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**Review**

HAGAR SALAMON, *Meat Matters: Ethnographic Refractions of the Beta Israel*

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## Reviews

The second room shifts to operational realities: loading planes, navigating muddy airstrips, and mechanical struggles. A notable highlight is the documentation of the (later) so-called 'Africa technique', an improvised airdrop method developed by West German crews to deliver supplies to inaccessible areas. These images underscore the mission's improvisational challenges and technical ingenuity.

For many Germans, the Ethiopian famine is remembered through televised appeals and the founding of Karlheinz Böhm's nonprofit organization Menschen für Menschen (MFM). This exhibition adds a military-historical dimension, revealing how Cold War-era German forces engaged in a rare cooperative humanitarian effort despite political divisions.

While the exhibition provides valuable historical insight, its critical framing of photographic representation ensures visitors reflect on the biases embedded in such documentation. The accompanying catalog deepens this analysis, making it a worthwhile companion.

For those interested in Cold War history, humanitarian missions, or visual culture, *Äthiopien '84/85* is a significant and thought-provoking exhibition—one that complicates familiar narratives while shedding light on an understudied chapter of German military involvement abroad.

The exhibition will be supplemented by a large special exhibition from summer 2025 (p. 4).

Andreas Wetter, Berlin

HAGAR SALAMON, *Meat Matters: Ethnographic Refractions of the Beta Israel*, Sephardi and Mizrahi Studies (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2023). . xiv, 153 pp., 30 figs. Price: \$80.00 (hardcover), \$30.00 (paperback). ISBN: 978-0-253-06577-3 (hardcover), 978-0-253-06578-0 (paperback).

The vast majority of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel (Ethiopian Jewish) community resided in rural villages in the northern Ethiopian Highlands prior to their late-twentieth-century *Aliyah* (immigration) to Israel. In this region, the rearing of cattle is a central source of livelihood and a central element in rural life. Hagar Salamon's new book explores the rich symbolism and significance with which the interaction between humans and cattle and the production and consumption of cattle meat was endowed in Betä ʿĪsraʿel society and in Ethiopian society more broadly. This symbolism is not only restricted to agricultural life but rather touches upon numerous aspects of Betä ʿĪsraʿel society, such as community, ethics, and interreligious interaction. Given that Betä ʿĪsraʿel communal life in rural Ethiopia is now a thing of the past, Salamon's study provides important insight into a world

which, for the Betä Ǝsra'el, mainly survives in the memories of their elders. Furthermore, it sheds light on how the complex dynamics relating to the community's present life in Israel are viewed through the prism of symbolism derived from the community's former life in Ethiopia, relating to cattle and meat.

Salamon presents a rich array of interconnected accounts, themes, and analyses rather than a strictly divided thematic discussion, and hence, the topics listed below are only a partial overview of the thematic scope of the book. The first chapter examines the practicalities of rearing cattle in the rural Ethiopian Highlands and the bonds that were subsequently forged between the cattle and their owners. The second chapter discusses symbolic and conceptual references to cattle in discourse on slavery among the Betä Ǝsra'el. It is noteworthy that slavery as a phenomenon existed among multiple groups in the Ethiopian Highlands, including Christians and Muslims. The third chapter examines the role of cattle, both practically and symbolically, in the establishment of new family units, as well as the emotional and symbolic aspects of slaughtering of cattle and preparing and consuming cattle meat. In addition, it investigates the links between slaughter and consumption and annual and life-cycle festivities. The fourth chapter discusses the role of cattle and meat and the symbolism associated with them in Betä Ǝsra'el and Christian religious festivities and in interreligious dynamics and, specifically, meat as both a symbolic and a practical marker of religious identity, embodying boundaries between religious groups.

The fifth chapter reviews the issue of meat as embodying the divide within the community between those who embraced (to varying degrees) the rabbinic (Orthodox Jewish) religious tradition and those who continue to adhere (to varying degrees) to the Betä Ǝsra'el religious tradition. It also refers to the involvement of Israeli authorities in enforcing slaughter in accordance with rabbinic religious law. The sixth chapter analyzes a series of humorous tales dealing with meat storage and consumption among the Betä Ǝsra'el community in Israel following the *Aliyah*, which reflect challenges faced by members of the community in adjusting to life in Israel. The seventh and final chapter examines social dynamics and symbolic aspects of *qərč'a*, groups organized for the purpose of purchasing and slaughtering cattle, the meat of which is divided among the members. It also describes the persistence of this practice among the community in modern-day Israel.

Given the abundance of literature on the Betä Ǝsra'el, albeit most of it dealing with the community's contacts with Western emissaries, *Aliyah* to Israel, and integration there, it is refreshing and fascinating to read a book that provides insight on the community's culture and life in Ethiopia from such a unique perspective. Aspects, both material and conceptual, of Betä Ǝsra'el life in rural Ethiopia have rarely been examined in such rich detail and within the broader context of rural life in the northern Ethiopian Highlands. The importance of this broader context is highlighted in the chapter on slaughter and meat preparation in the context of

religious events. There, Salamon examines practices and associated symbolism both among the Betä ʿƏsraʾel and among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and addresses how each group would view the practices of the religious other. By examining these practices together and taking into account that the two groups neighbored each other and were aware of each other's practices and associated theological concepts, aspects of religious symbolism which would be absent if each group were examined in isolation are brought to the forefront.

