, Michigan State University Press, 1989] to argue that they are of Christian origin because their religious chants are related to those of the Ethiopian Church', is equivalent to make an analogy from musicology that certain Jewish denominations make use of church-style organs and choirs in their services, and sing western music like Christians are therefore of Christian origin. Some synagogues have cantors who sing religious songs in operatic style. Other Jews sing Hebrew songs set to the tunes George Frederic Handel, or shake and wave like the Shakers and early Quakers when they pray. Are we then to conclude that Occidental Judaism is not deeply rooted, and that European and American Jews typically are converts from Christianity since much of western Jewish music—in style, melodic lines, rhythm, and their weaving at prayers—is hardly different from that of the Christian West?

I shall allude to some of the theories that I consider questionable propounded by recent Ethiopisants: that the Beta Israel are not any different from other Ethiopians; that they are Christian converts to some form of quasi-Judaism; that the nomenclature *Falasha* does not go back to before the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries; that Ayhud "Jewish" is a derogatory term to identify Christian heretics; that they are Ethiopians who do not know Hebrew but speak the Amharic and Agaw languages; that they do not represent "normative" Judaism; that overall some aspects of their history are inventions "intended to liken their history to that of other Jewish groups; that they only recently started identifying themselves as "Ayhud- Jewish." At any exhibit at the Jewish Museum of

New York in 1989, it was explicitly stated that they do not have the *talit*, or the Mogen David, or even the Torah, or that they do not know the Jewish holidays of Hanukkah or Purim, know Hebrew, or have the Oral tradition.

Firstly, all of us who belong to the Jews of Ethiopia are of course Ethiopians very proud and loyal Ethiopians. Ethiopia is one of those amazing multicultural societies which Erasmus's disciple, Damiao da Goes, in his fascinating treatise Fides, Religio, Moesque Aethiopum, rightly described in the 16th century as a land where diverse religions flourish and diverse peoples live in peace together. Jews in Ethiopia are lucky to hail from a country that has for centuries respected and venerated Jewish culture and tradition.

The question is not whether the Beta Israel are Ethiopians but whether they are also Jews. They are Jews no more and no less than other Jewish groups in different regions of the world. More than that, they are a people who have in fact preserved some lost ancient Jewish customs. For instance, contrary to the superficial claim, they do have and wear the *talit*, called *talyat* in Ge'ez (from which the Amharic *natala* comes) with *sisiot* but without the 'arba gedilim or four corner large *sisiot*. A lost Jewish custom preserved in Ethiopia is the regular or daily wearing of the *talit* as Yemenite Jews also did in Yemen.

They of course have the Torah, but in the codex form—which is an ancient form of transmitting the manuscripts. Like the Greek version of Alexandrian Jews and the Aramaic version of Syro-Palestinian and Babylonian Jews, the Holy Books are in a translation but in an important language called Ge'ez, closely related to Hebrew and Aramaic. Apart from the fact that such symbols exist in Ethiopia called “the Star of Solomon”, the 1989 exhibitors seemed to have little idea about the magical origin and recent history of the Mogen David as a Jewish symbol.

Elsewhere, it has been published that they do not know the holidays of Purim and Hanukkah, they do not have the Talmud, and have any idea of the Oral Law. They know the Book of Esther very well, and have the Fast of Esther. They might not light

Hanukkah candles, but they know the history of the Maccabeans and the events surrounding the Jewish victory over Antiochus even better than other Jews. For, until modern times, the works that contain the story, especially *I Maccabees*, were lost to the rest of Jewry and survive among others in Ge'ez, Classical Ethiopic, as part of the “canon.”

They call themselves Beta Israel, as Italian Jews also call themselves *Hebraeo*. The Beta Israel speak two Semitic languages—Amharic and Tigrinya. They also speak Agaw, just like other Jews worldwide who speak the local vernacular as well, like the Germanic Yiddish or the Sephardic Jews Ladino, a Romance language. Few Jews worldwide, outside the learned rabbis and except in Yemen, knew or spoke much Hebrew or Aramaic in pre-modern times. As for the Talmud, how many Jewish communities really knew much about it outside the learned few? A huge work with millions of words copied by hand on expensive parchments, it was possessed by the few wealthy who could afford to have it. Even among the learned, some medieval scholars complained that they did not have access to parts of the Babylonian Talmud. On the other hand, the Book of Jubilees, which exists in complete only in Classical Ethiopic/Ge'ez, contains elements of some of the earliest Jewish Oral tradition. Many Ethiopian Jewish books, whatever their provenance, such as *Te'ezaza Sanbat* and others have many stories and traditions that are not directly from the Written Law.⁶

