

THE ANCIENT TOWN OF ADWA

Part III

By G. E. Gorfu

During the Italian occupation Adwa became the administrative center for many reasons. One, of course, was the availability of fresh water, but more importantly was also the four important roads that merged there. These were: first, the road that goes north to Rama, Mendefera and Asmara, a second one goes west through Enticho, Adigrat to Adi-Keyh and Dekemhare in Eritrea. This same road splits at Adigrat and goes south to Mekelle, Dessie, and Addis Ababa. The third road goes west to Axum, and Shire Enda Selassie, and fourthly, the road in the south, which goes through Tembien, Abyie Adi, to Mekelle.

Few know that until the Derg Regime messed up the educational system in Ethiopia with Biherawi Fidel Serawit, for many years Adwa was the national top scorer in grade average points, and in the total number of students sitting and passing the 8th grade General Examination. In the School Leaving Certificate results too, (12th grade) it was one of the top scoring schools in Ethiopia. The elementary and secondary schools both have the same name: Queen Sheba School. (See the website at: <http://negstsaba.com>)

For this reason, many students used to come to Adwa, not only from surrounding towns and villages, but also from far away Gonder, Godjam, Dessie, and Asmara. There also was a Swedish Mission Teachers Training Institute (TTI) in Forestale, on the banks of River May Guagua. So, all through the fifties, sixties, and seventies, many students from all over Ethiopia flocked to Adwa. Graduates of TTI became elementary & high school teachers and directors, and can still be found in many top administrative and executive positions in private NGOs and in government, while some have retired or passed away.

The houses built by the Italians, which later became classrooms, are still being used by students, though some are in ruins and their windows boarded up for lack of repair. (See pictures below) This is sad and regrettable. Students that get the luxury to attend in the classrooms are only the upper grades while first and second grade students actually take their classes in the open air, and sit under the Wanza trees on little rocks and stones.

The author visited Adwa four years ago, and was amazed and reduced to tears to see the very rock on which he sat upon more than fifty years ago still being used. (See picture below). A gas cylinder left behind by the Italians hangs from a Wanza tree, and serves as the school bell by hammering it with a rock, to announce class and brake times.

Fifty years ago, the elementary school alone had a student population of around two thousand. Today, however, both the elementary and the secondary schools have upwards of ten thousand students, and are overflowing far beyond capacity. Some famous private donors, like W/ro Lidia Schaefer and the late Ato Terfu Asfaw, have built schools in Adwa and in the surrounding villages to take off some of the burden, but Adwa's demand for education still remains great, and seems to be ever increasing.

More to follow...



Queen Sheba School with Mount Soloda in the background. Note the boarded windows.



Queen Sheba School in ruins but still in use! See students in blue uniform in left corner.



Open air classrooms, teachers' benches and a bicycle; a gas cylinder under a Wanza tree. Fifty years ago I sat on one of these rocks, and found my very seat still being used today!