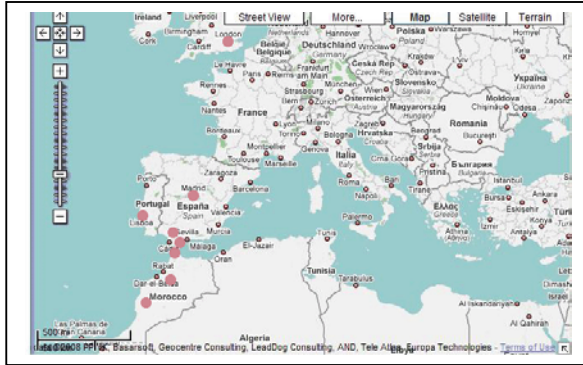


Touring and Learning: Amharic Beyond Ethiopia

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Recently I traveled from London to Morocco, Portugal and Spain respectively. In Morocco I visited Marrakech, Fez and Tangier, in Portugal Lisbon and in Spain Madrid. I enjoyed my long journey in which I used the four main means of transportation (train, ferry, bus and plane) and my stays in each of the above mentioned destinations were pleasant and educative.



Marrakech (The Red City)

Marrakech is a red, beautiful tourist destination in North Africa and comprises the Medina and the new city. Its wonderful surrounding areas like the Atlas Mountains and the villages of the Berber people in the valley are some of tourist attractions. BY chance my hotel (Ryad Magaor) was located between the Medina and the new city that enabled me

The brown dots show locations covered by the tour.

to see the two city parts plainly. The next day I was informed about an organized trip to the Atlas Mountains (eureka) and joined the group for which we paid a reasonable amount of money. The landscape, the small river that flows in the valley, the Berber villages and the people who are engaged in traditional hand craft and oil production were memorable. During my three days stay at Marrakech I visited the market at Jama El Fana and the Grand Mosque. In the market I saw (touched) the dancing snakes; variety of traditional hand made fabrics and displayed nuts and pastry for sale.



The City of Marrakech

The Atlas Mountains

Jama El Fana, Market

Pastry Products at Jama El Fana

Fez and its Ancient Medina

At 11am I left Marrakech for Fez on 06/07/08 by train and it was a good opportunity for me to see the rural part of Morocco and the landscape. In Fez, I was greeted by the people in the hotel and a young man asked me if I need someone to help me see historical places. As I was persuaded by his approach and persistence agreed to pay some money to see the Medina.

In the morning the young man confirmed our visit to the Medina and introduced me Hisham who was later found to be his brother. Hisham tied his neckties lovely and has an elegant personality. His pretty good English language command helped me to learn more about Fez than I initially anticipated. I loved my hotel room and enjoyed the hospitality of the people.



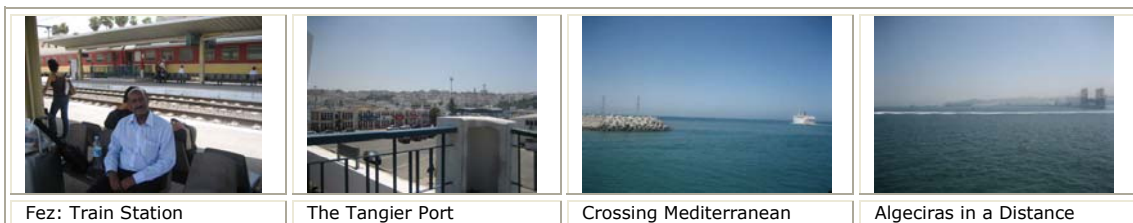
The next day we started our visit from the walls of the Medina which were built by the Almohads in the 12 century to protect it from enemies of Islam. I further visited different historical places including the famous Dar Ed Dbegh, the toners area and the market.

Then Hisham directed me towards the Zawiya of Moulay Idriss ij, Al Azhar or Idriss. He is the founder of Fez and built this historical building in the 11th Century. This is the most impressive place where I was absorbed and fascinated by the decoration on the front gate of the building. When I closely observed the architect and the decorations I came across with the Amharic/Ethiopian Scripts that has formed the shape of a flower and beautifully decorated the gate with great wisdom.

