



Miscellanea

Songs That Travel

A Review Article of the CD box *The Liturgy of Beta Israel*

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ABSTRACT In 1986, a Franco-Israeli team of scholars set out to document the liturgy of the Beta ʿĒsrāʿel, a group of Ethiopian Jews which at the time was in the process of making *aliyah* under dramatic circumstances. The scholars gathered a group of priests in Israel and produced an impressive corpus of recordings, covering important parts of the liturgical tradition. Over the past decades, the team has been publishing their results in a number of articles and monographs, and in 2019 presented a selection of recordings in the form of a CD box. The box contains three CDs plus a bilingual booklet with information about the liturgical tradition of the Beta ʿĒsrāʿel: their music, prayers, and ritual practices. In this review article, the research results presented in the booklet are evaluated, with special attention paid to the effects that migration has had on the Beta ʿĒsrāʿel liturgical tradition. It investigates which effects the historical circumstances surrounding the recordings have had on the material and subsequent analyses of it. This review article also provides an introduction to the transmission of Beta ʿĒsrāʿel liturgical chant, comparing it with the Ethiopian Christian tradition, and offers an overview of earlier recordings of the Beta ʿĒsrāʿel tradition, published and unpublished.

KEYWORDS Beta Israel, Jewish liturgy, Ethiopian Christianity, chant, migration, Ethiopian Jews, musicology

Avant-propos

But music, like all things that are subject to development, has to obey a constant,

[1]

sometimes accelerating and sometimes ebbing, evolution from which it cannot and must not withdraw.¹ (Huber 2017, 16)

What started as a review of the CD box *The Liturgy of Beta Israel: Music of the Ethiopian Jewish Prayer*, edited by Edwin Seroussi and published in 2019,² has turned into an extended analysis of this publication as well as of previous books and articles by members of the editorial team behind it. The CD box is one of the products of an impressive research project on the liturgy of the Beta ʿĒsrāʿel, the Ethiopian Jews, as documented in Israel in the 1980s. Being the product of almost three decades of engagement with the material, one would expect that the two-hundred-page booklet, which is an integral part of the CD box, would have been carefully prepared. Unfortunately, this is not the case and it leaves ample room for criticism. In order to assess more fairly the parts of the booklet that remain brief, it has therefore seemed necessary to also include here other publications that have emerged out of the project. Additionally, the circumstances surrounding this remarkable project invite us to see the recent developments in the Beta ʿĒsrāʿel liturgy as a reaction to the dramatic history that the group itself has undergone and, indeed, as an example of how religious traditions in general are affected by and respond to migration. [2]

Introduction

The Beta ʿĒsrāʿel liturgy project was initiated in the 1980s as an attempt to avoid the “rapid erosion of the autochthonous liturgical practices of the Beta Israel” that was taking place after the large waves of Beta ʿĒsrāʿel *aliyah*³ (1).⁴ Under the auspices of Simha Arom, a joint Franco-Israeli team⁵ gathered Beta ʿĒsrāʿel priests (ፄሶች; *qesōčč*, sg. ፄሶ; *qes*) to begin recording of their liturgical tradition.⁶ Subsequently, “[i]n the 1990s the recordings became the basis for a thorough scientific project on the music and text of the Beta Israel liturgical repertoire” (2). Additional specialists joined the group: Frank Alvarez-Péreyre (a linguist and anthropologist), [3]

- 1 German original: “Die Musik aber, wie alle Dinge, die einer Entwicklung unterliegen, muss einer konstanten, mal sich beschleunigenden und mal abebbenden, Evolution gehorchen, der sie sich nicht entziehen kann und auch nicht entziehen darf“ (translated by Sophia Dege-Müller).
- 2 *The Liturgy of Beta Israel: Music of the Ethiopian Jewish Prayer* (הליטורגיה של ביהא ישראל: נעימות ההפילה של (יהודי אתיופיה). Edwin Seroussi (ed.), Selection and commentaries by Simha Arom, Frank Alvarez-Péreyre, Shoshana Ben-Dor and Olivier Tourny. Anthology of Music Traditions in Israel 26 (מסורות של מוזיקה 26 אנתולוגיה של מוזיקה בישראל 26). Jerusalem: Jewish Music Research Centre, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (מרכז יהודי למוזיקה). 2019. 3 CDs + booklet (94 pages in English, 87 pages in Hebrew), \$30, ISBN: 7290105167293. The CDs have been made available on Spotify by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (<https://open.spotify.com/album/0iDT4YhCo8WphtMNVhAjAo?si=ivvRS5OCT1-pla3a67-QTA>; accessed September 2, 2020).
- 3 The term *aliyah* refers to the immigration of Jews from the diaspora to Israel. In the case of the Beta ʿĒsrāʿel, their *aliyah* took place in several large operations, known today by their military names. The most famous are “Operation Moses” from November 1984 to January 1985 and “Operation Solomon” from May 24 to May 25, 1991 (Kaplan 2003, 556).
- 4 When we provide page numbers in the main text, they refer to the booklet of the CD box.
- 5 The team included members from the Jewish Music Research Centre (JMRC), the Department of Music of the Jewish National and University Library, the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), and the Maison des Cultures du Monde.
- 6 The booklet does not reveal much about the priests, except their names (4). *Qes* Adane Tekuye could perhaps be the Adana Takuyo from Ambobar who was also Kay Kaufman Shelemay’s informant (Shelemay 1986b, 347). Elsewhere, some of the authors state that five priests came from “Tigre” (i.e., Təgrāy), one each from the regions of Walqāyt, Wagarā, and Gondar, and one apprentice from Səmen (Alvarez-Péreyre and Ben-Dor 1999, 235; cf. also Atar 2005, 162).

Shoshana Ben-Dor (an expert in Beta ʿEsrāʿel studies), and Olivier Tourny (at the time a PhD candidate, but later to become a renowned musicologist). In 2000, Edwin Seroussi became the director of the Jewish Music Research Centre (JMRC) and “inherited this complex and ambitious scientific project” (2), of which the publication of the present CD box plus booklet is one of the outcomes. Previously, other team members have published studies based on the materials collected, some of which will be discussed in this review article, as they help to elucidate the contents of the booklet. The most important of these studies is Tourny’s monograph *Le chant liturgique juif éthiopien* (2009), but smaller articles have also made contributions on various aspects.⁷ About one third of the recordings now made available were published previously on the CD *Liturgies juives d’Éthiopie*, prepared by Alvarez-Péreyre and Arom in 1990.⁸

The extensive booklet accompanying the CD box is bilingual in English and Hebrew. Given our linguistic limitations, the following elaborations are based solely on the English portion.⁹ The booklet starts with a general introduction to the Beta ʿEsrāʿel traditions and liturgy, followed by a section on Beta ʿEsrāʿel liturgical music and performance practices. In a third section, the contents of the three CDs are commented on chant by chant. As the booklet lacks a table of contents, one is provided as an appendix to this review article. The booklet additionally includes two charts, the first (19) showing the Ethiopian Christian calendar (NB, *not* the Beta ʿEsrāʿel calendar)¹⁰ in comparison with the Gregorian dates and the Hebrew month names, the second (20–21) delineating “Beta Israel prayers according to the annual cycle.” There is no explanation of the transliteration system that has been employed, nor pronuncia-

[4]

7 Tracking down these related publications has been a challenging task, as only a few of them are included in the reference list at the end of the booklet. It is probable that some publications that touch upon, and perhaps further develop, the themes covered in the booklet have been overlooked. Noticeably, the two-volume *Anthology of the Ethiopian Jewish Liturgical Music* by Frank Alvarez-Péreyre, Simha Arom, Shoshana Ben-Dor, and Olivier Tourny, reportedly in print in the Yuval Music Series at The Magnes Press (Jerusalem) in 2002 (Tourny 2002, 103n18) and in 2004 (Anteby-Yemini 2004, 38n2) has not been available to us.

8 Below, each track number of the 1990 CD is given together with its correspondence on the presently published CDs: 1 = CD III-10, 2 = CD II-11, 3 = CD II-3, 4 = CD I-10, 5 = CD III-7, 6 = CD I-7, 7 = CD II-11, 8 = CD I-9, 10 = CD III-14, 11 = CD I-4, 12 = CD I-6, 13 = CD III-12. The booklet of the 1990 CD is available in digitized form at the website of Maison des Cultures du Monde (<http://www.ligne13.maisondesculturesdumonde.org/sites/default/files/albums/booklet260013.pdf>; accessed August 31, 2020). Twelve of the fourteen tracks can be found in a YouTube playlist (https://youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_lwIqe_p5dPyF6MwhHFbNKG-Koh_8vtry50; accessed August 31, 2020), whereas thirteen of fourteen tracks are found on Spotify (<https://open.spotify.com/album/7d8TzUenN2ogbT6ma3Hc4Z?si=nr-o2qfbRomF0jERgdSVFg>; accessed September 2, 2020). For unclear reasons, track 14 is missing from the version available on Spotify; however, judging from the title and duration of the track as given on the back of the 1990 booklet, it is likely that it corresponds to the present CD III-13. See also the website of the NLI, where, however, the recordings are not publicly available (https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL002765341/NLI; accessed October 5, 2020).

