

RELIGIOUS MUSIC of the FALASHAS

(Jews of
Ethiopia)



**Recorded in Ethiopia
by Wolf Leslau**

**RESPONSIVE READING
IN GEEZ**

**PRAYERS FOR:
PASSOVER, NEW YEAR,
SATURDAY, WEEKDAYS
AND ABSOLUTION**

CHORUS, DRUM, GONG

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(Jews of Ethiopia)

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MUSIC OF THE FALASHAS

(JEWS OF ETHIOPIA)

INTRODUCTION BY DR. WOLF LESLAU

IN SOME REGIONS NORTH OF THE LAKE TANA IN ETHIOPIA LIVES A POPULATION OF JEWISH FAITH CALLED FALASHAS. THEIR HISTORICAL ORIGIN AND RACIAL AFFINITIES PRESENT MANY DIFFICULT PROBLEMS. WERE THEY ORIGINALLY JEWISH IMMIGRANTS? IF SO, WHEN AND FROM WHERE DID THEY COME TO ETHIOPIA? OR ARE THEY A SEGMENT OF THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION OF ETHIOPIA CONVERTED TO JUDAISM? AND IF SO, BY WHOM WERE THEY CONVERTED AND WHEN? AS YET NO DEFINITE ANSWERS HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO THESE QUESTIONS.

THE FALASHAS RESEMBLE, IN GREAT MAJORITY, THE AMHARAS -- THAT IS, THE MAIN BODY OF THE ETHIOPIAN POPULATION. OTHERS RESEMBLE THE PEOPLE OF AGAU DESCENT, THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION OF ETHIOPIA.

THE FALASHAS LIVE EITHER IN SEPARATE VILLAGES OR TOGETHER WITH OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE ETHIOPIAN POPULATION. IN THE LATTER CASE THE FALASHA HUTS FORM A COMPACT UNIT OF THEIR OWN AND ARE USUALLY APART FROM THE MAIN BODY OF THE VILLAGE. IN APPEARANCE THE FALASHA VILLAGE DOES NOT DIFFER FROM AN ETHIOPIAN ONE. ONE SEES THE SAME CIRCULAR HUTS OF BRANCHES, PLASTERED WITH MUD, AND THATCHED WITH COARSE GRASS, AND THE SAME GRANARIES OF DRIED MUD.

HOWEVER, THE FALASHA VILLAGE HAS NOTICEABLE CHARACTERISTICS WHICH REVEAL THE OCCUPATION OF ITS INHABITANTS. THUS, IN VARIOUS SECTIONS OF THE VILLAGE ONE SEES A HOLE IN THE GROUND AND ABOVE IT A LOOM. A FALASHA IS WEAVING LINEN. ELSEWHERE A FIRE BURNS, IRON PIECES ARE LYING AROUND, AND A SMITH IS MAKING UTENSILS SUCH AS AXES, SICKLES, AND KNIVES. STILL IN ANOTHER SECTION CLAY IS BAKED; PITCHERS BIG AND SMALL, POTS AND CUPS, GRANARIES OF CLAY AND OTHER CLAYWARE ARE STANDING NEARBY ON THE GROUND: A FALASHA WOMAN IS MAKING POTTERY. IN THE

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY WOLF LESLAU



Falasha woman carrying her child in typical Ethiopian fashion.



Falasha types.

COUNTRY AROUND THE VILLAGE WE SEE MEN TILLING THE GROUND, PLOWING WITH ONE OR TWO OXEN, AND SOWING WHEAT, BARLEY OR MILLET. THIS LAND, HOWEVER, IS NOT THEIRS. THEY TILL THE GROUND AND PAY AN ANNUAL RENT IN WHEAT TO THE OWNER.

IN ADDITION, THERE ARE SOME HUTS PECULIAR TO A FALASHA VILLAGE -- THE SYNAGOGUE, THE "HUT OF BLOOD OR MALEDICTION", AND THE "HUT OF THE WOMAN-IN-CHILDBED".

THESE LAST TWO HUTS ARE USUALLY AT THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE VILLAGE, BUT IN SOME INSTANCES ONLY A SMALL DISTANCE FROM IT. THEY ARE READILY DISCERNIBLE BY THE LOW STONE-WALL SURROUNDING THEM. AS SOON AS A WOMAN REACHES HER MENSTRUAL PERIOD SHE LEAVES HER WORK AND ENTERS INTO THE "HUT OF BLOOD" OR OF "MALEDICTION". THERE SHE REMAINS SEGREGATED, FOR SEVEN DAYS, BEING CONSIDERED AS IMPURE. SHE DOES NO WORK AT ALL. HER FAMILY POURS WATER OR COFFEE FOR HER OVER THE LOW STONE WALL. THEY BRING HER BREAD OR ROASTED GRAIN WITHOUT TOUCHING HER. THE MORNING OF THE SEVENTH DAY THE WOMAN WASHES HERSELF AND HER CLOTHES, REMAINS AT THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE VILLAGE THE WHOLE DAY, AND AT SUN-SET SHE ENTERS HER HOUSE.