Robert Hetzron, my late colleague and co-editor of the *Journal of Afroasiatic Languages*, had once proposed that the term *Falasha* comes from Agaw. I believe it comes from *Falasi*, *falasiyan*, from the Ge'ez root *falis*—to immigrate, to be uprooted, and to be exiled. *Falasiyan* is an ancient Classical Ethiopic Ge'ez term well-attested as a descriptive term for Jewish exiles related to the words *galut*, *golah*. Among the numerous references in the Ge'ez Bible, one example is: *Daqiqomu la-falasiyan yahansu beta Egzi*, “The children of the *falasiyan* will build the House of the Lord.” (Ezra 4:1).

The highly loaded statement that is often thrown around is that, in medieval Ethiopia, *Ayhud* (Jews) was a derogatory term, used to identify Christian heretics, but rarely, if

ever, to designate Jews.⁷ Going back to the early Church, the term “Jew” has been used as a derogatory term, even in Christian West, to describe unbelievers. In both Ethiopia and western Christendom, the term was an equivocal word, and fully applied to real Jews as well. In the Ethiopic Chronicles, it is usually *kama ayhud* —“like the Jews”—that describes the Christian heretics. It should be added that neither in western or eastern Christian tradition are the Jewish people identified or seen as heretics.

In both Ethiopian and Jewish tradition, scribal work is regarded as a job, not a religion. If some of the Beta Israel manuscripts were copied by Christian scribes, that is no different from the fifteenth and sixteenth century Flemish or Italian Talmud printers who were Christians. If some of their literature was influenced by Ethiopic or Arabic literary sources, that is no different from Arabic *Sefer Hayashar* or the *Maqamat of El-Harizi*.

Then there is the claim that Ethiopian Judaism is not *normative* Judaism. Is Reform Judaism or Conservative Judaism normative? What about Moses and Aaron? They were nowhere in the Bible referred to as Jews. There are too many people, with half-baked knowledge of Judaism throwing around this word “normative,” first coined by a distinguished Christian Harvard scholar of Judaism, George F. Moore.⁸ Throughout history, in particular during the intertestamental period, there were many Jewish sects which gave rise to different schools of thought and some diverging trends of religious practices. We should not be forcing Ethiopian Jews into a procrustean bed of Jewish “normativity” at the same time that we are ceasing to apply such a notion to first-century Palestinian Judaism.

Nor is there evidence that the Beta Israel is a deviant splinter group of Ethiopian Christians who apostasized during in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[cf. T. Tamrat. “Some Notes on the Fifteenth-Century Stephanite ‘Herese’ in the Ethiopian Church,” *Rassegna di studi etopici* XXII (1966) pp.103ff.] There were individuals who became Jews and Jews who became Christians, but there is nothing attesting to the apostasy of any one large group of Ethiopians who converted *en masse* from Christianity

to Judaism. Ethiopian Christianity has had its heretics—for example, the Stephanites—but this is a country that has never been without its Jews.

We take the self-claim of most Jewish groups from the West for granted. We do not scrutinize their identity or the authenticity of their history. Would most Jews indeed tolerate such a far-reaching and unsettling ethno-religious inquisition into their origins?

Although it is often thought that Ethiopian Jews are a Judaic group somewhat similar to the Karaites or the very ancient Samaritans, because of their strict adherence to the letter of the Torah, it is wrong to compare them to these groups. It is also wrong to assume that they are a totally biblical Jewish group lacking the Oral Law because the Talmud is not available to them. [cf. Ullendorff, *op.cit.* p.116] To be sure, the Ethiopian Jews' *weltanschauung* is wholly pivoted on the teachings of the Torah or the Hebrew Bible which they regard as the word of God, and whose precepts they keep very stringently. Nonetheless, as evidenced by the reference above to traditional literature, they never knowingly rejected the Oral Law and can't be regarded as perpetrators of unorthodoxy.

The Ethiopian Jewish belief in the divine origin, supremacy, and authenticity of the Law and in the coming Messiah and the Messianic Era; their eschatology and vision of the Day of Judgment; their faith in reward and punishment and the resurrection of the body; their theology, which is full of angelology and demonology; their asceticism; and their possession of post-biblical works such as the *Book of Enoch* and *Book of Jubilees*—all reflect their knowledge of much more than the Written Law.