9 However, the list of reference is only given once, as part of the English section.

10 On page 27, the authors describe the challenges in determining the exact calendar of the Beta ʿEsrāʿel. Wolf Leslau had already remarked that computing the Beta ʿEsrāʿel calendar is difficult and that he did not manage to reach satisfactory results (1957, 75). The booklet (18) describes an epagomenal month called *Aderash* (perhaps ለዳራሽ; *ʿaddārāš*, “hall, reception room,” or ለድራሽ; *ʿadrāš*, for which Kane gives the definition “one who delivers, e.g., messages; protocol officer (inf.); fast vehicle; address,” 1990, 1741) that is added every three to four years to keep the lunar calendar aligned with the solar calendar. The practices described by Shelemay of referring to the months by ordinal numbers and of adding epagomenal *days*, not a month, are not mentioned in the booklet (Shelemay 1986b, 44–46, however, see also 1999a, 65n2). In 2017, Basil Lourié presented an in-depth analysis of calendric considerations, concluding that the Beta ʿEsrāʿel calendar is substantially different to the “Jewish” calendar contained in the computus tables (2017).

tion guidelines for the reader unfamiliar with Gəʿəz and ʿAgaw, the sacred languages of the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel.¹¹

The Franco-Israeli Project in the Context of Modern Beta ʿĒsrāʾel History

Before embarking on an analysis of the CD box and the accompanying booklet, let us consider the Franco-Israeli Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgy project from a bird’s-eye perspective. As indicated above, the very *raison d’être* of the project is found in the post-emigrational context. Starting from 1980, increasing numbers of Beta ʿĒsrāʾel began to emigrate to Israel. By 1983, it is estimated that around four thousand were living in Israel. Through a number of *aliyah* “operations” of different sizes, more and more Ethiopian Jews were taken to Israel, culminating with “Operation Solomon” in May 1991, in which over 14,000 Beta ʿĒsrāʾel reportedly arrived during the course of thirty-six hours. After this, smaller operations continued to occur, resulting in a total number of over 55,000 immigrated Beta ʿĒsrāʾel in Israel in the middle of 1999, not counting members of the group born *ba-aretz* (Kaplan 2003, 556). [5]

Initiated in the 1986, with additional recordings being made in 1989 (Tourny 2002, 99–100), the Franco-Israeli Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgy project has its roots in the middle of these turbulent migration years. It was because of the geographic dislocation of the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel that Simha Arom and the other researchers came into contact with this liturgical tradition. This geographic dislocation was, at the same time, also the reason why the researchers felt that they were faced with a tradition under an imminent threat of extinction, one that swiftly needed to be recorded (Tourny 2002, 99–100). As a result of living in Israel, the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel were exposed to the practices of Rabbinical Judaism to an extent they had never experienced before. Kay Kaufman Shelemay, in a book published in 1986, shared a similarly pessimistic view of the future of the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgical tradition, simply stating that “Beta Israel ritual will not survive much longer in the new world of the people who transmitted it for centuries” (Shelemay 1986b, 216). As pointed out by Steven Kaplan already at the first stages of this project, it is somehow ironic that this effort to preserve the liturgical traditions of the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel took place in a context where the main informants were “enrolled in a program of rabbinical studies” aimed at assimilating their religious life to Rabbinical Judaism (Kaplan 1988, 51). [6]

As a result of these historical circumstances, the recordings which form the basis of the project represent a truly unique moment in the history of the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgical tradition, newly arrived and not entirely settled in a new land. This was a context in which the practitioners were forced to re-invent their tradition to suit their new living conditions. Eric Hobsbawm’s observations about the steady but non-linear change of traditions can be fruitfully applied to this situation. He writes: [7]

[t]here is probably no time and place with which historians are concerned which has not seen the ‘invention’ of tradition [...]. However, we should expect it to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which ‘old’ traditions had been designed, producing new ones to [8]

11 In this review article, we transcribe Gəʿəz according to the transcription system used in the long-term project Beta Maṣāḥəft, based at the Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies in Hamburg, except in direct quotations from other sources.

which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carrier and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated: in short, when there are sufficiently large and rapid changes on the demand or the supply side. (Hobsbawm 1983, 4–5)

Back in the 1980s, when the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgy project began, it was unforeseeable how the tradition of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel would evolve and develop. A return to an (almost) original state must have seemed unlikely, given the dramatic changes that the community was going through, including the conscious, state-sponsored efforts to make the community—as Tourny puts it—“conform to the norm” of “modern Judaism” (Tourny 2002, 100). Writing in 2020, almost three decades after the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgy project was initiated, we can, however, observe that some of the fears expressed at that time appear not to have been realized. Rather, the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgical tradition has shown impressive stability, being able to withstand many changes and to reverse others that had already taken place. Music, it has been pointed out, “possesses a high degree of stability at least in some of its major manifestations” (Shiloah and Cohen 1983, 227). We will return these questions below. [9]

The CD Booklet: First Part

The first section of the CD booklet, “The Beta Israel Liturgy: Components and Dynamics” (7–52), is an introduction to the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel and their liturgical life. As this descriptive section concisely treats a wide variety of topics, spanning from the use of different languages to calendrical questions, we have chosen to focus on the topics where an overlap between the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel and Ethiopian Christian traditions is found, and where we are able to make a contribution. [10]

After a general introduction, the historical relationship between the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel and Ethiopian Christianity is treated briefly. This question and its implications for Beta ʾĒsrāʾel ethnogenesis has been the topic of a heated scholarly discussion since the 1980s, when Kay Kaufman Shelemay, at the time an associate professor of music at New York University, published the monograph *Music, Ritual, and Falasha History* (1986b).¹² In it, she argues for a strong dependency of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgical tradition on the Ethiopian Christian tradition and suggests that the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel originated as a dissident group within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church around the fourteenth century. Her book was received with enthusiasm by many (Kaplan 1988, 1989; Sharvit 1988; Mooresfield 1989; Coplan 1990; Nasreddin-Longo 1991), but also received criticism (Weil 1989).¹³ The authors behind the CD box take a critical stance towards Shelemay’s work. Building on a statement by Kaplan (1987) remarking that “[w]ith the possible exception of their prayers [...], virtually the entire corpus of Beta Israel literature is of Christian origin,”¹⁴ they write: [11]

Interested in the musical dimension of the liturgy but also drawing on textual evi- [12]

12 The improved knowledge of literary works of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel, such as the *Təʾzāza sanbat*, “The Commandments of the Sabbath,” has also contributed to this development (see, for example, Kaplan 1987).

13 It should be mentioned that one of the points of criticism raised by Weil—that Shelemay does not compare the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgical tradition with any of the liturgical traditions of Rabbinical Judaism—was partly amended by another publication by Shelemay (1986a).

14 Unfortunately, the reference that the booklet provides for this quotation—“Kaplan 1987a:15” (10)—is not found in the article by Stephen Kaplan from 1987 included in their bibliography. We have not been able to identify the quotation, which is also given in the Hebrew section of the booklet (10).

dence, Shelemay chose not to focus on the specific nature of the music of the Beta Israel liturgical repertoire in comparison with the Christian one. She also refrained from comparing the literary structure of the Beta Israel pieces with Christian ones, or the internal organization of the textual sources within the liturgy. In those two parameters, it becomes obvious that sharp differences exist between the Beta Israel and the Christian liturgies in Ethiopia. (11)

We will have reason to come back to their statement, as the authors later develop the ideas that underlie their criticism of Shelemay's work. [13]

After this introduction, the focus shifts to the Beta 'Ēsrā'el liturgical tradition. The Beta 'Ēsrā'el are said to categorize their prayers either as “Ṣolot” (presumably ጸሎት, *ṣalot*, “prayer”) or as “Zemāre” (ዝግጌ; *zammāre*, “song, hymn”), where the first categorization implies that a prayer is obligatory in a certain liturgical context and the second that its use is optional. The status of a certain prayer may vary depending on the liturgical settings, on some occasions being “Ṣolot” and on others “Zemāre.” The terminology is interesting, as both of these words occur in the context of Ethiopian Christian liturgy as well—a fact that the authors do not mention—however, with different meanings. In the context of Ethiopian Christian liturgy, *ṣalot* refers to prayer in general, including both its private and liturgical manifestations (Zanetti 2010), whereas *zammāre* is a type of antiphon performed during *Qəddāse* (ቅዳሴ; the Eucharistic service) as well as the name of a collection of these (Habtemichael Kidane 1998, 110–16). This use of an identical technical vocabulary for similar or distinct entities is a feature already described by Shelemay (1986b, 144). [14]

There is a short section on the liturgical books of the Beta 'Ēsrā'el (13). In two, the “Kahen Maṣḥaf” (i.e., ካህን መጽሐፍ; *Kāhən maṣḥaf*, “The priest's book”) and the “Sa'atat” (i.e., ሰዓታት; *Sa'ātāt*, “[Book of] Hours”), “the prayers [...] are not written in the order of their performance” (13). The *Sa'ātāt* contains texts for the daily services, whereas the texts for holidays and Sabbaths are found in either the *Sa'ātāt* or the *Kāhən maṣḥaf*, or only in the oral tradition. In the “Mashaf Āsteray” (i.e., መጽሐፍ ለስተርእይ (?), *Maṣḥaf 'astar'ay* (?), “Book of Apparition”¹⁵), which contains only the prayers for the holiday 'Astar'ayo (አስተሰርዮ; “Atonement”, equivalent to Yom Kippur), the prayers “appear in the order in which they are performed” (13). The organization of the liturgical books is an area where comparisons with the Ethiopian Christian tradition might be fruitful. In the Ethiopian Christian context, liturgical books are generally arranged according to the order of performance of the individual prayers or chants. The liturgical calendar also plays a role in structuring the text. Historically, different ways of organizing the materials have been used in the Christian context, melodic characteristics sometimes being the main organizational principle (Shelemay, Jeffery, and Monson 1993). Although it clearly falls outside the scope of the CD box, a more in-depth study of the similarities and differences between the liturgical books of the two traditions might be a worthwhile project, adding to the musicological comparisons presented here and elsewhere (see, for example, Tourny 2007). [15]

In their dismissal of Shelemay's conclusions, the authors of the CD box booklet mention a [16]

15 The authors provide two different names for the holiday corresponding to Yom Kippur: *Āsteray* and *Āstaseryo*. The confusion between these two names has already been discussed by Leslau (1951, 142n50, 1957, 86n3). While the latter can easily be identified as the Gə'əz word ለስተሰርዮ; 'astar'ayo, “atonement,” the first word is difficult to interpret. Perhaps the authors of the booklet faced a similar problem, as they translated *Mashaf 'Āsteray* as “Book of Asteray” (13). It is possible that the name is connected to the word ለስተርእዮ; 'astar'ayo, “apparition, manifestation,” which in Ethiopian Christianity is used to refer to the feast of Transfiguration (Leslau 1991, 459; see also Aešcoly 1951, 42).

comparison of the “internal organization of the textual sources” (see above). In this, they seem to be referring to the discussion of differences between the Beta ʿĪsrāʾel and the Ethiopian Christian use of the Psalter that appears on page 23. This discussion is, unfortunately, little elaborated, something which doubtlessly is due to the embryonic state of research in both fields. The authors conclude that, as opposed to the eclectic quotations of the Beta ʿĪsrāʾel, the “Christians quote blocks of verses in consecutive order, in terms of both the verses and the order of chapters of the Psalms” (23). This difference, it seems, can be attributed to the fact that the authors used Bernard Velat’s edition of the *Məʿrāf* (ጠዕራፍ, ed. Velat 1966b, French transl. 1966a), the “Liturgical Psalter,” as their source material for the Christian tradition. As explained by Velat in the avant-propos to the translation, the *Məʿrāf* can be defined as an “arrangement of the Psalter for the different parts of the Divine Office” (1966a, 10). It contains, at its core, the *ordo* of the services of Divine Office and, as is common in this type of Christian liturgy, a central part of these services is occupied by psalms taken from the Psalter. If the authors had used a collection of “composed” chants instead, such as the *Ṣoma Dəggʷā* (ጸጢ: ድጎጎ, the “Antiphony for Lent”), likewise published by Velat in the 1960s (ed. Velat 1966c, French transl. 1969), as their example of Ethiopian Christian liturgy, the relationship between the biblical source text and the Ethiopian Christian liturgical texts would have appeared quite differently. And very possibly, it would have been more reminiscent of what they describe for the Beta ʿĪsrāʾel.¹⁶ Additionally, one can notice that even among the Beta ʿĪsrāʾel chants included in this publication, there is an example where a chant consists of “blocks of verses” from the same Psalm appearing “in consecutive order.”¹⁷ One part of the argument against Shelemay’s work thus seems to be based on an all too narrow reading of the Christian material.