AT THE ONSET OF LABOR, THE WOMAN ENTERS INTO THE "HUT OF BLOOD", WHERE SHE GIVES BIRTH TO HER CHILD. IF THE CHILD IS MALE, HE IS CIRCUMCIZED THE EIGHTH DAY, AND THE MOTHER THEN ENTERS INTO THE "HUT OF THE WOMAN-IN-CHILDBED", WHERE SHE REMAINS FOR THIRTY-TWO DAYS. IF THE CHILD IS A FEMALE, THE WOMAN STAYS IN THE "HUT OF BLOOD" FOR FOURTEEN DAYS, AFTER WHICH SHE ENTERS THE "HUT OF THE WOMAN-IN-CHILDBED", WHERE SHE STAYS FOR SIXTY-SIX DAYS.

ALMOST EVERY LARGE FALASHA VILLAGE HAS A SYNAGOGUE CALLED MASGID, WITH AT LEAST ONE RESIDENT PRIEST. THE EXTERIOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE LOOKS NO DIFFERENT THAN THE AVERAGE FALASHA DWELLINGS. IT IS CIRCULAR OR OBLONG, THATCHED WITH STRAW, AND, DEPENDING ON ITS SIZE, HAS TWO OR FOUR ENTRANCES. INSIDE, THE SYNAGOGUES ARE ALSO RATHER UNIFORM. IN SOME CASES THEY CONSIST OF ONE ROOM; IN OTHERS, THE OUTER SECTION MAY FORM A CIRCLE WHICH SURROUNDS A QUADRANGULAR SPACE CALLED QUEDDESTA QUEDDUSAN OR THE "HOLY OF HOLIES". ONLY THE HIGH PRIEST, THE PRIEST, AND THE DEACONS ARE PERMITTED TO ENTER THE HOLY OF HOLIES, WHERE THE TORAH AND THE CEREMONIAL CLOTHES OF THE PRIEST ARE KEPT.



Falasha priests with drum, gong.



Falasha weaver



Tilling the soil

THE PRIESTS PERFORM THE SERVICE IN THE SYNAGOGUE. THE PRIESTHOOD IS NOT A HEREDITARY OFFICE. ITS MEMBERS ARE RECRUITED FROM THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY. AFTER A CANDIDATE IS PROPOSED, THE HIGH PRIEST CONFERS WITH THE OTHER PRIESTS CALLED KAHEN, AND TOGETHER THEY EXAMINE HIS CHARACTER AND DEGREE OF LEARNING. IF ANY MEMBER OF HIS FAMILY AS FAR BACK AS THE SEVENTH GENERATION HAS EVER COMMITTED ADULTERY, OR HAS HAD A BODILY DEFECT OF ANY KIND, THE CANDIDATE CANNOT BE ELECTED TO THE PRIESTHOOD.

THE PRIEST DOES NOT DRESS DIFFERENTLY FROM OTHER FALASHAS. THE ONLY BADGE OF HIS OFFICE IS A TURBAN SIMILAR TO THOSE WORN BY PRIESTS IN THE ETHIOPIAN CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

EVERY LARGE COMMUNITY SUPPORTS A HIGH PRIEST, WHO IS CHOSEN FROM AMONG THE OTHER PRIESTS. BOTH THE HIGH PRIEST AND THE PRIEST PERFORM THE DAILY PRAYERS AT THE SYNAGOGUE, PRAY FOR THE SICK, BLESS THE CIRCUMCISED CHILDREN AND THE NEWLY MARRIED. THEY ALSO OFFICIATE AT THE SLAUGHTER OF SACRIFICIAL ANIMALS AND BLESS THE SABBATH AND THE FESTIVAL OFFERINGS. IN ALL MATTERS OF COMMUNITY WELFARE AND POLICY, THE PRIESTS, AS THE CHIEF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY, ARE LOOKED TO FOR GUIDANCE AND LEADERSHIP.

YET DESPITE THIS HIGH PRESTIGE IN THE COMMUNITY, THE PRIESTS DO NOT CONSTITUTE A PRIVILEGED CASTE AND MUST WORK LIKE ALL OTHER FALASHAS AT THE COMMON OCCUPATIONS.

