

---

## “Däbrä Dammo”, Not “Däbrä Damo”

« *Däbrä Dammo* », et pas « *Däbrä Damo* »

Alessandro Bausi

---



### Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/geolinguistique/1918>

DOI: 10.4000/geolinguistique.1918

ISSN: 2650-8176

### Publisher

UGA Éditions/Université Grenoble Alpes

### Printed version

ISBN: 978-2-37747-246-8

ISSN: 0761-9081

### Electronic reference

Alessandro Bausi, « “Däbrä Dammo”, Not “Däbrä Damo” », *Géolinguistique* [Online], 20 | 2020, Online since 01 December 2020, connection on 01 December 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/geolinguistique/1918> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/geolinguistique.1918>

---

This text was automatically generated on 1 December 2020.

Géolinguistique

---

# “Däbrä Dammo”, Not “Däbrä Damo”

« Däbrä Dammo », et pas « Däbrä Damo »

Alessandro Bausi

---

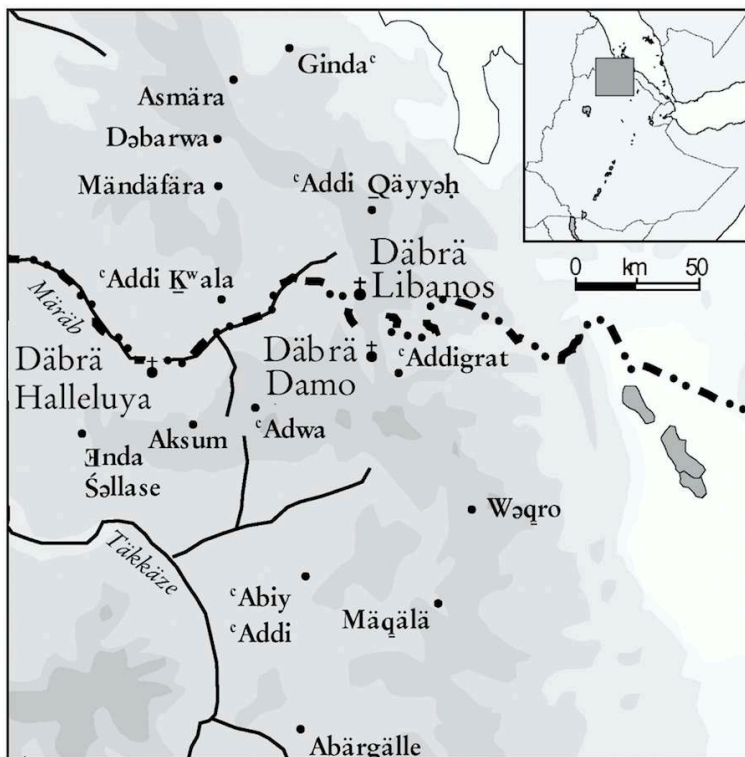
## Remerciements

I would like to thank for her kind help and advice in matter of toponymic methodology my old friend and colleague, Dr Elisabetta Carpitelli, Professor of Romance Dialectology and Geolinguistics at Université Grenoble Alpes; and for their stimulating feedbacks, Dr Hagos Abrha, Assistant Professor at Mekelle University, and Dr Mersha Alehegne, Associate Professor at Addis Ababa University. The author, as usual, is the only responsible for any error, mistake, and statement expressed in this note. For the sake of simplicity and disambiguation, transcriptions are generally according to the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (see Uhlig & Bausi, 2003–2014), but transcriptions in bibliographic references are according to the Beta *maṣāḥəft* rules (see online at <<https://betamasaheft.eu/Guidelines/?id=transliteration-principles>>). All forms provided in quotation marks and preceded by bibliographical reference are quotations that reflect the form exactly as given by the authors.

## 1.

- 1 The entry of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* dedicated to the well-known monastery of Təgray, in northern Ethiopia (Fig. 1), the foundation of which is traditionally attributed to the fifth-sixth century St Abunä Arägawi (that is, the Ἰnḍa Abunä Arägawi) is “Däbrä Damo”, with a short (non-geminated) *m*,<sup>1</sup> even though also the long (geminated) spelling “Däbrä Dammo” is recorded. Yet, the index of the fifth volume of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* has reversed this hierarchy and given priority to the form “Däbra Dammo”, and, though listing also “Däbrä Damo” with cross reference to “Däbrä Dammo”, considers “Däbra Dammo” the primary form.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 1. – The monastery of Däbrä Damo, in northern Ethiopia, near Däbrä Libanos, Eritrea, to the north, and 'Addigrat and 'Adwa in northern Təgray, Ethiopia.