The attempt to classify prayers on pages 25–27 is mildly confusing. To summarize, pre-existing texts, predominantly of biblical origin, are said to be used either prescriptively or homiletically (26). Prescriptive prayers are classified into two types: the “Wanevavo” type (probably ወነቡጎ, *wa-nababo*, “and He [God] spoke to him [Moses]”) and “all the other prescriptive prayers.” The homiletic prayers are categorized into eight different categories (“not always mutually exclusive”) according to their purpose, as well as into three further categories—descriptive, petitionary, and homiletic (27), the latter of which is further subdivided into the subtypes narrative homily and prescriptive homily (27)—“from the point of view of content and themes.” This categorization would have become clearer if examples of the different usages had been provided. If this is the comparison of the “the literary structure of the Beta Israel pieces with Christian ones” that Shelemay is said to have refrained from, it would have been opportune to spend more time on explaining the complex patterns and clarifying how these differ from a corresponding analysis of the Ethiopian Christian prayer tradition.

One feature that might have deserved a more thorough treatment is the formal characteristics of the texts themselves, most clearly apparent in the occurrence of rhyme. The authors note that rhymed verses do not occur in the Beta ʿĪsrāʾel tradition (53). In Christian liturgical

16 There are plenty of examples of antiphons in Velat’s edition of the *Ṣoma Dəggʷā* that unite quotations from different Psalms (as well as other biblical books) in various sequences. See, from the first pages of the edition, no. 15 (Velat 1969, 3/[287]), no. 111 (Velat 1969, 19/[303]), no. 121 (Velat 1969, 21/[305]), no. 185 (Velat 1969, 35/[319]).

17 This is the case for CD II-4, which consists of Ps. 135 (LXX): 1–3, 5–12, 16–17, 19–22 (the end of some lines are left out). Between vv. 11 and 12, a variant of v. 15 appears to have been inserted. An additional insertion is found between vv. 20 and 21, but due to the plurivocality, we have not been able to identify the text that is performed.

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texts, on the other hand, rhyme is attested from the earliest chant manuscripts onwards,¹⁸ and plays a central role in liturgical genres of later date, such as the *malkəʾ*. While probably restricted to certain types of liturgical chants within the Ethiopian Christian tradition,¹⁹ its early attestation makes it a possibly important distinguishing feature between the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel and Christian Ethiopian traditions of liturgical chant. The neglect of this topic can be connected to a general lack of focus on the texts (see below).

The section on performance practices (28–36) that follows this disparate introduction is valuable, especially in its second part, since it is intimately connected to the discussion of the musicological analysis appearing in the second part of the booklet. In this section, the discussion is more closely knit to the recorded material on which the project is based and which, in part, is made available through the publication of the CD box. Much of what has been taken up before is repeated here in the concrete context of the recordings, and it becomes clear that the previous introduction is meant to serve as a background for this discussion of performance practices. [19]

After this, a section is dedicated to the prayers of different calendrical cycles. The Beta ʾĒsrāʾel prayers are closely connected to the liturgical course of time, some being tied to the daily cycle, others to the weekly, monthly, or yearly cycle. There are three daily prayer hours: the morning, the afternoon (to be understood literally as prayers from noon onwards), and the evening.²⁰ After a short introduction, basically stating only that the same prayer can occur in various cycles, the authors go on to describe three series of prayers, i.e., individual prayers that occur one after another on specific occasions in the liturgical year of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel. The first series is the one that opens “every early afternoon service [is this *early* afternoon service something else than the afternoon service described above?], whether weekday, Sabbath, holiday or *Səgd*” (37). Then comes a section discussing different versions of the *Herzəgā* prayer, occurring at the beginning of “[a]ll evening prayers of all holidays” (39), and also as part of the morning services of all holidays.²¹ It is unclear whether the *Herzəgā* is to be understood as the first prayer in a “series” briefly sketched on page 40, or whether it forms a category on its own. Then follow discussions of a series of prayers that appears “in the order of prayers for the morning of the New Moon and all yearly holidays except for the *Səgd*” (40, italics in the original), and, finally, one for the “end of all festive morning services, including the Sabbath” (42). The descriptions of these series of prayers focus on the contents, but without providing the actual texts. Instead (with rare exceptions), central attributes and themes are reformulated [20]

18 See, for example, the following *śalast* antiphon for the Season of Flowers, attested in the fourteenth-century chant collection MS EMMML 7618 (fol. 90rb, lines 15–20), which seems to rhyme in *-t*: ጎለፈ፡ ክረምት፡ ቆመ፡ በረከት፡ ወተሰርገወት፡ ምድር፡ በሰነ፡ ጽጌት፡ ሎቱ፡ ይደሉ፡ ሰብሐት፡ ለእምላክ፡ ምሕረት፡ እሰመ፡ ንጉሥ፡ ወአቱ፡ ቀደሳ፡ ወእክበራ፡ ወእልዓላ፡ ለሰንበት፡፡ “The raining season has passed, the blessing has stood up, and the Earth has been adorned with the beauty of flowers. To Him glory is due, to the God of Mercy, for He is king. He sanctified, honored and lifted up the Sabbath.” Or the following *ʾarbāʿt* antiphon for the Season of Flowers (here in a standardized form), whose earliest attestation is in the pre-mid-fourteenth-century chant collection MS EMMML 7078 (fol. 7v, lines 16–19), likewise rhyming in *-t*: ሐመልማለ፡ ንነት፡ አሰካለ፡ በረከት፡ እንተ፡ እሰመርካ፡ ለምድር፡ በጽጌት፡ ገባራ፡ ሕይወት፡ እንተ፡ እግዚአ፡ ለሰንበት፡፡ “The greenness of Paradise, the grapes of blessing! You adorned the Earth with flowers. Giver of Life, you are the Lord of the Sabbath.” Jonas Karlsson is currently working on a PhD dissertation focussing on early Ethiopian Christian chant collections.

19 A comprehensive survey of such features in the corpus of Ethiopian Christian liturgical chants is still missing.

20 This seems to be in contradiction with what is reported by Leslau and Shelemay (Leslau 1957, 68–70; Shelemay 1986b, 104–9), who both distinguish a larger number of prayers times.

21 *Herzəgā*, variously spelled in different sources, appears to be an ʾAgaw word, although possibly originating from Gəʿəz, meaning “good Lord” or the like (see Shelemay 1986b, 306; Appleyard 1995, 110).

and summarized. To quote two examples: The “*Kiyake* [i.e., the prayer beginning with ኪያካ; *kiyāka*, “You”], expresses trust in God as the one who will protect, as the only God, king and creator, and ends with a statement that it is good to trust in God” (38). Similarly, on page 42,

[the prayer] *Yitbarak ...wayəmla* [i.e., ይትባረክ: [...] ወይምላእ; *yətbārak* [...] *wayəmlā*], ‘may He be blessed [...] and may (the Earth) be filled’ [...] opens with the declaration that God is to be praised as creator of everything, thus His world is filled with praise by all He created. This prayer also contains the phrase *zə’avtsəhanee* [i.e., ዘክብረኩሉ; *za-’abṣəḥanni*, “who has brought me”] which occurred in the prayers *Herzaga* and *Zegevre* [i.e., ዘገብረ; *za-gabra*, “He who made”]. After this brief introduction, the prayer goes on to describe God’s holiness, greatness and eternal nature, in short verses beginning with the phrase *behatitu qedus qedus* [i.e., ባሕተቱ ቅዱስ፡ ቅዱስ፡; *bāḥtitu qəddus qəddus*], meaning ‘He alone is holy.’ This phrase is also evidently influenced by the declaration of the angels in Isaiah (6:3) that the whole world is full of His Glory, a phrase that occurred earlier in that same prayer.

[21]

This way of reformulating the texts of the prayers creates a barrier between the reader and the actual material and, for laymen and specialists alike, a transcription of the text and a translation would have been more useful.

[22]

In a section on sacrifices (43–45), the sacrificial ritual is described in some detail, with a focus on the liturgical chants that are performed as part of it. Because of a typographical error (?), it remains unclear how the sacrificial ritual has changed since the arrival in Israel.²² In his monograph, Tourny, for his part, speaks of an “increasing abandonment” of animal sacrifices among the Beta ’Ēsrā’el in Israel, and also mentions that was part of the installation of new priests, two pieces of information that are missing in the booklet (2009, 178, 29).

