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Review

MARILYN HERMAN, *Gondar's Child. Songs, Honor, and Identity among
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Bibliographical abbreviations used in this volume

- AE* *Annales d'Éthiopie*, Paris 1955ff.
- ÄthFor* Äthiopistische Forschungen, 1–35, ed. by E. HAMMERSCHMIDT, 36–40, ed. by S. UHLIG, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner (1–34), 1977–1992; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (35–40), 1994–1995.
- AethFor* Aethiopistische Forschungen, 41–73, ed. by S. UHLIG, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998–2011; 74–75, ed. by A. BAUSI and S. UHLIG, *ibid.*, 2011f.; 76ff. ed. by A. BAUSI, *ibid.*, 2012ff.
- AION* *Annali dell'Università degli studi di Napoli "L'Orientale"*, Napoli: Università di Napoli "L'Orientale" (former Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli), 1929ff.
- BSOAS* *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London 1917ff.
- CSCO* *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, 1903ff.
- EAE* S. UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: A–C, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003; II: D–Ha, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005; III: He–N, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007; (in cooperation with A. BAUSI), IV: O–X, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010; A. BAUSI (ed. in cooperation with S. UHLIG), V: Y–Z, *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014.
- EFAH* Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Orient-Abteilung, Epigraphische Forschungen auf der Arabischen Halbinsel, herausgegeben im Auftrag des Instituts von NORBERT NEBES.
- EMML* Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.
- IJAHS* *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Boston, MA – New York 1968ff.
- JAH* *The Journal of African History*, Cambridge 1960ff.
- JES* *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa 1963ff.
- JSS* *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Manchester 1956ff.
- NEASt* *Northeast African Studies*, East Lansing, MI 1979ff.
- OrChr* *Oriens Christianus*, Leipzig – Roma – Wiesbaden 1901ff.
- OrChrP* *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, Roma 1935ff.
- PICES 15* S. UHLIG – M. BULAKH – D. NOSNITSIN – T. RAVE (eds.) 2005, *Proceedings of the XVth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Hamburg July 20–25, 2003* = *AethFor* 65, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- PICES 16* H. ASPEN – BIRHANU TEFERRA – SHIFERAW BEKELE – S. EGE (eds.) 2010, *Research in Ethiopian Studies: Selected papers of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Trondheim July 2007* = *AethFor* 72, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- PO* *Patrologia Orientalis*, 1903ff.
- RIÉ* É. BERNAND – A. J. DREWES – R. SCHNEIDER 1991, *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite*, I: *Les documents*, II: *Les planches*, Paris: [Académie des inscriptions et belle-lettres] Diffusion de Boccard.
- RSE* *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, Roma 1941–1981, Roma – Napoli 1983ff.
- SAe* *Scriptores Aethiopici*.
- ZDMG* *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Leipzig – Wiesbaden – Stuttgart 1847ff.

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MARILYN HERMAN, *Gondar's Child. Songs, Honor, and Identity among Ethiopian Jews in Israel*, Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2012. xvii + 316 pp., 2 maps, 16 figures. Price: US-\$ 34.95. ISBN: 978-1-569-02328-0.

Maryline Herman's book is essentially autobiographical, as long as it describes her immersion experience in a group of Betä ʿSraʿel musicians. Indeed, the anthropologist spares the reader no details, such as her need for a flat or her difficulties contacting Betä ʿSraʿel. It is obviously a bias of the author, but one notes the predominance of description over theoretical and methodological considerations.

The book is structured in two parts. The first one tells the story of Ethiopian Jews or "Fālaša" (an exogenous, presumably infamous label). No document can be produced to trace their origins and their possible links to the antique Judeans. Marilyn Herman demonstrates an excellent knowledge of this sensitive issue, touching on Jewish identity and by extension Israelis'. Can anyone be Jewish by conversion? Are not all Jews the descendants of Isaac? Can black people participate in the Zionist project? Herman responds again in a very personal way by exposing her own feeling of membership as an Ashkenazi English woman.

She continues with the recent history of the Betä ʿSraʿel, in particular their repatriation during the Moses Operation (1984) and the Solomon Operation (1991). Then Herman informs the reader on migrants, about their integration into Israeli society through first-hand accounts.

The second part of the book is perhaps the most interesting insofar as it presents new information: a presentation of the secular music of the Betä ʿSraʿel and the analysis of 15 songs. Following the same writing style, Herman wraps the theoretical information in narrative. One follows the adventures of *Porachat HaTikva*, a Betä ʿSraʿel set in a small town east of Tel Aviv band, which brings together musicians, singers and dancers from the Gondär region.

The reader learns almost by chance that Marilyn Herman joined the band, dancing on stage in traditional costume with Ethiopian women. As if anticipating the oddity of the situation, she justifies it as well.