Moreover, the basic tenets of the Ethiopian Jews' beliefs parallel the great Rambam's "(thirteen) chief principles of our faith." As he says, those who accept these principles "are then part of that 'Israel' whom we are to love and treat compassionately with kindness and fellowship" (*Heleq: Sanhedrin*, Chapter X).

To say that Ethiopian Jews do not have the Talmud is to propagate half-truths. As the

late Professor Shlomo D. Goiten of the Hebrew University used to point out, it is highly debatable how available and strictly followed the Talmud was outside the Babylonian and Yemenite Jewish communities who lived by it throughout the centuries, except among certain leading, learned Sephardic and Ashkenazi scholars and rabbis.⁹

The Talmud was an Aramaic commentary on the *Mishnah*. Aramaic continued in use for centuries among Yemenite Jews who to this day starting at age four fluently recite in Aramaic the Torah and other Biblical books every Sabbath and at holidays. Outside the Yemenite community, the language was primarily known only to a handful of scholars, Jews and Christians alike, and a few scholarly rabbis [[See S. Morag, Ha-evrit S'bafi Yehudey Teyman](#) [The Hebrew of Yemenite Jews], Jerusalem, 1963; cf. also [Pronunciation of Hebrew, in Encyclopedia Judaica XIII.](#)] The Talmud was certainly was no Harry Potter book, so to say, and with the exception of the communities mentioned above and certain educated members of the Jewish community in the *golah*. Why single out Ethiopian Jews for not studying or following its principles to the letter?

It is equally wrong to say without qualification that Ethiopian Jews do not know certain Jewish “festivals,” namely Purim and Hanukkah. As a national holiday, the Ethiopians mark Purim by the Fast of Esther. As for Hanukkah, religious Ethiopian Jews know more about the history of what this festival is about than even western religious Jews, because the books of the Maccabees, unknown to Jewry in the west until recent times, were copied and read in Ethiopia for centuries.

There has also been some recent attempts to apply blood types, enzymes, serum proteins, and histocompatibility antigens to the study of Ethiopian and other Jewish minorities. Sometimes, these studies jump from biology to history to argue that the Beta Israel were converts to Judaism and that western Jews alone share the DNA of the ancient Israelites.

Over two thousand years ago, the Jews were an ethnic group—but even then not a perfect one. Since then, Jews have intermingled with many nations and absorbed many

proselytes. I have no difficulty believing that Jews throughout the world today have a good deal of the ancient Jewish genes in their blood. However, belief in the existence of a clear-cut continuity in Jewish racial type or ethnic purity is not what Judaism is about. It is the centrality of concern for the Torah revealed on Mount Sinai and the great values of our heritage that bind us together as Jews.

The ancient Israelites were not a racial unit but a sacral association, called an amphictyony by some scholars. They were a people bound together by a common language, and common territory, similar historical experience, and common consciousness. The Ark of the Covenant was the main sacred cult object and formed the center of worship. They had a primary unit of social and territorial organization, a military tribal kinship structure, socioeconomic clan or endogamous kinship division, and extended family that was then patrilineal. In other words, the father had to be an Israelite, contrary to the more recent halachic ruling—now the subject of so much controversy—that defining a Jew as the child of a Jewish mother.

The Yemenite Jews share with the Ethiopians a complexion that, even at the time the Talmud was compiled, was considered “typically Jewish.” Thus a certain *Mishnah* about leprosy declares: “The children of Israel . . . behold they are like askro’a [boxwood or ebony], neither black [like a Cushite] nor white [like a Germani], but of intermediate [color] . . . An intensely bright spot appears dull on a German, a dull spot bright on a Cushite” (*Mishnah, Tohoroth, Negaim* 2:1ff.). Does this *halachic* criterion mean that only Yemenites, some Persians, Beta Israel, B’nai Israel or other Jews of intermediate skin color are legitimate? Are converts to be administered the proper skin pigmentation by qualified chemists in accordance with the Talmudic description at their conversion to Judaism? Theories that use race either to denigrate or to glorify Jews are examples what my late friend, the paleontologist Steven J. Gould called “the mis-measure of man.”

