



The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews: A History of the Beta Israel (Falasha) to 1920

James Quirin

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The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews is the most thorough scholarly study of Beta Israel history within Ethiopia yet written. It traces the development of the Ethiopian Jews from their controversial origins to the beginning of the twentieth century. The author places their evolution firmly within the Ethiopian social, ethnic, religious, political and historical context, using analytical tools such as caste, class and ethnicity. Quirin shows how the Ethiopian Jews struggled to maintain their identity in the face of political, military, economic and religious external pressures from the Ethiopian state and the dominant Christian society from the fourteenth through the early seventeenth centuries. He then analyzes their loss of political independence and partial assimilation into the society and state of the Gondar dynasty during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They faced new challenges and influences from European Protestant missionaries and western Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Quirin employs an exhaustive use of Ethiopian and European written sources, as well as an original and careful use of internal oral traditions obtained in interviews with scores of Beta Israel and other informants.

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