An analysis of the lyrics gives the anthropologist occasion to describe not only the lifestyle of Betä ʿSraʿel in Ethiopia as well as in their new homeland, but also the relationships between the members of *Porachat HaTikva* and their respective views on Ethiopian music or Israeli society.

The last five chapters are more technical from a musicological point of view. Herman explains that the word "music" (*zäfän*) is common to both

Christian and Betä ʿĪsraʾel Ethiopians indeed, but only the first ones formalized musical theory, while Betä ʿĪsraʾel have cultivated a strictly oral tradition.

Their songs alternate solos and chorus answers. This communicative form frequently extends to the public, who “receives” the vocal line. A simple step (*mānčəbčəb*) is associated with this part of the song. *Mānčəbčəb* is not a dance *per se*, but allows singers and musicians to position on stage. Then follows the *pizmon*, a part of the song that sees the whole band (but also the public) sing, dance and clap their hands. Thereupon the soloist begins an improvised section, following a repetitive rhythm, echoed by percussion (*käbäro*), hands clapping (*čəbčəbbə*) and accompanied with jerky movements of the shoulders and neck.

In addition to the percussive *käbäro*, the *masinqo* (one-corded fiddle) is the other essential instrument of Ethiopian music, as played by Porachat HaTikva.

Herman then declines a typology of various dances, accurately describing their movements. The choice of choreography is a process in which each group member can intervene. There is no director.

The word, i.e. the sound of the language, is the paramount in Ethiopian music. Herman noticed this fact, when Betä ʿĪsraʾel explained to her that musical styles are distinct, the one from the other, on the basis of the language used and not the melody. That is why they consent to play the same music as Christians, when they sing in Amharic, but not if they sing in Oromiffaa.

Notions of authorship and cover do not have the same meaning as in the Western world. As words are highly significant, changing the lyrics of a traditional Ethiopian repertoire is similar to a real composition.

Another major difference is harmony. The European notation is not appropriate to recording the music played by Betä ʿĪsraʾel. Herman analyses some songs of Porachat HaTikva after having transposed the melody on a scope and admits that the ratings division is not optimal, neither on the rhythmic nor on the acoustic level. In Ethiopian music, harmony is based on an intervallic progression (*qəññətoč*), that defines the “mood” of a song. Indeed, one considers the interval (relative) between two notes, rather than the tune (absolute) of the respective notes.

The text gives birth to the melody. This later this is syllabic, which means that one syllable corresponds to one note. The contrary melismatic melody (where one syllable is modulated over many notes) is rather rare and perceived as difficult to interpret or to “receive” for the choir.

In her analysis, Herman isolates melodic patterns. In most of the cases, one pattern covers one verse. Two rhyming verses form a couplet (*gəṭəm*), but each verse can have a different melodic pattern, echoing a non-rhyming

verse in another couplet. Therefore, the consistency of a song is ensured by interwoven rhymes and patterns.

If the Betä ʿĪsraʾel share many aspects of their musical culture with other Ethiopians, *Aliya* songs are definitely peculiar to them. *Aliya* is the Hebrew word for “emigration” of Jews to Palestine-Israel. Thus, Amharic *Aliya* songs tell Ethiopian Jews’ “return” to Israel and the hope placed in their promised land, but also the suffering to attain it and the loss of their native land.

Herman concludes her book with the *Aliya* songs, because they are praises to the earth by those who were called *Falasyan* in Ethiopia, that is to say “stray”, “landless”.

In the end, *Gondar’s Child* is a readable narrative, a book accessible to non-musicologists, which provides a good introduction to Ethiopian music. Moreover, audio recordings are freely available on the publisher website: www.africaworldpressbooks.com/gondars-child.html.

Nevertheless, one may challenge the representativeness of the sample, insofar as it consists of one band, Porachat HaTikva, and not of the entire community of “Ethiopian Jews in Israel”, to quote the subtitle’s words.

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HUGUES FONTAINE, *African Train/Un train en Afrique, Djibouti~Éthiopie: ኢትዮጵያ የባቡር ወገች/African Train*, Addis Ababa: Centre français des études éthiopiennes – Shama Books, 2012. 309 pp. Price: € 39.90. ISBN: 978-99944-867-1-7.

Hugues Fontaine is a French photographer and documentary film maker and has published several books in which he presents his photographs of Egypt, Yemen or Eritrea. To my knowledge, the present book is his first one about Ethiopia and Djibouti. *Un train en Afrique* is not a scientific book about the Addis Abāba–Djibouti train and its history, but a photo book that presents the photographic work of the author. Fontaine went to Dərre Dawa in autumn 2010, and while there he made a series of portraits of railway workers and photographed railway workshops. The author focuses on workers’ faces and details of machinery, with some larger views of the workshops. The aim of the book is obviously to document an industrial heritage and to highlight the role of railway workers in its development and its conservation. The informative aspect of the photos becomes less important than the author’s ability to share the atmosphere of places and the feeling of individuals portrayed. His photos reflect the pride of the railway