

THE ANCIENT TOWN OF ADWA

Part IV

By G. E. Gorfu

In previous articles we showed the educational aspirations of the young people of Adwa and the surrounding regions, (please see photos below) but in this connection, it is only appropriate to mention the pioneer of modern education in Adwa, and the very first teacher who brought his students into the newly opened Queen Sheba School – Haleka Tewolde-Medhin Gebru. The year was 1942; one year after the Fascist occupiers lost the Second World War and left Ethiopia.

Haleka Tewolde Medhin had started his school in Adwa long before the Italian occupation, but when the Italians took over the town and made it their administrative center, he moved his school to Mai-Misham, a mountain fortress about a day's journey south east of Adwa, where the Italians had no access. He continued to teach there all through the five years of occupation and founded the school, which bears his name to this day. When the Italians left, the Haleka returned to Adwa with a dozen of his close followers that now had become his trusted disciples and he continued where he had left. That was when the resistance and persecution by the Orthodox Church began.

The Orthodox Church, which had a total monopoly of education in Ethiopia, found this modern teaching heretical and an encroachment on its territory. Haleka Tewolde-Medhin and a dozen of his disciples were accused of heresy, imprisoned, and tortured. Church officials and clerics, with great influence on the young ruler, Dejazmach Tekle Haimanot G/Selassie, had the Haleka tried and sentenced to death. His home was ransacked and all his property confiscated. Twice they took him to a hanging tree for execution, but twice he narrowly escaped death by miraculous coincidences.



Emperor Haile Selassie passed a national edict that no death sentence can be carried out without his signature, and the Haleka was saved from a certain death. Later on, the case against him was dropped and the Emperor supported and encouraged him in his teaching. When Queen Sheba Elementary School first opened its doors, Haleka and seventeen of his students moved from Grat Mea'lem School at Enda Selassie to the new facility in town, creating the foundation stone for the school, and setting the tone of a brilliant spirit in Queen Sheba for generations to come.



Memhir Gobezie Goshu Ato

Gebreab Biadgign Blata Gebru T/Hmanot Ato Mekonnen Desta

Among the most notable educators of Adwa are: Memhir Gobezie Goshu, who opened the very first bookstore in town, Bashay Medhanie Hailu, Haleka Gezahegn Aflay, Haleka Yemane Berhan Aberra, Blata Gebru T/Haimanot, (who became the first director of Queen Sheba), Ato Gebreab Biadgign, (Director in the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts), Ato Mekonnen Desta,

a most dynamic and charismatic director, who encouraged girls to enroll, and many others, who spread education from Adua to Axum to Tambien Abeyi-Adie and to various parts of Ethiopia.



Animated students: tomorrow's engineers, doctors, possibly PM's too...



Solving arithmetic problems the old fashion way – by counting pebbles





Queen Sheba's walls in need of repair and paint, still serving as notice-board & map

A personal testimony: *Anna from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA*

I lived in Adwa for a year while I was teaching English at the TTI, (Teachers Training Institute 2003-2004). I often encountered students from Queen Sheba as well as walked past it so many times. I have also visited other schools, mainly elementary, in and around Adwa and Tigray. While the schools do need work and supplies, I am amazed at the quality of the education that students receive. I truly believe American students could learn something from the way education is given in Adwa.

For those of you from Adwa, I am truly jealous of your history. Always stay strong.

Anna Hammernik
The Carefree Foundation
Vice President of Public Relations



Anna Hammernik teaching one of her favorite classes in Adwa, Ethiopia

More on Anna at: - <http://www.uwmpost.com/article/c58b6a04073e048301074e5acc8f0010>

More to follow...