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A Unique Witness of Betä Esra'el Historiography*

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The Monastic Genealogy of Hoḥ^wärwa Monastery: A Unique Witness of Betä ʿĪsraʾel Historiography*

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Introduction

For a recent study, approximately seventy Betä ʿĪsraʾel manuscripts were examined in order to prepare a first comparative overview of the manuscript tradition of Betä ʿĪsraʾel (often referred to as the Jews of Ethiopia).¹ During

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¹ Dege-Müller 2020. It should be noted that the term Falasha (in its various spellings: Fālaša, Falascha, Falacha, Falascia, Falaxa, Falaschen, etc.) has commonly been used to refer to the Betä ʿĪsraʾel in the past. The term is considered derogatory by the group and should be avoided (cf. Quirin 1992, 11). The term goes back to a decree of unclear date, but allegedly issued by the fifteenth-century King Yəḥṣaq, which states, 'He who is baptized in the Christian religion may inherit the land of his father, otherwise let him be a *Fälasi*' (Tadesse Tamrat 1972, 201). James Quirin adds that this text was probably composed much later than the events it recorded (Quirin 1992, 12, 217). He also suggests that the manuscript was digitized as Collegetown, MN, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (= EMMML), 7334, fol. 28v (ibid., 217–218). Steven Kaplan adds that there is a marginal note in the manuscript stating, 'Since then, the Beta Israel have been called Falasoch' (Kaplan 1992, 183). As indicated by Tadesse Tamrat, Quirin, and Kaplan, the source is problematic. Judging by its palaeography, and the use of paper instead of parchment, it appears to be considerably younger than the fifteenth century. However, while it was stated that the part about 'been called Falasoch' is a marginal note, in EMMML 7334 it is part of the original text. Another term in use to refer to the group is Kayla. Just as outdated and pejorative as Falasha, it too should be avoided. Both terms are, however, still used in present-day Ethiopia, the term Kayla apparently rather exclusively in areas occupied by the Kəmənt group, in Armaçəho, north-

this process, one in particular immediately attracted attention: Jerusalem, The National Library of Israel, Ms. Or. 87 (henceforth JER NLI Or. 87). Its large dimensions and over ten kilos weight make it an impressive codex in purely physical terms, but it also contains extremely significant texts, and very peculiar scribal features. Several months after studying this manuscript for the first time, it is possible to consider it the most important historical source of the Betä ʿƏsraʾel known to the present day. From a textual and philological point of view, MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (= BnF), Éthiopien d’Abbadie 107 is usually regarded as the most important manuscript of the Betä ʿƏsraʾel.² While this assessment is discussed,³ MS JER NLI Or. 87 may be considered equally important for its historical value.

The manuscript contains the *Orit*, a Gəʿəz term for the Octateuch, as its main text as well as six other texts of varying length. Among these is what may merit to be called the ‘Hoḥ^wärwa genealogy’. This is only the second original piece of pre-twentieth-century Betä ʿƏsraʾel historiography ever discovered, the first being the *Religious Dispute*, published by Wolf Leslau in 1947.⁴ The scarcity of historical sources makes this discovery unique. Furthermore, the monastery it is attesting to, Hoḥ^wärwa, is (one of) the most important Betä ʿƏsraʾel monasteries, located on one of the seven holy mountains of this religious group.

From the current standpoint, MS JER NLI Or. 87 is also unique at another level. No other such manuscript exist about which so many details are known, for instance its whereabouts, various owners, and movements over the decades. In 2010, following the death of its most recent private owner, *Abba Yəşəḥaq Iyasu*, the last high priest of Təḡray,⁵ that latter’s family do-

west of Gondär. Already Antoine d’Abbadie remarked on this regional preference (d’Abbadie 1851, 240), which recent fieldwork in the region supports (Bar Kribus and I visited Armaçəho in October 2019). The term *Ayhud* (Jew) was too often used for heretic Christians and dissidents to be a clear indication for the Betä ʿƏsraʾel (Dege-Müller 2018).

² Since this manuscript contains most of the major Betä ʿƏsraʾel texts, it was also used by most scholars publishing on them, Aešcoly 1951, in general, but especially 12–16; Leslau 1951; Dochhorn 2017.

³ Antoine d’Abbadie commissioned this manuscript to contain the texts that he wanted, as he could not find them in a similar composition anywhere else (d’Abbadie 1859, 119). It is thus not a spontaneous artefact of the Betä ʿƏsraʾel, but an artificial composition; its philological quality is poor above all, and its value and importance should not be set too high (see Dege-Müller 2020, 26, especially n. 93).

⁴ Leslau 1946–1947.

⁵ The definition of ‘high priest’ among the Betä ʿƏsraʾel has not been sufficiently defined. Leslau states, ‘Each important community has a High Priest (*təlləq kabən*). He is chosen

nated the manuscript to The National Library of Israel, the current location of this impressive codex.

Firstly, in the following, the importance of the discovery of this genealogy is to be underlined and the details it contains elaborated upon. The monastic tradition of the Betä ʿƏsraʿel is to be discussed, revealing why Hoḥ^wärwa was such a special monastery, as well as the site of Hoḥ^wärwa itself. In the latter section, the manuscript will be described more thoroughly in its physical terms, and the text of the genealogy will be provided and translated.

Historical Writings of the Betä ʿƏsraʿel

It has been commonplace among scholars working on the Betä ʿƏsraʿel to describe the group as basically illiterate. Literally everybody who ever studied the Betä ʿƏsraʿel has stressed that this religious group has not produced any historiography of its own, but that all their traditions have been transmitted orally. A deeper look into the manuscripts of the Betä ʿƏsraʿel, however, reveals several smaller notes and genealogies that prove this judgment to be false.⁶ In general, it is argued elsewhere, there is a category of small-sized manuscripts containing the most original writings of this group—their prayers—all of which attest to the literacy of the Betä ʿƏsraʿel.⁷ These small-sized manuscripts also contain texts of special importance to the group, frequently containing a liturgical use, such as *Ardəʿt* ('The Disciples', in its

from among the priests after his character and his learning have been examined' (Leslau 1951, xxiv). Then he continues, 'If there is a monk in the village he takes over the office and functions of the High Priest' (ibid.). Henry A. Stern remarked that the Betä ʿƏsraʿel had three high priests, one in each of their major provinces, Q^wara, Dämbəya, and Armačəho (Stern 1862, 249). It is not clear at which point in time the Betä ʿƏsraʿel community in Təgray was established, nor when they had the position of high priest. There are only few studies of the Betä ʿƏsraʿel in Təgray, such as by Ḥaim Rosen (Rosen 1987), and by Giovanni Ellero (cf. Ellero 1948; Ellero 1995; Taddia 2005; Dore et al. 2005), all of which do not shed light on these two questions. After the *aliyah*, the Betä ʿƏsraʿel mass migration to Israel mostly in the 1980s and 1990s, the present-day situation in Israel is the following: 'the religious leadership of the community is composed mainly of priests and their disciples. One of the priests is recognized as the supreme religious leader of the community, the *liqä kabənat*—High Priest, literally "head of the priests"' (Kribus 2019a, 87).

⁶ Several shorter genealogies (religious and biological) have been found, a list of guests who contributed to a wedding gift, and short magic prayers, for example a protection against snake-bite, see Dege-Müller 2020, 25.

⁷ Dege-Müller 2020, 23–26.

Betä Ǝsraʾel version; CAe 3945),⁸ *Təʾəzazä sänbät* ('Commandment of the Sabbath'; CAe 2436), *Sabəʿtä Sänbät* ('[Liturgy of] the Seventh Sabbath'; CAe 5874), *Mäṣḥafä fəlsātu läʾAbba Abrəḥam* ('Testament of Abraham'), *Mäṣḥafä fəlsātu läʾAbba Yəṣḥaq* ('Testament of Isaac'), *Mäṣḥafä fəlsātu läʾAbba Yaʿqob* ('Testament of Jacob'),⁹ *Nägära Muse* ('Colloquy of Moses'; CAe 5873), *Gädlä Aron* ('Life of Aaron'; CAe 1422), and *Motä Muse* ('Death of Moses'; CAe 2024).

As noted above, Leslau published the *Religious Dispute* in 1947, which has been proposed as the first or earliest original piece of history written by the Betä Ǝsraʾel.¹⁰ The dispute assumedly occurred between a member of the Betä Ǝsraʾel who had converted to Christianity, and the Betä Ǝsraʾel religious leadership. The controversy was over the unity or trinity of God.

The whole dispute took place in the wake of the activities of the Protestant missionary Johann Martin Flad, who had established a school and missionary station in Ğända, in Dämbəya, in 1860.¹¹ Over a very brief period he had been successful in acquiring his first converts. The latter suffered greatly from the persecution of their former co-religionists. Flad describes many such events in his reports. He also refers to a dispute about the appropriateness of ritual sacrifice, one of the defining features of the Betä Ǝsraʾel. In reaction to being shunned by the Betä Ǝsraʾel community, one of the converts swore by the life of Emperor Tewodros that the Betä Ǝsraʾel must abolish the practice of conducting sacrifices until it was proven to be in accordance with Scripture. As a result, the Betä Ǝsraʾel were prohibited

⁸ The *Ardəʾt* exists in three versions, two Christian versions, a short (CAe 3943) and a long one (CAe 3944), and one Betä Ǝsraʾel version (CAe 3945). In the Christian versions Jesus Christ teaches his disciples, while in the Betä Ǝsraʾel version it is Moses who is talking to his followers. Reference is provided here to the CAe numbers of texts, the *Clavis Aethiopica* (CAe), which has been developed within the digital research environment *Beta maṣāḥəft*, an ongoing repertory of textual units attested in Gəʿəz literature. It allows to refer unambiguously to a specific text with its CAe number. All textual units can be filtered on <https://betamasaeft.eu/works/list>.

