

## Chapter 9 - Africa Transcript

### Audio file

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### Transcript

Speaker 1

So welcome to World History Podcast. This podcast is about Africa. My name is Professor Lisa Namikas, and I'm here with you today to talk about what we know about African history and Ethiopia. We have with us too, our interviewer, Ryan Pierce, and he's going to help us by asking a few questions. And let's get started. Let me ask you this, Ryan, what do you know about Africa?

Speaker 2

Interesting that you asked me that question cause when I think back what comes to mind, maybe pyramids, Ancient Egypt, Pharaohs and mummies and whatnot. That's the thing that stands out and then, you know, of course, the colonization of Africa in the 1800s and 1700s. So, other than that, I really don't. I really draw a blank for most of it but that seems like a big gap in between those two.

Speaker 1

Well, that's true. And it's very common if we think about it. There are about 4000 years between the events that you mentioned that pyramids were built about 2500 BC and the slave trade arose about 1700s and then colonization after that, so it seems like there's little reason to know about Africa South of the Sahara because so many of us say that it was isolated anyway in world history and really had little influence or impact, just as we also say the Americas were isolated by the oceans from what was going on in the Mediterranean world, but. In the case of Africa, it's just not true. Africa had many connections to the rest of the world.

Speaker 2

It did seem like 4000 years is a lot of history that I was unaware of. Why does it seem so hard to know?

Speaker 1

Well, that's a great question first. Africa didn't have ancient historians who wrote things down like Sima Kuan in China or Thucydides in ancient Greece. Instead, many African civilizations had griots who were record keepers, storytellers and moral guides that all wrapped in one they kept records orally, meaning they memorized entire histories. With entire lessons in their meetings and dates and figures. Some facts they spent years, sometimes even 20 years, training and learning before they took over as head griot.

Speaker 2

Oh my goodness. They must have had to remember a lot of things.

Speaker 1

Well, they did indeed. And when writing came along, these griots tended to lose their role, and as a result, we've lost some of their stories and their histories.

Speaker 2

OK. But maybe we should write down all the stories of the greats, don't you think?

Speaker 1

That raises another good point about the challenge of African history. So colonization has had a major impact on how we see Africa. When the Europeans arrived, they conquered many of the civilizations and memories have been lost or reshaped, and how African history is remembered is different now. So, for instance, if Europeans are writing down the stories of the greats, then they write down what they see as important, not necessarily the full story. All this stuff does not make it impossible to know African history, but we just want to be aware of some of the challenges.

Speaker 2

So what I'm hearing is that it's really important to pay attention to the history and think about how we talk. Africa and other civilizations. We might have assumptions about regions and places, but they're not always true.

Speaker 1

That's exactly right. So there are so many examples we could talk about the famous empires in West Africa like Ghana or Mali or Great Zimbabwe in South Africa or even the kingdoms around the Congo River. But with only the little time that we have in this podcast, I'm going to concentrate. Ethiopia is a great example of a country that has a lot of connection with the rest of the world. Even in Ethiopia today, there is so much history everywhere you turn and it is celebrated by everyone in the country. And this history connects Ethiopia with the world around it. Ethiopia also sees itself as one of the only continuously independent African countries because it was never colonized by Europeans in the 19th century. Country, you know, let's go on a live tour of the country and we'll talk about the many attractions that we see along the way. Kind of like a travel log. You can keep one and I can keep one. Do you like traveling?

Speaker 2

I sure do. And this one sounds like it's a tour off the beaten path. Our Ethiopians friendly.

Speaker 1

Well, they are so friendly. We won't get a fake touristy experience, but like any area. It's always good to be aware of your surroundings, so check the State Department website before traveling and find out if it's safe. And today it's fairly safe. So Are you ready? Let's go on a tour. We'll use Ethiopian Airlines and we'll fly into Addis Ababa, the capital city. It's one of the highest cities in Africa, so you don't need to worry about mosquitoes. Wearing malaria there. The first gate at Bolay International Airport that you walk through has a big sign over it saying land of origins and I'll point out a few origins as we. Go on our tour.

Speaker 2

I had a few vaccinations. Those you would want before you go travel to many places around the world. And I also have a visa so come.