ANOTHER RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION FOUND AMONG THE FALASHAS -- THE PRESENCE OF MONKS AND NUNS -- UNMISTAKABLY REFLECTS THEIR LONG EXPOSURE TO CHRISTIAN INFLUENCES.

AN IMPORTANT RELIGIOUS PRACTICE OF THE FALASHAS IS SACRIFICE. ALL SACRIFICES ARE OFFERED ON AN ALTAR (CALLED THE "AREA OF SACRIFICE") LOCATED ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE SYNAGOGUE. THE SACRIFICIAL ANIMAL MAY BE A BULL, A RAM, OR A GOAT, AND THEY MUST MEET THE OLD TESTAMENT REQUIREMENTS OF NOT BEING BLIND, LAME, OR HAVING ANY BODILY DEFECT. BESIDE THE SACRIFICES, THE FALASHAS BRING "OFFERINGS" TO THE PRIEST. ON SATURDAY MORNING OR AT ANY LUNAR OR YEARLY FESTIVAL THE WOMEN BRING BREAD AND BEER TO THE SYNAGOGUE AS "OFFERING".

THE FALASHAS, THOUGH EATING MUCH THE SAME FOOD AS OTHER ETHIOPIANS, OBSERVE THE PRESCRIPTIONS OF THE BIBLE WITH GREAT STRICTNESS AND EAT ONLY CUD-CHEWING, CLOVEN FOOTED ANIMALS. THEY ARE SCRUPULOUS ABOUT



SYNAGOGUE : its general design is similar to the Betachristian, church of the Ethiopian Christians.



Falasha Monks.



Falasha Men : This scene is typical of many parts of Ethiopia.

WASHING THEIR HANDS BEFORE AND AFTER EVERY MEAL (AS IS THE CASE WITH THE OTHER ETHIOPIANS), AND PRONOUNCING THE BENEDICTION OVER THEIR FOOD. THE FALASHAS DO NOT EAT RAW MEAT OR ANIMALS THAT HAVE DIED NATURAL DEATHS. FOOD PREPARED BY A NON-FALASHA WILL NOT BE EATEN BY A FALASHA PRIEST OR BY OLDER PEOPLE.

IT IS IN THEIR FESTIVALS AND FAST DAYS THAT THE FALASHAS SHOW THE GREATEST DIVERGENCE FROM THE ETHIOPIANS; THEY HAVE WEEKLY, MONTHLY, LUNAR AND YEARLY FESTIVALS AND FASTS. THESE INCLUDE THE FESTIVAL OF "LIGHT HAS APPEARED", CORRESPONDING TO ROSH HASHANA (NEW YEAR), CELEBRATED ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE SEVENTH MOON; THE FEAST OF HARVEST; PASSOVER; AND THE FEAST OF THE TABERNACLES. THE MOST IMPORTANT FAST IS THE DAY OF ATONEMENT, CELEBRATED THE TENTH DAY OF THE SEVENTH MOON. BEFORE THE END OF THE PRAYERS, THE WORSHIPPERS PUT A HANDFUL OF MILLET ON THE STONES, LEAVING IT THERE FOR THE BIRDS. THIS IS DONE TO COMMEMORATE THE DEAD. THE FALASHAS DO NOT CELEBRATE HANUKA. THE SABBATH IS CELEBRATED IN A VERY STRICT MANNER. MEN AND WOMEN QUIT THEIR WORK FRI-DAY AT MIDDAY, AND PERFORM THE RITUAL ABLUTIONS. AS SOON AS THE SUN SETS, ALL THE FIRES IN THE VILLAGE ARE EXTINGUISHED UNTIL THE SABBATH IS OVER. THROUGHOUT THE SABBATH NO WORK OF ANY KIND IS PERMITTED.