⁹ *Gädlä Abrəḥam*, CAe 5871; *Gädlä Yəṣḥaq*, CAe 4063; *Gädlä Yaʿqob*, CAe 4060.

¹⁰ Cf. Kaplan 1992, 131. In the twentieth century a few additional historical notes and texts were written by members of the group, such as by Tāʾammərat Amanuʾel (published by Leslau 1974), or by Asres Yayah 1995 and others.

¹¹ Ğända was formerly the site of a sizable Betä Ǝsraʾel settlement; it served, from 1860 to 1940, as the headquarters of the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews, which was aimed primarily at converting the Betä Ǝsraʾel to Christianity, with Flad being their head missionary in the region (Kaplan 1987, 29). I visited the place in October 2019. Parts of the original buildings are still visible. Most of it has been turned into a modern school, however.

from observing this practice until the matter was brought before the authorities.¹² A similar account of a religious dispute was reported by the Jewish scholar Joseph Halévy.¹³ According to Flad the dispute took place in 1862, according to Halévy in 1864.¹⁴

More confusion is encountered when observing the manuscript containing the dispute, and its additional information. Leslau states that the manuscript is part of the Griaule collection in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, and '[t]o judge from the final words of the text, the document was written at the time of Menelik the Second [r.1889–1913]'.¹⁵ Stefan Strelcyn, who catalogued that part of the Griaule collection, notes that the dispute is found in MS BnF Éthiopien 597 (Griaule 289).¹⁶ He quotes a notebook of the Mission Dakar–Djibouti (MDD), stating that the manuscript contains '[é]tudes d'un falacha, écrit par *Tamayet de Wallaqā* pour la MDD. Gondar. 20 nov. 1932'.¹⁷ Strelcyn gives the 'carnets MDD' (the notebooks of the MDD) as the source for the information about the scribe. Marcel Griaule was the leader of the MDD which crossed Africa from west

¹² Flad 1863; Flad 1922, 119–121; Kaplan 1987, 36. Swearing by the death of a king, in this case Tewodros (በ ቲዎድሮስ ይሙት, *bä Tewodros yämut*), was a serious act. The Betä ʿEsräʾel monks, on the other hands, instantly excommunicated the converts (Flad 1863, 13; Quirin 1992, 156–157).

¹³ Flad 1922, 119–121; Halévy 1877, 246–248. Quirin quite convincingly supports the year 1862 (Quirin 1992, 277, n. 244). After all Flad already published a report on this in 1863, and was eyewitness to the events.

¹⁴ Leslau himself reports of having heard stories about such controversies during his research among the Betä ʿEsräʾel, 'among others, the Falasha monks of Ačäрге, in the province of Saqalt (Begemdär)' spoke to him of a dispute (Leslau 1946–1947, 72).

¹⁵ Leslau 1946–1947, 71.

¹⁶ In his catalogue of the Griaule collection, Strelcyn gives a description of a manuscript that matches the text edited by Leslau (Strelcyn 1954, 179–180). However, Leslau describes the manuscript thus: 'It has the class-mark: Griaule, Amharique, côte provisoire 329; contains five folios, written on two columns' (Leslau 1946–1947, 71, n. 3). This does not match MS BnF Éthiopien 597, which has sixty folia and is written in one column only. As Strelcyn also identifies this manuscript as the source for Leslau's edition in his catalogue, it appears rational to follow him. The manuscript is accessible online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10029966z>.

¹⁷ Strelcyn 1954, 180. Wälläqa is a village just outside of Gondär, on the road leading to the north (Sämen Mountains, Aksum). It used to be inhabited by Betä ʿEsräʾel, but, after their mass migration to Israel, local Christians took over the village. It is, however, still taken to be a 'Falasha' or Jewish village, and a spot for tourists to buy 'traditional Falasha pottery' as souvenirs.

to east in 1931–1933.¹⁸ Griaule had special interest in the Betä ʿƏsraʿel, and was certainly aware of Halévy’s, and perhaps also Flad’s descriptions. It can be assumed that he commissioned the text about this religious dispute to be written down for him. The fact that the text is written in a European paper notebook, instead of a traditional parchment manuscript, supports this theory.

If the information, that the text was copied for Griaule in 1932, is to be trusted, as well as taking into account that the text refers to Emperor Mənilək II, one is left with the assumption that it was not written down ad hoc by the scribe, but that he copied a currently unknown *Vorlage*. The notebook also contains other interesting texts, which have not been studied so far—in which case it would be interesting to know if a *Vorlage* exists or not.¹⁹

¹⁸ The full name was Mission ethnographique et linguistique Dakar–Djibouti, and indeed their major interests were ethnographic and linguistic studies. Especially in Gondär, where they collected a lot of artistic samples and bought over three hundred manuscripts and magic scrolls, see Bosc-Tiessé and Wion 2005.

¹⁹ Strelcyn lists two other texts, ‘Notes autobiographiques’ and ‘Prières falachas’, both in Amharic (Strelcyn 1954, 179–180). It seems, however, to be only one additional text, divided into several chapters, covering fols 10r–46v. It is compiled in the form of an autobiography of an important Betä ʿƏsraʿel priest, Bərhan Barok. Though the genre of the text is an autobiography, the chapters treat the family history of the writer, the weekly prayers of the Betä ʿƏsraʿel (from Sunday to the Sabbath), the traditional school curriculum, ceremony of the ordination of a priest, and monastic life of the Betä ʿƏsraʿel monks described in relation to the life of the writer. Similarly, he mentioned places such as Amba Gʷalit (Täklä Haymanot) and Qärn Amba (personal communication with Sisay Sahile, Hamburg, 15 April 2020). Both Amba Gʷalit and Qärn Amba are known monastic centres of the Betä ʿƏsraʿel (see Kribus 2019a, 207–213, 256–272). Qes Bərhan Barok, the protagonist of the autobiographical notes, was the son of *Abba* Barok Adhənän (also mentioned in the text), the founder of the most prestigious dynasty of religious leaders of the Betä ʿƏsraʿel (to this day it remains the most prestigious religious family of the group). The text (fol. 45r) narrates how *Abba* Barok Adhənän lived as a monk (‘virgin’) at the monastery of Qärn Amba. He dreamt three visionary dreams, in which God told him to return to a normal life, marry, and have children—which he did. Despite his advanced age, he had many sons and daughters. This story is very popular among the Betä ʿƏsraʿel to this day (see references in Kaplan 1990a, 74). One of *Abba* Barok Adhənän’s grandsons published a little booklet on his grandfather, which includes the story, with some variations however (see Kribus 2019a, 270–272). It is known that the Barok family moved from Amba Gʷalit to Wälläqa at some point in time. The Israeli Yaʿel Kahana met Bərhan Barok there in 1972 or 1973 (Kahana 1977, 71–72). The paper notebook collected by Griaule is therefore remarkable for two reasons. First, it is an earlier narration of the account of *Abba* Barok’s time as a monk and visions than all versions documented

The dispute is far more elaborate than the Hoḥ^wärwa genealogy, but only surfaced in its entirety due to the exposure of the Betä ʿSra³el to (mostly) Protestant missionaries. The text of the dispute, it appears, was produced at the request of Griaule. The Hoḥ^wärwa genealogy, on the contrary, was written as a result of its protagonists' personal motivations. The genealogy dates to Emperor Yoḥannäs IV's time, who ruled from 1872 to 1889.²⁰

The Special Place of Monasticism in Betä ʿSra³el Society

Several references above have been made to the Betä ʿSra³el monks, which might come as a surprise since monasticism is a rare phenomenon in Judaism. In fact the monastic tradition of the Betä ʿSra³el is one of the most unique markers of this religious group. In the past, they were often viewed as a Christian Ethiopian substratum, but recent research reveals that the Betä ʿSra³el monks played a much more important institutional role for the society than Christian monks.²¹ This was due to the absence of a strong political leadership. The political rulers of the Betä ʿSra³el were referred to by the name Gedewon, which however functioned as a title.²² Many sources talk of their fight against the Solomonic monarchy. The conflicts with Emperor Yəṣḥaq (r.1414–1429/1430) were particularly devastating for the Betä ʿSra³el rulers, and their political authority vanished.²³

so far related directly by *Abba* Barok's son. Secondly it indicates that the Barok family had resettled already in the 1930s. Griaule's manuscript is a very important source for the history of the Betä ʿSra³el, even beyond the *Religious Dispute*, and merits an in-depth study, which we will hopefully carry out in the future.

²⁰ The genealogy refers only to ሳጢ : የሐንስ : መንግሥት : ('during Emperor Yoḥannäs's reign'). Ethiopian history saw four kings by the name of Yoḥannäs on the throne. The codicological and palaeographical evidence leads one to suspect it was either Yoḥannäs III, who briefly ruled for a year in 1840, and again in 1844/1845, or Yoḥannäs IV, who ruled 1872–1889. The latter appears the most likely.

²¹ Monks are called *mānäk^wäse* (or *mānokse*) from the Amharic term and Gə³əz word. The word *mānañ* is used for monks living in solitude or as hermits, it is also Amharic, and refers to ascetic or anchorite (see Kribus 2019a for a more detailed analysis of Betä ʿSra³el monks). The JewsEast project (www.jewseast.org) focuses on the study of the Betä ʿSra³el monasticism, with an important contribution by Bar Kribus (Kribus 2019a); other publications include Kribus and Krebs 2018; Kribus 2019b; Dege-Müller 2020. Emanuela Trevisan-Semi presented an in-depth analysis of the difference between Betä ʿSra³el priests and monks (Trevisan Semi 1987).

