

Remembering unique Eritreans in contemporary history

A short biographical sketch

Of

Abubeker Ahmed and Mohammed Nuri

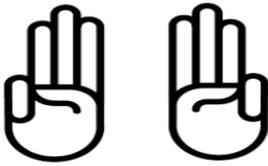
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Compiled and edited from electronic sources

by

Emnetu Tesfay

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Early life and personal data

No information is available about the personal data or early life of these two gallant heroes of Eritrea.

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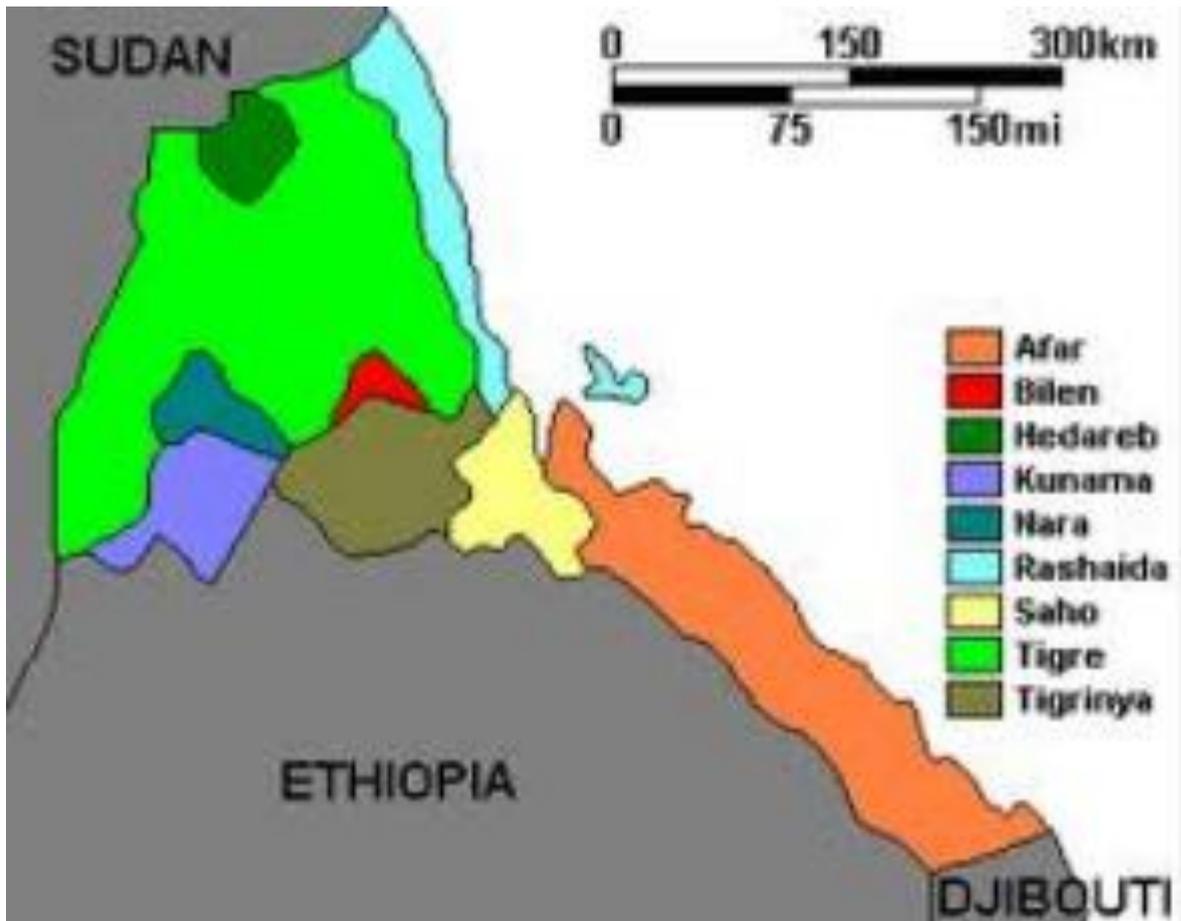
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Demographic map of Eritrea

አቡበከር መጥቃዕታቱ ቀጸለ። ጣልያን'ውን ወፍርታቶም አየቋረጹን። ግን ኪሕዝዎ አይከላሉን። ብዙስ አሸገሮም። ጋዜጣታት ዓጺ ጣልያን ከይተረፉ፣ ብዛዕባ አብያ አቡበከር ጸሓፊ። አብ መወዳእታ ግን፣ ጅግና አቡበከር ኣሕመድ አብ ሓደ እንጻር ጣልያን ዝገበሮ ውግእ ተሰውሉ።

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Saho women in their traditional costume

