



Richard Deiss und Nick Snipes

**The Gingerbread Station at the
other End of the World**

**Short stories about 222 railway
stations in Africa, Asia and Oceania**

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Cover picture:

Melbourne Flinders Station

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flinders_street_train_station_melbourne.jpg

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Bahnhof Beijing West (Cover)

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Inside first page: Station of Sylhet, Source:

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Preface

In the summer of 2007, I published the paperback *Palast der tausend Winde and Stachelbeerbahnhof* (*Palace of a Thousand Winds and the Gooseberry Train Station*), which contained little stories, interesting facts, and anecdotes about 200 railway stations worldwide. Over time, more anecdotes were collected, and so, I published my own volume for non-European stations, *Der Lebkuchenbahnhof am Ende der Welt* (*The Gingerbread Station at the End of the World*), at the end of 2008.

In the meantime, more stories have been added, and in summer 2009, I published anecdotes about American railway stations in a third paperback entitled *Grand Central Terminal and the Station at the End of the World*.

This meant that a new edition of the book *The Gingerbread Station at the End of the World* became necessary. In order to fill the gaps left by taking out the American stations, the chapters on stations in Japan, China, India, and Turkey were expanded. The corresponding book was published in autumn 2009, with an update in 2011. This is now a slightly updated new English language edition of the book for 2020. The present book thus contains anecdotes and facts about 222 stations in Africa, Asia, and Oceania. About every two years, the book will be updated. Hints for further interesting stories, anecdotes, and facts about railway stations are always welcome.

The five railway station books together contain stories, anecdotes, and facts about 1001 stations.

Berlin, October 2020

Richard Deiss with Nick Snipes

1. Africa

Africa has never had a well-developed railway network. In colonial times, in many regions, there were only branch lines from the ports to the hinterland to ensure the transport of raw materials. After the end of colonial times, the railway infrastructure in many countries fell into disrepair, partly because it was identified with colonial rule. Today, the railway is of little importance in Africa. The exceptions are Egypt—where more than half of Africa's 80 billion passenger-kilometres of rail passenger traffic per year is taking place—and South Africa (15% of Africa's rail passenger traffic and 80% of its rail freight traffic). Additionally, only the railways of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia have a transport performance of more than 1 billion passenger-kilometres. In Egypt, the concentration of the population in the Nile Valley favours rail transport. A high number of passengers is reached on a small network. The timetable is dense, and passenger numbers are high. Among the Maghreb countries, Morocco has the densest rail traffic with about four billion passenger-kilometres per year, twice as much as ten years ago. Rail traffic in Tunisia has also increased in the last ten years by about a quarter. In Algeria, after having fallen at the beginning of the millennium, rail traffic is also increasing again. Rail traffic is also growing in many sub-Saharan countries as a result of investment in new rail infrastructure by China (notably in Kenya and Nigeria).

Since sub-Saharan Africa is also rich in raw materials, new railway lines for freight transport are being built or extended there today, above all, with Chinese assistance. Passenger

transport has started to benefit from these measures, notably in Kenya and Nigeria, and some stations are also being revitalized or newly built as a result.

1.1 North Africa

Alexandria Misr railway station

Alexandria had the first railway station in Africa, and today's station is also one of the most impressive in the continent. In 1853, Robert Stephenson, son of the famous British railway pioneer George Stephenson, began to build Africa's first railway line from Alexandria to Cairo. The station is called Misr Station "Station of Egypt," after the Egyptian name of the country.

Cairo Ramses Station

In 1958, just a few years after the Suez crisis, Egyptian director Youssef Chahine made the feature film *Cairo Station*, set in Cairo's main railway station. In the film, a handicapped man who works in a newspaper stand named Kenawi falls in love with the beautiful Hanuma. When he tries to win her over with his vision of a traditional quiet country life, she says, "We have got used to the trains and the noise." The film was banned in Egypt for twelve years because of its relatively free-spirited approach to the country's identity and female charms. In today's increasingly "Islamizing" Egypt, it would certainly meet with strong rejection again in some circles because the leading actress appears in shorts in the film.

Cairo's central station had already made women's rights history in 1923 when the Egyptian feminist Hoda Shaarawi (1879-1947) demonstratively removed her veil here on her return to Europe from a Suffragettes congress in Rome.

Today, the station is called Ramses Station. However, a large statue of Ramses II on the station forecourt was moved to a museum in Giza in 2007 due to the effects of exhaust fumes and vibrations.

Oran's neo-Moorish station

The Algerian port city of Oran has one of the most beautiful railway stations in Africa. Designed in the Moorish style, the station resembles a mosque. The square ground plan of the clock tower corresponds to the architectural style of minarets in the Maghreb (which, however, do not have a clock). As in a mosque, a round dome arches over the waiting area. With a design that fits perfectly into the local architectural tradition, it is surprising that the builder was French: the architect Marius Toudoire (1852-1912), who became famous for the Gare de Lyon in Paris. Details of the station show, however, that no Muslim architect could have been present here as the doors and windows are decorated with the Star of David and the ceiling paintings in the entrance hall show Christian crosses.