Speaker 1

On let's go. Did you bring your umbrella? So June to September is the rainy winter season, but it's still OK to travel. Just be ready for a few late afternoon downpour. February to April. They're good months to go to. So whatever time you travel, just try to coordinate it with the major celebrations. They're always fun to incorporate into your trip. We're gonna hop around the country a bit, so make sure you have all good walking shoes. 1st I'll just. Throw out a few facts. There are nine different ethnic groups, major groups. The official language is Amharic, and the money is called Bur. Remember, Dinesh or Lucy? We talked about her in our prehistory podcast. Dinknesh is the name. That she was given by The Ethiopians, but Lucy, remember, was the name given by the British archaeologists. Dinesh is the oldest hominid discovered in Hadar. It's in the Afar region. It's part of the Great Rift Valley, which you can kind of compare to the Grand Canyon, only it's much larger. Hadar is about 185 miles. Northwest from Addis. So we'll take a taxi for a day trip there. Ethiopia is so proud of the fact that many hominid species have been found here. The bones are stored in the National Museum in Addis Ababa. They're very fragile, so most of the displays that you see are reproductions. Altogether. About 240 hominids were found here from about 3,000,000 years ago, not far away from Hadar is the Danakil Desert. It is the hottest place on Earth. Literally the average temperature is 95 degrees, and it can oftentimes reach 122. It's one of the lowest places on Earth, so some of the bodies of water that you'll see in the desert are full of bubbling sulfur and other minerals, so much that you lose yellow or bright green against the salty dry desert. It's breathtaking sometimes, but literally also it can take your breath away and be hard to breathe. So those that go there love it, but it's not for the average traveler.

Speaker 2

I'm not sure. It sounds pretty rugged.

Speaker 1

Don't worry, we have a lot of other things to. See. So we'll move on.

Speaker 2

Wow, this is all amazing. There's a coffee shop. Let's stop at home. I buy a really good coffee from Ethiopia. Has coffee played a role in Ethiopia's history, by the way?

Speaker 1

Well, yes, it has. In fact, our next destination is the southern regions of the country where the land is lush and green. Here is where most of the coffee is grown in your cafe, sadama, khafa and herrar. Today, Ethiopia is the 5th largest coffee producer and coffee is half of the exports and brings in most of its foreign currency. Ethiopians drink about half of the coffee produced there, and that is a lot. They love the coffee ceremony late in the afternoon. It takes about two or three hours, depending on the time you have. Usually women prepare the coffee and it starts with roasting the beans over the fire and then steeping those beans in hot water, pouring the water back and forth between pots. And finally, drinking small espresso like cups that have a lot of sugar added to it. So it's slightly sweet. It's polite to have 3 cups at the end. Remember to say to your abuna, it means good coffee and your Hostess will be very happy. Ethiopians were one of the first to harvest coffee beans by about the 4th or 5th century. It's believed, in fact, that the coffee plant originated here and spread to the rest of the world. Ethiopia brought coffee into Arabia in the 6th century and introduced coffee not only to the Arabs, but to Sufi

Muslims who used coffee to reduce their sleepiness. Focus more on prayer. And in this way they also introduce coffee to all other Muslim groups and then to Europeans. Finally, by the 16th century.

Speaker 2

Ethiopia's coffee is a great example of how trade has connected people, and I will remember to stay for three cups.

Speaker 1

Now that we've had our coffee, let's stop in the middle of the country at Lake Tana. It's about 350 miles from Addis, and we can see the different landscape compared to the Danakil Desert. It also reminds us of the connection to the rest of Africa, especially Egypt. Lake Tana feeds the Blue Nile and then the Nile River. It's a beautiful place where you can go boating. And relax and enjoy Nate. But this is just a stopover. We really want to get to Tigray province in the north of the country.

Speaker 2

Why Tigray, great prophets?

Speaker 1

There's a lot to see in Tigray. Ethiopian Airlines will bring us there. In a few hours.

Speaker 2

As we fly into Mekele, the capital city of Tigray, I see it as a very beautiful land, but the airport is a little small and there is no covered walkway.