²² See Abbink 1990, 427; Quirin 1992, 333 (Index).

²³ Abbink 1990, 428.

It was at this point, apparently, that monks gained in importance: they were the most learned,²⁴ and consequently acted as the highest religious authority, leading other clerics and consecrating new priests and *mäsqid*,²⁵ and were also in charge of leading the community.²⁶ The monks were so successful in their position that ‘Falasha religious life not only survived their political decline in the early fifteenth century, but appears to have even enjoyed a brief “golden age” during which important religious texts were either composed or adapted from Christian literature’.²⁷

The traditional education of priests and monks was very similar, as were the roles both groups played—one of the main differences between monks and priests was that priests had to be married in order to be ordained, while monks had to be celibate.²⁸

²⁴ Shelemay 1989, 79, ‘monastic training provided a good education and prestige, most Beta Israel priests studied with the monks’.

²⁵ The Betä ʿƏsraʿel term for ‘synagogue’ or ‘prayer house’.

²⁶ ‘[The Betä ʿƏsraʿel] clergy, especially the monks and priests were not only the paramount ritual experts, but also chief guardians of the community’s historical traditions and beliefs’ (Kaplan 1987, 32).

²⁷ Kaplan 1986, 350.

²⁸ Considerable arguments state that Betä ʿƏsraʿel monks were eunuchs. Several descriptions of the initiation rite of becoming a monk involve castration. The most detailed is from Flad’s German book (Flad 1869a, 33–34, my translation in the following): ‘soon there were heavy outbreaks of physical desire, upon which Aba Zebra [*Abba Šabra*] ordered that all those who wanted to join the community had to become eunuchs—in order to avoid such atrocities in the future’. He describes the education of the novices, and states, ‘Before they are accepted into the order (that is castrated), they are free to return to their families’. He continues to describe the initiation ritual, a huge celebration day, ‘when the deed is done’, with many monks coming from the villages nearby. They pray and drink beer together, they mix the powder of some intoxicating root into the beer of the novice to drug him. As soon as he is unconscious, they perform the castration, which allegedly costs many lives. In the English version of Flad’s book the translator gives only very slight hints about this ritual (Flad 1869b, 30): ‘unholy rites which will not bear description, and which cost many their lives’. D’Abbadie had reported something similar, but less drastic. Maybe he missed out on the actual emasculation part, as he only mentions that the novices consumed some kind of root, which caused infertility, and which made their beards disappear (d’Abbadie 1845). The Betä ʿƏsraʿel priest Asres Yayeh wrote another version on this ritual: ‘It is rumoured that something is placed on the male organ of the candidate for monkhood. Then the candidate is initiated into the monkhood. After the initiation the monk’s face gets transformed. His beard falls off. He becomes a full-fledged ascetic’ (Asres Yayeh 1995, 59). Halévy narrates how the ex-missionary Jean Stella told him in Eritrea ‘that they [the Betä ʿƏsraʿel] mutilated those of their children who were intended to be brought up for a monastic life. I [Halévy] may here state that

The high-ranking position of the monks drastically changed in the late nineteenth century, with the arrival of not only European Christian missionaries, but also of European Jewish emissaries, which led to ‘the increasing incorporation (to varying degrees) of elements of the Rabbinical tradition into Betä ʿƏsraʿel religious life’.²⁹ The monks were the strongest opponents to these foreign influences, vigorously defending the traditional beliefs, but in the end succumbed to the pressure.³⁰ Also the *kəfu qän*, a devastating famine of 1888–1892 caused by rinderpest, the subsequent collapse of agricultural production, plague, locusts, and abnormally hot weather,³¹ had a negative effect on Betä ʿƏsraʿel monasticism.³² Monasticism had almost disappeared by the mid-twentieth century, and only one monk immigrated to Israel, *Abba* Bāyyänä Dämmoze (d.1999). The latter had one novice who was initiated as a monk, *Abba* Abroye Mənase, and who is currently the only monk of the Betä ʿƏsraʿel.³³

subsequent inquiries proved this statement to be groundless, and that it came from Amharic [meaning “Christian”] sources’ (Halévy 1877, 202). The topic of castration of priests exists since antiquity and early times of Christianity and would be too much for this article, see Kuefler 2001; Collins 2013. The visionary dreams of *Abba* Barok Adhənän, mentioned earlier, in which God commanded him to return to secular life, after having ‘lived like a monk [virgin]’, and who, after following the commands, fathered several children, should be understood as a miracle. A miracle worked by God to restore *Abba* Barok Adhənän’s manhood after castration. A similar miracle is found in a *Miracle of Epiphanius of Salamis*, which is contained in the introduction of the text *Təntä haymanot* (‘The beginning of faith’; a study of this text is in preparation). Epiphanius restores the penis of an emasculated man, ወሶቢሃ ፡ ውኅዘ ፡ እስኪት ፡ እምውስተ ፡ ሥጋሁ ፡ ለምቱር ፡ ምስለ ፡ ቈላሕው ።, ‘And in that moment the genitalia came out of the flesh of that who had been cut, along with the testicles’, as in MS Addis Ababa, Capuchin Franciscan Institute of Philosophy and Theology, 013, fol. 4rb, digitized by the Ethiopic Manuscript Imaging Project (EMIP) as no. 667. I want to express my thanks to Steve Delamarter for providing me with a copy of this manuscript.

²⁹ Kribus 2019a, 87.

³⁰ While the monks proved the strongest group among the Betä ʿƏsraʿel to challenge the Protestant missionaries, in the end it was the lack of ‘centralized communal institutions capable of making decisions for the group as a whole, [or] efficient mechanisms for enforcing decisions made at anything other than village level’ (Kaplan 1987, 37).

³¹ ‘Kəfu qän’, *EAE*, III (2007), 376b–377b (R. Pankhurst).

³² Kaplan identifies the monks as one of the most severely affected parts of Betä ʿƏsraʿel society during this famine (Kaplan 1990a, 74). It was also a time of ongoing attacks of dervish troops from Sudan, an overwhelming threat for all of Ethiopia, but especially for the Betä ʿƏsraʿel.

³³ Kribus 2019a, 87.

Abba Šabra—Founder of Hoḥ^wärwa

The monastery of Hoḥ^wärwa stands out among all Betä ʿĪsraʿel monasteries. Its importance is connected to the traditions of the very foundation of Betä ʿĪsraʿel monasticism by *Abba Šabra* in the fifteenth century. The legends regarding *Abba Šabra* are numerous and diverse, but they are all transmitted orally, with no written sources having been handed down to the present.³⁴ D’Abbadie mentions a *Gädlä Abba Šabra* (‘Life of *Abba Šabra*’), but he himself never saw it, and it has not been discovered since.³⁵

Most narrations agree that *Abba Šabra* was a contemporary of Emperor Zärʿa Yaʿqob (r.1434–1468). After which the stories fall into two categories. Some maintain that he was a Christian native of Šäwa, in present-day central Ethiopia, who after having committed a murder went into exile, where he made contact with the Betä ʿĪsraʿel and, at some point, converted and embraced Judaism. Others say that he was a member of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel from the Səmen Mountains.³⁶

The legend continues that he was the father-confessor to none other than Emperor Zärʿa Yaʿqob and that he and one of the emperor’s sons, Šägga Amlak, drew the wrath of the emperor, a religious zealot. When Zärʿa Yaʿqob threatened to execute them, they fled into the wilderness. After several stops on their flight, they finally arrived at Hoḥ^wärwa. The legend talks of a miracle occurring in which *Abba Šabra* and Šägga Amlak became invisible upon the arrival of the emperor’s soldiers.

Abba Šabra spent the rest of his life at Hoḥ^wärwa. He is accredited with having laid down the strict purity laws of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel,³⁷ composing

³⁴ For an overview on the various traditions relating to *Abba Šabra*, see Ben-Dor 1985, 41–45; Kribus 2019a, 117–130.

³⁵ See for example Conti Rossini 1919–1920, 579.

³⁶ Dege-Müller and Kribus forthcoming.

³⁷ The rules are commonly known as *attənkuwī* (literally ‘do not touch me’), and are said to have been established by *Abba Šabra*. The rules mainly concern avoiding physical contact between Jews and members of other groups, and avoidance of food prepared by non-Jews, see for example Stern 1862, 178, or Leslau 1951, xxv–xxvi. If the monks did violate any of these rules they would have to undergo a week-long purification process that involved extensive prayers, regular baths, and eating only uncooked chickpeas. The diet of the monks was very limited in general; Flad remarks, ‘The Falasha monks lay heavy burdens upon themselves in endeavouring to work out a righteousness of their own. They undergo severe fasting and mortifications; many of them retire into the deserts, where they subsist on herbs and roots, and sometimes die of hunger. Many such cases came under my notice during my missionary work in Dshenda [Ġända]’ (Flad

some of their prayer texts,³⁸ teaching the *Orit* to the people, and, finally, introducing monasticism to the community. Although no written version of *Abba Šabra*'s life has been handed down, and though the oral traditions vary to some extent, the story does contain topoi found in many other (Christian) hagiographies, such as his troublesome past (potential murderer?), the conversion of other people (*Šägga Amlak*), the persecution by the authorities, the miracles granted by God, and, especially, becoming invisible. *Abba Šabra* and *Šägga Amlak* are very present in the oral tradition of the community, and frequently featured in the commemorative notes of their manuscripts.³⁹

In his analysis of the legend Jon Abbink calls it a 'nice inversion', that *Abba Šabra*'s first disciple was *Šägga Amlak*, 'son of the fanatical and Orthodox Christian king. Thus they [the Betä ʿĪsraʿel] were expressing the spiritual superiority of their own tradition which could even attract such close kinsman of the enemy king'.⁴⁰ This might also add to the veneration enjoyed by Hoḥ^wärwa: it is a site of victory over the Christian Solomonic kingdom.

