

Hebrews in Africa

The puzzling existence of Hebrews in the Horn of Africa (RENEWED)

History hides its secrets. But we want to know. Why are people who they are? What mysteries stick behind so many cultures and convictions, habits and hopes? It is difficult to find, and even more difficult to interpret, the ages old traces of Hebrew groups of people in Africa. However, they are there. Some groups claim a Hebrew descent. Others, who are like them, have even lost notice of it. But what can we discover of the origin and itinerary of groups with Hebrew roots? What hidden secrets can be revealed?

My interest turns in the first place to the people that we know as 'Ethiopian Jews' and related tribes, particularly a large tribe living in Ivory Coast (and Liberia and Guinee), the tribe of Dan. I want to know who they are. I try to reconstruct their past. I use the word 'Hebrew', but others prefer the description: Jew. Hebrew is more general. A Jew has a certain set of beliefs and values, that are not automatically shared by those with an Israelite or Hebrew origin. Hebrew includes Jews, and Judaism is more specific than Hebrew.

Some of those African Hebrews and groups with Hebrew traits, may have lost their faith and culture since long, but, nevertheless, their history makes me curious. What did they bring with them on their journey through the ages? What did they lose and why? Is, what we find today, the result of a long and uninterrupted history? Are some people groups genetically Hebrew, but not spiritually? Are other groups spiritual heirs of the faith and culture of Israel, but not genetically?

Hebrews in Africa: their history is mainly forgotten. They are or were during hundreds of years threatened and influenced by the majority group(s) that surrounded them. Who are they and what can we learn from their existence, faith and history?

My research started with a number of interesting meetings. First, I met with the Yibir - and the Tubal tribes in Somalia/Somaliland (from 1998 on), claiming a Hebrew origin. Then, in 2013, I found myself in the area of the tribe of Dan in Ivory Coast (with smaller entities in Liberia and Guinee). The latter do not even claim to be of Hebrew descent, but at least they point to Mali and even further away to the 'Mountains in de East' as their original habitat. However, their name puzzles me. Is there any connection with the biblical tribe with the same name? Is there any connection with the Falashas of Ethiopia, who claim to be descendants of Dan as well? Or is it a matter of coincidence?

Let's first consider some undeniable facts.

Elephantine, Egypt

175 letters and documents in the Aramaic language have been found in the South of Egypt, in the neighborhood of Assuan, at the border with Sudan. Those papyri and ostraca show the daily life of a Jewish settlement on the island of Elephantine in the Nile, four and five centuries before the start of the common calendar. The people did carry Jewish names, corresponded with Jerusalem, its governor and its priesthood. That is an undeniable and strongly supported proof of a Jewish population in Africa. They even had their own temple, built according to the model of the tabernacle, or the temple in Jerusalem, and a temple service according to the habits and laws obeyed in Jerusalem before the destruction of the first temple. This is strongly advocated by Samuel Kurinsky in his Hebrew Historical Fact Papers: "Jews in Africa III" (see www.hebrewhistory.info).

An in-depth study of this Jewish settlement has been done by Stephan G. Rosenberg, including carts and designs. It has been (re-)published in 'Near Eastern Archeology', Vol. 67, No. 1 (Mar. 2004), p. 4-13. This is a Magazine of The American Schools of Oriental Research.

The Bible tells about Jews in Africa

In Isaiah 11:11 we read about the return to Israel of people from Upper Egypt (literally: Syene, the town facing Elephantine). "From beyond the rivers of Cush my scattered people will bring Me offerings", says Zephaniah 3:10 (see also Isaiah 18:1). Those texts may stem from far before the time of the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE, but at least this was known far before the deportation of Judah (587 BCE). Jewish believers were living in the South of Egypt and even much further to the south (the rivers of Cush!). It is well known that Jeremiah migrated (a short time after the fall of Jerusalem) together with a large group of refugees to Egypt. This shows that large numbers of Jews were living in Egypt, Sudan and even Ethiopia, and as well: that believers in Israel were aware of it and that they felt connected with them.