[23]

At the end of the first part, life-cycle rituals connected with births, weddings, and mourning are introduced. The frequent references to specific chants that are performed on these occasions are valuable and add to the descriptions of similar rituals found in earlier studies (Flad 1869; Leslau 1957; Kaplan 1990, 142–50). Unfortunately, the chants are referred to here using only the “titles” (i.e., incipits) and the catalogue numbers in the Sound Archive at the National Library of Israel (NLI), with no references to track numbers on the CDs. For the tracks on the CDs, on the other hand, the NLI catalogue numbers are not given. This lamentable circumstance makes it difficult for the reader/listener to connect the available recordings with the descriptions in this section, if indeed there are overlaps between what is discussed in the booklet and what is found on the CDs.²³

[24]

The CD Booklet: Second Part

The second part of the CD booklet, “Music of the Beta Israel liturgy” (53–62), is dedicated to a musicological analysis of the Beta ’Ēsrā’el liturgy treating five main topics: melody, form, time, scale, and plurivocality.²⁴ In general, large parts of this section of the booklet are enhanced

[25]

22 In Ethiopia, the animal was “tied and slaughtered,” (44). However, “[r]ecently, the order of the offering of sacrifices was altered; the animal is first tied and then slaughtered” (44). Leslau and Kaplan discuss sacrifices but do not comment on the binding of the animal (Leslau 1957, 70–71; Kaplan 1990, 128–29).

23 In any case, one can notice that the tracks CD III-12 to III-14 belong to such life-cycle rituals.

24 For the latter, “heterophony” would appear be a more commonly used term.

and made easier to follow by a parallel reading of the corresponding sections in *Le chant liturgique juif éthiopien* (Tourny 2009), where tables and illustrative examples are provided more generously.

As described in the booklet, the melodies of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgical chants generally consist of a “variable number of verses” all being performed on different realizations of one and the same melodic formula (53). The same melodic formulas, furthermore, occur in numerous prayers, creating an impression in the listener that “different prayers sound very much like each other” (54). The booklet’s description of different types of “cells” consisting of melodic movements ascending or descending by different “conjunct degrees” (54–55) remains brief and is not always easy to understand for non-experts. This could perhaps have been remedied by the addition of illustrative examples.

Formally, the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgical chanting is based on the alternation between one or two priests singing solos and a choir, consisting of the rest of the participating clergy or learned men (28), either repeating a part of what the soloist has sung or responding with a recurring, textually and melodically fixed refrain (56). The booklet refers to the first as the “antiphonal pattern” and to the second as the “responsorial pattern” (see also Tourny 2009, 61). To these can be added a third, more complex form, which the authors of the booklet call the “hemiola pattern” (see Tourny 2009).²⁵ Here, the binary alternation between soloist and choir is combined with alternations between three (or more) different melodic phrases. One example, taken from the description of CD I–4, where three melodic phrases are repeated two times each, is reproduced schematically below as Table 1 (based on the page 65 in the booklet). The hemiola pattern is said to be absent from the Ethiopian Christian chanting tradition, but present, for example, in the music of the Sufi community in Gondar (57). Various combinations of these three patterns can co-occur within one chant.²⁶

Table 1: Schematic depiction of the “hemiola pattern.”

| Soloist | Choir | Soloist | Choir | Soloist | Choir |
|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|
| A | B | C | A | B | C |

The discussion of time and rhythm in the liturgical music of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel identifies four different “conceptions of musical time or [...] ways of characterizing it” (58) within the tradition, namely “[1] unmeasured prayers; [2] prayers emphasized by musical accompaniment; [3] unmeasured prayers accompanied by a rhythmic *ostinato*; and [4] strictly measured prayers” (58, italics in the original). The use of instruments plays a role in defining and separating these different categories, and will be discussed in more detail in a separate section below.

Describing the scales and the plurivocality of Beta ʾĒsrāʾel chants is not an easy task, as the “notion of absolute pitch is ignored among the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel and the scales of their prayers are not submitted to normalized temperament. Furthermore, at times, the pitch of a piece rises progressively throughout its performance” (60). The chants are often monophonic, but

25 Although the technical term is lacking, the article “The Formal Organisation of the Beta Israel Liturgy – Substance and Performance: Musical Structure” by Arom and Tourny (1999) appears to treat different forms of the hemiola pattern and provides further illustration, which, however, remains of limited use for *éthiopian(e)s* not trained in musicology.

26 According to Tourny, this is the case in the majority of Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgical chants (2009, 61).

in the “choral sections the melody branches out into intertwined lines, creating in the listener the impression of a rudimentary and sporadic plurivocality” (61). Out of naïve curiosity, and inspired by a note by Ron Atar (2011, 139), the question arises which role the circumstances surrounding the recording plays in this. As stated above, the group of priests that performed the chants consisted of individuals originating in different geographic regions. It was the immigration to Israel that led to the formation of this constellation of priests, and it seems unlikely that a similar composition of persons would have occurred in Ethiopia.²⁷ While the majority had their origin in the region of Təgrāy in northern Ethiopia, there were also representatives of other areas that the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel occupied. The question briefly touched on by Atar is basically the following: Is it possible that the frequent branching out of the melody “into intertwined lines” is partly the result of various local traditions, based on the same melodic foundation but differing in various details, being performed at the same time? Even if the plurivocality is also an intrinsic part of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel tradition of liturgical chant, it is difficult to imagine that the heterogeneousness of the singers would not in any way have affected the result. Generally speaking, it would have been useful if the geographic origin of each individual priest (their names are listed on page 4) had been clearly written out.²⁸ In future works of Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgical chant, it might be worthwhile to keep the topic of regional varieties in mind.²⁹

In general, it would have been extremely helpful if the descriptions of musicological characteristics of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgical chanting had been provided with references to representative examples among the chants on the CDs. This would have made the discussion more accessible to non-specialists, while also making more use of the unique possibilities offered by a multi-media publication like this. [30]

Excursion: The Transmission of Beta ʾĒsrāʾel Liturgical Chant

In connection to the discussion of the music of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgical tradition, we would like to offer a short survey of the previous literature on a music-related topic covered only briefly in the booklet, namely the ways in which the liturgical music of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel was (and is) transmitted. As stated in the booklet, the music of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel is transmitted only orally, and unlike the Ethiopian Christian tradition, which uses a system of musical notation known as *mälakkät* (ግልጽት, lit. “sign[s]”),³⁰ no way of noting down music in writing is known.³¹ Furthermore, the performance of the chants is said “not [to be] subject to any theorization” (53).³² This invites a comparison with Ethiopian Christian liturgical practices, [31]

27 It remains unclear precisely how the informants of the Franco-Israeli Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgy project were gathered. It is lamentable that the recording of different geographic styles was not in the focus of the research group.

28 See footnote 6.

29 A similar critique was put forward already by Weil in her review of the methodology in Shelemay’s *Music, Ritual, and Falasha History* (Shelemay 1986b; see Weil 1989).

30 For an introduction to the topic, see Tourny’s “Le support de l’écrit, la part de l’oralité dans la psalmodie de l’Église chrétienne orthodoxe d’Éthiopie: l’exemple du psaume 62” (2001). The most extensive study of the Ethiopian Christian system of musical notation so far is Shelemay and Jeffery’s three-volume *Ethiopian Christian Liturgical Chant: An Anthology* (1993, 1994, 1997).

31 It should, however, be stressed that orality also plays a central role in the transmission of Ethiopian Christian liturgical music.

32 What precisely is meant by “theorization” is a matter of discussion. The music-related terminology presented in Shelemay’s *Music, Ritual, and Falasha History* (1986b), *kaffəfaññā zemā*, *laslāsā zemā*, etc. (see

which are taught over many years in a formalized way in traditional church schools. With this culturally close example in mind, one might wonder if no such education existed among the Beta ʿEsrāʾel and, if not, what the social setting was in which their liturgical music was handed down from generation to generation.³³

The system of traditional education plays an important role in the Ethiopian Christian culture, and “is still given today in most of the parish churches and monasteries” (Chaillot 2002, 83). The traditional education of Christian clergy is a process of many years of studies in “houses” (ቤተ-ጳጳስ; *betočč*, sg. ቤት; *bet*) which specialize on different levels and matters of education, from the elementary *nəbāb bet* (ንባብ: ቤት; “house of reading”) to more advanced classes. Singing is taught in the *zemā bet* (ዜማ: ቤት; “house of chant”). Musical performance and dance, the command of the liturgical instruments (drum, sistrum) and the usage of the prayer stick are taught in the ʾaqʷāqʷām *bet* (አቋቋሞ: ቤት; lit. “house of [liturgical] moving”). This formal education system leads to a relatively standardized and regulated performance practice, with a couple of different recognized regional schools (see Chaillot 2002, 85–87). The system of traditional education within the Ethiopian Christian tradition has been the topic of numerous introductions of different sorts (e.g., Chaillot 2002, 83–100; Imbakom Kalewold 1970; Habta Māryām Warqənah 1969; see also Shelemay and Jeffery 1994, 3–6).

By contrast, descriptions of the education of Beta ʿEsrāʾel monks and priests are rare in the literature. Shelemay states: “Since monastic training provided a good education and prestige, most Beta Israel priests studied with the monks” (Shelemay 1986b, 79). Referring to Shelemay’s statement, Atar elaborates:

Beta Israel priests, as the main keepers and transmitters of their religious heritage and liturgy, used to study with monks (*manakosat*) over a period of about seven to ten years in their youth. They were taught, isolated, in monasteries [...]. The learning process of the young apprentices (*dyaqon*) consists not only [in] memorizing the written laws of the Bible [...], but also in observing the service and listening to it; indeed, the study of the service was a crucial part of the training. [...] The trainees were taught the immense number of prayers of *Beta Israel* liturgy—whose main services took place at night or early morning hours—by heart. The learning process was accomplished through listening to the services and memorizing the prayers and their order. (Atar 2011, 134–35, italics in the original)

A bit further down, Atar describes the learning procedure as follows: “[*q*]es Imharen used to interrupt other *qesoch*, correct the *zema* and even demonstrate it by himself, while the other *qesoch* listened and followed to his order” (2011, 135, italics in the original).

Tourny is able to provide an even fuller description of the process of learning, thanks to his interview with the priest ʾabbā Yermiahu.³⁴ ʾAbbā Yermiahu describes his time as a student of the monk ʾabbā Taʾammənu at the important Beta ʿEsrāʾel centre Səmen Mənāṭā³⁵ in the Səmen mountains as follows:

the index)—conspicuously absent from the publications of the members of the Franco-Israeli project—could be seen as an indication of a certain theoretical analysis of the music (however, see also Shelemay 1999a, 73). Was this terminology unknown to the informants of the Franco-Israeli team?

33 Shelemay states that the Beta ʿEsrāʾel had schools until 1888 (1986b, 199). Sophia Dege-Müller has elaborated elsewhere on the mixed information on the school system of the Beta ʿEsrāʾel (2020, 11–12).

