

THE ANCIENT TOWN OF ADWA

Part II

By G. E. Gorfu

A mere half kilometer or so from Bloko, situated on the top of a small hill to the West of Adwa and overlooking the town of Bloko, is the famous Adi-Abun, or ‘the town of Abun, the Papacy of Tigray. There still is an old Abby there, which I hear even now serves as residence, or for an overnight stay, when present day Abuns come to Adua from Axum.

Legend has it that one of the Tesa’atu Romawian Kidusan, (The Nine Holy Romans) had lived in Adi-Abun before founding a nearby monastery, and he was the first to introduce Tomatoes in the land. So they named them: Tsebhi Abun, meaning: The Abun’s sauce. Cherry Tomatoes to this day are known as Tsebhi Abun in many parts of Tigray.

During Medieval times Adwa was one of the best-known large open-air markets in Ethiopia (along with Harrar, Ankober, and Eneria). It was a major commercial and trading center serving most of Tigray and Northern part of Ethiopia. Adwa also had half a dozen or more prominent churches, the most famous of which was Adwa Selassie, built by Atse Yohannes. That edifice was destroyed and reduced to rubble by the bombings of the Derge Regime, but it has since been rebuilt and consecrated only a few years ago.

Across from di-Abun we find the old Adwa Hospital which was originally built during the five year Italian occupation. Adwa became an administrative center for the Italian governor, who lived in the building that came to be known as “Fisho”, a corruption of the Italian word “Officio”. It was at that time that scores of buildings were erected in Adwa including the old Telephone house, the electric engine house, and many other houses that later became Queen Sheba School, as offices and barracks to house the Italian officials.

Adwa hospital in Adi Abun built by the Italians has been neglected and frozen in time. It has deteriorated abysmally, and has lacked functional X-Ray equipment for over ten years or so, and the only X-ray equipment in nearby Axum, which used to serve as a last resort, has also become defective for a couple of years. The health and medical service is simply terrible, where people have to travel to Wukro, or Mekelle, a whole day’s journey by bus, or several days trek on foot or horseback, just for an X-ray. This needs to change.

In Part I of this series we had mentioned Mount Soloda and the many mountains in and around Adwa. These are the very hills and mountains that became world famous in Atse Menelik’s campaign against the Italians. These mountains served as fortresses and barriers for Ethiopian warriors for ambush and surprise attacks on the Italians. Many of these hills and mountains though terraced today, are still a major transportation hurdle.

Travels along these hills and mountains are difficult and precarious, as there hardly are any paved roads. (Please see photo). Most local roads built by peasant manpower in an ongoing “*Food for Work Program*” are really “dry weather only”, made just from dirt and gravel. These roads become extremely unsteady, slippery, and hazardous to truck and lorry, causing many accidents, ending scores of lives and destroying millions of Birr worth of property every year, especially during the rainy seasons.

More to follow please stay tuned...



Mountains of Adwa, with Mount Soloda and its pointed tip in the middle of photo.