Letter of Aristeas and the Country of Onias, and the New Testament era

There exists an apologetic booklet from about the year 250 BCE, dealing with the miracle of the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures: The Letter of Aristeas. It mentions as well the existence of the Jewish settlement in Elephantine. It makes the statement that Jews had been sent

over there to help pharaoh Psammetichus II against the 'Ethiopians' (= Nubians). This pharaoh reigned from 595 – 589 BCE. **1/**

In the time of the Maccabees an important priest, Onias IV, flees to Egypt, after being rejected as the high priest of Israel. There he built in 154 BCE a temple in Leontopolis (north-east Egypt), following the model of the temple of Solomon. He brought a number of Jews with him, who were in high esteem. The area where he lived was known as the Country of Onias.

In the time of the New Testament we find a very large Jewish community in Egypt, about one million people, mainly in Alexandria, the town of the famous Jewish philosopher of that time, Philo.

Then, we have the story of the 'minister of finance' of the candace of Ethiopia, in the New Testament (Acts 8:26-40). He went for worshipping God to Jerusalem and was able to read and to converse in the Hebrew language. He was a Jew, the only way to explain his long pilgrimage. From where did he come? At that time, every plot of land south from Egypt was called: Ethiopia. But there is a clue. Candace is not a name, but a title, meaning: queen. And this title is found only in de Meroitic language, the language of Meroe, the capital of a large country in nowadays Sudan. The ruins of Meroe are found 100 kilometers north of Khartoum. Jews had an important position at that time, it seems, in Meroe.

The tribe of Dan in Africa?

Eldad ha-Dani made a world journey during the 9th century A.D. This is the nickname of Eldad ben-Mahli. He makes known to those whom he meets that he belongs to a strong Jewish nation in East-Africa, with big towns and well developed. This nation was composed of people from the tribes of Dan, Asher, Gad and Naphtali. He visited Babylonia and nowadays Tunisia, Spain, Egypt and other areas, speaking about the 'lost tribes' of Israel. He brought with him a Hebrew Halakoth (a Jewish law-book) from his native country. According to him many Hebrews had settled in Africa from the time of the split in between Judah and Israel, long before the downfall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. **2/**

A medieval voice: Benjamin of Tudela and Marco Polo

Benjamin of Tudela is well known as a Jewish world traveler. He made a prolonged journey from about 1160 – 1173, from his home town Tudela in Spain to Jerusalem, the Middle East and

the Arabian Peninsula. Everywhere he tried to figure out the number of Jews. He was a kind of statistician and quite detailed in his observations.

He found out that large numbers of Jews were living in many places, and, interesting for us, he writes about independent Jewish states in nowadays Yemen and East-Africa. One had a population 300.000 people. However, it seems that Benjamin has not visited those areas personally, but that he was dependent on information from others. Because of his investigations he is considered as one of the most important sources of knowledge about the Jewry of his time. He tells about their life, meeting places, organization etcetera. But where do we find this state with 300.000 citizens? Is it in Yemen? In that case this state has exercised some influence in Africa as well. Countries like Saba and Axum had their territory, during hundreds of years, at both sides of the Red Sea.

Benjamin of Tudela mentions a country, Aden or Eden in Thelasar: "...very mountainous and contains many independent Jews, who are not subjected to the power of the Gentiles, but possess cities and fortresses on the summit of the mountains from where they descend into... Nubia..., a Christian Kingdom... The Jews generally take spoils and plunder from them, which they carry into their mountain fortresses, the possession of which makes them almost unconquerable. Many of the Jews of Aden visit Egypt and Persia..." (See: www.medievalnubia.info) I follow the explanation given by A. Asher already in 1840 in his "Commentary on Benjamin of Tudela", who situates Aden in between the Blue Nile and the Red Sea in Africa.

An important fact is that in Benjamin's time many Jews were aware of large numbers of co-religionists who were spread all over the world, waiting for better times and a return to the Promised Land. Benjamin of Tudela speaks also about the town of Kuts, at the border of Egypt, with 30.000 Jews.

More than one century later the famous explorer Marco Polo speaks about Jews in East-Africa. In "The travels of Marco Polo, III, 35 he writes: "There are also many Jews in the country..." The name of the country used by him is Abash (=Abyssinia) and also: Middle-India.