Speaker 1

Yeah, you're right. And we're lucky it's not raining either. So remember, we're off the beaten path and we see history where it's all started. We are going to travel to a city called Axum. It's named after the ancient empire. The Axumite Empire began about their 1st century in the current era. Let's go and we can see the tall obelisks or Stella that are here. They're like tall carved pillars, kind of like the Washington Monument. There's about ten of these, Stella. King Izana built a few of the Stella himself, although some were already standing. In the 3rd century, King Izana welcome Christianity to Ethiopia, and he himself will become Christian. You can see the Stella from a distance once you're already in Axum, but to see them closer up we enter a small. Museum. Then we can walk around the grounds. Be ready though. Foreigners or Ferengi have to pay more. It's kind of like that in a lot of places, like in Asia and Eastern Europe, even though it sounds like a lot, maybe 500, but it still works out to only. A few dollars, though.

Speaker 2

I also see a big church.

Speaker 1

That's the Church of Saint Mary of Zion. I'm going to talk about that church a little bit later. If we really want to see the beautiful history of Christian churches in Ethiopia, we need to go to Lalibela, Lalibela is a World Heritage site. We can take a bus right there. It's a bit long, maybe about 8 hours, but

there's always buses coming and going. It's famous for its churches cut out of rock in the mountains. The churches were designed during the Zagwe dynasty in the same area. It's kind of the ancient as ancient axumite, but the Zagwe dynasty existed from about the 9 to the 13th century when its most famous leader Gabry mescal Lalibela, was born. His mother said that a swarm of bees surrounded him and she understood that this was a sign that he would be a future. So she took him to Jerusalem to spend much time there when he was young. And now people go with their prayers and their dreams, and they pray for the intervention of God into their lives. You know, as they enter these churches in in. La Bella.

Speaker 2

Bees surrounded him. Why bees?

Speaker 1

By bees, bees symbolized wisdom in Ethiopia's triggering new culture, so it makes sense.

Speaker 2

Professor Lisa, thanks for taking us to Lalibela and the bus ride back to Axum wasn't that bad, but I have a feeling you want to talk more about the Church of Saint Mary.

Speaker 1

Oh, you're right. And here's where the legend and history coincide. So after the Zaga dynasty came the Solomonic dynasty and that dynasty would last. To our day. The justification or origins for the Solomonic dynasty are found in a book called the Kebra Nagast, which was written in 1322. The book tells us. That the Queen of Sheba traveled to Israel.

Speaker 2

Wait, wait, wait, wait. I I think I heard of the Queen of Sheba before. Wasn't she mentioned in the Bible in the Old Testament? I remember a story from Sunday school. She brought a caravan of gifts for King Solomon.

Speaker 1

Yeah, The Ethiopians believe that the Queen of Sheba was from Axiom and she linked Ethiopia to Israel and then through that connection to Christianity later. Solomon was the Israelite king in the 10th century BC. Legend has it that they got married and she had. His son today we can visit some of the historical places that claim to be part of this tradition. So in Axum we can start at the Queen of Sheba's Palace and not too far away is her bath or pool dug into the side of a mountain. The palace was made of stone and bricks and only about two or three feet of the outline of the rooms remain. You can walk through the palace area. It's all grassy and you can see where the rooms were. You can wonder how she. Lived in the buildings. There's a little kitchen area and a bedroom area, and guess what? You can all do this for free.

Speaker 2

Really, that's a great way to share history.

Speaker 1

Actually it is and there's more to the legend. It's believed that the queen of Sheba's son, Menelik, later returned from Israel and on his way home, his aides brought the Ark of the Covenant carrying the stones with parts of the 10 Commandments. And arc is like a trunk or a box, and Metallica isn't that since the Ark did not destroy them on the way home, it was meant to be with him. So they kept the ark at a church in Axiom for safekeeping.

Speaker 2

So you're saying that the ark with the 10 Commandments is right now currently in Ethiopia right now?

Speaker 1

Well, according to The Ethiopians, it is and there's about 10 other places around the world that claim to have the Ark and parts of the 10 Commandments as well. So it's a bit up to debate, which is the real one, but in Ethiopia we can view the home of the Ark, the church, where it is presumably held. The church is Our Lady of Mary of Zion, and it became the covenant.