Although, as Salamon rightfully maintains, the dynamics between the Betä ʿƏsraʾel and the politically-dominant Christian society were especially significant and influential (pp. 65–67), and accordingly, her discussion focuses mainly on these two groups, I would suggest that expanding this comparison to address other religious groups which interacted with the Betä ʿƏsraʾel in detail has considerable potential. Members of the multiple religious groups in the northern Ethiopian Highlands, including but not limited to Christians, Muslims, Betä ʿƏsraʾel, and Kəmant, shared numerous cultural features, and so variations in each group are telling with regards to the respective group's culture, identity, and interaction with others. Thus, the book offers intriguing accounts by members of the Betä ʿƏsraʾel community regarding how Betä ʿƏsraʾel slaughtered cattle, how this compared with Christian slaughter of cattle, and how the Christians viewed Betä ʿƏsraʾel slaughter, associating it with the Crucifixion (pp. 69–70). It would be fascinating to follow this example and examine additional, parallel accounts by Christians, Muslims, Kəmant, and other neighboring religious groups, not just on a given practice, but on how they viewed this practice being carried out by others and on how they understood the views of the religious other on their practice.

Finally, Salamon's detailed examination, highlighting links between past and present, enables us to grasp to a much greater extent the dynamics at play in present-day engagements of the Betä ʿƏsraʾel community with cattle and meat. These emerge not as new phenomena but as significantly building upon the memories and symbolism of the past and applying them to the realities and challenges of the present. Specifically, the tensions within the community between the inclination to adopt rabbinic practices and the inclination to preserve and continue the practices of the Betä ʿƏsraʾel religious tradition and the attempts by the religious authorities of the State of Israel to encourage adherence to rabbinic practices are all reflected in matters pertaining to meat preparation and consumption.

Salamon's book is a highly recommended and enjoyable read for those interested in the Betä ʿƏsraʾel and their dynamics with others, and for those interested in life and culture in rural northern Ethiopia. To end with a personal note—in my travels in the Ethiopian Highlands, I witnessed some of the phenomena examined in the book without truly understanding them. Reading the book has enabled me to think back on my past experiences with new insight.

## Reviews

Thus, I know from personal experience what an asset Salamon's study can be for better understanding aspects of the rich cultures and heritage of the northern Ethiopian Highlands.

Bar Kribus, Tel Aviv University

MARCO DI NUNZIO, *The Act of Living: Street Life, Marginality, and Development in Urban Ethiopia* (Ithaca, NY–London: Cornell University Press, 2019). xiv, 245 pp. Price: \$36.95 (Paperback). ISBN: 978-1-5017-3626-1.

The inner city of Addis Abäba is a testament to the profound changes urban Ethiopia has undergone over the past two decades. Since March 2024, large parts of the historic district of አራዳ ፒያሳ (*Arada Piyassa*) have been demolished as part of the so-called 'Addis Ababa Corridor Development Project', which foresees a grand reconstruction of the (inner)city. Several reviews have already been written on Marco Di Nunzio's scholarship about urban life in Addis Abäba, most of which were published closer to the study period. However, considering the ongoing developments in the capital, Di Nunzio's book, *The Act of Living*, has become particularly relevant and has garnered renewed attention. This is exemplified, for instance, by the exhibition 'Remembering Arada' at Birmingham City Hall (7 until 18 March 2024), curated by the author in collaboration with Adelaide Di Nunzio, a photographer and visual artist.<sup>1</sup>

This book, published by Cornell University Press in 2019, is a fascinating account that depicts the transformative journey of the Arada district, or what the author calls the city's 'historic soul', since the early 2000s. The reader embarks on this journey through the eyes of the two protagonists, called 'Haile' and 'Ibrahim'. Both men are trapped in a particular economic and social context in Ethiopia's major urban center at the time of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) rule (1991–2018/2019). And regardless of personal efforts or moments of promise for change, they are unable to climb the social ladder. This is what Di Nunzio describes as their persisting 'condition of marginality'—the main theme of the book.

The first chapter takes the reader to the central setting of the study, the Arada neighbourhood. The area is, however, more than just the home to the protagonists; it represents the concept of socio-economic existences. The author argues

<sup>1</sup> 'Remembering Arada – A New Exhibition on the Demolition of Addis Ababa's City Centre in Birmingham', *University of Birmingham* (2 May 2024), <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/2024/remembering-arada-a-new-exhibition-on-the-demolition-of-addis-aba-bas-city-centre-in-birmingham>, accessed on 26 August 2024.