From Tsegay Berhe G. Libanos & Red. (2005, p. 18a).

- 2 Wavering of spelling of this place name in scholarly contributions, either “Däbrä Dammo” or “Däbrä Damo”, is emblematic of the uncertainties of rendering of names (place names as well as personal names) that afflicts Ethiopian and Eritrean studies.<sup>3</sup> Transcription of Ethiopian and Eritrean names appears subject to a sort of barbarian, telluric, and uncontrolled variation that, on the one hand, escapes whatever rule and, on the other hand, makes whatever forms equally acceptable and legitimate in this chaos, beyond any understandable linguistic sense, reason, method, and consistency.<sup>4</sup>
- 3 In this connection, the index of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* gave priority to the form “Däbrä Dammo” with the intention of correcting a wrong praxis, based on the principle that Däbrä Dammo is the form—beyond any possible doubt—that is used, and was used also in the past as far as we can ascertain, by the local Təgrəñña speakers. The Ethio-SPaRe project led by Denis Nossitsin recorded this form during the project team’s visit to the monastery in the November–December 2010 campaign. Among the various aspects of fieldwork carried out by this project, precise recording of place names, given in an as precise as possible written and phonetic form, was one of the main tasks, and a very meritorious one indeed.<sup>5</sup> If there were any further need of confirmation, the form “Däbrä Dammo”—and only this—is that provided and documented by Hagos Abrha, of Mekelle University, who is a mother-tongue Təgrəñña speaker and a professional linguist and philologist, quite conversant with the region and the place, that he has frequently visited.
- 4 One could add that the spelling “Daməmo” (with two letters) in the Golden Gospel of Däbrä Libanos, at Ham, could hint at a geminated *m*.<sup>6</sup> Although this form was so far not put in connection with the spelling of the place name, there is not yet any convincing

etymology on which to ground a geminated or simple spelling. The form “Daməmo” could therefore be due to a scribal error, or it could even depend on the Gə‘əz (Ethiopic) passage of the *Gadla Abunä Arägawi* that explains—in all likelihood, *ex post*—the place name with the order given by the saint, “demolish it” (“*daḥməmo*”), referred to the ladder used to climb up the mountain (*anba*) where the monastery is located.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.

- 5 The question, moreover, is not new. The geminated spelling “Däbrä Dammo” was adopted by scholars who strongly relied directly on well informed Ethiopians and on first-hand evidence, starting from Ignazio Guidi, in his contribution on *Gädlä Abunä Arägawi* (“Life of Our Father Arägawi”), where he always adopts, certainly not by chance, a geminated form.<sup>8</sup> Carlo Conti Rossini also wrote in his article “Pergamene di Debra Dammó” that he took care of letting ascertain as precisely as possible the pronunciation of the name: on his behalf, Antonio Mordini checked the spelling, presumably interviewing more people from the place, on the spot, and the form resulted to be “Dammo”, geminated, and with closed “o” at the end.<sup>9</sup>
- 6 The treatment of the place name in the *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition* deserves a special and very careful consideration. If the substantial description of the architecture and decoration of the church in the second volume authored by David Krencker and Theodor von Lüpke (1913, pp. 168–194, and also *passim*) always adopts the form “Debra Damo”,<sup>10</sup> no doubt this was a sort of normalized or simplified form.<sup>11</sup> This form had already entered the current use and did not represent any precise phonetic rendering of the place name. The chief of the *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, the great Semitist Enno Littmann, had very clear what was the actual phonetic form: the form with geminated *m* “*Däbra Dämmō*” is accurately recorded in the index to the second volume, in brackets and italicized, near the normalized form “Debra Damo”, with a precise notation of gemination and even vocalic length.<sup>12</sup> The geminated form also occurs in the fourth volume, of genuinely linguistic character, as a possible integration of the acephalous “[D]MW<sup>m</sup>” (presumably, with pseudo-Sabaic mimation) in the inscription DAE no. 8 (= RIE no. 186), l. 21.<sup>13</sup>
- 7 Yet, either the non-phonetic or the normalized tradition—also represented by Conti Rossini himself and canonized by his influential *Storia d’Etiopia*—had already generally imposed the non-geminated form.<sup>14</sup> “Däbrä Damo” is also the only form that two further very influential works like Tadesse Tamrat’s *Church and State in Ethiopia* (1972, p. 319a, index) and George B. W. Huntingford’s *The Historical Geography of Ethiopia* (1989, p. 283c, index) adopt, the latter still being the only available monograph on Ethiopian (and Eritrean) historical geography. Through them, this form entered the secondary literature as approved by several authors, for whom it is superfluous to provide further details here.
- 8 To this tradition also belongs the German branch of Ethiopian studies headed by Ernst Hammerschmidt (for example 1967, p. 174, index, “Däbrä Damo”), who does not appear to have been a careful reader of Enno Littmann’s *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*.<sup>15</sup> Years of teaching experience confirmed me that German speakers who do not have a specific professional linguistic training have difficulty in perceiving and pronouncing consonantal length: this is a quite understandable phenomenon, since consonantal length has no phonemic status in German. The illuminating case study by Altmann, Berger, and Braun (2012) highlights that, comparing native German, native Italian, and