The Site of Hoḥ^wärwa

Hoḥ^wärwa, as a location, enjoys a certain mystical fame, being known as the first monastery of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel. Many travellers and scholars have tried to reach it—and only few have succeeded. Expeditions set on reaching Hoḥ^wärwa are uniformly described as challenging and dangerous. There are several reports of travellers planning to visit it, who were prevented to do so due to security constraints.⁴¹ Some descriptions of successful visits are ra-

1869b, 30). D'Abbadie reported that the monks were wearing an 'iron hair shirt' ('ont un cilice de fer', d'Abbadie 1845).

³⁸ For example the prayer *Bäqädami gäbrä ʿagziʾabəḥer*, see Hayon 2003, 9.

³⁹ Dege-Müller 2020, 11, 30. Kaplan lists further similar narratives of the Christian monks *Gäbrä Masih* and *Gäbrä Iyäsus*, who also struggled with the normative church, and who are said to have assisted the Jews in various ways (Kaplan 1992, 71).

⁴⁰ Abbink 1990, 434.

⁴¹ D'Abbadie attempted to visit Hoḥ^wärwa, 'je résolu d'aller à Hoharua [...] mais mon projet s'étant ébruité, un de mes amis vint me prévenir que des voleurs de grand chemin m'attendaient au passage' (d'Abbadie 1851, 181). Jacques Fäitlovitch describes how his Betä ʿĪsraʿel friends tried to discourage him from this trip, warning him of the dangers of the area, imminent malaria, and the almost impassable mountains (Fäitlovitch 1910, 84). Halévy travelled twice to this region during 1867–1868, but the first time the insecure situation in the region prevented him from proceeding further (Halévy 1869, 282). On his second trip he managed to reach Ayeq^wa (spelt 'Ayequa' by him, our local inform-

ther obscure, and some points on maps leave the impression that the map-maker did not visit the site in person.⁴² The text of the Hoḥ^wärwa genealogy (see below), however, offers a first original indication about its location, as it states that Hoḥ^wärwa is in Ğanfänkära.⁴³ The district of Ğanfänkära in Armaçəho was in pre-twentieth-century times known for its wild game (elephants, giraffes, buffalo, lions).⁴⁴ Traversed only by secondary trade routes it was far less visited and described more rarely than adjacent regions.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, the information from the genealogy, in combination

ants told us ‘Ayek^wa’), ‘surrounding Mount Hoharoa’, but he ‘was unable to proceed alone to visit the hermits’ (Halévy 1877, 228–229).

⁴² For example Quirin 1992, 42.

⁴³ Fol. 163rc, spelled ‘Ĝani fäkära’. This spelling with an internal *-i-* is also found in Lejean 1867, 364 (where he suggests the spelling ‘Djani-Voggarä’, which is Ĝani Wägära), in d’Abbadie 1845, and in Tā’ammərat Amanu’el’s notes (Leslau 1974, 626). Halévy, who travelled through Ğanfänkära coming from the north, also stated that Hoḥ^wärwa was located in this district (Halévy 1869, 282).

⁴⁴ Extensive description in Rüppell 1840, 141–171.

⁴⁵ One of the first tangible sources to these regions is James Bruce, who writes, ‘At three quarters past eight we came to Werkleva [Wärqləba?] [...]. Above this, too, is Armatchiko [Armaçəho], a famous hermitage, and around it huts inhabited by a number of monks. These, and their brethren of Magwena [Mägina], are capital performers in all disorder of the state; all prophets and diviners, keeping up the spirit of riot, anarchy, and tumult by their fanatical inventions and pretended visions’ (Bruce 1790, 288). Before and after this account, he mentions further place names, ‘Wali’ [Walia?] and the river ‘Ma-haanah’ (?), which all can be found on maps of Armaçəho, near Ğanfänkära—the exact borders of this district are not easy to distinguish (see the maps of Salt 1814, 136; Fäitlovitch 1910, 189; E. A. Survey Group 1941). Further in the chapter Bruce gives another description: ‘Here we have a view of the steep mountain Magwena, where there is a monastery of that name, possessed by a multitude of lazy, profligate, ignorant monks’ (Bruce 1790, 290). It is tempting to associate the heretic monks of Bruce’s description with the monks of Hoḥ^wärwa. Fäitlovich’s map also features ‘Magina’ (Mägina) not far from our region of interest. There is one other reference that might support the hypothesis that Bruce encountered Betä Əsra’el monks at Mägina. Ellero, who described the settlements in Wälqayt, states about Addi Agäw: ‘Centro esclusivamente di Falascià è il già rammentato Addi Agau [Addi Agäw], così detto appunto per la stirpe de’ suoi abitanti, i cui avi vennero da Moghinà [Mägina] (Armacionò [Armaçəho]) ove erano immigrati dal Semién [Səmen]. [...] La tradizione vi ricorda una lunga sosta, in preghiere, dell’anacoreta abbà Sefrà [Abba Şabra], proveniente dal Semién’ (Ellero 1948, 112). The tradition that Ellero reported here, connecting the Betä Əsra’el of Mägina not only to *Abba Şabra*, but stating that he came from the Səmen Mountains, is a strong support of my claim. Thus, if indeed Bruce referred to Betä Əsra’el monks in this area, it would be the first attestation thereof, dating backward the otherwise first reference by d’Abbadie of 1845 to 1790.

with travel routes and old maps, allows for a relatively precise identification of the location of Hoḥ^wärwa.

Before the discovery of the genealogy under study, the place name Hoḥ^wärwa had not been found written in *fidäl*. Thus, very different forms of it can be found in the literature: ‘Koharwa’,⁴⁶ ‘Kokora’,⁴⁷ ‘Hoharewa’,⁴⁸ ‘Hoharwa’,⁴⁹ ‘Hoharua’,⁵⁰ ‘Huharuà’,⁵¹ ‘Hohwara’,⁵² ‘Huharwa’,⁵³ and ‘Ḥaḥarwa’.⁵⁴ As becomes clear, there is no consensus on the correct spelling of Hoḥ^wärwa. Indeed, even our genealogy renders the name in two different spellings: Ḥok^wärwa (ሐክርዋ) and Hoḥ^wärwa (ዮኩርዋ). Thus far, no suggestions regarding its etymology have been made.⁵⁵

The descriptions of the place vary considerably. Flad writes that ‘Hoharewa’ is the cave in which *Abba* Ṣabra lived, in the province of ‘Armatschoho’ (Armaçḥo). He also claims that 200 monks lived in the village around it.⁵⁶ In the same year, Halévy writes that the province of ‘Djanfankara’ (Ġanfänkära) is well populated with Betä Ḥsra²el, who live in eight villages around the mountain ‘Hoharwa’. Some fifteen Betä Ḥsra²el hermits, known for their wisdom and held in great respect also by the Christians, are said to live on the mountain’s summit.⁵⁷ After such a long time, the size of the monastic community at Hoḥ^wärwa is difficult to establish. Presumably, the number fluctuated over the centuries. The reports fall into two groups, those indicating 200–250 monks (Flad and Quirin), and those of only 15–20 monks (Halévy and d’Abbadie).⁵⁸ The latter seem to have more credibility, firstly because Halévy most possibly visited the site himself (or came very close), and, secondly, d’Abbadie’s in-

⁴⁶ D’Abbadie 1845.

⁴⁷ D’Abbadie 1867; 1873.

⁴⁸ Flad 1869b, 32.

⁴⁹ Halévy 1869, 282; 1877, 229–230.

⁵⁰ Faitlovitch 1910, 84.

⁵¹ Conti Rossini 1919–1920, 578. Carlo Conti Rossini here states that d’Abbadie spelled the place ‘Hoḥuärwā’.

⁵² Quirin 1992, 66.

⁵³ Leslau 1974, 626.

⁵⁴ Gobäze Barok 2007, 6.

⁵⁵ I decided in favour of Hoḥ^wärwa, since all but d’Abbadie’s account and the oral tradition use a word with two *h*- sounds.

⁵⁶ Flad 1869a, 33. Quirin gathered oral tradition from two priests who stated that 250 monks lived in the area (Quirin 1992, 118), but the information seems to refer to the period of the Gondärine kingdom (1630s–1769).

⁵⁷ Halévy 1869, 282.

⁵⁸ Flad 1869a, 33; Quirin 1992, 118; Halévy 1869, 282; d’Abbadie 1851, 260–262.

formant, *Abba Yəṣṣhaq*, was the leader of the community and, therefore, in a good position to provide d'Abbadie with correct information.

It has not been established for certain that Flad visited the site himself, or how close Halévy managed to get. The last village that Halévy describes, *Ayeq^wa*, is at the foot of the mountain. Flad does not provide any further descriptions that could help locate the site. The only trustworthy description, containing exact travel points, has been provided by Fäitlovitch. He outlines his travel all the way from the region of *Dämbəya* to the 'deserts' of *Armaçəho* and *Ĝanfänkära* on foot. At one point he writes that they 'tried to reach the village of Meriena [*Märina*]—at the foot of the Hoharua mountains—where a few Falasha families live'.⁵⁹ In *Märina*, Fäitlovitch got into a fight with the Christian villagers, but was eventually able to continue his trek.