I have never heard or seen that the Amharic/Geez symbols were used in other places except I heard that Jesus was speaking this language. Well, as a researcher I have felt that there should be some interaction of culture and civilization as far as North Africa, as there has always been dealings between people. Amazing! I have also read that Moulay Idriss I founded Moulay Idriss in Zerhoun Region, 25 kilometers away from Meksenes town. The clearly scripted Amharic letters and the name Zerhoun my open a new study area which my give us important information about Africa as well as the world at large.

Fez to Tangier

After 3 days in Fez I took a train and traveled to Tangier. Tangier is a beautiful port located at North end/cost of Morocco. Once you reach at Tangier you are so close to Europe. According to my informants from some points the distance between the land of Africa and Europe is less than 20 Km. Tangier, which is found at the edge of the Mediterranean Sea can fascinate anyone that arrives there.



Stayed the night at Tangier, the next day traveled to Europe (Algeciras) by Ferry across the marvelous, blue Mediterranean Sea. It took for the fast ferry only 3 hours to cross the sea and reach at the edge of Europe (Spain). When we approach the land I saw Gibraltar on the right and Algeciras on the left. During my school days I read about this area but now I can see it in my eyes right from the Mediterranean Sea. It was phenomenal.

Lisbon (the Historic City)

From Algeciras I had to get a buss and travel to Portugal. According to my itinerary/schedule I should arrive in Lisbon the next day. As planned I traveled to Seville and from there to Lisbon. My journey across Spain and Portugal took the whole night and finally arrived in Lisbon at around 8:30 am.

Lisbon was a special destination for me because of my interest in history and beyond that because of my country/Ethiopia's ancient relation with Portugal. At school when I

was 12 years old I read a book about the alliance between Ethiopia and Portugal. Their relationship reached at its highest peak in the 16th century and was so deep and genuine that cost them their dear and best citizens like Christopher Dagamma.

Cristovão da Gama (c.1516 - 29 August 1542) was a Portuguese soldier, who led a Portuguese army in Ethiopia (1541–1543) against the Muslim army of Imam Ahmad ibn Ibrihim al-Ghazi (also known as Ahmad Gragn). Christopher was the son of the great traveler, Vasco Dagama who discovered America and India. *He was sent by King Imanue to Ethiopia to fight against Gragne so as to support the Christians.*

Many times in his travels he demonstrated a quick mind that saved his companions, and in recognition for his usefulness, in 1541 his brother Estevão, now Viceroy of India, gave him command of a ship in the fleet Estavão led into the Red Sea against the Ottoman naval base at Suez.

Christopher landed at Massawa and Arqiqo, the next Ethiopian port south and began his trek inland to Debarwa, the capital of the Bahr Negus, or Ethiopian viceroy for the Northern provinces (recently called Eritrea).

According to legend Mohammed *Gragne's* (which means left handed in Amharic) father was a Christian highlander Priest who was killed by other priests because of his love/relation with a Muslim woman Called Fatuma (mother of Mohammed Gragne). Gragne's father was killed because he went to church unknowingly with a Muslim garment which angered the priests in church and killed him with *Mequamia (a stick of Ethiopian Orthodox Church priests)*. Traumatized by his father's killing Gragne hated Christians and developed great fighting skills which enabled him to attack the strongest Christian, solomonic dynasty in Showa/Ethiopia in collaboration with south Arabia.

When King Immanuel¹I received a letter from King/Atse Libnedingle of Ethiopia that informed him how the Governor of Zabid in South Arabia was supporting Grange's aggression to impose Islam on Christian highlanders and stressed the importance of their collaboration to defend their belief, King Imanuel was so saddened by the incidence and went to church in Lisbon and prayed for Ethiopia. Then he talked to the messengers of Ethiopia and sent his best army to fight along side their Ethiopian Christian friends. In this context we need to appreciate peoples/leaders passion, deep believes and great determinations of the 16th century which have contributed hugely to the present human relations and progress.

Queen Sable Wengel who left Debre Brihan camped on the top of Mount Debre Damo that Ahmed had not been able to reduce her by siege and fought along side Christopher Dagama until her son Gelawdewos arrived from Shoa with his strong army to join them. Queen Sable Wengel advised Christopher Dagama that he should not launch a major war against Grange until her son joins them. But Christopher believed that failing to engage the invaders would make the natives distrust his troops, and they would then stop bringing food and supplies.