advanced German learners of Italian, non-native vowel length contrast is perceived (by Italians) just as well as the native consonantal length contrast, while, on the contrary, non-native consonantal length contrast is perceived (by Germans) poorly compared to the native vocalic length contrast.

### 3.

- 9 In a kind answer to my query, in order to come up with an explanation concerning this divergent tradition, Getatchew Haile undertook a few interviews and reported that, according to his test, “All Amharic speakers pronounced it as Damo, like my teachers [...], while the Tigrigna speakers as Dammo. I guess it can be a contribution if we take the occasion to explain this fact, that it is a regional variation” (email exchange of 20 and 22 June 2015). This is an important contribution in fact, that injects a new factor useful to understand the development of the tradition, that is, that the non-geminated form accepted by scholars, among others, of the caliber of Tadesse Tamrat and Getatchew Haile, finds support in the Amharic-speaking Church tradition and on its rooting in Amharic-speaking areas. That this tradition was in turn deemed of higher and more prestigious rank than the Təgrəñña one—in the Ethiopian context, but also outside of it—would explain the large generalization of the “Däbrä Damo” form, which in fact, in some cases at least, also occurs in Təgrəñña speakers’ mouths.<sup>16</sup> At present, however, in the absence of any systematic investigation on the ground, it is impossible to draw any isogloss demarcating the areas of distribution of the geminated and non-geminated forms, which would not necessarily overlap with the distribution of Amharic- and Təgrəñña speakers, these latter being to large extent also Amharic-speakers.
- 10 If we also concede in hypothesis that the form “Däbrä Damo” was early canonized in the prestigious Amharic-speaking ecclesiastical tradition,<sup>17</sup> why should this form—that reflects a non-local tradition—be adopted in scholarly (linguistic, historical, philological) contexts? at variance with what is done for all other Təgray place names that are given according to their local form?<sup>18</sup> and against basic rules of toponymic research? It might be obvious, but it is still worth reminding that there is no other possible criterion to determine the primary linguistic form of a place name—the “authentic” one, as geolinguists say<sup>19</sup>—than the evidence of the form used by the local inhabitants in their own language. Since place names are “cultural artefacts which arise from the interaction between language and environment”, there is no other way, all the more in a scholarly context, than to record and transcribe them as faithfully as possible in the form as they arise from this delicate interaction.<sup>20</sup> In this case, the only form that matches these mandatory and essential requirements is “Däbrä Dammo”.
- 11 A separate and distinct problem is that of ascertaining *why* the Amharic-speaking tradition would have opted and supported a varying form “Däbrä Damo”. This opens up a new field of research on the Təgrəñña-Amharic interference in historical place names, for which more cases and evidence should be collected. That “symmetries in the perception of non-native consonantal length contrasts” might have played a role also in this case, as in the cited case study in Altmann, Berger, and Braun (2012, p. 387), is a hypothesis that it would be worthwhile to explore more in detail.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALTMANN Heidi, BERGER Irena & BRAUN Bettina, 2012, “Asymmetries in the Perception of Non-Native Consonantal and Vocalic Length Contrasts”, *Second Language Research*, vol. 28, no. 4, p. 387–413.
- BAUSI Alessandro, 2005, “Däbrä Libanos (in Šəmāzana)”, in S. Uhlig (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 2, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, p. 28a–29b.
- BAUSI Alessandro, 2007, “Un indice dell’*Evangelo d’oro* di Dabra Libānos (Šemazānā, Akkala Guzāy, Eritrea)”, *Aethiopica*, vol. 10, p. 81–91.
- BAUSI Alessandro, 2014, “Topography, Historical”, in A. Bausi and S. Uhlig (eds), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 5, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, p. 532a–533b.
- BAUSI Alessandro & UHLIG Siegbert (eds), 2014, *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 5: Y–Z, *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag.
- BECCARI Camillo (ed.), 1917, *Rerum Aethiopicarum scriptores occidentales inediti a saeculo XVI ad XIX*, vol. 15: *Index analyticus totius operis*, Romae, Excudebat C. de Luigi.
- BERNARD Étienne, DREWES Abraham Johannes & SCHNEIDER Roger, 1991, *Recueil des Inscriptions de l’Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite. Introduction de Fr. Anfray*, vol. 1: *Les documents*, Paris, Diffusion de Boccard.
- BOMBACI Alessio, DEL POZZO E., PONTECORVO V. & RUBINACCI Roberto, 1937, *Elementi per la toponomastica etiopica*, Napoli, R. Istituto Superiore Orientale di Napoli, S.I.E.M. Stabilimento Industrie Editoriali Meridionali.
- CONSOCAZIONE TURISTICA ITALIANA, 1938, *Africa Orientale Italiana*, Milano, Consociazione Turistica Italiana, coll. “Guida d’Italia della Consociazione Turistica Italiana”.
- CONTI ROSSINI Carlo, 1893, “Catalogo dei nomi propri di luogo dell’Etiopia, contenuti nei testi gi’iz ed amhariña finora pubblicati”, in *Atti del primo Congresso Geografico italiano* (Genova, 18–25 September 1892), vol. 2, Parte Prima: *Memorie della sezione scientifica*, Genova, Tipografia del R. Istituto sordo-muti, p. 387–439.
- CONTI ROSSINI Carlo, 1901, “L’evangelo d’oro di Dabra Libānos”, *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, Serie quinta, vol. 10, pp. 177–219.
- CONTI ROSSINI Carlo, 1909, “Les listes des rois d’Aksoum”, *Journal asiatique*, Série 10, vol. 14, p. 263–320.
- CONTI ROSSINI Carlo, 1928, *Storia d’Etiopia. Parte prima: Dalle origini all’avvento della dinastia Salomonide*, Bergamo, Istituto italiano d’arti grafiche, coll. “Africa Italiana”, no. 3.
- CONTI ROSSINI Carlo, 1940, “I. Pergamene di Debra Dammó. II. I Galla Raia. III. Il Libro della Rivelazione dei misteri attribuito a Tolomeo”, *Rivista degli studi orientali*, vol. 19, p. 45–80.
- CONTI ROSSINI Carlo, 1942, *Proverbi tradizioni e canzoni tigrine*, Verbania, A cura dell’Ufficio Studi del Ministero dell’Africa Italiana, Ambrogio Airoldi Editore, coll. “Collezione scientifica e documentaria dell’Africa Italiana”, no. 5.