Radbaz, the rabbi of Cairo

The head rabbi of Egypt, David ben Solomon ibn Zimra, known under his nickname Radbaz, wrote in 1545 "But those Jews who come from the land of Cush are without doubt from the tribe of Dan..." He knew the Jews of Sudan and Ethiopia and knew about their origin.

A testimony from Israel

We found, so far, a number of clear testimonies of Jewish presence in Africa, especially Upper-Egypt and further to the south. I do not consider here the large Jewish settlements at the very beginning of our calendar in Cairo, Alexandria and Cyrenaica (in nowadays Libya), but they have been a bridge in between world Jewry and the Sub-Saharan Jews. We have seen already that up till the late Middle Ages there has been a Jewish and/or Hebrew presence over there. Did they continue as a separate group of people?

Among many voices, we may consider the information given by Obadiah ben Abraham Bartenura (c. 1445 – c. 1515) of Italy, but living and working in Israel. He writes about the year 1500 in his famous commentary on the Mishna that the Beta Israel of East Africa consider themselves to be descendants of the tribe of Dan. This is in line with Radbaz and about the same time.

One million ?

Manoel de Almeida (1580-1646) was appointed as the representative of the Jesuits in Ethiopia, where he did arrive in 1622. In his “*Historia de Etiopía a Alta ou Abassia*” he states that the number of Jews in that country was about one million. He writes as well that they were able to read Hebrew and that they spoke a deformed Hebrew language. There are some more European travelers and missionaries who wrote about Jewry in Ethiopia 16th and 17th centuries. But here we see a number added to that statement. Most logic seems the conclusion that there is at least a connection (physical as well as spiritually) in between the Jews found in biblical times in Egypt, those later on in Nubia/Ethiopia already before the year 1000 and those mentioned later. They may have mixed with people around and be reinforced by Jews fleeing from South-Arabia and other areas, but in every period of time travelers, explorers and religious leaders are aware of large quantities of Jews living in East-Africa. **3/**

More voices about historical East-African Jewry

The oldest Ethiopian history books are the *Kebrá Nagast* and the *Fetha Nagast*. Both are compiled in the 13th century, but part of it traces back to even the 7th century. The last one contains mainly laws. They claim that Aksum was a Jewish kingdom, before its king became a Christian in 324 CE.

A number of historians and linguistic experts bring in their view, that the habits and rituals in the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia point to a Jewish past, that much of the religious vocabulary shows an origin in the Hebrew language and culture and that the old Ethiopian Ge'ez language has drawn vocabulary from the Hebrew language.

Already in 1930 Jones and Monroe wrote: "... that the chief Semitic languages of Ethiopia may suggest an antiquity of Judaism in Ethiopia. There still remains the curious circumstance that a number of Abyssinian words connected with religion, such as ... hell, idol, Easter, purification, and alms, are of Hebrew origin. These words must have been derived directly from a Jewish source, for the Abyssinian Church knows the Scriptures only in a Ge'ez version made from the Septuagint." All this points in the same direction. Ibrahim M. Omer says: "... Some Ethiopian traditions claim that half the population of Aksum was Jewish before the coming of Christianity..." 4/

This kingdom of Aksum has been very powerful and important. The Persian religious leader Mani declares in 270 in his book 'Kephalaia' that Aksum in his days was one of the most powerful countries in the world, together with the Roman empire, Persia and China. 5/

Leo Africanus – a Moroccan who ended up at the court of the pope, writes in 1550 in his book about African geography of "The land of the Jews", just like Livio Sanuto, as well in the 16th century. Sanuto, the Cartographer of Venice, wrote and designed the "Geografia dell' Africa" (1588). 6/

Additional facts

A traveler of the 6th century wrote about military conflicts between an Aksumite king and his enemies in the 'Semenai' (= Semien mountains in North-Western Ethiopia?). This Alexandrian traveler is known as Cosmas Indicopleustes (because he visited regions as far as the Indian Malabar Coast. We know from later times that a Jewish kingdom had developed in the Semien mountains. Is that what Cosmas reports about? This offers no strong support for the thesis that one or several Jewish kingdoms did exist at that time in that area. But it fits well in the picture of a Jewish kingdom in the Semien mountains that we receive from other sources.

