



# **The Beta Israel: Falasha in Ethiopia: From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century**

*Steven B. Kaplan*

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...balanced and well informed...a striking piece of scholarship aimed at demythologizing the origins of the Ethiopian Falasha.

-Foreign Affairs

Kaplan's definitive treatment will be of interest to students and scholars of Jewish history, African history, and comparative religion, as well as anyone interested in Jewish affairs and the modern Middle East.

The Midwest Book Review

Kaplan's conceptualizations are judicious and clearly expressed...incisive and well documented... and provides essential background for the process of assimilation now taking lace in Israel.

-The International Journal of African Historical Studies

Kaplan's able interdisciplinary approach is of great value for persons interested in religion, civilization, and process of change.

-Religious Studies Review

Kaplan's well-written, lucid presentation make[s] this important, competent contribution accessible to all levels of readers. Highly recommended.

Choice

Insightful and thorough, a welcome contribution. Kay Kaufman Shelemay, Professor of Music, Harvard University

Undoubtedly the most detailed, most scholarly, and most dispassionate argument of Falasha history hitherto published. [T]his work deserves ... the most careful study by all those (and in particular in Israel) who have any practical or scholarly connection with the Beta Israel.

-- Edward Ullendorff Emeritus Professor of Ethiopian Studies, University of London Fellow of the British Academy

Given Kaplan's facility with both written and oral sources, he is in a unique position to synthesize and reconcile the new historical findings of ethnographers with the written sources and differing conclusions of earlier historians and linguists. His work is insightful and thorough, a welcome contribution.

-- Kay Shelemay, Wesleyan University

The origin of the Black Jews of Ethiopia has long been a source of fascination and controversy. Their condition and future continues to generate debate. The culmination of almost a decade of research, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia* marks the publication of the first book-length scholarly study of the history of this unique community.

In this volume, Steven Kaplan seeks to demythologize the history of the Falasha and to consider them in the wider context of Ethiopian history and culture. This marks a clear departure from previous studies which

have viewed them from the external perspective of Jewish history. Drawing on a wide variety of sources including the Beta Israel's own literature and oral traditions, Kaplan demonstrates that they are not a lost Jewish tribe, but rather an ethnic group which emerged in Ethiopia between the 14th and 16th century. Indeed, the name, Falasha, their religious hierarchy, sacred texts, and economic specialization can all be dated to this period. Among the subjects the book addresses are their links with Ethiopian Christianity, the medieval legends concerning their existence, their wars with the Ethiopian emperors, their relegation to the status of a despised semi-caste, their encounters with European missionaries, and the impact of the Great Famine of 1888-1892.

Kaplan's definitive treatment will be of interest to students and scholars of Jewish history, African history, and comparative religion, as well as anyone interested in Jewish affairs and the modern Middle East.

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