- DÄNĀ'EL KĀBRAT, 2005–2006, የቤተ ክርስቲያን መረጃዎች (Yabetakrəstiyān marraḡāwočč, “Information about the Church”), Addis Ababā, Māḡbara Qəddusān, Mega Printing House, 1998 Ethiopian calendar.
- DILLMANN Christian Friedrich August, 1865, *Lexicon linguae aethiopiae, cum indice latino. Adiectum est vocabularium tigre dialecti septentrionalis compilatum a W. Munziger*, Lipsiae, T. O. Weigel.
- DOMBROWSKI Franz Amadeus, 1983, *Ṭānāsee 106: Eine Chronik der Herrscher Äthiopiens*, vol. 1: Teil A; vol. 2: Teil B, Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner Verlag, coll. “Äthiopistische Forschungen”, nos 12A, 12B.
- DREWES Abraham Johannes, 2019, *Recueil des Inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite*, Tome III: Traductions et commentaires, B: Les inscriptions sémitiques. Texte révisé et adapté par Manfred Kropp, édité par Manfred Kropp et Harry Stroomer, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, coll. “Aethiopistische Forschungen”, no. 85, and “De Goeje Fund”, no. 34.
- FLECHIA Giovanni, 1871, *Di alcune forme di nomi locali dell'Italia superiore. Dissertazione linguistica*, Torino, Stamperia Reale.
- GETATCHEW HAILE, 2015, Review of D. Nosnitsin, *Churches and Monasteries of Tagray. A Survey of Manuscript Collections*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013, coll. “Supplement to Aethiopia”, no. 1, in *Aethiopia*, vol. 18, p. 223–230.
- GUIDI Ignazio, 1894, “Il «Gadla 'Aragāwi»”, *Memorie della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, Serie quinta, vol. 2 [1896], p. 54–96.
- HAMMERSCHMIDT Ernst, 1967, *Äthiopien: Christliches Reich zwischen Gestern und Morgen*, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz.
- HUNTINGFORD George Wynn Brereton, 1989, *The Historical Geography of Ethiopia from the First Century AD to 1704*, ed. by Richard Pankhurst, Oxford, Oxford University Press, coll. “Fontes historiae africanae, Series Varia”, no. 4.
- KANE Thomas Leiper, 2000, *Tigrinya-English dictionary*, 2 vols, Springfield, Dunwoody Press.
- KELLY Samantha (ed.), 2020, *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, Leiden / Boston, MA, Brill, coll. “Companions to European History”.
- KRENCKER Daniel & LÜPKE Theodor VON, 1913, *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, vol. 2: *Ältere Denkmäler Nordäbessiniens. Mit Beiträgen von Theodor von Lüpke und einem Anhang von Robert Zahn*, Berlin, Druck und Verlag von Georg Reimer.
- LES LAU Wolf, 1987, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic): Ge'ez-English, English-Ge'ez, with an Index of the Semitic Roots*, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz.
- LITTMANN Enno, 1913, *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, vol. 4: *Sabäische, Griechische und Altabessinische Inschriften*, Berlin, Verlag von Georg Reimer.
- LIUZZO Pietro Maria, 2019, *Digital Approaches to Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, coll. “Supplement to Aethiopia”, no. 8.
- MATTHEWS Derek & MORDINI Antonio, 1959, “The Monastery of Debra Damo, Ethiopia”, *Archaeologia or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London*, vol. 97 (second series, vol. 47), p. 1–58.
- MORDINI Antonio, 1944–1945, “Informazioni preliminari sui risultati delle mie ricerche in Etiopia dal 1939 al 1944”, *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, vol. 4, p. 145–154.
- MORDINI Antonio, 1960, “Gli aurei di Kushāna del convento di Dabra Dāmmò. Un'indizio [sic] sui rapporti commerciali fra l'India e l'Etiopia nei primi secoli dell'era volgare”, in *Atti del Convegno*

