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Review

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MONICA S. DEVENS, *The Liturgy of the Seventh Sabbath. A Betä Israel (Falasha) Text = Aethiopistische Forschungen Bd. 38.* Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden 1995. xxiii, 258 pp. DM 98,-.

The study of the Betä Israel, or Falasha, also popularly known as the Ethiopian Jews, has expanded enormously in the last decade and a half, prompted by the two large scale emigrations to Israel of the greater part of the Betä Israel population, first in 1985 and then in 1991. Much of what has been published is of at least questionable scholarship and focuses either on the alluring but often, in the literalist way it is posed, arid question of Betä Israel origins, or on the contemporary sociology of Betä Israel communities adapting to the very different environment of modern day Israel. Over roughly the same period, however, there has appeared a handful of books of the highest scholarship approaching the Betä Israel first and foremost as an Ethiopian people, and secondly looking at the Jewish nature of the people, how it is manifested or how it may have developed. The whole question is of course one that needs to be handled with the greatest care and sensitivity, not the least because when dealing with the matter of a people's "origin", their ethnogenesis, serious scholarship can produce results that may be in conflict with populist views, including the self-perception held by the people under study. DEVENS' opening paragraph in her introduction is in this light a masterpiece of tact and succinctness, and most scholars would agree with her that the 15th and 16th centuries constitute the period during which the Betä Israel came into existence in a recognisable form as "a unified group, with religious beliefs which represented a fusion of pre-existing Judaic elements ... and the galvanizing forces of monks who had abandoned the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church." Oral tradition, in part, and, in particular, recent historical research tend to support this thesis.

The evidence of Betä Israel literature, which is entirely liturgical and devotional, is however of considerable importance in addressing this question of "origins" or ethnogenesis. Much of the comparatively small Betä Israel literary corpus has been available in translation for some time, and the general impression is, as DEVENS says, one of a reworking of Ethiopian Christian texts. *The Liturgy of the Seventh Sabbath*, however, "appears to be an original work". Even here, DEVENS is cautious and takes pains to explain her use of the word "appears", since aside from the fact that the text abounds with (near) quotations or paraphrases of Biblical sources, including, interestingly, the New Testament, the form and layout of the text is familiar from Christian liturgical works; the use of often repeated formulaic expressions, acrostic prayers built around the well-known Ethiopian forms

of the names of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the division into **ጾገራፍ** or “chapters” (more properly sections), the interpolation of instructions to the priest and the laity for the conduct of the liturgy, these and others are all features in common with Ethiopian Christian liturgy and service books. The theme of the Sabbath construed as a female figure who intercedes with God on behalf of the faithful is also found in Ethiopian Christian sources. All of this leads DEVENS to speculate whether *The Liturgy of the Seventh Sabbath*, like other Betä Israel religious works, might be “a highly edited form of an Ethiopian Christian treatise”, though no Christian text has to date come to light that could be such a Vorlage. Whether or not such a Christian version is ever found, it remains true that all Betä Israel literature is to some degree derivative from Ethiopian Christian literature, either directly and in a literal sense, or in so far as it arises from the same religious and cultural milieu and is inspired and modeled upon Christian texts and forms.

Following the brief but highly informative and well-argued discussion about the nature of the text, DEVENS describes her manuscript sources (essentially three manuscripts), and the apparatus for identifying and citing sources for the Biblical quotations in the text, including non-canonical texts such as Jubilees and Enoch. She goes on briefly to discuss the problem of translating what is a corrupt text linguistically, described by DEVENS in typically cautious terms as “in some respects the text does not follow classical Gəʿəz grammar.” This text, like other collections of Betä Israel prayer texts, contains sometimes extensive passages in Qwarenya (called Agaw by DEVENS and identified by being printed in a smaller typeface), the Agaw language or dialect formerly spoken by the Betä Israel. These passages present enormous problems and all scholars of this century, Devens included, wisely if apologetically leave these untranslated. The evidence of nineteenth century scholars such as Halévy and Faïtlovitch at the beginning of this century clearly states that knowledge of Qwarenya was disappearing fast, though the sections in this language were and are today maintained in the liturgy.