34 This is the Hebrew version of the name Jeremiah, whose Gəʿəz form is ʾErmayās (አርሞያስ).

35 In the recent past, the valley of Səmen Mənāṭā was the most important monastic settlement for the Beta ʿEsrāʾel. There are several descriptions of monks and priests taking their priestly or monastic vows there. It



Figure 1 The remains of the Siq^wālā prayer house of Səmen Mənāṭā, which ʾabbā Taʾammənu presided over (copyright Sophia Dege-Müller, 2017).

I moved in with him [the teacher, ʾabbā T.], along with four other young people who were following his teaching. Each one slept in a small shelter next to the master's hut. Each shelter was separated from the master's room by a fence. We were forbidden to enter that room. We were studying outside, under an awning. We got up early to pray. My father had taught me some prayers, but at the time I did not know how to read. With Abba Ta'amennu, we studied three times a day: in the morning, the noon and the evening before sunset. In the morning, after prayers, I went to work in the master's fields, when it was my turn. We used to rotate between the students. At night, we also studied. That was the time when we learned by heart the prayers, especially the *zema*. Abba Ta'amennu was singing and I had to repeat exactly like him. If I did it wrong, he would interrupt me and I had to try again for as long as he asked. Sometimes he would beat me. After that, your thinking is much better! When I finally sang well, he would congratulate me and kiss me. My master's *zema* was beautiful. (Tourny 2009, 21, translation by Sophia Dege-Müller, italics in original)

[37]

Such descriptions are clearly reminiscent of the Christian Ethiopian church school setting:

[38]

was also as a place of education and learning. There were two prayer houses (ወሰኒድ፣ *masgid*) in the valley, and ʾabbā Ta'amənnu was the head of the Siq^wālā *masgid* (see Kribus 2019, 186–93). Sophia Dege-Müller and Bar Kribus visited the valley of Səmen Mənāṭā in October 2017 (see figure 1). In an interview, the name of the *masgid* was indicated as Siq^wālā (Kribus 2019, 190). It might, however, also be Zəq^wālā, which is the name of (at least) two other places in Ethiopia, one in an ʾAgaw zone, the other (an important Christian site) near Bišoṭtuu/Dabra Zayt.



Figure 2 The huts of students at the *qəne* school of Dabra Šaḥay Q^wəsq^wām of Q^wəsq^wām Māryām in Gondar (copyright Sophia Dege-Müller, 2017).

the oral instructions, the numerous repetitions, physical punishment,³⁶ the days spent learning and, specifically, the study of certain parts of *zemā* at night.³⁷ Similar living conditions of the students, sharing small huts near their master's, can still be observed in church school today.³⁸ One might thus conclude that the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel monasteries fulfilled a function similar to the Ethiopian Christian church schools, which are often located next to a church or a monastery (see figures 2 and 3).

On the Use of Musical Instruments

Musical instruments, in particular the kettledrum (ነጋሪት; *nagārit*) and the gong (ጠትቅዕ; *matqəʿ*),³⁹ are mentioned several times throughout the booklet, often in statements like “in Ethiopia [this chant] was accompanied by a frame-drum” (80), creating the image of a past custom. Without doubt, this was the impression that was prevalent in Israel in the 1980s. In

36 Already St Yāred, the sixth-century inventor of liturgical music according to the Ethiopian Christian tradition, was beaten by his teacher when he had difficulties memorizing the Psalms (see Conti Rossini 1904, 8).

37 Compare the so-called የጣታ ትምህርት; *ya-mātā tēmhart*, “night studies,” of the Christian tradition (Shelemay and Jeffery 1993, 7).

38 In addition to the texts referred to above, Chaillot offers numerous images that show the living and teaching conditions in the schools (2002, 83–100). For a description of *zemā* schools, see Selamsew Debashu's MA thesis “The Teaching-Learning Processes in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Accreditation Schools of Music (*Zema Bets*): The Cases of Bethlehem, Zur Aba and Gondar Baeta Mariam Churches” (2017). He describes “schools and [...] surrounding thatched roof huts which are the residents [residences] of students” (2017, 8). See figures 2 and 3.

39 In other publications (Leslau 1957, 25; Shelemay 1983, 4, 1986b; Kaplan 1990, 122; Atar 2011, 141), the name for the gong is more often given as ቃጭል; *qāçäl*. No discussion of this terminological difference is found in the booklet.



Figure 3 The huts of students at the *zemā* school of Beta Ləhem, Gāyənt (copyright Jonas Karlsson, 2018).

another publication, Tourny furthermore gives a practical explanation to this, namely that “the priests had not been able to bring these ritual instruments with them [during the emigration]” (Tourny 2002, 102).⁴⁰ Be this as it may, it is clear that the liturgical use of *nagārit* and *maqṭəʿ* has meanwhile been resumed in Israel.⁴¹ This is confirmed, for example, by recent YouTube videos⁴² and by personal experience.⁴³ Earlier observers indicate that the use of musical instruments in the Beta ʿĪsrāʿel liturgy was frequent. Leslau writes that on Sundays and feast days (except on ʿAstarəyo), “the priests beat the drum and strike a gong with a piece of iron during the prayers. All this is accompanied by rhythmic movements of the body. They [the priests] also beat the drum and sound the gong every Friday morning in honor of the approaching Sabbath” (Leslau 1951, 113, see also 1957, 69).⁴⁴ Atar, according to whom the

40 In his 2009 study, Tourny elaborates on how the priests had to abandon their instruments due to emigration, and how the musicologists took notes during the performances to trace how the instruments would have been used in the original setting (2009, 59). No traces of these notes are found in the booklet. Compare also Atar, who states that priests who emigrated “during Operation Solomon (1991) were able to bring out [of Ethiopia] their instruments” (2005, 162).

41 However, it remains unclear which musical instruments are used for the individual chants on the CDs when they are performed nowadays. A comparison with earlier published texts (see below) could perhaps provide examples.

42 See for example, the following videos capturing snapshots from the celebration of *Baʿala maṣallat* in Jerusalem in 2016 (<https://youtu.be/c4kVal7plrc>; accessed September 2, 2020), *Baʿala maṣallat* in Rehovot in the same year (<https://youtu.be/OhaUcYrSRaQ>; accessed September 2, 2020), and *Māʿrar* in the ʿAbbā Ṣabrā Synagogue in Beersheba (<https://youtu.be/FffqW67Plks>; accessed October 25, 2020). The importance of the Internet in modern-day research has already been noted by Huber: “The influence of the Internet creates an increased awareness of primary sources as a result of interwoven links” (“Durch den Einfluss des Internets entsteht ein erweitertes Bewusstsein für Primärquellen als Folge ineinander verwobener Links,” Huber 2017, 30, translated by the authors).

43 Bar Kribus, personal communication, October 27, 2020.

44 In another publication, Leslau mentions that songs sung during “weddings and other occasions of rejoicing” were accompanied by *masanqo* (መስገቶ; the Ethiopian single-stringed bowed lute, see page 5 in the

drum was struck with the hand, writes that the use of musical instruments was acceptable (but not necessary) “during the main *Beta Israel* holidays,” except on the Sabbath and on *ʾAs-tasrəyo* (Atar 2011, 141). To our knowledge, there are no studies of the current liturgical use of musical instruments in Israel, but it may be assumed that the practice closely follows the pre-*aliyah* tradition.

The complete absence of musical instruments of the recordings of the recently published CD box is indicative of its special nature. This makes clear the extent to which the recordings represent an extraordinary moment of time in Beta ʾĒsrāʾel history, an unprecedented moment characterized by unconventional liturgical practices, abandoned as soon as the possibility to resume the older tradition (of musical accompaniment) appeared. Indeed, the time of mass migration of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel to Israel was a time that caused the instant formation of new traditions. Margaret Hayon, writing about the liturgy of the Service for the New Moon, confirms this, stating that “[e]vidently, therefore, this particular service is a highly condensed version of what would have been performed in Ethiopia, adapted to the circumstances of the caravan site [the Neve Carmel caravan site where the immigrants first lived, near Haifa]” (Hayon 1999, 212; see also Shelemay 1999b). This might also be connected to the fact that the Franco-Israeli project did not record the liturgical chants during live religious services, but as a staged performance. While on the one hand ensuring great sound quality, this means that the performance practices were documented and analysed disconnected from their natural milieu.

In general, little has been written about the performance practices surrounding the use of musical instruments. It is lamentable that the extensive and thorough analyses which the materials collected by the Franco-Israeli project have been subject to lack this part of the liturgical tradition, as it would otherwise doubtlessly have been dealt with in depth. In the booklet it is remarked that neither the gong nor the drum had the function of marking rhythm, but that they were used to “provide sporadic and emphatic punctuations to the chant” (58). This statement is perplexing, as a repeated rhythmic pattern is clearly to be found on several of the recordings that include instrumental accompaniment (see Atar 2011, 141–43).⁴⁵ In general, it could have been useful if the booklet had elaborated more on the use and role of instruments, this being “a feature of the Beta Israel liturgy that is unique in the [overall] Jewish liturgical tradition” (Atar 2005, 158). Also, the “extraordinariness” of the complete absence of musical instruments on the recordings—unnatural, one might say, to the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgical tradition—could have been stressed more.

The CD Booklet: Third Part, and CDs

The third part of the booklet, entitled simply “Contents of the CDs” (63–90), consists of individual descriptions of each of the forty-one recordings on the CDs. Each chant is introduced

booklet accompanying the CD published by Leslau in 1950). It can be presumed that these songs are of a different type than the liturgical chant (*zemā*) with which we are concerned here. On this topic, see also the recording of a Beta ʾĒsrāʾel wedding song by Herbert Prasch (see below) from 1958. It is available at the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna under the siglum B 5510, and a snippet is accessible online (<http://catalog.phonogrammarchiv.at/session/10643>; accessed October 27, 2020). Shelemay described the use of *masanqo* during post-liturgical celebrations occurring in connection with *Səgd* (Shelemay 1999a, 66).

