

# Biography of Dr. Berhanou Abebe Gedle (1932-2008)

## Birth

Dr. Berhanou Abebe Gedel was born on October 14, 1932 in Addis Ababa from his father *Ato* Abebe Gedel and his mother, *Wzo*. Yeshiemebet Wolde-Aregay.

## Education

When he came of age, Dr. Berhanou was introduced into the nascent realm of modern education in Ethiopia. He was subsequently educated in the some of the best schools found in and outside of the country, and in the process reached the pinnacle of scholarship. His life in the world of scholarship was very impressive as can be seen from the following list:

- Dr. Berhanou Abebe attended the Teferi Mekonnen and Alliance Française schools from 1939 to 1946, completing his elementary education with “*Great Distinction.*” Subsequently he joined the Lycée Guebre Mariam School for his secondary education and he obtained the Baccalauréat in 1953 with “*Great Distinction.*”
- After the Baccalauréat, he left for France for further studies where he stayed from 1953 to 1967. During his fourteen years stay in France he was educated in a number of higher learning institutions and graduated in different disciplines
  - 1954 - 1957 Law Faculty at the Institute of Comparative Law and obtained an L.L.B. Besides, he worked with Professor Tubiana on various research projects and as instructor.
  - 1957 to 1960 he joined the Institute of Law Studies in Paris and worked on various research projects and he attended the first international conference on Ethiopian. He also attended under the auspices of the United Nations, a special training in International Service.
  - 1961 to 1963: *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* in Sorbonne and studied the Historical Ethnology of East Africa and the Science of Administration. He successfully completed the study with “Very Great Distinction” and awarded a Licence és Lettres.
  - 1962 to 1964 Dr. Berhanou pursued his studies at the internationally well-known university of Sorbonne and obtained his Doctorate Degree on the evolution of land ownership in Shoa covering the period from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - 1965-1967 He obtained le Doctorat d’Etat es Lettres (the Highest level of Academic distinction in France from the University of Sorbonne on the social history of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopia with a special emphasis on the reign of Emperor Menelik II. While conducting his research in Paris

for two years the French Government made available all the relevant documents located in various French institutions.

- 1967 he returned to his beloved country Ethiopia.

## **An Ethiopian Polyglot**

Dr. Berhanou was a veritable polyglot who had a mastery of the following Ethiopian and foreign languages: Amharic, Geez, Tigrigna, Oromifa, French, English, Italian, Latin, Classic Greek, and Arabic.

## **Research and Publications**

Dr. Berhanou Abebe Gedel has published a number of very valuable research based works in the course of his long period of dedicated service, such as on the Annales d'Ethiopie. Furthermore, he has made presentations at national and international historical, linguistic, and cultural symposia on Ethiopia and Africa. Also, he has served as the Secretary of the All African Pre-history Council. For his contributions, Dr. Berhanou has received innumerable letters of appreciation as well as awards of merit.

To name but a few of his published works:

- The Rise of Land Tenure in Ethiopia (1971)
- The History of Monasticism in Ancient Ethiopia (1981)
- History of Ethiopia (2002)

In addition, on the occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the French Revolution, he has translated and published the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 in Amharic. Together with his colleagues, he has prepared a French-Amharic and an Amharic-French Dictionaries in 2004 and 2005 respectively.

## **Professional Membership**

- The French Society of Natural History (Member)
- Association of African Railways (Founding member and Acting General Secretary)

## **Awards**

- Commandeur de l'Ordre de Haileselassie (Ethiopie)
- Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur (France)
- Chevalier de l'Ordre du Merite (France)

- Commandeur des Arts et lettres (France)
- Officier des Palmes Academiques (France)

## **Professional Contributions**

Dr. Berhanou Abebe is one of the few Ethiopians who made unique professional contributions in the fields of history, international relations, social studies, administration, and science and technology. He displayed utmost competence and leadership quality in executing a number of activities, including research and public services. Some of Dr. Berhanou Abebe's contributions are summarized below.

- From 1958 to 1965, he taught Ethiopian languages, history, and culture in the Department of Eastern Languages at Paris University.
- Upon his return to his home land he join the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, in the former Haile Selesie I University, and served as a researcher and instructor.
- In 1968, with a letter written by the Ministry of Pen and the Emperor's kind permission, he was appointed to serve as a General Manager of the Haile Selassie I Prize Trust. He served the Trust for close to six years.
- With the kind permission of His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie I, he served as a member of the National Education Commission beginning in 1968.
- In 1961, he served as a member of the Amharic Language Academy.
- He was assigned by the Ministry of Pen to serve as a Deputy Manager of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway Company from 1972 to 1974.
- In 1974/5, he was an official of the Ministry of Communication and Posts.
- From 1975 to 1980, he served as the Head of the Department of Heritage Conservation in the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs. In 1976, the same Ministry assigned him to serve as a member of the Council of Science and Technology.
- From 1980 until his retirement in 1997, he taught in the Department of History and Heritage Management at Addis Ababa University.
- Starting 1981, he served as an External Relations Officer of Addis Ababa University

After retiring from Addis Ababa University, Dr Berhanou Abebe continued to serve his nation and the continent with his usual dedication, upright character, and good repute and thus put to work the rich experience he had acquired over the years.

To mention a few of his latest engagements, he served as:

- He contributed to the study commissioned by the African Union on the Rwandese Genocide along with Mrs Johnson Sirleaf who is the current President of the Republic of Liberia.
- AU observer in the negotiations meant to mediate the various conflicting factions in the DRC

- Representative of the Global NGOs Forum for the Central African Republic formed in Geneva
- Board member and Vice President-Nominee of the upcoming St Thomas Aquinas Catholic University which is soon to be inaugurated by the Ethiopian Catholic Church
- AU observer of the recent elections in Zimbabwe.

Dr Berhanou passed away on July 1, 2008 due to a sudden natural cause while on line of duty in Zimbabwe. His death is a great loss not only to his family members, relatives, close friends and colleagues but also to the country and continent he loved. We have lost a man of great stature and impeccable character! But his remarkable deeds, character and memories shall remain with us forever!

Dr. Berhanu was married to Wzo. Fikirte Seyoum and is survived by three children. We extend our condolences to his family and friends and pray to our Heavenly Father that he may favor His son to inherit the Kingdom of God.

**AMEN!!!**