The discovery of notes made by JACQUES FAÏTLOVITCH listing some of these Qwarenya sections with an Amharic translation of sorts does now, however, present at least the possibility of understanding them. APPLEYARD’s article, cited by DEVENS in the bibliography and now appeared in the volume *Semitic and Cushitic Studies*, edited by GIDEON GOLDENBERG and SHLOMO RAZ [Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden 1994] contains a number of phrases and even whole sections that appear in the present text. The status and nature of these Qwarenya sections is complex. In the first instance, the degree of textual variation and corruption from one manuscript to another is far greater than is found in the Gəʿəz, and the establishment of an anchored or “correct” form is extremely difficult. Secondly,

it is evident that the Qwarenya passages are not simply translations of the Gəʿəz; sometimes they are in a part paraphrases of and are linked in content to the surrounding Gəʿəz, whilst at other times there appears to be no connexion, in so far as they can be understood at all. By way of an illustration, on the one hand the recurring sections in the Gəʿəz, ‘where are your priests? where are your prophets? ...’ ([7vb, 20vb, etc.] አይቱ ሀለዉ ካህናቲክሙ ...) are reflected in the Qwarenya አንኮናይኒ አንን ካህናታን ... ካሊያታን ..., which may mean something like ‘who then are they our (or we) priests ... prophets?’. Similarly the strophe in Gəʿəz [20ra]: አብ ይቀትል ውሉድ ይሴብሕዎ ውሉድ ይቀትል አብ ይባርክ ... ‘He slays the father(s), The child[ren] praise Him. He slays the children, The father[s] bless Him ...’ is reflected in the Qwarenya አዶረለስ ክዋወ ሀርለለ ኒገዊስ አጋዊ ሀርለስ ክዋዊ አይረለን ኒገዊያ ..., though the text is so corrupt (አዶረለስ alongside አይረለን presumably for something like *ayärläs, assuming a Qwarenya item *ayär ‘father’ cognate with Kaäliña አየር and Khamtanga ayər) and the Qwarenya is certainly much shorter than the Gəʿəz. On the other hand, the extensive passage [44ra–b] which is interpolated by Gəʿəz phrases is evidently not a translation of the Gəʿəz and even seems to contain instructions to the priest or laity if the often recurring ከሉብቲ ‘receive’ also means ‘make the response’, like Amharic ተቀበል.

What is clear in the Qwarenya sections are all the names and titles given to God that occur in these liturgical texts. Thus, alongside the familiar አደራ ‘Lord’, we find ሄርዝጋ, ሄር and an abbreviated ሄ, ጋያ, ጋኒማ አባ ጋያ, and so on. Also note-worthy is the compliment that appears variously as ሸኘወ ሸኘታር and ሰኛወ ሸኘታር, which is presumably sāñiwä sāñtar ‘you who were [and] who are’, also occurring in the FAÏTLOVITCH text edited by APPLEYARD, and which reflects the Gəʿəz ዘሀሎ ወይሂሉ.

This is altogether an excellent piece of scholarship, thoroughly and meticulously researched. The translation is readable, which is in itself an achievement given the difficulty of the Gəʿəz text. The annotation is thorough and complete. If one wanted to find anything to quibble with, one could regret that the translation does not appear in parallel layout to the Gəʿəz text, but follows it so that the reader is constantly turning back and forth. One imagines, however, that most readers will dispense with the Gəʿəz and consult only the English, which alone contains the references to Biblical source texts. The use of the symbols ' and ` to indicate the glottal and pharyngeal, respectively, which are normally rendered by ' and ʿ, is also slightly irritating. Neither, though, are serious detractions.

David Appleyard