

Home: The Final Resting Place

Written by Winta Woldeyesus



Many would say that home is where the heart is but according to the Tigre ethnic group in the northern and western parts of Eritrea, it is quite the contrary. They maintain that their home is their grave. As a result they would do any thing to make their grave attractive and exceptional, while they are still alive. They might live in tents but they will build their graves with concrete and cement.

Graveyards located along the road to the town of Afabet, east of Gudem-Halib are evidences to the sayings and beliefs of the Tigre people. This area is believed to be the graveyard of the Adi Meáreb clan and according to the oral tradition of the area; the graveyard was first established during the Turkish colonization era aging some hundred years. The first Eritrean to be buried in this graveyard was a man named Hamid Omer. Some of the unique features of this graveyard are that the tombs were built by mud mixed with milk. This was done simply due to lack of water at that period of time. In addition to this, the graves had various styles, Turkish and Arabic style, and all of them face in the same direction.

In these areas once a grave is constructed, a structure would be built above the grave as large as a house with a triangular or circular roof and the entry facing south. Once inside the structure, one can see the grave was built with great art, emphasizing the society's strong believes as to the grave being the best resting place.

There are similar historic sites of graveyards just few kilometers from the town of Afabet around Qamchewa, here the graveyards have Arabic writings, which can be used as a source to identifying the period and the lifestyle of the earlier residents of this area.

The town of Afabet is also known for its historic sites, and one who gets the opportunity to visit the town of Afabet will witness a collection of weaponry in both sides of the road which seems to accompany you to the town, a telling sign of the hard times of colonization the inhabitants of the area experienced, especially during the Derg regime. Once you reach the town of Afabet, there are two prominent historical buildings: a traditional hut standing in the middle of the town, and a tower house standing at the further east higher grounds of the town. The second one built with

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concrete and has entries that face all directions of the town and was built by the Soviet advisors of the Derg regime to control the people and at the same time to be at a safe distance from the general public. Where as the hut was used as a headquarters by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) located in the central part of the town. Those two buildings represent the ideological difference among the two groups, where one wanted to be among the people while the other wanted to be as far away as possible from the people.



During the Nadew Ez, Derg deployed Soviet advisors to destroy the Eritrean people's struggle for independence once and for all; as a result they built a tower with all the military sophistication of that time. Yet, all the preparations of Derg ended in utter failure and Afabet was liberated. Despite the fact that those two building used to be rivals, today they both are part of one history and are standing as historic heritages of the Eritrean people.

In the road from the capital to Afabet one can observe both cultural and historic heritages and is evidence to a multi-cultural society with a history of decades of colonization. There are also many similar huts in Nakfa that were used as the headquarters of the officials of the EPLF that survived decades of bombardments and have a history that needs to be told in great detail.