*internazionale di Studi Etiopici* (Roma, 2–4 April 1959), Roma, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, coll. “Problemi attuali di scienza e di cultura”, no. 48, p. 249–254.

NOSNITSIN Denis, 2013, *Churches and Monasteries of Tagray. A Survey of Manuscript Collections*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, “Supplement to Aethiopica”, no. 1.

PHILLIPSON David W., 2017, “Die große Kirche von Debra Damo”, in S. Wenig and B. Vogt (eds), *In kaiserlichem Auftrag. Die Deutsche Aksum-Expedition 1906 unter Enno Littmann*, vol. 3: *Ethnographische, kirchenhistorische und archäologisch-historische Untersuchungen*, Wiesbaden, Reichert Verlag, coll. “Forschungen zur Archäologie Außereuropäischer Kulturen”, no. 3/3, p. 275–284.

RICCI Lanfranco, 1999, “Zëbän bur, Zëbän Abür”, in *Miscellanea Aethiopica reverendissimo domino Stanislaw Kur septuagenario professori illustrissimo viro amplissimo ac doctissimo oblata* (= *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne*, vol. 12, no. 2 [2000]), Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Archidiecezji Warszawskiej, p. 235–239.

RIVOIRA Matteo, 2013, “L’identità sul cartello. Esperienze di toponomastica bilingue nelle valli occitane del Piemonte”, *Géolinguistique*, no. 14, p. 57–88.

TADDESSE Tamrat, 1972, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270–1527*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, coll. “Oxford Studies in African Affairs”.

TAYLOR Simon, 2016, “Methodologies in Place-Name Research”, in C. Hough (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, coll. “Oxford Handbooks in Linguistics”, p. 69–86.

TSEGAY BERHE G. LIBANOS & RED., 2005, “Däbrä Damo”, in S. Uhlig (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 2, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, p. 17b–20b.