On Sunday, 20 September, we left Meriena and reached, after an ascent of 3/4 hour, Hoharua situated on a high plateau by the same name, where the old mesgid [*mäsġid*] of the Falashas is found. The Hoharua mountains, whose high reaching peaks offer the view over the entire provinces of Abyssinia, all the way to Sudan, are a landscape of high attraction, here is the site of the most holy and most cherished memories of the Falasha, and legends connected to its peaks and steep declines abound. Indeed, we still find traces of their former prayer houses, and other attestations of the past of the Jews of Abyssinia. [...] The temple itself, today the most beautiful prayer house of the Falasha, is completely different from the others, an impressive massive structure, in characteristic temple-shape, whose tin roof can be seen from afar. It stands in a little dip of the mountains, in a place called *Loso* [?], and is surrounded by the houses of the priests.⁶⁰

On the next day, Monday 21 September, we visited, accompanied by the high priests, all sites related to the memories and past of the Falasha.⁶¹

He ends his description noting that descending again 'from that mountain [...] turning southwards we passed the nearby Falasha village *Aiqua* [*Ayeq^wa*]',⁶² Fäitlovitch's description gives the impression of a cluster of related sites, that together forms the larger holy site of *Hoh^wärwa*. It is

⁵⁹ Fäitlovitch 1910, 86, my translation.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 88–89, my translation.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 91, my translation.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 91–92, my translation.

striking that most scholars and travellers talk of it as a mountain, and even include it on their maps as stylized mountains. Samuel Baker dubs it ‘Mt. Horrea’, and d’Abbadie names it ‘Mt. Kokora’.⁶³ In his *Géodésie d’Éthiopie* of 1873, d’Abbadie published additional data to his map: he describes ‘Kokora’ as an ‘isolated and flat hill where the great assemblies of Wägara [Wägära] were held’.⁶⁴

Aside from his written description, Fäitlovitch also marked his travel route onto a detailed map, with the district of Ğanfänkära, and points for Hoḥ^wärwa and Ayeq^wa. A few other maps feature places that, when all combined, produce a quite clear location of Hoḥ^wärwa. The German naturalist and adventurer Eduard Rüppell spent almost three weeks in Ğanfänkära, hunting and gathering specimens in 1833–1834. Afterwards, he published a map (1838) as well as an extensive report of his trip (1840). He wrote a stark description of the view from the village of ‘Kulla’ (Q^wälla)⁶⁵ over Ğanfänkära.

In the foreground one isolated volcanic mountain of striking form stands out. It lies south-east of the village Workemider [Wärqämädär] and is called by its inhabitants Ankodib [Anq^wadib]. The four isolated spikes that form its peak are visible from most parts of Kulla, and are the focal point of orientation for the entire region.⁶⁶

Further on he mentions the place ‘Karoa’ (Kärwa), ‘which is 3/4 hour east from Ankodib’.⁶⁷ An impressive mountain like this Ankodib perfectly

⁶³ D’Abbadie 1867 (https://ethiomap.huma-num.fr/public/?id_article=13, accessed on 5 November 2020); Baker 1870, 131. Quirin also marks it as ‘Mt. Hohwara’, the position he suggests is, however, quite off (Quirin 1992, 42).

⁶⁴ D’Abbadie 1873, 419, my translation. Éloi Ficquet was so kind to indicate this reference to me.

⁶⁵ Q^wälla is the designation of one of the different ecological zones of Ethiopia. Still situated in the highlands, it marks lower areas, with warmer (even hot) temperatures, wild animals, and oftentimes dangerous diseases (such as malaria), but also fertile soil, cf. ‘Q^wälla’, *EAE*, IV (2010), 311b–312a (A. Ritler).

⁶⁶ Rüppell 1840, 153, my translation. Indeed Anq^wadib is even visible from the view point in Kossoge (on the modern road connecting Gondär and Däbark) overlooking Ğanfänkära from the highlands of Wägära.

⁶⁷ Rüppell 1840, 166, my translation. Both places are marked on his map of 1838 (Rüppell 1838). In the course of the JewsEast field research, Bar Kribus and I tried to visit Hoḥ^wärwa in October 2019, but unforeseeable heavy rains prevented us from reaching the site. We were however able to conduct interviews at Anq^wadib, Kärwa, and Ayeq^wa and documented an abandoned Betä ʿĪsraʿel cemetery. The area is nowadays almost exclusively populated by Kəmant (Rüppell said the same in Rüppell 1840, 148–149). Our

matches Fäitlovitch's description of 'the Hoharua mountains, whose high reaching peaks offer the view over the entire provinces of Abyssinia, all the way to Sudan',⁶⁸ however, it does not mark Hoḥ^wärwa proper. In combination with two other maps, a more precise picture is attained. The map *Carta dimostrativa della Etiopia (Gondar)*, produced by Enrico de Chaurand, traces Rüppell's travel route and, in addition, 'Mt. Horrea'.⁶⁹ The *1:250,000 Lake Tana E.A.F. No. 541* map published in 1941 contains 'Acqua' (Ayeq^wa) and 'Amba Ancudib' (Anq^wadib Mountain).⁷⁰

The fact that Hoḥ^wärwa was known as a place of special interest, even to those who had no specific interest in the Betä ʿƏsraʿel, becomes clear from the numerous references on the maps. Thanks to the combination of information provided from the Hoḥ^wärwa genealogy, the travel accounts, and maps, its location can be pinpointed with reasonable precision.

The genealogies indicate a connection to the monastery of Hoḥ^wärwa and an unnamed monastery in Wälqayt. Although there are some indications about monastic networks,⁷¹ in the case of Hoḥ^wärwa, this is unfortunately the only reference. Regarding monasteries in Wälqayt, we have no precise information at all. There are several mentions of Betä ʿƏsraʿel monks

informants had not heard of Hoḥ^wärwa, but only Kərwa, which we first took as a corruption of the word, until we realized that it refers to another mountain nearby (which we also surveyed), which we identified as 'Karoa' from Rüppell's account and map. We were directed to another informant, the most knowledgeable Qes ʿƏsäte Täkäle, age 70. He claimed to have some Betä ʿƏsraʿel ancestry himself. In the brief interview he related all the relevant information about Hoḥ^wärwa and *Abba Šabra*. He told us that the synagogue of Hoḥ^wärwa is to be found near the town of Sali, which we saw in the distance, while the cave is a bit further from it; he also indicated to the valley nearby. The cave is protected by thickets and a large serpent; there are also still several hermits, who are however 'invisible' and can only be seen on special days. Not only did his descriptions contain several technical terms that relate directly to the Betä ʿƏsraʿel, but his narration of the invisible hermits also closely resembles that of the *Abba Šabra* legend. For a few photographs of the area see <https://www.jewseast.org/single-post/2019/09/19/A-Monastic-Genealogy-for-Hoharwa-Monastery-%E2%80%93-A-Unique-Piece-of-Bet%C3%A4-C6%8Esra%CA%BEel-Historiography>, accessed on 11 November 2020.

⁶⁸ Fäitlovitch 1910, 88, my translation.

⁶⁹ De Chaurand 1894, Hoḥ^wärwa is marked at an elevation of 1800 m above sea level. I have to express my thanks to Éloi Ficquet, who kindly shared this map with me, which in the future will be available at the Ethiomap website: <https://ethiomap.huma-num.fr/>.

⁷⁰ E. A. Survey Group 1941.

⁷¹ Some are listed in Dege-Müller 2020, 10, n. 19.

in Wälqayt, but no exact location of monasteries given.⁷² This may be due to the fact that the area of Wälqayt suffered severely from the *kəfu qän*.⁷³ There may also not have been many stable monasteries, but rather areas of hermits, or single monks living in normal villages. Like Armaçəho, Wälqayt is, still today, a hinterland, only traversed by secondary trade routes.⁷⁴ Aside from Halévy, the Italian colonial officer Ellero is the only one to have given extensive reports on the villages of Wälqayt: it is due to him there is knowledge of the above mentioned link between Mägina in Armaçəho and Addi Agäw in Wälqayt.⁷⁵

The Protagonists of the Genealogies

The two genealogies contained in the manuscript provide us with a number of personal names, some of which can be identified. The scribe of the first genealogy, *Abba Wärqe*, is the most important among them. The evidence shows that *Abba Wärqe* was a learned and highly esteemed man, who was also wealthy enough to buy such a valuable codex. The first additional text in the manuscript, the *Nägärä Muse*, was written by Wärqe himself which palaeographical evidence makes distinct. Throughout the manuscript are brief annotations in the margins for internal chapter headings and reading advice, most probably written by *Abba Wärqe*, or at least in part. There is one additional note in the manuscript, of which Wärqe is also the author—a short book curse written in a secret script.⁷⁶ This is a rare scribal feature but attests to the high learning of the scribe.

⁷² *Abba Yəshaq* lists the names of monks in Wälqayt, but also remains unclear about the exact places they lived in (Waldman 2018, 290).

⁷³ Kaplan 1990a, 74–75.

⁷⁴ See also Taddia 2005.

⁷⁵ Halévy 1869, 279–282. Ellero 1948, 111–112, also republished in Ellero 1995, 128–129 as in Dore et al. 2005, 111.