Having successfully petitioned the Governor of Zabid in South Arabia, as well as offering "much money" and submission to the official, Gragn received a number of musket men, far more than DaGama had. Despite their bravery, the Portuguese and Ethiopians were heavily defeated on 28 August at the Battle of Wofla, with only 170 surviving the assault (counting the 30 men escorting the horses from the Hill of the Jews). In the battle, DaGama's arm was broken from a bullet, and was captured that night with 14 companions and killed by Gragn Mohamed

¹ **Manuel I**, 1469–1521, king of Portugal (1495–1521), successor of John II. Manuel's reign was most notable for the successful continuation of Portugal's overseas enterprises. Joined and had planned the expedition in search of a sea route to India and had appointed Vasco da Gama to head it, but it was under Manuel that the epochal voyage was made (1497–99) and that the wealth of the Indies began to pour into Portugal. Cabral announced the discovery of the coast of Brazil (1500), and such commanders as Francisco de Almeida and Afonso de Albuquerque built up the Portuguese commercial empire. Portugal became the leading commercial nation of the West. Manuel used his new wealth to erect some beautiful buildings, including the Hieronymite monastery at Belém (now in Lisbon), near the spot where Vasco Da Gama embarked for India

Emperor Gelawdewos, arrived from Shoa and they took measure of their situation. Using the arms stockpiled at Debre Damo, the Portuguese were able to rearm themselves, and with the promise of their ability Gelawdewos was able to raise a new army, which met Ahmad Gragn at Wayna Daga (Gonder). The Portuguese musket men aimed their fire only at the Gragn's musket men who had played a decisive part at Wofla and stormed the enemy's camp. While the sources differ on the exact details, all agree that Ahmad Gragn was killed by the allied forces of Ethiopia and Portugal in Gondar at Woina Dega.

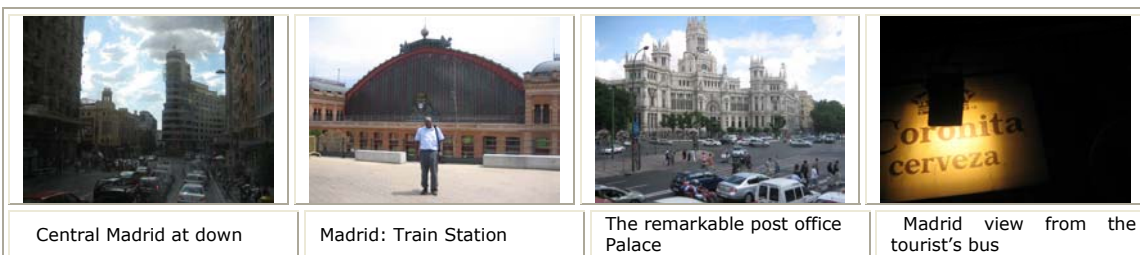
History Repeats Itself?

While visiting Lisbon I contemplated the current difficult situation of Ethiopia and the effort that has been made by Anna Gomez who was the Head of the European Union's Observer Mission during the 2005 elections in Ethiopia. She is a Portuguese and was the one who boldly informed the world that the election under the undemocratic and unpopular ethnocentric group was not a free and faire one. She further stood alongside the peace loving and the Ethiopian people by denouncing the November 2005 massacre in Addis Ababa. Nevertheless things are still complicated and our people are suffering from the incumbent criminal ethnic group that damaged the people's unity and the countries territorial integrity. We always appreciate Anna's integrity and honesty which are the main indicators of responsible people.



Lisbon to Madrid

My next destination was Spain's Madrid and I left Lisbon for Madrid by train on 13/07/08, in the evening. My journey took the whole night. The train seemed to be in hurry to reach Madrid and crossed several cities and towns in Portugal and Spain. I was so eager to see my next destination (Spain). Early in the morning I moved the curtain in the train and started to look outside at the lovely rural green landscape, mountains, grazing animals and rivers. When the sun rose it was marvelous and felt something unusual. I asked the people in the train, if the sunrise in Spain is different from other countries. Yes, they confirmed that. It was a bright, lovely morning. Sun+! The fast train galloped across the beautiful land of Europe it looks as if the speed accelerated because of the suns light. I have many Spanish acquaintances and hence Madrid was another exciting city for me. During my stay in Madrid I used tourist busses and walked longer distances in this marvelous city. I enjoyed the weather, amazed by the size, beauty and its friendly people.



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