Bio-ethnic or racial superiority was not in the prophetic Jewish tradition which considered Jewish choseness strictly from the point of view of the responsibility for

taking the Torah. Throughout history, proselytes were not only welcome but praised, among others by Rambam, as more heroic and praiseworthy than born Jews for voluntarily accepting the yoke of the Torah. Many people (even kings among them such as Izates of Adiabene and possibly Dhu Nawwas of South Arabia) chose Judaism. Some of the great Rabbis are believed to have been converts—perhaps even the great Rabbi Meir.

It is regrettable that so much time and energy still have to be spent defending Ethiopian Jewish identity. My hope is for a future focus on the study of Ethiopian Jewish history and literature without any prejudice. Israelites, Jews, and Ethiopians undoubtedly interacted during many historical periods—the well-known pre-Hellenistic and Hellenistic Red Seafarers and traders; the pilgrims to the Holy land some of whom had even left Ge'ez inscriptions in the Sinai desert; the Axumite soldiers who fought alongside the Judeophile Queen Zenobia; the Bible translators; the armies of King Kaleb that fought against the armies of Du Newwas; the survival of important Jewish literature such as Enoch and Jubilees.

Jews must have come to Ethiopia after the destruction of the First Temple or the Second Temple, in Hellenistic and Roman times, and, possibly, in pre-Solomonic times. Additionally, some Ethiopians converted to the religion of Israel. Ebedmelech (Jer. 38:7f.; 10ff.; 39:16) may have been such a convert.

There is no lack of theories and hypotheses which have been put forward to explain the origin of Ethiopian Jewry: remnants of ancient Israelites, in particular, descendants of the Tribe of Dan; Jews who settled in Ethiopia in post-exilic period, arriving either through Yemen or the Sudan; descendants of the first-born of Judean aristocracy who accompanied Menelik, Solomon's son by Makeda (IK 10:1 ff) who also brought the Tablets of the Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai and Jewish beliefs and practices to Ethiopia; remnants of Jewish or Judaized Ethiopians who rejected Christianity when it became the official religion of Ethiopia; a Hamito-Semitic people who had converted to

some form of Pre-Talmudic Judaism; and more recently, an Ethiopian Christian group that embraced Biblical Judaism about five hundred years ago.

In my view, Jewish contact with the land of Ethiopia, as both legend and history attest, goes back to the First Temple period. From that time onwards, Jews have sought the land of Ethiopia and its South Arabian (Yemeni) colonies both as a commercial venue in peaceful times and as a refuge during the times of war and destruction in the land of Israel. In spite of some scholarly disagreements, a strong case can be made that the names Cush (Gn. 2:13; 10:16ff; Is. 43:3; etc.), Sheba (Gn. 10:7, 28; IK. 10:1ff.; Ez. 27:22f. etc.), and Havilah (Gn. 2:11; 10:7, 29; 25: 18, etc.) refer to parts of northern and western Ethiopia, and indicate ancient Jewish contacts with these lands. Ethiopian legends claim that Jews settled in Ethiopia in King Solomon's time. Certain Oriental Jewish legends claim that the Queen of Sheba donated Ethiopia to King Solomon. According to a certain Midrash, however, the contact goes back even further—to the time of Moses and his Ethiopian wife (Numbers 12:1) Whatever the veracity of such legends, the discovery in Ethiopia of such lost important Jewish literary works like The Book of Enoch and The Book of Jubilees, the strong Jewish theological flavor of the Ge'ez language, and the overall Jewish molding of Ethiopian culture all attest to a long history of interaction.

One must certainly not rule out the possibility of the conversion of some of the indigenous people of Ethiopia to some form of pre-Talmudic Judaism. It is also possible that Ethiopian Jews came through the Sudan to Ethiopia. Yet there is no doubt about the central importance of Jewish immigration from Yemen to Ethiopia from ancient to modern times.

Jewish contact with Ethiopia was fostered throughout Hellenistic times as well as in the first centuries of the Christian period with the well known Red Sea shippers. Christianity itself was brought to Ethiopia by Jewish Christians from Syria and Palestine before the fourth century. Furthermore, the domination of southern Arabia by the Ethiopians, before the rise of Islam, must have been a good cause for the coming of the Jews of Yemen to

Ethiopia.