45 Compare also the recordings published by Leslau in 1950 (see footnote 57).

by a title and the name of the soloist(s).⁴⁶ In the subsequent description, information about the liturgical usage of the chant, its contents (with biblical quotations and/or paraphrases occasionally being identified), and its melodic and rhythmic structure are regularly given. Information about the language of the prayers is sometimes included, but not systematically. Almost all descriptions end with a musicological analysis of the structure of the chant. These descriptions tend to be somewhat technical and will probably partly remain a mystery for the non-musicologist reader. Examples include: “This antiphonal piece is measured, yet its rhythmic articulation is flexible, which further emphasizes its heterophonic texture” (81), and “[t]his is an unmeasured antiphonal piece in which several voices in the choir are superimposed (mostly in thirds and fifths), producing an embryonic polyphony” (79). However, building on the theoretical description in the second part of the booklet, these descriptions do provide the reader/listener with a valuable chance to experience in practice what was described theoretically in the first two parts.

Most striking is what is missing, namely the texts of the chants. Their inclusions, both in the original language(s) and in English translation, would have increased the value of this publication immensely, both for scholars and the interested public. The only reason we can think of for leaving them out would be the limitations in space. Despite this, at least the titles of the chants could have been translated. As *qes* Avraham Tezazu, Shoshana Ben-Dor, and Ada Wertheim are said to already have produced transcriptions and translations of the texts (5), we are eagerly awaiting their publication. [43]

Sifting through the previous literature on Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgical chants, it turns out that the texts of several of the pieces included on the CDs have actually been published before, in some cases by the editors of the CD box themselves. It goes without saying that one would have expected these to be mentioned in the booklet. A couple of the chants have also been published—either in versions perfectly matching what is found on the recordings or in similar versions—by Shelemay (in two different publications) and Wolf Leslau. To simplify access to these sources, which add value to the recordings on the CDs, we provide references to the tracks with a published text in Table 2 below. [44]

Table 2: Tracks on the three CDs whose texts have been previously published.

| | Alvarez-Péreyre and Ben-Dor 1999 ⁴⁷ | Tourny 2009 | Shelemay 1986b | Shelemay 1986a | Leslau 1950 |
|--------|--|------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| CD I-1 | | | | | pp. 5–6 ⁴⁸ |
| CD I-2 | Ex. No. 3 | Ex.19 (p. 64) | | | |
| CD I-3 | | | 1-9A/B | E | |
| CD I-7 | Ex. No. 1 | | | | |
| CD I-9 | Ex. No. 2 | | 1-6E ⁴⁹ | | |

46 The term “title” here most often refers to the first words of the prayer, sometimes with additions to make it possible to distinguish chants with the same first words (Shelemay 1983, 6). One can notice that the track CD I-2 is entitled “*Yātbārek ʿegziʾabāher... nəgru laʿegziʾabāher*” (i.e., ይትባረክ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ... ንግሩ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር፡; *Yātbārak ʿĒgziʾabāher... nəgəru la-ʿĒgziʾabāher*, “Blessed be the Lord ... say to the Lord”), but the chant clearly begins with the words *Yātbārak səmu la-ʿĒgziʾabāher*, “Blessed be the name of the Lord.” If there is a reason for this discrepancy between the recording and the name, one would have appreciated a note on this in the commentary.

| | Alvarez-Péreyre and Ben-Dor 1999 | Tourny 2009 | Shelemay 1986b | Shelemay 1986a | Leslau 1950 |
|----------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| CD I-11 | | | 1-15C | | |
| CD I-13 | Ex. No. 7 | | | | |
| CD II-3 | | | 1-11B | | |
| CD II-7 | | Ex. 61 (p. 104) ⁵⁰ | | | |
| CD III-3 | | | | B | |
| CD III-8 | | | 1-6E | | |

Another fact that should have been clearly stated is that a number of the recordings on the CDs in the CD box, as mentioned above, have already been published by the members of the team: the fourteen tracks that were published on the CD *Liturgies juives d'Éthiopie* by Alvarez-Péreyre and Arom in 1990.⁵¹ It should, however, be stressed that the recordings are now provided with a more comprehensive commentary than previous. [45]

As stated in the introduction to the booklet, the selection of chants “aims at representing the main genres, contexts of performance and performance practices” of the Beta ʿĒsrāʿel liturgy (7). While the reviewers are not in a position to tell if any essential prayers, genres, etc. are missing, the CDs do indeed contain examples of a variety of types of soloist–choir and text–melody interactions, as well as other features described in the first parts of the booklet. The chants are organized according to their place in the system of liturgical celebrations of the Beta ʿĒsrāʿel. First comes a section with chants for the Sabbath (CD I, tracks 1–9), after which follows a section with chants for specific annual feasts: *Fāsikā* (CD I, tracks 10–11), *Māʿrar* (CD I, tracks 12–13), *Bərḥān šaraqā* (CD I, tracks 14–15), *ʿAstarəyo* (CD II, tracks 1–3), *Baʿala maṣallat* (CD II, tracks 4–5), and *Səgd* (CD II, tracks 6–8). Then follow sections with chants that occur at different annual feasts (CD II, tracks 9–12; CD III, tracks 1–6), chants that occur both in the annual liturgical cycle and on the occasions tied to the life cycle (CD III, tracks 7–11), and, finally, chants that occur only on occasion of celebrations of the life-cycle events of circumcision, wedding, and mourning, respectively (CD III, tracks 12–14). [46]

While the sound quality of the CDs is generally very good, the mingling of multiple voices sometimes makes it difficult to follow the text of the prayers (this concerns the parts sung by the choir). However, given the fact that the recordings were made outside of the liturgical context and completely without the accompaniment of musical instruments, it is difficult to say whether or not they convey a realistic impression of the liturgical chant of the Beta ʿĒsrāʿel. [47]

47 The transcribed examples are found on pages 245–251. The two authors note that the transcriptions were done by a Tigrinya speaker and thus “reflect Tigrean pronunciation of the Geʿez and ʿAgawegna texts,” and that they were only of preliminary nature.

48 The text is an almost perfect match during the first two minutes, but after that point, some lines are transposed and do not match what is found on CD I-1.

49 In the parts sung by the choir, it is not always possible to ascertain whether the text given by Shelemay is actually what is performed. Furthermore, the last line in Shelemay’s text is missing from the recording on the CD.

50 Only the first three lines match, more or less, what is heard on CD II-7.

51 See footnote 8.

Transcriptions and *Akribie*

Even though this is the product of a project initiated in 1986, the booklet would still have benefited greatly from another round of proofreading. This concerns the transliteration system—a fact that has been hinted at above—but also the contents in general. [48]

On many occasions, the reader is simply left in a state of perplexity when conflicting statements are presented side by side. To clarify, two representative examples will be quoted. On page 14, it is claimed that: [49]

Ethiopian Jews had their own dialect of ‘Agawegna, called Qwaregnia, known today only to a few elders and the *Qessoch* from the Qwara region. Close to this language was a Jewish dialect called Falashigna. (*italics in the original*) [50]

Taking the authors by the word, the reader is left with the nonsensical impression that on the one hand, the Ethiopian Jews had their own ‘Agaw dialect, and on the other hand, close to this, there was a Jewish dialect (of ‘Agaw).⁵² Similarly, on page 15, the word ‘*Orit* (ኦሪት) is said to refer either to “the whole Bible or to the Pentateuch.” On the next page, it is said, instead, to refer either to “the whole Bible or to the Octateuch.” With such irregularities multiplying, the risk is immanent that the reader’s trust in the presented information will diminish. For the authors, it would have been an easy task to correct such irregularities, but a reader lacking background knowledge is simply left without a clear understanding of the fundamental facts. Contradictory statements like these are coupled with occasional erroneous ones, as when Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, the three men thrown into a furnace by Nebuchadnezzar according to Dan. 3, are qualified as the ones “to whom [God] made His voice heard at Sinai” (38). [51]

As mentioned in the Introduction, the booklet lacks a section dedicated to the transcription system used. Unfortunately, the transcriptions leave a lot to desire. They are, generally speaking, inconsistent and at times difficult to decipher, even for trained *éthiopian(e)s*. The extensive use of {v}, indicating a spirantized pronunciation of /b/, is idiosyncratic, for example in the spelling “egzi’aveher” for ‘*Ḥgzi’abəher* (አገዚአብሔር; 40). A word which presumably is the Gə‘əz *maḥaranna* (መሐረን; “have mercy on us”) is variously rendered as “*meharana*” (13), “*meharena*” (37, 82), and “*maharena*” (38). The Gə‘əz word ‘*əsebbəḥakka* (እሴብሐክ; “I praise you”) is transcribed as “*əsebāhaka*” (89), and “*əsebehake*” (40–41), examples where, within one word, the Latin grapheme {e} corresponds to no less than three different Gə‘əz phonemes (/e/, /ə/, and /a/), and the phoneme /ə/ is rendered in three different ways ({ə}, {e}, and {ā}). In another publication where a similar transliteration system is used, two of the authors described it as “a temporary phonetic transliteration” (Arom and Tourny 1999, 256n3). If it was temporary in 1999, it would have been suitable to change to a more transparent transcription system in 2019, at least when referring to the parts of the chants performed in Gə‘əz, a language which, after all, has a long history of research, with several functional transcription systems in use.⁵³ [52]

Occasionally, the text betrays an imperfect mastery of Gə‘əz, although this concerns only minor details. In an extract from the common beginning of different versions of the *Herzəgā* [53]

52 For an introduction to ‘Agaw dialectology, see the Introduction in Appleyard’s *A Comparative Dictionary of the Agaw Languages* (2006, 1–20).

53 See, for example, the system used in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (Uhlig 2003, I:xx–xxi) or the one recommended by the journal *Aethiopica* (https://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/toc-aethiopica/Miscellaneous/Aethiopica_Transliteration.pdf; accessed September 1, 2020).

prayer (39), the authors suggest that the Gəʿəz word *yom* (ዮም) is used in the meaning “day,” although it is clear from the context that the standard meaning of “today” is intended (see Dillmann 1865, 1075; Leslau 1991, 627). It is easy to suspect that this interpretation was influenced by the meaning of the cognate word in Hebrew. Another example appears on page 41, where the authors translate the Gəʿəz interrogative *man-nu* (መኑ, who?) as a relative pronoun (compare Dillmann 1865, 186–87; Leslau 1991, 348).