⁷⁶ This scribal feature was already presented in Dege-Müller 2020, 33–35, but needs to be update, since I now fully deciphered the note. Ms JER NLI Or. 87, fol. 163rc–va: **ዛቲ፡ ጸ ሪት፡ ዘአባ፡ ወርቁ፡ ዘተሠየጣ፡ በቫሽሽጣ፡ ዘሠረቃ፡ ወዘፈሐቃ፡ በሙሴ፡ ወአሮን፡ ቃል፡ ውጉዝ፡** ‘This is the *Orit* of *Abba Wärqe*, who bought it for 30 *šamma* (pieces of cloth), whoever steals it, and erases it, shall be anathematized by the words of Moses and Aaron.’ Cf. Pankhurst 1962 on the usage of *šamma* cotton cloths as ‘primitive money’. Augustine Dickinson was able to transpose the recto and verso side of this note, which allowed reading a part that could previously not be deciphered (**በቫሽሽጣ**). It also showed variant spellings or spelling mistakes, such as **ዘተሠየጣ** where one would otherwise expect **ዘተሠየጣ**, or **ሻጣ** instead of **ሸጣ**, and **ቁል** instead of **ቃል**. I thank Susanne Hummel, Augustine Dickinson, and Jonas Karlsson for fruitful conversations that were instrumental

Taking all this into account, one may speculate *Abba Wārqe* to have been the head of Hoḥ^wärwa monastery at some point in his life, in the nineteenth century.⁷⁷ The list of his spiritual family extends through his disciples *Abba* Iyob and *Abba* Iyasu. When the famous high priest *Abba* Yəṣṣəḥq Iyasu dictated his memoirs in 1991, he narrated almost exactly the same genealogy of his spiritual ancestors—*Abba* Iyasu, the last name added to the commemorative notes of the manuscript, was his biological father.⁷⁸

All through the manuscript, in its main text, the *Orit*, the names of ‘*Abba* Wārqe and his [spiritual] sons *Abba* Iyob and *Abba* Iyasu’ have been inserted in the commemorative notes in modern pen.⁷⁹ Aside from a few names of Betä ʿƏsraʾel in the commemorative notes of some manuscripts, which reveal their personal names only and rarely anything else, these monastic genealogies are an absolute *novum*.⁸⁰ *Abba* Wārqe not only lists his spiritual genealogy but also that of his biological family, including the line of his father, his mother’s line, and a list of his brothers.

Abba Iyob structured his genealogy in the same way, starting with his biological father’s family, and going on to list his brothers and sisters. He continues by narrating the monastic genealogy of his teacher, repeating Wārqe’s list, and ends with the line of his mother. The last part of his text narrates how he celebrated the *täzkar*, the traditional mourning ceremonies,⁸¹ three times for his spiritual father, *Abba* Wārqe, in two different monasteries.⁸² This is where the word Hoḥ^wärwa first appears, also naming two other heads of the monastery. *Abba* Iyob describes how he sacrificed three cows in Wārqe’s honour and donated a traditional luxurious garment

in reaching these conclusions here. The overall scribal features of the secret script will be studied in an upcoming publication.

⁷⁷ There is another head of Hoḥ^wärwa known by the name, *Abba* Yəṣṣəḥq, the major informant of d’Abbadie. The second genealogy discussed here lists two more ‘heads’ (the word *šum* is used), *Abba* Gošu and *Abba* Kidanu.

⁷⁸ Waldman 2018, 279–280.

⁷⁹ While it is difficult to prove, it is assumed that these short notes were written by *Abba* Iyasu, or perhaps his son *Abba* Yəṣṣəḥq. *Abba* Yəṣṣəḥq is mentioned at the end of the first additional text on fol. 3r.

⁸⁰ A few other elaborate genealogies have been discovered, for instance a genealogy of *Däbtära* Barok (Dege-Müller 2020, 25, n. 89). There are modern publications which give Betä ʿƏsraʾel genealogies, such as Asres Yayeh 1995, 137–167, or *Abba* Yəṣṣəḥq in Waldman 2018, 282–288.

⁸¹ The *täzkar* of the Betä ʿƏsraʾel has been described several times, e.g. Flad 1869a, 68–69; Leslau 1957, 97.

⁸² Next to Hoḥ^wärwa the text refers to a monastery in Wälqayt, without specifying the name.

(a *gāmǧā*)⁸³ worth 3.5 *bərr* (Maria Theresa thalers) to the monastery, showing his deep respect and veneration for his spiritual father, and that this occurred during the reign of Emperor Yoḥannəs IV.

Aside from the names of the family members of *Abba* Iyob, nothing else is known about him, save that he was the teacher of *Abba* Iyasu, the third person mentioned in the manuscript that can be identified. According to the information provided by *Abba* Yəṣṣḥaq, the name of Iyasu's father was Gonšel. The manuscript was handed down from *Abba* Wärqe to his disciples. Its last owner, *Abba* Yəṣṣḥaq, born in the year 1900, received it as a gift from his father *Abba* Iyasu at his consecration into priesthood at the age of 27.⁸⁴

The Physical Features of the Manuscript

The codex JER NLI Or. 87 is a very impressive manuscript of considerable size. Measuring 34 cm in height and 31 cm in width, it contains 163 folia, and weighs over 10 kg. The codex is bound in a reddish-brown leather cover, embossed with ornaments. So far, it is a perfect representative of the Christian Ethiopian manuscript tradition following all the rules to be anticipated in this instance.⁸⁵ However, the cross that is usually at the centre of the decorated covers has been scratched off on both covers of this codex, a clear indication that it was repurposed to suit a Jewish owner.⁸⁶ The handwriting,

⁸³ Cf. Kane 1990, 1918, '(red coloured) cloth of silk and gold thread'.

⁸⁴ In the memoirs that *Abba* Yəṣṣḥaq dictated he tells the story of his dangerous flight from Ethiopia, on foot, to Sudan from where he, along with others, eventually emigrated to Israel. On the way they are attacked and kidnapped by highway robbers, who took everything from them but the manuscript which had no value to them. See Waldman 2018 for the full account. The manuscript has had quite some media coverage; there is a video with *Abba* Yəṣṣḥaq Iyasu reading from the manuscript (starting from around minute 45): https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL000245172/NLI, accessed on 11 November 2020. The manuscript stayed in family possession, even after *Abba* Yəṣṣḥaq's death in 1995. It was donated by the family to The National Library of Israel on 21 March 2016. The donation ceremony was a big event with high-ranking members of the community: <https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nli/english/library/news/pages/orit.aspx>, accessed on 11 November 2020. Additional photos: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/64126959%40N03/sets/72157665675201310>, accessed on 11 November 2020. The latest book by *Rabbi* Menachem Waldman showcases *Abba* Yəṣṣḥaq holding the manuscripts in his hands on the cover (Waldman 2019). The photograph was taken in 1985, after his emigration (which was on 28 January 1982).

⁸⁵ Sergew Hable Selassie 1981; Balicka-Witakowska et al. 2015; cf. also Dege-Müller 2020.

⁸⁶ Until now two other such alterations have been witnessed, in MS Jerusalem, Ben Zvi Institute for the study of Jewish communities in the East, 6001, where a hole is cut into

albeit hinting at a rather recent age, is neat and careful. The text is arranged in three columns, which is relatively rare for Betä ʿĪsraʿel manuscripts. All in all, it amounts to a perfect example of a *de luxe* Betä ʿĪsraʿel manuscript.⁸⁷

The main text of the codex is the *Orit*, which comprises the five Books of Moses as well as Joshua, Judges, and Ruth.⁸⁸ Together with the genealogies, it comprises a total of six additional texts, all written by members of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel.⁸⁹ One of them is a protective prayer for a woman called Männa. The longest of the *additiones* is the *Nägärä Muse*, extending over fols 1ra–3r and written by *Abba Wärqe* himself.⁹⁰

the leather, and in MS Jerusalem, The National Library of Israel, Ms. Yah. Or. 24, where the cross ornament is covered under some material, most probably wax, see Dege-Müller 2020, 23.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

⁸⁸ Distribution of the texts: (1) Genesis, fols 4ra–34rc; (2) Exodus, fols 34va–59vc; (3) Leviticus, fols 60ra–79vc; (4) Numbers, fols 80ra–104vc; (5) Deuteronomy, fols 104va–127vc; (6) Joshua, fols 128ra–143vc; (7) Judges, fols 144ra–159vc; (8) Ruth, fols 160ra–162ra.

⁸⁹ The *additiones*: (1) *Nägärä Muse*, fols 1ra–3r; (2) Book of Nehemia 9:1–16, fols 162ra–162vb; (3) protective prayer for Männa, fol. 162vc; (4) genealogy of *Abba Wärqe*, fol. 163ra; (5) genealogy of *Abba Iyob*, fol. 163rb–rc; (6) book curse, secret script, fol. 163rc–va.

⁹⁰ While the first two folia are written in two columns, fol. 3r only in one. The *Nägärä Muse* is also known as *Gädlä Muse* ('Life of Moses'), the full English title is *The Colloquy of Moses with God on Mount Sinai*. In Ethiopia it exists in a Christian version (CAe 2052, CAVT 130, German translations by Goldschmidt 1897; Duensing 1958) and in a Betä ʿĪsraʿel version (CAe 5873), with the latter being a rather abridged version of the former. There is a French translation by Kaplan (Kaplan 1990b, 97–105) and Ted Erho is currently preparing an edition. The text was translated from the Arabic, in the mid-eighteenth century as stated by an embedded colophon. While it clearly states that it was translated from Arabic, the reference of the exact date is less clear, and needs further investigation. The present manuscript states that it was a 'Thursday during the reign of King Iyasu'. There were several kings by that name, Iyasu I (r.1682–1706), Iyasu II (r.1730–1755), Iyasu III (r.1784–88), and even Iyasu IV (r.1813). Other manuscripts provide different dates. MS Frankfurt am Main, Stadtbibliothek zu Frankfurt am Main, MS. orient. Rüpp. II, 7 (now lost), containing the Christian version, states that it was translated by *Abunä Krastodolu*, in the 'year of Creation of the world 7247' (Goldschmidt 1897, 95) which, according to Chaïne, is 1755 (Chaïne 1925, 247). However, the last *Abunä Krastodolu*, the third of his name, died already in 1735; cf. 'Krastodolu III', *EAE*, III (2007), 442a–443a (S. Chernetsov). 1755 is the year in which Iyasu II died and Iyoʿas I started to reign. MS Tel Aviv, Sourasky Central Library, Faitlovitch Collection on Ethiopia and Ethiopian Jews, Faitlovitch manuscript no.8, fol. 14v gives the time of 'King Iyoʿas [...] on a Thursday', while, in the same library, Faitlovitch manuscript no.14, fol. 29va–b gives 'the time of King Iyoʿas, 7250 year of Creation' (= 1758 CE). MS BnF Éthiopiens d'Abbadie 232, fol. 8vb only refers to 'the time of King Iyoʿas'. There were two

These types of *Orit* manuscript fulfilled important functions, alongside their primary religious use. Leslau noted that *Orit* manuscripts were used for the swearing of oaths.⁹¹ Also, similar to the Golden Gospels of the Ethiopian Christian tradition, at least the manuscript under study served as an archive for the safeguarding of important notes, in this case the genealogies, of the monastery.

