

Remembering unique Eritreans in contemporary history

*A short biographical sketch
of
Abraha Deboch and Mogos Asgodom*



Mogos Asgodom

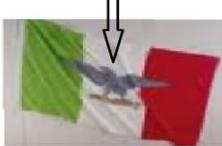


Abraha Deboch

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electronic sources*

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Early life and personal data

Origins of Abraha Debotch is from a village called Maedo in May Tekela district of Seraye province while Mogos Asgedom is from a village called Adi Barin in Tsilima district of Seraye. But birthplace is not yet known for both of them. Year of birth for both of them is also not mentioned anywhere so as per today it is unknown.

Seeing that the education of "natives" was strictly limited in the Italian Colony of Eritrea, Abraha Deboch and Moges Asgedom had made their way to Addis Ababa. There they had enrolled in Ethiopia's most modern school at that time, the Teferi Mekonnen School, which was founded in 1925.

Abraha Deboch and Moges Asgedom, who are they?

Not much is known about the birth places and the early life's of these gallant Eritrean patriots who have shown the world what a colonized, suppressed and discriminated person can do against a mighty colonial power. The heroic act of Abraha and Moges was not just about killing Graziani. Mussolini can always send another Viceroy. They were more focused in teaching us all what can be accomplished when individuals set their focus and energy in search of freedom. The fact of the matter was it worked. The patriots were inundated by new recruits. The spirit of "Yes I can" became contagious. Apathy was replaced by

action. Darkness was gone and the light shone high and bright. Colonized and suppressed people understanding the power of the individual to rise up and defeat the colonizer and the suppressor.

What is known is that Abraha Deboch and Moges Asgedom, both of Eritrean origin, decided to strike against the Viceroy, whose oppression had by then incurred the hatred of many Ethiopian and Eritrean compatriots. They decided to act.

The main features of the story are well known. In February 1937 - the second year of the Italian occupation of Ethiopia - the Viceroy, Graziani, decided to hold a celebration at the Addis Ababa Palace - now Addis Ababa University, to commemorate the birth of an Italian royal baby: the Prince of Naples. The commemoration was scheduled for 19 February, and the principal Ethiopian courtiers in the city were all invited to attend.

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| Eritrean plotters in Italian occupied Addis Abeba |
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Eritrean opponents of the occupation included these two young Eritrean friends Abraha Deboch and Moges Asgedom referred to as - **The Two Plotters**.



Abraha Deboch

The first of the plotters was Abraha Deboch, who had by then succeeded in finding employment with the Fascist Political Bureau in Addis Ababa, where his Eritrean origin, knowledge of Italian, and familiarity with the city made him appear useful. He was, however, bitterly opposed to the Graziani regime, and particularly its racial discrimination.

The second plotter was Moges Asgodom, who was unemployed, but looked after by a friend by name of Sebhat, who served as a language instructor in the German Consulate (formerly the German Embassy).



Mogos Asgodom

The two friends, Abraha Deboch and Moges Asgedom, decided to seize the occasion of the forthcoming celebration at the Palace to attempt to assassinate the hated Viceroy.

Unused tip: Could not be Trusted

Tradition has it that Abraha, not wishing to harm innocent Ethiopians, warned a number of them to stay away from the Palace on the fateful day. However, most of them reportedly ignored his warning, for they saw him as an employee of the Fascists, and felt that as such could not be trusted.

It is told that Abraha and Moges had by then acquired a number of Breda-type Italian hand-grenades, and had on several occasions traveled into the nearby lowlands, in the direction of Mount Zeqwala, to experiment with throwing them.



Italian colonial army marching in Addis Abeba

Abraha before leaving his home

On the appointed day Abraha, before leaving home, placed an Italian flag on the floor of his house, and stuck a traditional warriors spear into it - a symbol of defiance for everyone later to see.