Speaker 2

Now we've talked before about. Paying for certain things and not paying for others. So in this case, do we have to pay to see? The art too.

Speaker 1

Well, this one you can't actually see. And currently the church is closed for repairs, so we can only see the Dome of the church from the outside.

Speaker 2

Well, if some of the history has not been verified, how do we know what to believe?

Speaker 1

That's a great question. So the story of the Queen of Sheba and the Legend of the Ark maybe did or did not exist for real, but their stories did, and they it's the stories and the legends that are important to understanding Ethiopia and its view of history. The stories themselves have become. The history. So for example, the Solomonic dynasty of Ethiopia traces its lineage back to the Queen of Sheba for 1000 years or more, and it only ends in in our time with highly Selassie's regime in 1974. So to honor the Queen of Sheba and the legend honors the dynasty of highly Selassie 2. Every emperor had themselves crowned at the Church of Saint Mary to emphasize that connection.

Speaker 2

So is everyone in Ethiopia Christian? The Christian history does seem to be pretty important.

Speaker 1

Well, that's another great question. Christians are dominant, but they're not the only important religious group in Ethiopia. One important part of Ethiopia's history is often left out, and that is the Muslim influence and presence. One of the most important places for Islamic history is Massawa, actually located today in the small state of Eritrea on the Red Sea coast. Today, Eritrea can be difficult to enter,

but up until the 1990s it was part of Ethiopia. It is on the coast and its beaches are some of the prettiest in the world and if you can get a visa you can go scuba diving in some of the best and cleanest waters off the Dalek islands. Muslims arrived in Ethiopia in the 7th century and landed at Misawa. Ethiopia was one of the earliest sanctuaries after Muslims were fleeing from the Koresh traders in Mecca. The Ethiopian ruler gave them freedom and let them build the first mosque here. Today, about 33% of Ethiopians are Muslim. They're concentrated in the eastern provinces bordering Somalia and are from many different ethnic groups. One Islamic hub in Ethiopia is found at Harare, in the northeast, and historically, Muslims have been marginalized and have had little political influence. They didn't even have the right to own land until very recently, but their history is definitely one thing that's being written more about more about this history appears in later years after 1500, when our class. Ends and so we leave. We leave that to a little bit later. There is much more to see in Ethiopia, so if you can stay longer, consider it and you can enjoy the. Ethiopian food is some of the best food in Africa, a slightly sour flatbread is called angera. It's usually topped with some kinds of meat and lentil stews or vegetables, but now this brings us to the end of our tour. And so we're back in Louisiana. But even in Louisiana, we can find global connections all around us. In fact, we can even taste Ethiopia's amazing. Food right here in New Orleans. There's a wonderful restaurant called Addis Nola. It's on Bayou Rd. in New Orleans and it's consistently rated one of the best restaurants in only in New Orleans. But among Ethiopian food in the United States, when you walk into the restaurant, you can feel as if you were right. In Ethiopia, the restaurant has tables, but if you look you'll see I'm a \*\*\* or a woven table where people would traditionally stand and eat. You'll also see special artwork all around the walls, reflecting the different ethnic groups from the country. Prince Lobel is the owner and manager of the restaurant at the Addis Nola, and I recently interviewed him. And here's part of the interview. Welcome, Prince Lobo. Thank you so much for interviewing with us. Can you tell us a little bit about your connection to Ethiopia?

Speaker 3

Well, my mother's Ethiopian, she left when she was about 14. She went to school in Czech Republic. She went to school in Prague and that's where she met my father, who was. From central Africa, where I was born, and at a young age at about two, she decided to come to America to go back to school, and from there, you know, I. Was I was pretty much raised in Baton Rouge for the majority of my life with my mother, who was from Addis from the capital. You know, all that time being spent away from home, you know it can. It can feel sad. It can feel, you know, a lot of things. But she wanted to try to bring a piece of her home to New Orleans after being here for more than 20 years to. Like it's and. So the restaurant was her way of doing it.

Speaker 1

Ethiopian food has ancient origins. Food can tell us so much about how the people lived, what Prince Lobo, in your opinion, are some of the unique traditions related to food.