Toudoire also designed the stations of Bordeaux Saint Jean and Toulouse Matabiou and the post office in Algiers.

The new station of Marrakesh

Marrakesh is in the process of benefiting particularly from the expansion of rail transport in Morocco. In the long term, high-speed rail services to Casablanca and a new railway line to the south are planned. In October 2008, a new Marrakech terminus station was opened. The reception building imitates the architecture of the massive gates of the old town of Marrakesh. The station thus lives up to its role as the gateway to the city. Despite its oriental architecture, the French-speaking railway administration did not miss the opportunity to give the station a new-fangled English name. It is officially called the Marrakesh Rail Center.

1.2 Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti

Addis Ababa

Addis Ababa has one of the most beautiful railway stations in Africa. However, no trains leave from here anymore, and a road project endangers the preservation of the station function.

In the station square, the gilded sculpture of the Lion of Judah stands on a black granite pedestal. By the way, this lion is also found in the coat of arms of the city of Jerusalem because Judah was an Israeli tribe. The pedestal is decorated with relief portraits of the Ethiopian emperors Menelik II and Haile Selassie I. The statue was erected in 1930, shortly before the coronation of Haile Selassie. Yet, in 1935, the Italian occupying forces took it to Rome. There, the fourth anniversary of the proclamation of the Italian Empire by Mussolini and Adolf Hitler was celebrated. The young Ethiopian Zerai Deres took part in the parade and was supposed to greet the Duce, the Führer, and the Italian King with a ceremonial sword. However, when the parade passed by the lion statue and Deres saw that the national symbol dear to him had been stolen from his country and brought to Italy, he was overcome with rage and stabbed Italian soldiers marching along with his sword. Deres was killed but has since been considered an Ethiopian patriot. In the 1960s, the lion statue was finally returned to the Ethiopians and solemnly reinstated in the station square with the participation of Emperor Haile Selassie. After the 1974 revolution, the new regime under Mengistu wanted the lion removed from the square. However, war veterans reminded Mengistu that an Ethiopian patriot gave his life for the monument, and the lion remained in the station square.

Dire Dawa

Dire Dawa, Ethiopia's second-largest city, owes its existence to the construction of the railway line from Djibouti to Addis Ababa. Originally, the railway line was supposed to run through the city of Harar. For the Muslims of Ethiopia, Harar is the fourth holiest Islamic city after Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. Harar was once considered the “Timbuktu of the East” and was not accessible to Christians in the 19th century. Out of consideration for this, Italian and French skilled workers and engineers were settled in nearby Dire Dawa, which was to become a repair and inspection site. As the costs of building the railway exploded, it was decided to run the line along the ridge instead of via Harar. Dire Dawa became the administrative centre of the railway line, which soon attracted the country's foreign trade. The old caravan route from Harar to the coast quickly lost its importance. In front of Dire Dawa station, built in 1902, a grey freight diesel locomotive stands as a monument.

Agordat - from station to airport

The Eritrea Railway, the only railway line in Eritrea, was built by the Italian colonial masters between 1887 and 1932. Many stations on this railway line, including that of the capital Asmara, resemble stations in southern Italy. The railway line from the port of Massawa to Asmara once continued to Agordat and Bishia, not far from the border with Sudan. The station building at Agordat station is still standing but is no longer designed for railway traffic. In the meantime, it is one of a kind and serves as a passenger terminal for the small Agordat airport.

1.3 West- and Central Africa

The monument at Dakar station

Dakar railway station, built in 1914, has several peculiarities by West African standards. On the one hand, there is international rail traffic (to Bamako in Mali); on the other hand, there is regular suburban traffic, both of which are rather rare south of the Sahara. The bronze war memorial in the railway station square - showing a Frenchman and a Senegalese man standing together, with the latter carrying a weapon - is also rather unusual. Next to the soldier Dupont stands the Senegalese marksman Demba. The station square, formerly known as Place de la Gare Dakar-Niger, was renamed Place du Tirailleur in August 2004.

Bamako and the Super Rail Band

In 1970, Tidiane Koné founded the Orchestre du buffet de la gare de Bamako in Bamako, which performed twice a week in the dining hall of Bamako station, the terminus of the Dakar-Niger train line. This was soon to become the most musically influential band in the country. Singers like Mory Kanté and Salif Keit, who joined the band in the early seventies, later became internationally famous. The cover of the band's first records featured the Bamako railway station. Additionally, the Malian Railway Company served as a sponsor for the band. In 1985, the band, which still exists today, took on the shorter and more international name: Super Rail Band.

Bobo Dioulasso and the acronym

Bobo Dioulasso's railway station, built in 1934 in the Sudanese style, is considered one of the most beautiful in Africa. In the last 20 years, its white façade has borne the logos of three different railway companies. In colonial times and until 1989, the international railway line was operated by the Régie des Chemins de Fer Abidjan-Niger. Despite its name, the railway only connected Côte d'Ivoire with Upper Volta. An extension to Niger and the Volta river did not