Convoy of Italian occupying force deployed in the vicinity of Addis Abeba

Rodolfo Graziani, the target of the attack

Two young Eritreans Abraha Deboch and Mogos Asgodom made a daring assassination attempt and wounded the Fascist Italian Viceroy Marshall Rodolfo Graziani on 19 February 1937 in Addis Ababa by throwing 7 hand grenades and killed 3 Italian Officers and wounded 52 others including

General Liotta, Commander of the Italian Air force who lost his right eye and a leg as a result of the attack. The attack by Abraha Deboch and Mogos Asgodom in the heart of the invaders gave the patriots a moral boost and the retaliatory action taken by the Italians following the attack further widened the existing gap between the Ethiopian people and the Italian Occupiers.¹²

The two men, taking a number of hand-grenades with them, made their way to the Palace compound. They entered the Palace building, where, as assumed collaborators, they attracted no attention - and took up their position to strike. They were thus, it appears, standing immediately below the overhanging balcony, which was to be the Viceroy's saving, as it prevented the little bombs from exploding immediately beside him.

The bombs were hurled, it is said, shortly before mid-day. Graziani and some thirty of his colleagues were wounded - and the Viceroy, who was badly shaken, later claimed that no less than 250 pieces of steel had entered his body.

The official ceremony began as might be expected. Viceroy Graziani made a speech, a number of Ethiopian notables made their submission to the victors, Italian planes made a fly-over above the city, and at 11 o'clock officials began distributing the promised alms to priests and the poor.



Italian Viceroy, Rodolfo Graziani, the target of the attack

Abraha and Mogos managed to slip through the crowd to the bottom of the steps to the Little Gebbi, then began throwing grenades. According to one account, they managed to lob 10 of them before escaping in the resulting confusion. According to Richard Pankhurst, they were rushed from the scene by a third conspirator, a taxi driver named Simeyon Adefres. Pankhurst also credits him with providing the grenades that Abraha and Mogos threw.

Behind them, the dead included *Abuna* [Qerellos](#)'s umbrella-bearer. The wounded included the *Abuna* himself, the Vice-Governor General [Armando Petretti](#), General Liotta of the Air Force, and the Viceroy himself; one grenade exploded next to him, sending 365 fragments into his body. Viceroy Graziani

was rushed to the Italian hospital where he was operated on immediately, and saved. General Liotta lost his leg to the attack.



Benito Mussolini showing his anger

Reprisals

The Italian response was immediate. According to Mockler, "Italian *carabinieri* had fired into the crowds of beggars and poor assembled for the distribution of alms; and it is said that the Federal Secretary, [Guido Cortese](#), even fired his revolver into the group of Ethiopian dignitaries standing around him." Hours later, Cortese gave the fatal order:



Scene of mass massacre

For the rest of that day, through Saturday and Sunday, Italians killed Ethiopians with daggers and truncheons to the shouts of "Duce! Duce!" and "Civiltà Italiana!" They doused native houses with gasoline and set them on fire. They broke into the homes of local Greeks and Armenians and lynched their servants. Some even posed on the corpses of their victims to have their photographs taken. In three days, the Italians had killed 30000 Ethiopians in Addis Ababa only. The first day is commemorated as "Yekatit 12" (Ethiopian February 19) till now. There is a monument called with the same name in Addis Ababa in memory of those Ethiopian victims of Italian aggression.



Mussolini orders summary execution

The attempted murder provided the Italians with the reason to implement Mussolini's order, issued as early as 3 May 1936, to summarily execute "The Young Ethiopians", the small group of intellectuals who had received college education from American and European colleges. The same day as the assassination, a military tribunal was set up, and by nightfall 62 Ethiopians were tried and shot. "The Graziani Massacre marked the almost total liquidation of the intellectual component of the Resistance," writes Bahru Zewde.

Thousands of Ethiopians of all classes were sent to detention camps at [Danan](#) in the [Ogaden](#) and Nokra in the [Dahlak Archipelago](#). Conditions at Danan were inhospitable, and Graziani had given orders that the prisoners would receive only the bare minimum of food and water. As Sbacchi notes, "Poor facilities, including latrines, the humid climate, malaria, stomach infections, and venereal disease took many lives, especially among those compelled to work on the irrigation canal or on the banana and sugar-cane plantations." Between ten percent and half of the prisoners died at Danan.