We have quite some information about wars in between Christian and Jewish powers in the Horn of Africa. It was about the year 960 that queen Yudith took power over Aksum. She was Jewish or at least supporting the Jews. Later, when the Solomonic dynasty came into power since 1270,

king Amda Seyon organized a military campaign against the Jews. Many were killed or converted by force in 1329. It became worse for them during the reign of king Yeshaq (1414-1429). The Jews were not allowed to possess land, and many became craftsmen like smiths. The information found in the annals of the Ethiopian kings is very interesting indeed. So, we know about the war of the Ethiopians with the Beta Israel under the king Sarsa Dengel, who reigned from 1563-1597. This war was really very cruel and the underlying party was afraid to be completely annihilated. Finally, from about the year 1620, there was no independent Jewish territory anymore.

A violent second enemy, besides Sarsa, was the Adal sultanate (Somalia). During its attempt to conquer Ethiopia, the Jews did suffer a lot. Their books and prayer houses were destroyed, many were killed. Again, a new enemy rose up: the Darwish sultanate (Sudan) at the end of the 19th century. Besides there was a terrible draught, also at the end of the 19th century, killing probably one third of the Jewish community.

Archeological finds in Somaliland

A number of photo's in my possession throw some light on the Hebrew history of East-Africa. I keep them like a treasure. Those are photos of recent findings in Somaliland. Some of the ornaments carry Hebrew script. Other documents and ornaments show the David's star or the Menorah. Sometimes other scripts were used, for example old Libyan (Tifinagh or: old Libyco-Berber script). Specialists have discovered that the Hebrew script on the cover of a golden booklet on one of those photo's stems from the beginning of the Common Era. Other findings I have only seen on photo's in the hands of those who found the treasures, without receiving a photo myself. I was able to discover on some documents even the old Hebrew script, that was in use in Israel before the Babylonian captivity. This gives an answer to a question of historians. "Did the Jews in East-Africa know the Hebrew language?" They knew it during centuries at least and many of them have spoken this language.

Much research is needed for those documents, pottery and ornaments, found in the many caves and irrigation tunnels of Somaliland. In the same way as the Jewish valuables, many holy books of the orthodox churches have been hidden in Somaliland. It is known that the Adal Sultanate and later the Darwish State have destroyed everything that was not of their own (Muslim) religion, especially sacred texts. This may give the indication that those artifacts were hidden during the 17th century. However, it is not easy to get access to those historical treasures. Nowadays many individuals and even criminal groups search the caves and tunnels of Somaliland, where people before them did not dare to enter because of fear for evil spirits. 7/

Falashas

What about our times? Has anything been left over of this old Hebrew/Jewish tradition? Oh, yes. We find in Africa signs, remnants and people representing an old Hebrew presence in several countries, testifying of a mainly unknown history. Among them the Falashas, a Jewish remnant of old Jewish kingdoms and lost glory. Their name means: foreigners, as they were called by the surrounding majority in Ethiopia. Beta Israel (sons of Israel) is the name used by themselves. Finally, since 1984, they were brought to Israel, to be reunited with the Jewish community living over there, all of them survivors of oppression and hatred. During the ages, the Falashas (tribe of Dan) had kept alive their faith and their culture as a dwindling minority. Beside the Falashas in Ethiopia we know about the Falashamura (Falashas who were forced to become Christians). They have partly been brought to Israel as well.

In Somalia/Somaliland we find two tribes, the Yibir and the Tubal, who trace back their origin to Israel. Yibir is the Somalian word for Hebrew. It is no pleasure to be a Yibir or a Tubal – they suffer under a terrible oppression, due to their presumed origin. No well thinking person will trace back his origin to Israel in a Muslim country. But as well the Yibirs and Tubals, as their opponents, have been convinced about this origin during the ages.