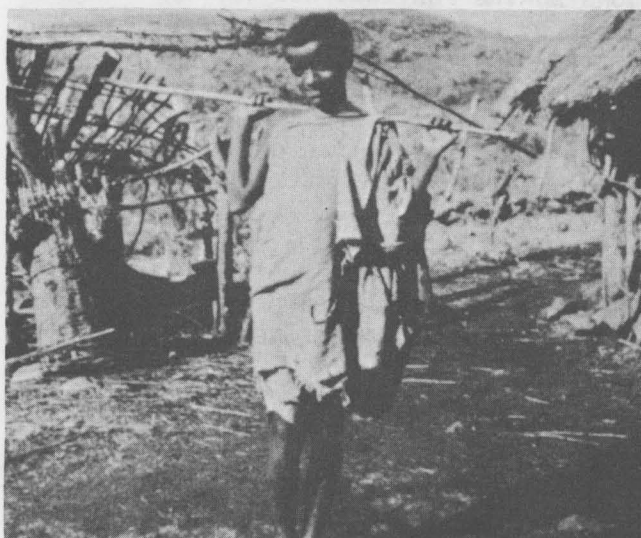
THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ESPECIALLY THE APOC-RYPHAL "BOOK OF THE JUBILEES" CONSTITUTE THE CHIEF SOURCES OF FALASHA RELIGIOUS LAW AND PRECEPTS. ALL OF THESE WORKS, ALONG WITH MOST OF THEIR RELIGIOUS LITERATURE, ARE WRITTEN IN THE LANGUAGE OF GEEZ (OLD ETHIOPIC). THE TALMUD AND ALL OTHER POST-BIBLICAL LITERARY WORKS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF FRAGMENTARY PIECES OF APOCRYPHA, ARE UNKNOWN. AN IMPORTANT WRITING OF THE FALASHAS IS THE "COMMANDMENTS OF THE SABBATH" IN WHICH THE SABBATH IS PRESENTED AS A KIND OF SAINTLY PRESENCE. (SEE TEXT, BELOW)

THOUGH THEIR LITERATURE IS WRITTEN IN OLD ETHIOPIC, THE SPOKEN LANGUAGE OF THE FALASHAS CONFORMS TO THAT OF THEIR ETHIOPIAN NEIGHBORS; IN THE AMHARIC-SPEAKING REGIONS THEY SPEAK AMHARIC, THE MAIN LANGUAGE OF ETHIOPIA, WHILE IN THE NORTHERN OR TIGRIÑA-SPEAKING REGION THEY SPEAK TIGRIÑA.

FORMERLY THEY SPOKE A LANGUAGE BELONGING TO THE AGAU GROUP OF CUSHITIC ORIGIN. ALL HISTORICAL EVIDENCE INDICATES THAT THE FALASHAS HAVE NEVER AT ANY PERIOD SPOKEN HEBREW.



Falasha blacksmiths



Young Falasha carrying walking stick in typical Ethiopian fashion.



Displaying knife for sacrifices and "offerings".

PRAYER IS THE MOST IMPORTANT MANIFESTATION OF FALASHA RELIGIOUS LIFE. THEY RECITE THEIR PRAYERS IN THE SYNAGOGUE OR, OCCASIONALLY, OUTDOORS. ON WEEKDAYS, THE HIGH PRIEST OR THE PRIEST IN CHARGE OF THE RELIGIOUS SERVICE ALONE RECITES THE PRAYERS.

ON SATURDAYS OR ON FESTIVALS THE PEOPLE COME TO THE SYNAGOGUE AND EITHER JOIN IN PRAYER WITH THE PRIESTS OR LISTEN TO THE PRAYERS. THERE ARE SIX DIFFERENT PRAYERS, DURING THE DAY AND FOUR AT NIGHT, AND PARTICULAR PRAYERS FOR THE SABBATHS AND FESTIVALS. THE LANGUAGE OF THE PRAYERS IS GEEZ; IN SOME OF THEM, HOWEVER, ARE STILL FOUND PASSAGES IN QUARENYA, WHICH IS THE CUSHITE LANGUAGE PREVIOUSLY USED BY THE FALASHAS. ON ALL SPECIAL HOLIDAYS EXCEPTING ONLY THE DAY OF ATONEMENT, THE PRIESTS PLAY THE DRUM AND THE IRON GONG DURING PRAYERS. ALL THIS IS ACCOMPANIED BY RHYTHMIC MOVEMENTS OF THE BODY. THE PRAYERS, ACCOMPANIED BY MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, ARE PERFORMED OUTDOORS EITHER ON SPECIAL FESTIVALS AND FASTS, OR DURING BURIAL CEREMONIALS, OR ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS SUCH AS THE RECEIVING OF AN IMPORTANT GUEST.

SONGS ACCOMPANIED BY INSTRUMENTS SUCH AS THE MASONQUO ARE SUNG DURING WEDDINGS AND OTHER OCCASIONS OF REJOICING.