Conditions at Nokra were even worse than at Danan, according to Sbacchi. The detainees sent there joined 500 prisoners serving life sentences for serious political crimes, increasing the total number incarcerated to 1,500. These inmates at Nokra were forced to work in the island quarries, manufacturing cement. Temperatures at Nokra averaged 122 °F (50 °C); the inmates suffered from lack of fresh water, sunstroke, marsh fever, and dysentery.

The final reprisal struck in May. Investigators found that Abraha and Mogus had stayed a while at Debra Libanos, and slight circumstantial evidence suggested that the monks had foreknowledge of their plans. Graziani, mindful of his misadventure at Jijiga, believed they were complicit and 19 May cabled the local commander, "Therefore execute summarily all monks without distinction including the Vice-Prior." The following day, ironically a feast day of their patron saint [Tekle Haymanot](#), 297 monks plus 23 laymen were shot -- the entire population of the monastery.

Monument and annual Memorial

The Yekatit 12 Square (Sidist Kilo) monument stands in tribute to the thousands of innocent martyrs butchered by the Fascist Italian Occupiers on that date in in the Ethiopian Calender year of 1929 (1936 Gregorian Calendar). The massacre took place at the order of the Italian Vice-Roy Marshal Grazziani in response to an assassination attempt against him carried out by two Eritreans.



The Yekatit 12 Square (Sidist Kilo) monument

Situated in Sidist Kilo Square, this monument is dedicated to the war heroes of the Italian Occupation (1935-1941). In particular, the monument commemorates the lives and tragic deaths of citizens of

Ethiopia attacked after an attempt was made on the life of Graziani, the Italian Governor of Addis Ababa, when Italian soldiers razed their homes to the ground in retaliation. The name Yekatit 12 comes from the date of the Ethiopian calendar that the events took place (corresponding to February 19, 1937).



religious procession of priests at the monument

The monument is shown here during a religious procession of priests of the Orthodox Church, probably at Timkat (Epiphany). Wreaths were laid here by the Emperor to commemorate the massacre every year. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam continued this practice during his rule, but for a time after the fall of the Dergue regime, only the Mayor of Addis carried out this practice. Recently, the President of the Federal Republic has taken over this

task. The monument is in the form of a white obelisk with black bas reliefs of scenes of the massacre as well as scenes of the Imperial funeral accorded to the remains of the victims in the presence of the Emperor following the liberation around it.

End of life

For a while Abraha and Mogus hid at the ancient monastery of [Debre Libanos](#) but soon moved on, seeking sanctuary in Sudan. Somewhere in [Gojjam](#) local inhabitants, always suspicious of strangers, murdered them.



Abraha Deboch



Mogos Asgodom

“Rest in Peace”

----- End of story-----

A wakeup call

Many countries in the world honor their heroes and commemorate them eternally by erecting statues, naming streets, parks, schools, universities and all sorts of institutions in their names. Eritrea has failed to remember its heroes in all spheres of life and fields including statesmanship, military, scholarships, arts, literature, religion, music and sports. It would be too long to list all the great Eritrean personalities from antiquity to the present. Even the heroes of the last 50 years who have not been recognized and honored are very many.

I believe many will agree with me that Eritrea has many amazing individuals in history who have done something unique to their country in the field of politics, culture, education, sport etc, which we need to remember them for what they have done. It is disheartening though not to see biography books of Eritreans in the library shelves. Lately I have decided to open a section in my website that will be dedicated to the biography of individual Eritreans from all walks of life in history (www.emnetu.com).

To start with I have randomly established a list of possible candidates. I therefore ask you all to put additional names to the list and return it to me. The list has to accommodate only individuals who have passed away. In other words we will concentrate only on post mortem biographies. I will update the list when I hear from you. The list will remain open all the time for additional names.

If you are positive about this idea and you have the time I would challenge you all to write biographical sketch or find individuals who can be interested to write a biography on any in the list. If you come across anyone who has access to information but not ready to write, you can ask him/her to supply the information to me in any format (paper, diskette, gramophone dish, cassette, videos, photographs etc) so that I can send it to the one who is interested to write.

The size of the file is not important at all. What is important is remembering them and trying to document their history before it disappears all together. The size will be determined only by the amount of information available on these individuals. Of course the individuals in the list must have done something positive to the cause of our country or to the well being of our people and our culture.

Emnetu Tesfay