The overall feeling in the Yibir communities is that they became Muslims against their own will. Twice I heard them say: “We have the wrong religion and live in the wrong nation.” It is dangerous to say so in an orthodox Islamic country. Another point is that they have their own language, that during long times has been forbidden in their country. The measures taken against Jews in neighboring Ethiopia six centuries ago, are up till today in operation for the Yibirs and Tubals of Somalia: not allowed to possess cattle or land. Many of them work as blacksmith, especially the Tubal.

Ibrahim Omer has tried to find evidence of the descent of the Yibirs from the Beta Israel, but he did not find the definitive proof in his article: “Ethiopian Jews in Somalia; Tracing remnants of the Yibirs.” He says that they are seen as foreigners and receive the name ‘sab’, meaning: foreigners. Fanatic Muslim elements (Al Shabaab) threatened to kill all of them, due to their Jewish decent (in their eyes), and especially the person who had been chosen as the representative for his tribal community in the Somalian government (after 2010) was in great danger and resigned because of it.

A different point of view

Dr. Steve Kaplan (1953) of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem came to a different point of view. In his article: “The invention of Ethiopian Jews: Three Models” (1993) 8/, he states that the Beta Israel of Ethiopia have no Jewish roots, that they are ordinary Ethiopians who since 1500 identified themselves with Judaism. Their holy books in the Ge’ez language are not very antique Jewish documents, but translations that have been made since about the year 1400 from Arabic books. He repeats this point of view, with many facts, in other books and articles. He opposes the popular point of view (that I sustain as well) of the great promoters of the ‘model’ of an ages old Jewish descent of the Beta Israel, and their fate resembling the oppression suffered by the Jews worldwide. But what is the origin of those ‘ayhud’ (they called themselves the Beta Israel) of Ethiopia? Only a marginalized group of Ethiopians, who tried one day to establish an alternative history, culture and religion? I am not convinced at all. It is so more logic that Hebrews, living during 2000 or so years in the region, have continued as a minority group. The late origin of their holy books (translations from Arabic, says Kaplan), might be due to oppression and loss of their cultural heritage as a result of it. But what to do with the remark of Manoel de Almeida, who wrote that the Jews in Ethiopia spoke a ‘deformed kind of Hebrew’? (see above) Kaplan is strongly opposed by Ibrahim Omer (Univ. of California), who sees the Falashas as the descendants of the Beta Israel, that have been present in Sudan/Ethiopia for over 2000 years.

Reconstructing the past

There are a number of theories about the Jewish presence in the Horn of Africa. Did those people descent from Israel, or from groups in Egypt or Yemen? Did it happen in the time of king Solomon (Kebra Nagast) or later? The undeniable finds of historical evidence of antique Hebrew life in Sub-Saharan Africa confront us with many questions. Who were those people? Were they genetically Hebrew, or mixed with local tribes? How was their itinerary? What language did they speak? Was there any connection with other Jewish people?

A popular opinion is that Jews traveled to Egypt and went from there to Sudan/Ethiopia. Great names supporting this opinion are Joseph Halévy (Alliance Israélite Universelle) in the 19th century and Jacques Faïtlovich (1881-1955), who wrote about the lost tribes of Israel and visited the Beta Israel as well.

Nowadays we find this theory of an ages old Hebrew and Jewish presence in East-Africa as the leading opinion among researchers. This became very important with the influx of Falashas in Israel. “Do they really belong to ‘us’?” Menachem Waldman, a rabbi living in the U.S. State of New York advocates the popular point of view. He wrote in: “The Koren Ethiopian Haggada: Journey to Freedom” (2012) about the Jews in Ethiopia. “A major wave of emigration from Judah to Kush and Abyssinia dates to the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, in the beginning of the 7th century B.C.E. Rabbinic accounts of the siege assert that about 110.000 Judeans remained in

Jerusalem under king Hezekiah's command, whereas about 130.000 Judeans led by Shebna had joined Sennacherib's campaign against Tirhakah, king of Kush." This may explain the large numbers of Judeans in the Egyptian army of Psammetichus II.