A TYPICAL PRAYER IS THE FOLLOWING:

"HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, THE STRONG, THE POWERFUL. HIS STRENGTH DOES NOT WEAKEN, HE GOVERNS ALONE, KING, PRAISED BY ALL. HIS THRONE IS HIGH, THE POWER OF HIS KINGDOM IS TERRIBLE, THE ART OF HIS WISDOM IS ADMIRABLE. HE IS ALL FIRE. HE IS PERFECT, PURE, NONE IS LIKE HIM. HE KNOWS AND UNDERSTANDS ALL THOUGHTS BEFOREHAND. HE IS SANCTIFIED BY THE SAINTS, AND THE STRONG TREMBLE BEFORE HIS SPLENDOR. THE KING OF KINGS, HIS KINGDOM IS MIGHTY. THE LORD OF THE STRONG, HE GROWS NEITHER OLD NOR EVER CORRUPT. THE KING, HE HIDES HIMSELF NOT, BUT HE CAN NOT BE SEEN. HIS ABODE IS PERFECT, HIS DEEDS ARE WONDERFUL...."

RECORD 01464A (1): PRAYER FOR PASSOVER
CHORUS, GONG, DRUM

RECORD 01464A (2): PRAYER FOR NEW YEAR

RECORD 01464B (1): PRAYER FOR PASSOVER-
CHORUS

RECORD 01464B (2): PRAYER "ADONAI" FOR
SATURDAY -- CHORUS

RECORD 01465A (1): PRAYER OF ABSOLUTION
-- CHORUS, GONG, DRUM

RECORD 01465A (2): PRAYER "ADONAI" FOR
WEEKDAYS -- CHORUS

RECORD 01465B: RESPONSIVE READING --
IN THIS RECORDING THE FIRST VOICE SPEAKS IN GEEZ (ANCIENT ETHIOPIC) AND THE SECOND VOICE TRANSLATES FOR THE CONGREGATION INTO AMHARIC (MODERN ETHIOPIC). FOLLOWING IS THE GEEZ TEXT, GIVEN IN STANDARD PHONETIC TYPE, WITH A LINE-BY LINE TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH INSTEAD OF AMHARIC:

Yatbarräk 'ægzi 'abəher 'amlakä 'asra 'əl
"Blessed be God, the Lord of Israel"

'amlak läkullu mänfäs wäläkullu zäsəga
"The Lord of all spirit and of all
flesh"

wäzentu wə 'ətu səməyə māhari səmu
zälä 'aläm
"This is my name, His name is gracious
for ever"

wäzəkreyänni lätəwleddä təwled
"to be remembered for generations".

wäyəbe 'ægzi 'abəher lämuse
"And God said to Moses"

'anä wāhabkukä sänbätatä wäbä 'alatä
wämeslä 'əräft
"I gave thee the Sabbaths and the
festivals for a rest"

wäšaw 'u səməyə zäbäräbu ' sänbät
"And they called my name on the
fourth Sabbath"

'anä wə 'ətu zahallo wäyēhellu
"I am the one who was and will be"

wäsəməyänni zälä 'aläm
"And my name is for ever"

(wäbo 'at sänbät) bäsabə 'ət 'əlät
bätä 'amnotä 'ægzi 'abəher
("And the Sabbath came) on the seventh
day in confidence to God".

zäyəsə 'əl wäyägänni wäzäyəsəbbah
wäzäyəsəggəd
"He who will implore, be submissive,
praise, prostrate himself"

bätəbu 'ləbbu
"with his resolute heart"

habehu, 'iyəşşennässu 'əllässä
yā 'aqəbuwwa
"to him; those who keep (the Sabbath)
will not be reduced to misery"

wāzəntu wə 'ətu həgg'womu lä 'əllä
ya 'aqbu sänbätä 'əgzi 'abəher
"These are the prescriptions for those
who keep the Sabbath of God"

zāyahayyu zāyäkäbruwwu lä 'əllä
yakäberuwwa läsänbät
"He will give life and will honor
those who honor the Sabbath"

lä 'əllä ya 'aqbu
"for those who keep it (the Sabbath)"

'amä yetwaqäsomu 'əgzi 'abəher lä 'əllä
yənäbru wəstā mädər
"When God will reprimand those who live
on earth"

'amä 'əlätä meş 'at teqäwwəm sänbät
'emhabä 'əgzi 'abəher
"on the day of the arrival (of the
last judgement), the Sabbath will
stand before God"

'əllä yəfärhəwa wätəkäwwən səm 'a
lädäqiqä addam bädähratom
"(to intercede for those) who fear
her, and she will be a testimony for
the children of Adam on the last day"

wätəbelo sänbät lä 'əgzi 'abəher
"And the Sabbath said to God"

'abiy səmākä mähari səmākä
"Great is Thy name, gracious is Thy
name"

wäyəbela 'əgzi 'abəher läsänbät
"And God said to the Sabbath"

mäharku läki zäyäkäwwənäki
"I am gracious in your behalf to
those who belong to thee".

READING LIST

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