The Jewish presence in Ethiopia has deep historical roots as world Jewish solidarity, encompassing Jews living in Ethiopia, echoes back to antiquity. Rabbi Akiba reported a visit to Yemen to seek aid from local Jews, and his supposed audience with the Ethiopian ruler.¹⁰ About a hundred-fifty years after Akiba, Ethiopians and Jews, perhaps including Axumite Jews, fought side by side in alliance with Queen Zenobia (c. 263-273), in the Palmyraean war against Aurelian of Rome. The Ethio-Byzantine war in Yemen about 525 C.E. is usually depicted by scholars as a Christian response to a Jewish persecution of Christians. It was more likely a Jewish revolt against Christian authority and missionary activity, in solidarity with the Jews of Babylonia.

Arabian and Ethiopian Jews may have been part of the Prophet Muhammad's earliest inner circle. Yet the ascendancy of Islam accelerated their eclipse. Edwards Gibbon's well-known remark that Ethiopia slept for nearly near a thousand years, forgetful of the world by which it was forgotten, has some truth when applied to the Beta Israel. In the end, together with its Jews, Ethiopia itself became isolated from the rest of the post-Islamic world.

Yet in the ninth century, a special sense of world Jewish spiritual solidarity reemerged as a direct result of the activity of Eldad ha-Dani whose Ethiopian connections are wrongly denied. Eldad's claims about Lost Tribes surviving beyond the rivers of Cush illuminated the horizon for medieval Jews as well as inspiring medieval Christian legends about Ethiopian King 'Prester John.'¹¹

The fact is that today large segments of the Jewish population cannot even count their ancestral lineage (as Yemenite Jews, by the way, do) beyond two or three generations. Jews and ancient converts to Judaism have lived all over the world for over two thousand years, and they should be the last to defend unrealistic Jewish authenticity or the concept of non-existing racial or ethnic purity or uniformity.

The insult and hurt many Jews feel today because of the Who-is-a-Jew question should be replaced by a discussion of the rich multidimensional aspect of today's Jewish people. In a world full of hate and prejudice, Israel—the haven in our own time for 100,000 Ethiopian Jews—can and must become an example “a light to the nations” now and in the twenty-first century of harmonious coexistence of culturally diverse peoples. That is what our ancient great prophets foretold: they expect nothing less than that from us who claim to be their heirs.

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¹ Ephraim Isaac, "Is the Ark of Covenant in Ethiopia?" *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (July-August 1993), p. 60; Isaac, "An Obscure Component in Ethiopian Church History," *Le Muséon*, Vol. 85, Nos. 1-2 (1972), pp. 225-258; Edward Ullendorff, *Ethiopian and the Bible* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

² (Ephraim Isaac, "Jewish Solidarity and the Jews of Ethiopia" in *Organizing Rescue: Jewish National Solidarity in the Modern Period*, ed. S. I. Troen and B. Pinkus (London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp. 403-420.

³ Rabbi Amar wrote, "And I have already examined and investigated their Jewishness for a long period of time, and I wrote a long reasoned legal decision, and in it I stated that they are "yehudim gemurim" (completely Jewish), and I also held that after they immigrate to Israel, it is appropriate to arrange for them a "giyur le'khumrah" [a conversion ceremony as a stringency] in order to eliminate all doubt. . . . And I pray that Your Excellency will be privileged that by his hand the downtrodden of Israel shall be gathered, and shall come to Zion joyfully. . . ." Excerpt in translation from a letter from Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Thursday, the 21st day of Iyar (May 29, 2003).

⁴ Steven Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia: From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p. 7.

⁵ Maxime Rodinson, "Sur la question des 'influence juives' en Ethiopie," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Vol. 9 (1964), p. 11.

^{6 6} A. Z. Aelcoly, *Sefer Ha-falalim* (Jerusalem, 1943); J. Halevy, "Excursion chez les Falacha, en abyssinie," *Bulletin de la société de géographie*, Vol. 17 (1869), p. 270. Even some other works found in Classical Ethiopic/Ge'ez contain early Jewish Oral traditions; see, for instance, Ephraim Isaac, *A New-Text Critical Introduction to Mashafa Berhan*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973).

⁷ Cf. Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*, p. 9.

⁸ George Foote Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927).

⁹ See Chaim Rabin, *Liturgy and Language in Judaism* p. 131, in Language and Religious Practice, William J. Samarin, ed. Newbury House Publishers, Rowley, MA p.141; cf. Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, trans. from the Hebrew by Chaya Galai (New York: Basic Books, 1976.)

¹⁰ *Bamidbar Rabba* (Naso) 9:34.

¹¹ (Avraham Epstein, *Eldad ha-Dani* (Pressburg, 1891); Ephraim Isaac, “Prester John,” in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1988).