Speaker 3

Once a month in Ethiopian culture they have something called the mahabir. A mahabir pretty much just translates to like getting together and so. Every month they would host our, my mother's. Some friends of hers would host a. Mahabir and then. It would kind of be like a pot luck of the sort they would all. Bring their best dishes and their foods. And you know, we would pretty much just have an opportunity to

enjoy the best of this ancient Ethiopian. Rising for at least you know for the along my entire. Childhood growing up.

Speaker 1

Are there any special foods that you think best represent Ethiopia?

Speaker 3

Some of the best will always be the *doro*. That's the national dish of Ethiopia. *Doro* translates to chicken. And what is this Stew, which really is kind of the staple of this dishes, this caramelized onions, that they a lot of onions, that they low cook, they low heat simmer for. You know, six hours, 7 hours when you're cooking. Yeah. Personally, in your own home for us at the restaurant, we cook it for about 24 hours with the chicken and then a whole boiled egg as well. The reason why that dish is so important is because it's actually normally done during holidays, as dish celebratory. Just something used as a celebration because it is a labor of love and it takes a long bit of time. In order to have it fully prepared and finished whenever you, whenever you know you're eating it. So that's one of the really, really, really big staples that you'll find on really special occasions in Ethiopia, you know. Definitely the most popular. And then and then. One of the most important things to consider whenever we're talking about Ethiopian food is in in *Jir* the bread itself, right? That flat bread that takes at least about 3 days to ferment, one of the using Teflon that just drains the world. That in itself is not a complete dish, but it is something that is essential in Ethiopian cuisine.

Speaker 1

*Doro Wat* and the bread *injera* sound amazing. I know the *injera* has a nice tangy flavor, and the *Doro Wat* spices are rich in flavour too, especially with pepper and tomato. And *Jir* is made of Taff. It's the most ancient grain in the world. What about the coffee ceremony? Can you tell us anything about this tradition?

Speaker 3

Ohh yeah, Ethiopian coffee. You know, Ethiopia is the origin of coffee. It's the birth place in the home. They say the Kefar region in Ethiopia was where it was discovered. And you know, it's customary after every meal to do a coffee ceremony where they're roasted beans for you and you have a chance to use that as a way to finish the meal and kind of. That would be kind of the commencement of an engagement, however.

Speaker 1

From everything you've said, family seems so important.

Speaker 3

Well, you know, Ethiopia is in, in the continent of Africa with 54 countries. Ethiopia is the only one that's never been fully. It's never been colonized, ever. So it's one of those coaches where they've had such. A pride and. A sense of self because they haven't lost any of it. They've been doing these moves for the last 2000 years and. You know it's just one of those things that it really is an experience whenever you get together and come together around *injera*. It really is an experience to sit down and be with family, friends and just share this meal and it's not to be missed.



Speaker 1

We're ready to eat.

Speaker 3

I think one of the one of the best. What we like to believe is. One of the best. It's your, your restaurants in the South. Because there's not that much exposure to the cuisine. In the South at all, and we really pride ourselves on bringing that to the Community and. To our people. And you know, we make an experience. We now have hand washing station where you can wash your hands before you. Get into this. Finger food experience with friends and you know it's always been about sharing the culture and the love of. African cuisine and culture to our local community and you know it's idea. Addis Nola is the name of. The restaurant's. Ideas being the capital of Ethiopia and Nola, obviously being New Orleans, LA so. Not a fusion. But really, just bridging the gap between both and allowing people to have that experience in their own backyards and their own community. And you know. To cherish and really take with them.

Speaker 1

What a great way to end our tour. Thank you so much. Level and again the restaurant is called at the Addis Nola. It's just off Esplanade north of the 10, before you get to broad St. We can enjoy some traditional, authentic Ethiopian food right here in Louisiana and continue to learn more about other people from around the world by trying their cuisine and learning more about their everyday life and just talking to people we. Meet and we can all come together and share experiences at the same time. So thank you so much that ends our tour of Ethiopia. I hope you enjoyed it and. Learned a lot. So why not search for another blog or more information about some other region of Africa that we didn't have a chance to touch on, like Ghana or Congo or Zimbabwe, explore and travel.

Speaker 4

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