Conclusion

We see a continuous Jewish presence in North and East Africa from c. 700 BCE till our days. If we limit our area of interest to Sudan and the Horn of Africa, we have a number of testimonies from the Bible, findings in Elephantine, the Letter of Aristeas, the history of Onias, the 9th century traveler Eldad ha Dani and the 13th century Benjamin of Tudela to the national history of Ethiopia, the Kebra Nagast. Later on, from the end of the 15th century and in the 16th century we hear the voices of different witnesses about Jews in that same area. Even if there are many questions about their itinerary and descent, it becomes complicated not to see an uninterrupted line in between the people, mentioned by Eldad ha Dani and the Jews/Hebrews found there up till today. Those people are themselves convinced about their Hebrew origin. They were different from the surrounding peoples. They tried to preserve their culture and religion amidst oppression and strong powers trying to adjust them to the surrounding majorities. This is certainly true for the Falashas. They kept the tradition that they are descendants of the tribe of Dan.

The findings of Hebrew artifacts hidden in Somalia seems to be in favor of the opinion of Omer. Tribes in Somalia, claiming a Hebrew origin, as well as the existence of the tribe of Dan in West-Africa may bring in new arguments in favor of the 'popular' opinion of the offspring of the Beta Israel. At least this helped me to formulate my thesis: The Beta Israel are originally Jews; their history shows an uninterrupted Jewish presence in East-Africa and most probably the major group descended from Egypt southward. What has been left over of them is small and powerless, compared to the mighty Jewish presence that was once found in the Horn of Africa.

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Postscript

It is amazing to see how many people are studying the Hebrew legacy of Africa, and even everywhere in the world. One needs a fulltime job to study all those studies and reports. However, I use this opportunity to introduce to my readers two authors, who at least have something important to tell. Even if they as well mix up their ideas with quite a lot of presuppositions, they bring at the same time a lot of worth wile observations and quotes. The reader has to make the best out of it.

I have to add that so many authors want to show the Hebrew descent of so many tribes and regions, that it becomes finally nearly ridiculous. However, we should not fall in another trap neither, just denying all Hebrew influences in so many tribes. We have to find out the truth, as far as possible, and have to be satisfied that many things can't be proven as to yet.

The first is Joseph J. Williams s.j., author of: "Hebrewisms of West-Africa; from Nile to Niger with the Jews", London, 1930. This author brings us a goldmine of citations that can't easily be put besides, even if the book is already old. The major thesis is that vast areas of Africa have been colonized and influenced by the inhabitants of Carthage, especially after the city fell twice in the hands of their enemies. They were, during many centuries, already in touch with many areas, not only in the Maghreb, but all over West Africa. Among their inhabitants may Jews were to be found. The language of Carthage, Phoenician, is a dialect of the Aramaic language, and as such very close to Hebrew. The cultures of Carthage and Israel were quite closely related. Some believe that Tarshish, mentioned several times in the Bible, is in fact the old town of Carthage.

West-Africa has known during the ages large kingdoms; among them: the Ghana and the Songhai empire. According to Williams both of those empires have known strong Carthaginian (and probably Jewish) influences and even kings. He gives a lot of quotes of authors (many Arabian) of the Middle Ages, who talk about lots of Jews in West-Africa, even Jewish kingdoms. That of course was also true for the Maghreb, with many Berber tribes and some (quarters of) towns that had become Jewish.

Another author is a Nigerian, Odi Moghalu, who wrote *Igbo-Israel*, Xlibris, Bloomington U.S.A., 2015. He tries to proof that the Igbo's and some smaller tribes are the descendants of the Israelite tribe of Gad. He gives some quotes from the medieval time, telling that whole regions have spoken the Phoenician language.

Both authors point to Eldad ha-Dani (9th century CE), Al-Idrisi (12th century CE) and Leo Africanus (15th Century CE). Ha-Dani has written about numbers of people in Western-Africa speaking the Phoenician language and about a mighty Jewish kingdom over there. Al-Idrisi has written about countries inhabited by Jews. Those Jews however had mainly lost their own religion. He talked about a country Lamlam, 200 miles to the west from Timbuktu. Most of the habitants of that country were originating from Europe and the Magreb (due to progroms), according to him. Leo Africanus wrote about a 'mighty Jewish nation' at the right side from the Nile. Is this the famous kingdom Kikouyo? The location of that kingdom is not known, but it has to be found somewhere in Mali/Chad, alongside the Niger. We can't ignore those clear testimonies, supported even by the Tarikh es-Sudan.

