

THE LITURGICAL TRADITION OF THE BETE ISRAEL COMMUNITY: RETHINKING RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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Abstract

There is a well-known resemblance between the textual, liturgical, and ritualistic world of the Bete Israel community, and that of Ethiopian Christianity. Studies in this field tend to focus on comparing the two, naturally assuming Ethiopian Christian traditions served as the main source of influence on liturgical traditions of Bete Israel. By doing so, they often overlook the Jewish influences present in that liturgy.

This article calls for a reevaluation of both the assumptions and the methodologies often applied to Bete Israel. Instead, it utilizes a diachronic-phenomenological method, focusing on the texts themselves and their connections to Jewish sources.

The article presents both oral and written liturgical texts, demonstrating the unique characteristics of the Bete Israel liturgical traditions. Indeed, I argue that they align more closely with those of ancient Judaism, than they do with those of either rabbinic Judaism or Ethiopian Christianity.

Yet, it is not a conclusive statement but an invitation for further thought and exploration, paving the way for comprehensive future studies on the prayers and liturgical world of Ethiopian Jewry.