Text and Translation of the Genealogies

Genealogies are often used as markers of privilege, linking to a famous ancestor, to claim land rights, or to mark affiliation to a certain (spiritual) group. Christian Ethiopian monastic genealogies often hark back to the Nine Saints or Egyptian Desert Fathers to underline their spiritual privilege.⁹² The present genealogies might do the same; however, due to the lack of knowledge of Betä ʾĪsraʾel historical and monastic figures, it cannot be identified—save, obviously, for the connection to Hoh^wärwa.

Below, the text of the genealogies has been given together with an English translation. The texts themselves contain several interesting features. They have been written in a mix of formulaic Gəʿəz passages and more freely phrased parts in Amharic.⁹³ Some parts indicate the local dialect of Wägära and Gondär. The language of the texts is not easy to understand and some parts remain unclear. In general, there are some mistakes in the orthography and varying spellings of the same words. The second genealogy has been interrupted several times by empty or skipped lines, the reason for

kings by the name of Iyoʿas, the first r.1755–1769, the second r.1818–1821; given the other evidence it was most likely Iyoʿas I. Faitlovitch manuscript no.8, fol. 14v and MS BnF Éthiopien d'Abbadie 232, fol. 8vb both have 'Ananya' as the scribe, which can be however coincidental. For the latest study compare Zuurmond 2004.

⁹¹ Leslau 1951, xxviii.

⁹² Tadesse Tamrat 1972, 107. The genealogy of the famous Täklä Haymanot, published by Getatchew Haile, is a good example for this, claiming descent from the Egyptian monks Anthony, Macarius, and Pachomius, and from Zämikaʾel Arägawi of the Nine Saints (Getatchew Haile 1982–1983).

⁹³ The formulaic passages follow structures that are very common in genealogies, especially in monastic genealogies of the Ethiopian Christian tradition: 'sequences of names "en-chained" to each other in a characteristic syntactic pattern: personal name (of the "spiritual father")—*wälädo lä* (lit. "[he] begot/generated [him]")—personal name (of the "spiritual son")', see the description in 'Genealogy: Monastic genealogy', *EAE*, II (2005), 747a–b (M.-L. Derat-Red.), esp. 747a.

which is not apparent. Some of the names are Amharic, others appear to be Agāw names.⁹⁴

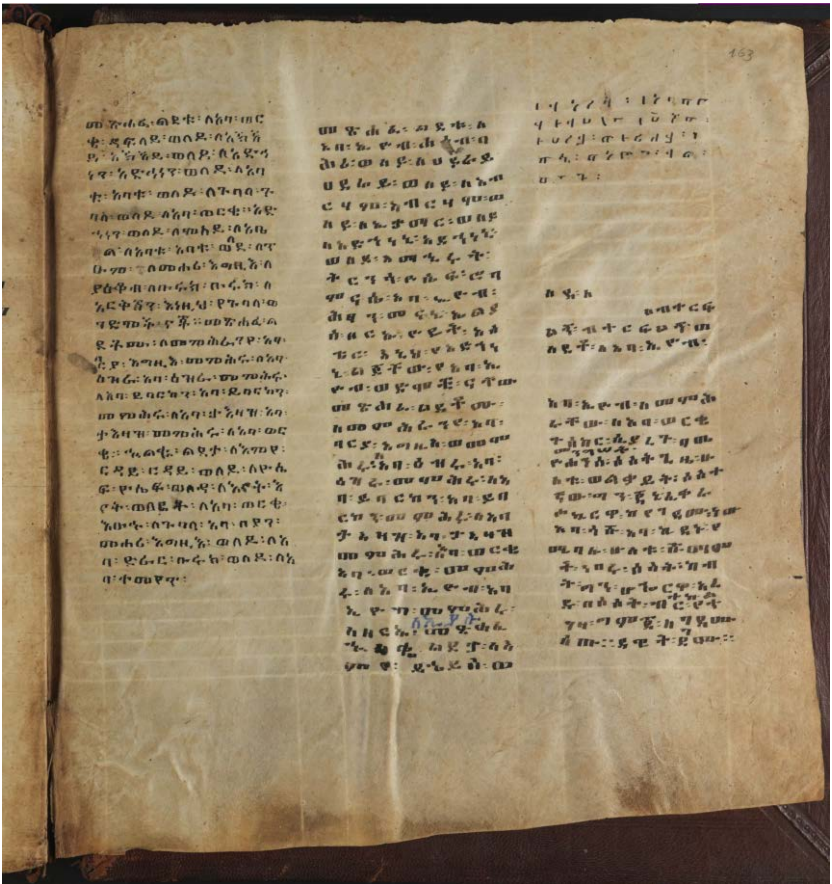


Fig. 1 Ms JER NLI Or. 87, fol. 163r.

Genealogy 1 (Scribe a)⁹⁵

(fol. 163ra) መጽሐፈ ልደቱ ለአባ ወርቁ ጳጳሳይ ወለደ ለአኸኸይ ለአኸኸይ ወለደ ለአድጎንን አድጎንን ወለደ ለአባቱ አባቱ ወለደ ለጉባላ ጉባላ ወለደ ለአባ ወርቁ ለአድጎንን ወለደ ለሞሰይ።⁹⁶ ለአቤ

⁹⁴ This is elaborated on in Dege-Müller 2020, 25, nn. 89, 32.

⁹⁵ Scribe a = *Abba* Wärqe, Scribe b = *Abba* Iyob.

⁹⁶ ሞሰይ a variant of መሴ ('Moses').

ል ፡ ለአባቱ ፡ አባቱ ፡ ወለዶ ፡ ለጥዑም ፡ ለመሐሪ ፡ እግዚእ ፡ ለያዕቆብ ፡ ለቡ
 ሩክ ፡ ቡሩክ ፡ ለአርቅሸን ፡ እነዚህ ፡ የጉባላ ፡ ወንድሞች ፡ ናች ።⁹⁷ መጽሐፈ ፡
 ልደቶሙ ፡ ለመምሕራንዩ ፡ አባ ፡ ባርያ ፡ እግዚእ ፡ መምሕሩ ፡ ለአባ ፡ ዕዝራ ፡
 አባ ፡ ዕዝራ ፡ መምሕሩ ፡ ለአባ ፡ ይባርከን ፡ አባ ፡ ይባርከን ፡ መምሕሩ ፡ ለአ
 ባ ፡ ታእዛዝ ፡ አባ ፡ ታእዛዝ ፡ መምሕሩ ፡ ለአባ ፡ ወርቄ ። ጎሳፊቄ ፡ ልደታ ፡ ለ
 እምየ ፡ ርዳይ ፡ ርዳይ ።⁹⁸ ወለዶ ፡ ለዮሴፍ ፡ ዮሴፍ ፡ ወለዳ ፡ ለእናት ፡ እናት ፡
 ወለደቶ ፡ ለአባ ፡ ወርቄ ፡ እሁጉ ፡ ለጉባላ ፡ አባ ፡ ቢያን ፡ መሐሪ ፡ እግዚእ ፡ ወ
 ለዶ ፡ ለአባ ፡ ድራር ፡ ቡሩክ ፡ ወለዶ ፡ ለአባ ፡ ተመየጥ ፡

‘Book of the birth of *Abba* Wärqe. Daflay fathered AḲəḲəy. AḲəḲəy fathered Adhəñän. Adhəñän fathered Abbatu. Abbatu fathered Gubala. Gubala fathered *Abba* Wärqe. Adhəñän fathered Mosäy, Abel, (and) Abbatu. Abbatu fathered Ṭəʿum, Mähari Ḃgziʿ, Yaʿqob, (and) Buruk. Buruk (fathered) Arqəšän. These are the brothers of Gubala. Book of the birth of my teachers. *Abba* Barya Ḃgziʿ was the teacher of *Abba* ʿEzra. *Abba* ʿEzra was the teacher of *Abba* Yəbarəkän. *Abba* Yəbarəkän was the teacher of *Abba* Taʿəzaz. *Abba* Taʿəzaz was the teacher of *Abba* Wärqe. List of the birth of my mother. Rəday Rəday (*sic*) fathered Yosef. Yosef fathered Ḃnat. Ḃnat gave birth to *Abba* Wärqe. Brother (of) Gubala (is) *Abba* Bāyan. Mähari Ḃgziʿ fathered *Abba* Dərar. Buruk fathered Tämäyyät.’