እዚ እናኾነ እንከሎ፡ ጣልያንን ምኒሊክ ናይ ኢትዮጵያን ስምምዕ ገበሩ። ጣልያን ምእንቲ ንኤርትራ ብሰላም ኪገዝእዋ፡ ምንሊክ ንኹሉም ተቃወምቲ ኤርትራውያን ካብ ትግራይ ከውጽእም ተሰማምዑ። በዚ መሰረት፡ ናይ ትግራይ ገዛኢ ዝነበረ፡ ደግያት ገብረሰላሴ፡ ንመሓመድ ኑሪ ኣብ ዓድዋ ኣሰሮ። መሓመድ ኑሪ ግን ካብ ማእሰርቲ ኣምለጠ። ምስ ሓሙሽተ ሰዓብቲ ከኣ ኣብ ጉንደት ኣብያኡ ቀጸለ። ግን፡ ብጣልያንን ኢትዮጵያን እናተሃድኑ ነዊሕ ኪጸንሑ ኣይከኣሉን። ከም ደግያት ኣበራ ሃይሉ ብኢትዮጵያ ተኸዲዑ ከኣ ተቃውሞኡ ኣቋረጸ። ብድሕር'ዚ መሓመድ ኑሪ ናበይ ከም ዘበለ ዚፍለጥ የልቦን። ስሙ ግን ኣብ መዝገብ ታሪኽ ኤርትራ፡ ብወርቂ ቀለም ኣጽሓፊ።

Abubeker Ahmed and Mohammed Nuri

Translated by Winta Weldeyesus
Friday 30th of October 2009

The people of Saho were also known for their opposition to any colonizer and bravery. They had defeated Raas Araia and Raas Alula but due to the repeated attempts by the Tigrayan rulers to colonize the people of Saho. But when the attempts of these rulers intensified the people of Saho were compelled to accept Italian rule, thinking that it would be the lesser of two evils. But they soon began to stage opposition against the Italians. Abubeker Ahmed and Mohammed Nuri were some of the well-known opposition leaders from among the people of Saho.

In 1901 Abubeker, together with 20 of his followers confronted 200 Italian troops and killed two and injured four of the soldiers. But Abubeker's wife was captured during this confrontation while he escaped to Adelarabe region and began inciting people to stand against the colonizers. The Italians tried to persuade and threaten the people of Saho to fight against Abubeker, which only made the people's support of Abubeker grow stronger.

Another Saho hero was Mohammed Nuri. He was one of those who broke out from the Nakura prison. After his escape he was living in Tigray and was attacking Italian commanders from Tigray jointly with Gebremedhin, the son of Degyat Bahta Hagos.

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| Who are the Saho people? |
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The Saho people of Eritrea are a nomadic people, whose lives are built around their herds. Numbering only 180,000 people they compose only about five percent of the total population of Eritrea. They roam throughout much of Eritrea though they are particularly present in the central region.

Eritrea has a total land area of 121,000 square kilometres – roughly the size of Pennsylvania or three times the size of the Netherlands. The Saho are predominantly Sunni Muslim, with a significant level of animism incorporated.



Map of the Saho region in Eritrea (source: Joshuaproject.net)

Saho who occupy Eastern foot hills of Akeleguzai and Semhar region of Eritrea are among the country's longest-established peoples. For over three thousand years of their known history they have watched civilizations flourish and decay with their own lives. Unfortunately, no attempt has been made by Saho scholars or others to document the very rich history and culture Saho's are endowed with. Therefore, sources regarding social structure, mode of life, history and culture of Saho are scarce.

No official census has yet been made to determine Eritrea's population. However, it is acknowledged that Saho are the third largest ethnic group in Eritrea. Many Saho observers estimate Saho population as being a little over 10% of Eritrea's estimated 3.1 million inhabitants. The overwhelming majority of Saho inhabit Eritrea but there are Saho tribes who reside along the border areas of Eritrea and Tigray region of Ethiopia.

In Eritrea, Saho mainly dwell in the Eastern foothills of Akele-Saho (aka Akele-guzai) and Semhar occupying 60% or more of the landmass. Saho's are also found intermingled amongst Tigrinya speaking populace in parts of Eritrea's highland regions (Akeleguzai, Seraye and Hamasein). They also intermingle with Tigre speaking tribes in Lowland regions (Semhar and Barka) as well as with Afars to the East plains of Samoti and Wangabo.

The Saho are farmers. Foro is located in the middle of a valley at a former reservoir built by the Italians during their colonial rule. Irrigation provides Saho farmers with beautiful fields of maize that extend toward the mountains as far as the eye can see.

The family constitute elementary segments in the segmentary genealogical structure. This structure taken as a whole, defines the system of rights over the land, including particularly pasturage, to which each family may lay claim by reasons of its genealogical position. The social organisation of Saho is based on kinship and descent. The sub-tribes are of as genealogical branches descended from a common ancestor. They are known as Kisho, Mela, or Are. Each sub-tribe is divided into numerous kinship groups known as Dik or Abusa, which usually bears the names of individuals, the

founders of the lineage.

All Saho tribes share a common language, culture, and history. However, not all Saho tribes have common origin or trace their lineage to a common ancestor. The earliest known Saho tribes, known as “Bado Ambalish” or bearers of land are, Kabota, Idda, Asa Bora & Gadafur. These warrior tribes are now less prevalent and in some instance extinct. The dominant Saho tribes today are conquerors of the earliest Saho tribes. However, the conquerors adopted Saho language and culture; others came to settle among them in around 800 A.C. to preach Islamic religion. They too gradually adopted the language and culture hence, becoming part of Saho tribes.