Previous Recordings of Beta ʿĒsrāʾel Liturgical Chant

One of the main aims of this review article is to look at the Franco-Israeli Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgy project within its historical context. As we have pointed out above, the recordings on which so much research has been based are affected in a number of ways by the fact that they were produced in the turbulent years surrounding the mass immigration of the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel to Israel. This is most clearly manifested in the complete absence of musical instruments on the recordings. In this context, the value of recordings produced before the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel *aliyah* becomes apparent. Below, a short survey of recordings of the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgical chant is provided. We begin with those that have been published and are available for purchase, and thereafter discuss a selection of the extensive recorded materials available in archives, much of which, however, are in the meantime also accessible online. [54]

As far as we have been able to ascertain, the first recordings of Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgical chant were carried out by Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, the “father” of Jewish musicology, in 1911. Equipped with a phonograph, Idelsohn had at that time embarked on a three-year trip through the Orient, from Iran in the East to Morocco in the West, with the intention of recording the liturgical music of the Jews living there.⁵⁴ On August 14, 1911, Idelsohn encountered Gete Yermiyahu (ገጥ) in Jerusalem. Gete, around 28 years old at that time, was subsequently recorded singing prayers in Gəʿəz for the Sabbath (Isaiah 6:3) and reciting Deuteronomy 6:4.⁵⁵ The recordings of Gete are of special interest, since he was one of the young Beta ʿĒsrāʾel students who, thanks to Jacques Faïtlovitch, were able to receive a European education.⁵⁶ The recordings, whose sound quality is of course far from modern standards, are of limited value for liturgical research, as they were produced in an extra-liturgical context, by a single individual and without the accompaniment of musical instruments. Their importance lies in their age. [55]

In 1950, Wolf Leslau, in cooperation with the Archive of Primitive Music of Columbia University, published an LP with seven recordings of Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgical chants, accompanied [56]

54 The collection, kept at the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, has been remastered and was published by Dietrich Schüller in 2006 under the title *Tondokumente aus dem Phonogrammarchiv der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Gesamtausgabe der historischen Bestände 1899-1950. Series 9: The Collection of Abraham Zvi Idelsohn (1911-1913)*. See also the catalogue of the collection published by Israel Adler and Judith Cohen (1976) and the note on the recordings published by Shelemay in an appendix in 1986 (1986a, 399–400).

55 Idelsohn took notes on his informant (personal dates, place of origin, etc.) and had him write out the texts recorded. We are indebted to Drs Kerstin Klenk and Clemens Gütl of the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna for kindly making the recording and notes of Idelsohn available to us, and for making a sound snippet accessible online (<http://catalog.phonogrammarchiv.at/session/4464>; accessed October 5, 2020).

56 Gete served Faïtlovitch and other scholars as a valuable informant and friend (for more on his person, see Faïtlovitch 1910; Guandalini 2005).

by a six-page booklet.⁵⁷ The circumstances surrounding the recordings are not described. As far as the content goes, the chants are taken from different feasts (Passover, New Year), and include two versions of an “Adonai prayer” for Saturdays and weekdays, respectively. The text of one responsive reading, performed on the LP in Gə‘əz with a line-by-line Amharic translation, is given in transcription (of the Gə‘əz text) and English translation in the booklet. On the recordings, both drum and gong can be heard.

In 1967, Jean Jenkins published an LP entitled *Musique traditionnelle d’Éthiopie*, which reportedly contains an “Office du Sabbat = Falasha Sabbath service” followed by a “Prière quotidienne = Falasha daily prayers.” In 1970, she further published a two-disc LP entitled *Ethiopia Vol. 1: Music of the Central Highlands*, also reportedly containing samples of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel music. We have not been able to access these recordings and are thus unable to say anything about their potential value for the study of Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgical chant.⁵⁸ However, it should be noted that the NLI houses two recordings of a) 24:18 minutes, and b) of 22:34 minutes, produced by Jenkins in 1965. Perhaps this is the raw data on the basis of which she later prepared her LPs. The recordings were made in Ethiopia and contain chants both with and without musical instruments.⁵⁹ [57]

In 1973, an LP entitled *Ritual Music of Ethiopia* was published by Lin Lerner and Chet A. Wollner, containing, among other things, an excerpt from a Beta ʾĒsrāʾel Sabbath service recorded in Ambobar (approx. 3 minutes).⁶⁰ Two years later, in 1975, the same persons (?)⁶¹ published another LP, *Ethiopia: The Falasha and the Adjuran Tribe*, this time with a recording of the full Sabbath night service (24:15 minutes).⁶² Again, the recording had been made in Ambobar. The latter LP also included a booklet of a few pages, which, however, remains perfunctory at best. Judging from our aural impression, the LPs seem to contain different recordings. However, as both capture Sabbath services, they lack musical instruments. As in the case of Leslau’s and Jenkins’ LPs, the circumstances surrounding the recording remain unclear. [58]

In 1976, Isaac Gottlieb reportedly published an LP entitled *Ethiopian Falasha Music*, contain- [59]

57 The booklet is available online in digitized form (https://media.smithsonianfolkways.org/liner_notes/folkways/FW04442.pdf; accessed August 31, 2020). The audio files have been made available as a YouTube playlist (https://youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_m7isle1_Vr24tBzXk6DXbEkabw1sjFAi4; accessed August 31, 2020).

58 Photographs of the covers are available online (<https://www.discogs.com/Various-Ethiopie-Musique-Traditionnelle-DEthiopie-Traditional-Music-Of-Ethiopia/master/1069396>; <https://www.discogs.com/Jean-Jenkins-Ethiopia-Vol-1-Music-Of-The-Central-Highlands/master/1641979>; both accessed October 5, 2020).

59 These recordings are accessible online at the website of the NLI (https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL000256243/NLI; https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL_000256245/NLI; both accessed October 5, 2020).

60 Photographs of the covers are available online (<https://www.discogs.com/Various-Ritual-Music-of-Ethiopia/release/10906311>; accessed November 2, 2020). The sound files have been made available on YouTube (https://youtu.be/FKUHXI5_28; accessed November 2, 2020) and are also sold online (<https://folkways.si.edu/ritual-music-of-ethiopia/sacred-world/album/smithsonian>; accessed November 2, 2020). Two Italian versions, one LP and one cassette, were also released in 1975 (<https://www.discogs.com/Various-Musica-Dell-Music-Of-Etiopia/release/6205912>; <https://www.discogs.com/Various-Musica-Dell-Music-Of-Etiopia/release/11186411>; both accessed November 2, 2020).

61 On the cover of the LP from 1973, the name of the second publisher is given as “Chet A. Wollner,” whereas it is given as “Chad Wollner” on the cover of the LP from 1975.

62 The booklet is available online (https://folkways-media.si.edu/liner_notes/folkways/FW04355.pdf; accessed October 27, 2020). The recording of the Sabbath service is available on YouTube (https://youtu.be/w8o99_Oq6DA; accessed September 2, 2020). See also the catalogue post in Trove, “the place to explore all things Australian,” an online catalogue run in cooperation with the National Library of Australia (<https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/10826268>; accessed September 28, 2020).

ing “various prayers, psalms and parts of the Shabat and Shavuot services,” accompanied by a booklet (Abbink 1986, 43n74). This publication has not been available to us but should be mentioned for the sake of completeness.⁶³

In 1986, Nicolas Sokolowski published an LP entitled *Israël / Vol. 2: Les Juifs d'Éthiopie*, [60] the recording of which has not been accessible to us either.⁶⁴ However, according to the information on the cover, it contains at least two pieces of Beta 'Ēsrā'el music—one chant for “welcoming the Torah” and one for “welcoming the Sabbath”—both performed by twelve priests at the Meir Institute in Jerusalem (compare the recordings by Herzog below).

Finally, we reach the recordings made within the scope of the Franco-Israeli Beta 'Ēsrā'el [61] liturgy project, published partly in 1990⁶⁵ and again, with a larger number of samples, in 2019.⁶⁶ The 1990 CD included a bilingual (French-English) booklet of nineteen pages and some information on the liturgical tradition of the Beta 'Ēsrā'el, but noticeably less elaborate than in the present publication. In the context of previous recordings, the material produced by the Franco-Israeli Beta 'Ēsrā'el liturgy project stands out both because of its scope and—most importantly—because of the special time in the history of the Beta 'Ēsrā'el in which it was carried out. To our knowledge, it is the only extensive documentation of the Beta 'Ēsrā'el liturgy in the years after the immigration to Israel. In this regard, it is of considerable importance for our knowledge about this time period.

In addition to the published recordings, there are numerous unpublished ones, made in the [62] past decades, from the 1950s until the 1990s. A large collection is stored at the NLI, which has a special section dedicated to ethnographical recordings. Many of them are freely accessible online and offer a good overview of the documentation of Beta 'Ēsrā'el liturgical chant. While the open-access policy is laudable, there is generally little background information available about the individual recordings. For some it is not specified in which specific location, or even in which country, they were done. Other important collections are preserved in the phonogram archives in Vienna (Austria) and Berlin (Germany). Since the number of recordings would justify a study in its own right, we will present here only a few selected examples:

- In 1955 and 1956, Leo Levy (1912-1982) made several recordings which are deposited [63] at the NLI. Background information is scarce, but the recordings contain liturgical chants with and without musical instruments. In the ambiguous metadata provided by the NLI, the same recording is said both to have been made in Israel, in Kfar Batya,⁶⁷ in 1956,

63 The discographical data for this publication have been taken from Kaplan (1990, 205; see also Tourny 2009, 185).

64 Photographs of the covers are available online (<https://www.discogs.com/Les-Juifs-DÉthiopie-Israël-Vol-2/release/2741988>; accessed November 1, 2020).

65 See footnote 8.

66 In this context, the CD accompanying Hervé Roten's *Musiques liturgiques juives: Parcours et escales* (1998) should also be mentioned. It contains two pieces of Beta 'Ēsrā'el chant: one prayer for “Yom Kippur” entitled “Wafetsemo” (1:04 minutes) performed by *qes* Rah'amim and one prayer for the Sabbath entitled “Barûq' Adonay” (2:33 minutes) performed by *qes* Yermiahu. We have not had the possibility to listen to these recordings but, given that Roten's description of Beta 'Ēsrā'el chant heavily depends on the publications of Tourny, it is possible that these published recordings also originate from the corpus gathered by the Franco-Israeli team in the 1980s.

