

THE ANCIENT TOWN OF ADWA

Part I

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Feb 15, 2007

The reason for this series of articles on Adwa is two fold: first to introduce this ancient and historic town to those who do not know much about it, and secondly, to expose and debunk some political operatives and pundits at home and in Diaspora who have been heaping totally unfounded accusations and lies of “wealth” being taken from the rest of Ethiopia and shipped and accumulated in Adwa due to the one fact that the PM and many in the present government happen to come from this much neglected town.

Adwa is one of the most ancient towns in Ethiopia. Situated on South East of the Soloda Mountain, where the River Assem joins River May Guagua, both being outflows from opposite ends of Mount Soloda, Adwa is founded on a fairly even and flat ground. It most probably is the availability and abundance of fresh water in these rivers, which must have attracted early people to settle here.

As the crow flies, Adwa is barely ten miles from Axum. The winding and dusty road, however, stretches some 25 Kilometers, or twelve to thirteen miles distance. No one seems to know the true meaning of the name “Adwa”. Some say it is a combination of two words: Adi – meaning town or land, and wa’ – meaning beware! So, they interpret: “land or town to beware of”. That is pure conjecture that may or may not be true. In reality however, no legend or oral history has survived that tells us of how, when, or by whom Adwa was founded and given such a name, or what the name really means.

From its close vicinity to Axum it is reasonable to surmise Adwa was founded very soon after Axum became the center of Ethiopia and the political powerhouse of the land. Adwa probably started as a hunting excursion stop for an Imperial entourage, or possibly as an army extension or garrison town for an Imperial force. Unlike Axum, which gets its water from flood run-offs, Adwa was blessed with an abundance of year-round fresh water from the two rivers named above, which flow from Mount Soloda.

The oldest ruins in Adwa are to be found near Enda Giorgis, an old church North West of Adwa, and to the south of Bloko, a smaller town about three kilometers away, on the road to Axum. These ruins, legend tells us, are all that is left of what once used to be a palace of Queen Sheba. These ruins and the legend is the basis for the theory that Adwa was founded as an extension of Axum and an Imperial hunting and watering stop.

River May Gua-gua too, has a history of its own. The name Gua-gua, we are told, is a corruption of guangua, a Tigrigna word that means hollow, pipe, or tube. And the legend goes on to tell us that water was once piped from the river uphill to where the palace of Queen Sheba used to stand; hence the name May Guangua, meaning piped water.

What kind of system or what type of technology was used, or how water was pumped uphill, still remains, and will remain a mystery until some serious archeological digs and research can be conducted on the site. That would then prove or refute the legend. These, however, are certain: the existing legend, the ancient ruins, and the name, “May Guagua”.

Much later on, during the turmoil that came about between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Catholics during the reign of Fasiledes in the Gonder dynasty, Portuguese Jesuit priests who were expelled from Gonder, the then capital of Ethiopia, were sent on gizot, (a form of exile and punishment) to Adwa, in an area named Fre-Mona, as recorded in some of their own writings. Fre-Mona was located in a corner of Adwa at the present site of Gobo-Geza, about half a mile from the center of town on the road to Bloko.



Adwa – One of the major dusty roads in town and Mount Soloda in the background

The majestic and imposing Mount Soloda (seen above) seems to overshadow everything. It is an ever felt presence everywhere one goes, and can be seen from almost anywhere in town. Mount Soloda, however, is not the only mountain in Adwa and its surroundings. A little further off to the East and South East, are many mountains as high and as majestic. These are Mount Moqtun, Mount Semaiata, (even higher and more imposing than Mount Soloda) Enda Aba Gerima, Enda Aba Tsahma, Mount Debre Damo and many others. Some of these mountains are visible from vantage places in town.

More to follow...