Ababa Biadglo

Father’s name: Kes Biadglo

Mother’s name: Ababo Sanbato

Year of birth: 1958

Place of birth: Simien – Menata, in the Simien region.

Main occupation in Ethiopia: Soldier and political activist

Region of residence in Ethiopia: Simien.

Language interview was conducted in: Amharic.

Content of the interview:

Ababa begins with a song of yearning for Jerusalem. He describes his family tree and talks about his village – a holy place inhabited by Jewish monks. The monks educated many Kesim, who were then stationed in various Jewish communities. It was there that Ababa’s father was ordained as a Kes, became the spiritual leader of the village, and even taught generations of Kesim himself.

Ababa describes various illnesses and the way they were treated in great detail. Due to the great distance from a modern medical clinic, the residents of the village were forced to use traditional medicines and to find their own ways to treat illnesses, which were of course not always successful. Ababa’s oldest sister lost eight of her children to the same illness in one year. He talks about the mutual assistance in the village – the community would provide help for the bereaved families, with agricultural work and anything the family needed.

Ababa compares the different regimes that ruled Ethiopia during his lifetime: from the feudal regime of Emperor Haile Selassie, the Derg regime and the EPRDF regime (the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front). He talks in detail about the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie and the rise of the Derg regime. This took place on the backdrop of grassroots uprisings about topics such as farmers owning their lands and their work hours. The rebellion against the Emperor’s regime was led by officers in the national army and various rebel organizations. When the rebellion was successful and the Emperor’s regime fell, the rebel organizations began to fight among themselves and the split among the people grew.

The Derg party led by Mengistu Haile Mariam eventually took power and pursued all its opponents. This bloody period is known as the “red terror”, during which forced conscription was instituted. Ababa had to choose whether to wait to be kidnapped to the army or to enlist with one of the organizations he was ideologically aligned with.

Ababa chose to join the rebel organization – the EPRDF which worked to bring down the Derg regime and to establish a democratic state in Ethiopia. In his role in the organization Ababa worked within the civilian population in various villages in the north of the country. He worked to establish political and educational institutions, appointed regional rulers on behalf of the organization and ensured that the residents’ lives continued undisturbed. His activity even reached places still controlled by the Derg.

During the fighting, many areas were captured by the EPRDF and soldiers in the Derg army were taken captive. These captives were interrogated and their testimonies circulated to the public by the organization to expose the murderous actions of the Derg regime.

Ababa, who began his career in the organization in a junior position, rose steadily through the ranks. He describes the structure of the organization, the manner the orders were handed down the chain of command and the method of supervision of their implementation.

Ababa reminisces about the period of his service in the organization during the civil war. He wandered from place to place and position to position for three years, unable to communicate with his family. When the EPRDF army reached the outskirts of Addis Ababa, Operation Solomon began to bring Ethiopian Jewry to Israel. Ababa received permission from his organization to reunite with his family and to immigrate to Israel.

Transcript of the interview:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1U0sU7KGVTmRHBDZ2lmYjlJTzg/view?usp=sharing>

Keywords:

Ababa Biadglo, nature, agriculture, Kesim, monks, holy sites, ritual purity, kosher, regime, feudalism, democracy, dictatorship, diseases, epidemics, death, rebellion, army, the red terror, forced conscription, Operation Moses, population management, Derg, Emperor Haile Selassie, EPRDF, ??, Simien – Menata, Simien, Addis Ababa, Wollo, Israel.

Interview, filmed, archive, memories of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Jewish heritage, Ethiopia, Beta Israel, Judaism, Jew, festivals, Jewish festivals in Ethiopia, festivals in Ethiopia, tradition, north west Ethiopia, Lake Tana, settlement, Injera, Dabu, Sigd, village, agriculture, agriculture in Ethiopia, Bible, the Holy Land, Israel, family, family in Ethiopia, Ethiopian family, house, family structure, professions, religion, education, man, woman, Beta Israel, Africa, Tala, Amharic, Tigri, Tigrina, Tigrinya, Tagri, Kes, synagogue, ritual impurity, ritual purity, Jewish tradition, Ethiopian tradition, festivals in Ethiopia, menstruation house, Ethiopian village, handicrafts, Ethiopian handicrafts, Ethiopian Jewish culture, Ethiopian culture, culture, Jewish history, history of Ethiopian Jewry.