Genealogy 2 (Scribe b)

(fol. 163rb) መጽሐፈ ፡ ልደቱ ፡ ለአባ ፡ ኢዮብ ፡ ሐጎብ ፡ ባሕሪ ፡ ወለዶ ፡ ለሀ
 ደራይ ፡ ሀደሬይ ፡ (*sic*) ወለዶ ፡ ለአብርሃም ፡ አብርሃም ፡ ወለዶ ፡ ለኢታማር ፡
 ወለዶ ፡ ለአድጎነኒ ፡ አድጎነኒ ፡ ወለዶ ፡ እማኒሩት ፡ ትርንጎ ፡ ዮሴፍ ፡ ሮባ ፡
 መናሴ ፡ አባ ፡ ኢዮብ ፡ ሕፃን ፡ መናኒ ፡ ኤልያሰ ፡ ዘርኩ ፡ ዮዲት ፡ አስቴር ፡
 እኒህ ፡ የአድጎነኒ ፡ ልጆቻው ።⁹⁹ የአባ ፡ ኢዮብ ፡ ወ[ን]ድሞቹ ፡ ናቸው ፡ መ
 ጽሐፈ ፡ ልደቶሙ ፡ ለመምሕራንዩ ፡ አባ ፡ ባርያ ፡ እግዚእ ፡ ወመምሕሩ ፡ ለአ
 ባ ፡ ዕዝሩ ፡ (*sic*) አባ ፡ ዕዝራ ፡ መምሕሩ ፡ ለአባ ፡ ይባርከን ፡ አባ ፡ ይባርከን ፡
 መምሕሩ ፡ ለአባ ፡ ታእዛዝ ፡ አባ ፡ ታእዛዝ ፡ መምሕሩ ፡ ለአባ ፡ ወርቄ ፡ አባ ፡
 ወርቄ ፡ መምሕሩ ፡ ለአባ ፡ ኢዮብ ፡ አባ ፡ ኢዮብ ፡ መምሕሩ ፡ ለዘርኩ ፡ (ለኢ
 ያሱ)¹⁰⁰ መጽሐፈ ፡ ጎሳፊቄ ፡ ልደታ ፡ ለእምየ ፡ ይኔይሰ ፡ ወ(fol. 163rc)ለ
 ዶ ፡ ለ (*sic*) (one empty line) ለብተርፍልኝ ፡ ብተርፍልኝ ፡ ወለደቶ ፡ ለአባ ፡
 ኢዮብ ፡ (two empty lines) አባ ፡ ኢዮብ ፡ ለመምሕሩቸው ፡ ለአባ ፡ ወርቄ ፡

⁹⁷ This is Wägära dialect for ናቸው (‘they are’).

⁹⁸ Redundant repetition of this name here.

⁹⁹ ልጆች ፡ ናቸው ። ፈ.

¹⁰⁰ Written above the line in modern pen.

ተሰከር ፡ (sic) ሲያረጉ ፡¹⁰¹ ባጤ ፡ ዮሐንስ ፡ (መንግሥት ፡)¹⁰² ሶስት[፡] ጊዜ ፡
 ሁለቱ ፡ ወልቃይት ፡ ሶስተኛው ፡ ግን ፡ ጃኒ ፡ ፈቀራ ፡ ሐኪርዋ ፡ ከየገዳሙ ፡ ነ
 ው ፡ አባ ፡ ጎሹ ፡ አባ ፡ ኪዳኑ ፡ የሚባሉ ፡ ሁለቱ ፡ ሹግሞች ፡¹⁰³ ነበሩ ፡ ሶስ
 ት ፡ ካብት ፡ ግን ፡ ሆኑርዋ ፡ አረዱ ፡ በሶስት ፡ ብር ፡ (ተኩል)¹⁰⁴ የተገዛ ፡ ግ
 ምጃ ፡ ለገዳሙ ፡ ሰጡ ። ዳዊት ፡ ደገሙ ።

‘Book of the birth of *Abba* Iyob(.) Ḥagob Baḥri fathered Hadāray. Hadārey (sic) fathered Abrəham. Abrəham fathered Itamar. (Itamar) fathered Adḥanani. Adāhanani fathered ʿEmaḥirut, Tərəngo, Yosef, Roba, Mānase, *Abba* Iyob, Ḥəṣan, Mānani, Elyas, Zārku, Yodit, Aster. These are Adḥanani’s children, (and they) are *Abba* Iyob’s brothers (and sisters). Book of the births of my teachers. *Abba* Barya ʿEgzi³ was the teacher of *Abba* ʿEzru (sic). *Abba* ʿEzra was the teacher of *Abba* Yəbarəkān. *Abba* Yəbarəkān was the teacher of *Abba* Taʿəzaz. *Abba* Taʿəzaz was the teacher of *Abba* Wārqe. *Abba* Wārqe was the teacher of *Abba* Iyob. *Abba* Iyob was the teacher of Zār³u (and Iyasu). Book of the list of birth of my mother. Yəḥeyyəsä (breaks off here, continues next column) fathered (one empty line) Bətärfələñ. Bətärfələñ gave birth to *Abba* Iyob (two empty lines). During (the reign) of Aṣe Yoḥannəs *Abba* Iyob celebrated the *təzkär* of his teacher *Abba* Wārqe three times. Two times (in) Wälqayt, but the third (in) Ğani Fäqāra Ḥok^warwa, from each monastery. The two heads that were there are named *Abba* Goṣu (and) *Abba* Kidanu. But they slaughtered three cattle/bulls in Hoh^wärwa. They gave *gəmḡa* that was bought for 3.5 *bərr* to the monastery.¹⁰⁵ They repeated the *Dawit*.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Typical for the Gondär dialect of Amharic, ሲያረጉ is a variant of ሲያደርጉ (‘to do something’, simple imperfect of the verb ‘to do’).

¹⁰² Written above the line in same hand/ink and pen.

¹⁰³ The title *šum* in a Christian context is used in a military or administrative way, the usage here to refer to monks is rather uncommon. There is however at least one other Betä ʿEsraʿel monk who used that title, *Šum Abba Baḥtawi* Bäsāmay Märḥawi of Čäqo Abba Däbtära monastery, see Kribus 2019a, 293–298.

¹⁰⁴ Written above the line in same hand/ink and pen.

¹⁰⁵ At that time the reference is to Maria Theresa thaler.

¹⁰⁶ The Book of Psalms is traditionally called *Dawit*.

Conclusion

In this article, MS JER NLI Or. 87 has been analysed in a broad context. The manuscript contains several significant features that mark its special status. Unlike two other manuscripts of great importance to Betä ʿSraʿel studies, MS BnF Éthiopien d'Abbadie 107, and the source of the *Religious Dispute* published by Leslau in 1947, which were both commissioned by foreigners, MS JER NLI Or. 87 originated out of the interest of the Betä ʿSraʿel group. It was bought by *Abba Wärqe*, head of the most important monastery of Hoḥ^wärwa. The manuscript attests not only to Wärqe's learning, but also to the general literacy of the Betä ʿSraʿel. In the light of this evidence, the notion that the group was completely illiterate should surely be abandoned.

The manuscript itself is a crucial witness to the Betä ʿSraʿel manuscript tradition. With the erased cross on its covers and the note in secret script, it attests to some unique codicological and scribal features. The impressive codex has been held in high esteem for the last 130 years at least and is probably the most important manuscript known by the community at this time.

The monastic genealogies contained in this manuscript are the second historical document of the Betä ʿSraʿel to predate the twentieth century, the other being the *Religious Dispute* published by Leslau. While the latter is a more elaborate note, it became so only due to the exposure of the Betä ʿSraʿel to Protestant missionary activities, which proved to be one of the weakening factors in Betä ʿSraʿel history. The genealogies of the first document, on the other hand, were a result of their protagonists' motivations and interest.

Due to these texts, information can be gathered on the individuals, the monastic network and tradition, as well as the mourning practices for one of the monastic leaders. The language also makes cautious inference to the origin of the protagonists in the Gondär-Wägära area. By comparing this genealogy with monastic genealogies preserved in the Betä ʿSraʿel oral tradition, it is possible to shed further light on the individuals and on events mentioned in this oral tradition.

A new look at and a first-time collation of the cartographic evidence and travel itineraries, supported by the information of the genealogy, have allowed the precise localization of Hoḥ^wärwa on the map. The information gathered further reveals that Hoḥ^wärwa is not a single location, but an agglomeration of holy sites in a larger area. Future travels will hopefully allow for field research to visit the region.

The manuscript under study also invites to elaborate on several other aspects of Betä ʿSraʿel history. While reinvestigating the manuscript containing the *Religious Dispute*, a second text of equal historical importance was brought to light, that awaits further study. A rather obscure element of Betä

Ἐsraʿel monastic tradition, the probable castration of monks, was discussed in the light of the existing sources for the first time, shedding light onto a miracle story connected to *Abba* Barok Adhənān.

The discovery of the genealogies leaves us with further directives for our research. The codex demonstrates the importance of surveying Betä Ἐsraʿel manuscripts for marginal notes and additional texts, to uncover more on the Betä Ἐsraʿel's past. The work of locating the remains of the Betä Ἐsraʿel monastic centres often recalls that of a treasure hunt: with almost no tangible traces, no written documents leading one to the sites. It has been entirely dependent on oral information, mostly recorded decades after the Betä Ἐsraʿel have left Ethiopia. The monastic genealogies of the monks *Abba* Wārqe, *Abba* Iyob, and *Abba* Iyasu of Hoh^wārwa monastery are therefore an unparalleled discovery, adding new information about this legendary place, which our team will hopefully be able to document in the future.

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Summary

During the course of a study of the manuscript tradition of the Betä ʿEsraʿel (Ethiopian Jews), MS JER NLI Or. 87 came to light. This codex is a unique manuscript with several important elements contributing to the knowledge of the history of the Betä ʿEsraʿel. Its most important feature, by far, are two short additional notes that have been termed here the Hoḥ^wārwa genealogy. This genealogy is the second piece of original pre-twentieth-century Betä ʿEsraʿel historiography ever discovered, alongside the *Religious Dispute*. Taking the manuscript as a starting point, this article is to embrace subjects such as the Betä ʿEsraʿel scribal tradition, aspects of its literature, monasticism, the history of the Hoḥ^wārwa monastery, and the history of the manuscript itself.