Most authors nowadays think of complicated and multiple migrations from Europe, the Maghreb, Yemen, Israel to Africa and many, many internal migrations within Africa. In Africa we see a movement from the north-east (Egypt, Sudan and Libya) to the south and the west.

All of these voices are reasonably in line with the thesis that I developed in this article. They bring in their explanation of the itinerary of the people of Dan (see a second article). My main theme is: The influence and the distribution of Judaism in the first millennium was larger and

wider than most historians think so far. If so, we have to find up till today traces of it. Did we lose something in the course of centuries, and can we find back what got lost?

(See as well the enlarged note 3)

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1/ An interesting study is from the hand of Benjamin G. Wright III, “The Letter of Aristeas”, Berlin/Boston, 2015

2/ Among much information, it would be good to read www.chabad.org/library/article-cdo/aid/112285/jewish/EldadHadani.htm

3/ The work of Almeida was based on a history of Ethiopia written by a former Roman Catholic missionary to that country, Pedro Paéz (1564-1622), who wrote about Jews in Ethiopia as well. Other people writing about African Hebrews in his time were for example: The Scottish cartographer John Ogilby (1600-1676) and his French counterpart D’Anville (1697-1782). Ogilby published in 1670: “*Africa: being an accurate description of the regions of Ægypt, Barbary, Lybia, and Billedulgerid, the land of Negroes, Guinee, Æthiopia, and the Abyssines, with all the adjacent islands ... collected and translated from most authentick authors.*” *He speaks about many Jews, scattered all over the coast of ‘Guinee’, that is most of the West-African coast. Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d’Anville has published ‘Afrique’ in 1749. Most of the inlands is in his time yet unknown in Europe. He paints several areas. One of them receives the name Negroland, a broad banner from the west to the east of Africa, including Senegal, Sierra Leone, Guinee, Mali, Niger and Chad. He gives an explanation: Negroland was in the past Jewish. Very interesting is a voice of 2 centuries later. The American Presbyterian missionary, John Leighton Wilson (1809-1885) sees a lot of evidence for the thesis of D’Anville. He points in his book ‘Western Africa’ from 1856, among many other observations, to a phenomenon. Many tribes know guilt offerings, and they smear the blood at the doorposts, an old biblical example. (See Exodus 12:7)*

4/ Article ‘The forgotten origin of the Ethiopian Jews; from Northern Sudan’, 2012. This can easily be found under the name of the author on internet. It is repeated in the book of both authors “History of Ethiopia” a book that has seen many reprints. Ibrahim M. Omer teaches at the University of California and publishes about Jewish-Nubian relations/influences and the East-African Beta Israel. He has written a number of articles for the ‘Jewish Magazine’. Very revealing is: “Evidence mounts of ancient Jewish roots of Beta Israel Ethiopian Jewry.” Genetic Literacy Project, 16-06-2015.

5/ Tewelde Beyene, ‘History of Eritrea: The Rise, the Apogee and the Decline of the Axumite State’, 2005

6/ Another famous cartographer, Al Idrisi (1099-1165) from Morocco, living on the island of Sicily, writes about: “... Jewish Negroes in the Western Sudan...” Quote from George E.

Lichtblau (1920-2004) in an article "Jewish Roots in Africa".
(www.mamiwata.com/Blackjews.html)

7/ There are many historical Jewish artifacts and even habits in Somalia. The leader of the Mudug region in Somalia, told me that not far from the town Galkaayo the remnants of a synagogue have been discovered, with a Hebrew text on the wall. It has been covered under sand again, out of fear of destruction. Is it by chance that the name of the major clan in Somaliland is Isaaq? And why do many Somalis say, when they want to praise God, 'Halleloy'? Why not the Arab (Muslim) counterpart of this expression?

8/ This article appeared in 'Cahier d'Études africaines', 132, XXXIII-4, 1993, pp. 645-658. It can be read on internet: www.persee.fr/doc/cea_0008-0055_num_33_1497

In a second article, I want to show what is known so far about Hebrews in West-Africa. :The Tribe of Dan in West-Africa