Contemporary Saho tribes can be divided into 11 tribal groups. Many of the clans have a single clan head called Redanto, who presides over a hierarchy of lesser “chiefs” and headmen known as “Nabara”, and “Chiqqa”. These clan leaders do not preside over political-legal courts with firm means of executing their judgments and upholding their position. Rather they are to be regarded as representative figureheads exercising an extremely important role in mediating within their own clan in conjunction with clan elders and in negotiating with other groups. Most important group decisions reflect a general consensus of feeling amongst the elders.

The AFRO-ASIATIC FAMILY, or the HAMITO-SEMITIC FAMILY of languages encompasses nearly all the languages of the Near East and northern Africa. What binds the branches of the Afro-asiatic family together is their consonantal root system, as well as other syntactic similarities, In this system most words consist of three consonants, while a lesser number have

two or (to an even lesser extent) four consonants. In any one word, these consonants are called the "root," and the root relates to the general concept behind the meaning of the word. Usually, the root is unalterable, although it can be inflected by the use of infixes (elements which are inserted within the root) and by prefixes and suffixes, all of which denote grammatical changes and which form new words with related meanings.

Source:

Most significantly, the vowels of the root--and hence its vocalization--change depending upon how the root is used in any given part of speech, e.g., as a noun, a verb, or in a certain mood, case or verb tense, etc. The pattern of vowel usage and change is called the "scheme." Thus, root and scheme are the two major elements which constitute the word in the Afro-asiatic languages. For example, in Saho language the root pertaining to the concept of dancing is r-g-d. While the consonants rgd will always remain the same, the scheme and vocalization will change depending upon usage.

<http://www.allsaho.com/>

<http://www.allsaho.com/language.html> (there is a lot more on this link)

Insights into Eritrea's Saho traditions

An ancient Tradition among the Saho of Eritrea

Traditionally, the Saho have used a cow's horn called a mahmuga to remove blood from those members who are ill. Using the cow's horn, the blood is leached from the one who is ill in an effort to remove the illness. They believe the sickness is contained within the blood of the individual, and by removing the blood life and health will be restored.





Watermelon is widely cultivated in the Saho region

Six Major Tribes among the Saho of Eritrea

The Saho are divided into six major tribes: the Asaorta, the Mini-Fere, the Tero'a, the Haso, the Debri-Mela, and the Irob. The Asaorta is the largest tribe, which itself is broken down into five sub-tribes. The Saho are a semi-nomadic people who migrate seasonally from the eastern lowlands during the cooler winter months back up to the highlands during the intense heat of the summer. Today, the Saho often tend other people's cattle, in exchange for grain. Many Saho children wear little leather pouches around their neck, which are supposed to ward off evil spirits. Honey has traditionally been an important part of the Saho diet and the people are also known as good beekeepers.

The Saho culture

Saho, people of the coastal plains of southern [Eritrea](#). Traditional Saho culture involved considerable mobility, because people needed to move their herds of [camels](#), [sheep](#), [goats](#), and, more recently, [cattle](#) from summer pasture to winter pasture each year. However, the Saho have become increasingly settled since the mid-20th century. Most of the Saho are Muslims who practice [Sūfism](#), or [Islamic](#) mysticism, but some groups, including the Minifere and the Debri-Mela, include both Muslims and [Christians](#). The Saho numbered some 250,000 in the early 21st century.





Saho woman jumping to the tune of the traditional music

Images from the Saho culture
(Source:google.com)





Some facts about the Saho people

Demographics

According to [Ethnologue](#), there were approximately 213,800 Saho speakers in 2006. Most are concentrated in Eritrea (191,000 speakers), with the remainder inhabiting Ethiopia (22,800 speakers). Within Eritrea, the Saho primarily reside in the [Southern](#) and [Northern Red Sea](#) regions.^[3]

The Saho have a system of [clans](#) (11 at present), which are in turn divided into [kinship](#) groups. Clan loyalty is an important factor in Saho politics.

Language

The Saho people speak the [Saho language](#) as a [mother tongue](#). It is part of the [Cushitic](#) branch of the [Afro-Asiatic](#) family and is quite similar to [Afar](#).^[3]

The Irob dialect is only spoken in Ethiopia.^[3]

Religion

The Saho are predominantly [Muslim](#). A few [Christians](#), who are also known as the [Irob](#), live in the [Tigray region](#) of Ethiopia and the [Debub Region](#) of Eritrea.^[4]

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| End of life |
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Abubeker continued to oppose the Italians and they made various attempts to capture him, which all failed, even Italy's newspapers began writing articles about his opposition and he died in one of his fights with the Italians.

While many Eritrean heroes were organizing against Italians from Tigray, Italy made an agreement with King Menelik to deport all Eritrean opposition leaders from Tigray. Consequently, Degayt Gebreselasie of Tigray imprisoned Mohammed Nuri from which he escaped with five of his followers and settled in Gundet. Following this nothing is known about the life of his Eritrean hero, though he is always remembered as one of the brave men that opposed the Italian colonization.



Abubeker Ahmed



Mohammed Nuri

----- *Rest in Peace* -----

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