67 In Kfar Batya, there was a boarding school where some members of the Beta 'Ēsrā'el were offered an education from 1955 at least till 1957. The aim was that they should become teachers and, on their return to Ethiopia, instruct the local Beta 'Ēsrā'el population (Summerfield 1997, 309–18).

and in Ethiopia, in the famous Beta ʾĒsrāʾel village Walaqā, in 1956.⁶⁸ It seems that the recording contains two different parts, where, judging from the sound quality, the first (minutes 0:00 – 10:40; *without* musical instruments) was produced in Kfar Batya and the second (minutes 10:40 – 31:21; *with* musical instrument) in Walaqā.

- In 1958, a small number of recordings was produced by Herbert Prasch within the framework of the so-called “Austrian Transafrica Expedition” (*Österreichische Transafrika-Expedition*).⁶⁹ Headed by Maximilian Lersch, this expedition travelled by car from Tunisia to Rhodesia between the years 1957 and 1959. In February 1958, they passed through the Səmen mountains in Ethiopia, where Prasch recorded three samples of Beta ʾĒsrāʾel chant and one spoken prayer. Prasch’s recordings also testify to songs with and without instruments. The metadata sheets accompanying the recordings do not include information on which type of service or which feast the chants belong to. Prasch’s recordings are available at the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna.⁷⁰ [64]
- Kay Kaufman Shelemay produced numerous tapes during her fieldwork in Ethiopia in the mid-1970s. These have not been published but are deposited in the Archives of Traditional Music at the University of Indiana in Bloomington, with another copy at the Archive of World Music at Harvard University.⁷¹ [65]
- Remarkable are the recordings of Avigdor Herzog produced during *Səgd* in 1978.⁷² Unlike many other post-immigrational recordings, these were done during a live religious service (at the Western Wall in Jerusalem—religious singing from other Jewish tradi- [66]

68 The same recordings are accessible online at two different locations on the website of the NLI (http://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL000243153/NLI; https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL000255146/NLI; both accessed October 5, 2020).

69 Maximilian Lersch and Walter Eder published an introduction to the expedition in 1961 (1961), a work which, however, was not available to us during the writing of this review article. Technical data on the recording equipment are found in an article by Prasch from 1962 (1962).

70 Sound snippets of the four recordings (sigla: B 5512 – B 5515) are available on the website of the Phonogrammarchiv (<http://catalog.phonogrammarchiv.at/session/10644>; accessed October 5, 2020). B 5512, B 5513, and B 5515 contain unidentified chants, while B 5514 contains first a spoken blessing, beginning in Gəʿəz and ending in Amharic (repeated twice on the recording), then a section where many voices intermingle and the words are difficult to hear. On the metadata sheet, the reliability of which should not be exaggerated, the singers on Prasch’s recordings are identified as Beta ʾĒsrāʾel priests (“Falaschenpriester”) originating from an unknown place in Eritrea and now residing in the Səmen mountains, which is where the recordings were made. The lack of information about the liturgical context of the chants makes their identification difficult. We are indebted to Dr. Kerstin Klenk and Dr. Clemens Gütl of the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna for kindly making the recordings and metadata sheets of Prasch available to us.

71 Shelemay mentions further tapes used by her, at the time (and presumably still) in private possession (1986b, xiv).

72 Accessible online at the website of the NLI (https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL003487899/NLI; accessed October 5, 2020). Herzog’s recording of the *Herzəgā* prayer from 1978 provides us with a wonderful example of how the documentation available in archives can help us understand the changes that occurred after the migration of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel, because another recording of the same prayer is also available at the NLI (https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL003485846/NLI; accessed October 5, 2020). While this recording unfortunately lacks a date or other metadata, the recording quality and the fact that the prayer is played with gong and drum allow the assumption that is rather old, probably stemming from pre-*aliyah* times (see also Shelemay 1978).

tions can be heard in the background).⁷³ The recording starts with the prayer *Herzagā*, easily recognizable. Avigdor Herzog also did many other recordings in the years 1985 to 1987, mostly at the Meir Institute in Jerusalem.⁷⁴

The absence of post-1990s recordings—both published and, at least as far as we are aware, in the archives—is remarkable. From the 1950s until the 1990s, a good number of useable recordings is available, but after this point the documentation appears to have stopped. To better understand the developments which the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgy has undergone since its arrival in Israel, such recordings would have been valuable. It is lamentable that the documentation carried out by the Franco-Israeli Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgy project did not continue as the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel became more and more rooted in their new homeland. [67]

Concluding Discussion

One of the first questions that the CD box and its accompanying booklet raise concerns the intended readership, or rather listenership. In the introduction, the authors state that “it is our sincere hope that the present work will contribute, if only symbolically, to lessening the sense of frustration that accompanies large sectors of the Beta Israel community in Israel to this day. [...] We hope the main beneficiaries of our work will be the children and grandchildren of those [...] who migrated to Israel” (5–6). This is clearly not to be taken in the sense that the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel in Israel are the main intended audience—this publication is, after all, a highly specialized work—and the question of the intended audience remains open. For scholars of Ethiopian Studies, the transliterations are annoyingly faulty, and they would have appreciated the texts of the chants, ideally in the original script. For the interested public, systematic translations of Gəʿəz terms would have been required, something which is often missing. Parts of the booklet consist of specialized musicological analyses that remain difficult to penetrate for those without academic training in that particular field. [68]

Leaving these remarks aside, the more central issue, affecting both the CD box and related publications, is the lack of consideration for the historical circumstances surrounding the recordings. It deserves to be repeatedly underlined that the recordings were made at a very peculiar moment in the modern history of the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel—right after the arrival of the first larger groups of refugees to Israel in the 1980s. As we have seen above, this affected the recordings in various ways. Most conspicuous is, of course, the complete absence of musical instruments. This means that an entire aspect of the performance practice of the Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgy has not been taken into account. In addition, the composition of a choir of priests originating in different regions in Ethiopia might have had implications that are difficult to assess. Of course, these were the circumstances under which the recordings had to be made, and it in no way diminishes their importance for our understanding of Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgical chant in this particular time. However, one wishes that they had been addressed both in the booklet accompanying the CD box and in other publications building on the same material. [69]

The Franco-Israeli Beta ʿĒsrāʾel liturgy project, most recently materialized in the publication of the CD box, is an important addition to the field of Ethiopian-Jewish musicology and [70]

73 Another live recording from *Səgd* at the Western Wall was made by Jacob Ephraim in 1982 (https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL000240189/NLI; accessed October 5, 2020).

74 Several examples are available on the website of the NLI (search for “Avigdor Herzog” and select the keyword “Musical tradition (Jewish), Ethiopian” in the drop-down menu “סוגה” (“Genre”) in the menu bar on the left).

Beta ʾĒsrāʾel studies in general. Apart from the numerous aspects already treated by the researchers involved, the material provides an impulse for investigating related topics. Has the transformative period of Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgy documented in the recordings left traces on the liturgy which are still manifest today? Has the intermingling of priests of different geographic origins resulted in an amalgamation of different traditions, or have certain regional varieties prevailed over others?⁷⁵ Which role have individual priests and monk(s) played in this?⁷⁶

It would furthermore be very interesting to see a comparative analysis of liturgical recordings from the past 109 years, for which the extensive recordings provided by this project would deliver an important backbone. The historical material would ideally—one might say, necessarily—be complemented by a study of the present practices of Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgical chant, complete with the (revived) use of musical instruments. Studies of the present-day tradition are, in general, a pressing desideratum. One must not forget that although the Franco-Israeli Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgy project has continuously produced publications during the last three decades, they are all based on the tradition as recorded in the 1980s. To our knowledge, little to no research has been carried out on more recent Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgy. Therefore, the questions are numerous: How is the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgical chant transmitted nowadays? (The changed ways of transmission, connected with abandonment of the places where Beta ʾĒsrāʾel formerly lived, may well have been a trigger for other developments.) In which concrete ways and to which extent have the liturgical traditions of Rabbinical Judaism changed the liturgy of the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel, and is there resistance to such influence within the group? When were microphones and megaphones introduced to enhance the liturgical performances,⁷⁷ and has there been a counter-movement due to the rabbinical ban of using technical devices on the Sabbath?

[71]

By way of conclusion, we hope that some of the shortcomings of the publication discussed here will be remedied in the coming “detailed book”⁷⁸ and the “section of the JMRC website” dedicated to Beta ʾĒsrāʾel music, which are announced by Edwin Seroussi at the end of the preface (3).⁷⁹ There are no reasons to doubt that the materials collected within the framework of this research project—of great importance for the study of Beta ʾĒsrāʾel liturgy—will form the basis for excellent research publications in the future. Ideally, these can be promulgated both in forms that reach academic standards and in popularized versions, strengthening the Beta ʾĒsrāʾel in appreciating their heritage and informing the general public in Israel and abroad of the rich liturgical traditions of Ethiopian Jewry.

[72]

All in all, the main value of *The Liturgy of Beta Israel: Music of the Ethiopian Jewish Prayer* lies in its making a comprehensive selection of Beta ʾĒsrāʾel chants, representing a special moment in the group’s remarkable modern history, accessible to the public. Hopefully, this

[73]

75 The changes undergone by other liturgical traditions that immigrated to Israel in the past decades have been studied by Shiloah and Cohen (1983). Their focus is on European Jews, but the traditions of Jews arriving to Israel from Morocco, Yemen, or Iraq are also discussed.

76 Jasmina Huber, studying the Jewish liturgical tradition in Belgrade, found that there was such a strong influence of two individual persons—Rabbi Isak Asiel and cantor Stefan Sablić—that she speaks of a “personified tradition” (2017, 367).

77 Compare, for example, the following YouTube video recorded during the celebration of *Səgd* in 1982 (<https://youtu.be/C9ccl34HAzs>; accessed October 27, 2020).

78 The booklet ends with a list of reference which includes publications not mentioned in the text of the booklet itself. Especially the references to previous publications of Beta ʾĒsrāʾel prayer texts (e.g., Aešcoly 1951; Halévy 1877) might be an indication that a publication of the prayer texts is forthcoming.

79 As of September 28, 2020, we have not been able to find a section dedicated to this topic on the website in question.

publication will make the materials collected within the Franco-Israeli Beta ʿĒsrāʿel liturgy project and currently held at the NLI—unique due both to its extensiveness and to the extraordinary moment in Beta ʿĒsrāʿel history that it records—more widely known and inspire further research into the riches of Beta ʿĒsrāʿel music and liturgy.

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