UHLIG Siegbert, APPELYARD David, BAUSI Alessandro, HAHN Wolfgang & KAPLAN Steven (eds), 2017, *Ethiopia: History, Culture and Challenges*, Berlin / Münster / Wien / Zürich / London, LIT Verlag / Michigan State University Press, coll. “Afrikanische Studien / African Studies”, no. 58.

UHLIG Siegbert, APPELYARD David, BAUSI Alessandro, HAHN Wolfgang & KAPLAN Steven (eds), 2018, *Äthiopien. Geschichte, Kultur, Herausforderungen*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag.

UHLIG Siegbert & BAUSI Alessandro (eds), 2003–2014, *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 1: A–C; vol. 2: D–Ha; vol. 3: He–N; vol. 4: O–X; vol. 5: Y–Z: *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

## NOTES

1. See Tsegay Berhe G. Libanos & Red. (2005). For an update, see the record on the Beta maṣāḥəft platform: Denis Nosnitsin, Alessandro Bausi, Pietro Maria Liuzzo, Solomon Gebreyes, and Eugenia Sokolinski, “Dabra Dāmmo ’Abuna ’Aragāwi”, in A. Bausi (ed.), *Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: Eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung / Beta maṣāḥəft* (< <https://betamasahaft.eu/manuscripts/INS0105DD/list>>, last modified on 7 August 2018 [accessed on 28 February 2020]). See also the survey by Dānə’el Kəbrat (2005–2006, pp. 517–520).

2. See Bausi & Uhlig (2014, pp. 729b and 800c). The form (“Dabra Dammo”) is also the only one mentioned in Uhlig et al. (2017, p. 361, index), and Uhlig et al. (2018, p. 388, index); and in a work that is going to be influential in the studies of medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea, see Kelly (2020). In other cases the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* corrected current wrong transcriptions of place names,



see for example Bausi (2005), where the “Ḥam” widely attested in secondary literature was corrected to “Ham”.

3. The primacy of “Däbrä Dammo” or “Däbrä Damo” is undecidable on a spelling basis, since the syllabic script used for Gəʿəz, Amharic and Təgrəñña (known as *fidäl*) does not mark gemination and no graphic elements distinguishes “Däbrä Dammo” from “Däbrä Damo”, and they both are written <da-mo>.

4. See Bausi (2014) for a concise overview on the studies of Ethiopian and Eritrean historical geography. A detailed treatment of a digital approach to the study of Ethiopian and Eritrean place names is provided by Liuzzo (2019, pp. 105–142). A thorough study of Ethiopian and Eritrean toponymy is still to come and is a major desideratum. An interesting case that shows the complex phenomena of stratification and re-interpretation that can be detected was offered by Lanfranco Ricci, who finely underlined the interference between Saho and Ethiopian Semitic place names; see Ricci (1999, p. 238): “*Si tratta ad ogni modo di una variazione di rilievo, poiché è un esempio di come le popolazioni non di lingua tigrina, e tali sono i Saho, vadano tuttora, e sono andate, sostituendo alla toponomastica dei tigrini quella della loro lingua, almeno nelle parti passibili di adattamento.*” (“It is in any case a significant variation, since it is an example of how the non-Təgrəñña-speaking populations, and such are the Saho, still go, and have gone, replacing the toponymy of the Təgrayans with that of their language, at least in the parts that can be adapted.”)

5. See in this respect the large index in Nosnitsin (2013), pp. 418–430, and on Däbrä Dammo, and the place name recorded in this form, see pp. 83–86 and 419. This spelling is explicitly criticized in his review by Getatchew Haile (2015, p. 230): “Regarding transliteration, the famous monastery of Arägawi/zä-Mikaʿel is Däbrä Damo, not Däbrä Dammo.” Before the Ethio-SPaRe investigation, this (“Däbrä Dammo”) is the form that I took care of recording during my visit in 1992.

6. See Conti Rossini (1901, p. 200, l. 18, doc. no. 18), to be interpreted as “*Daməmo*” or “*Damməmo*”; see also Bausi (2007, p. 85a).

7. See Guidi (1894, p. 74, l. 7): “*wäbäʿəntäzä täbəhələ Däbrä Daḥməmo*”, “and because of this it was called Däbrä Daḥməmo”; the explanation was already noted by Guidi (1894, p. 74, n. 3), who observed that the verb “*daḥmama*” (“destroy”) is absent from Dillmann (1865), but attested in other lexica; see Leslau (1987, p. 127a–b): either “*dahmäma*”, “*daḥmäma*”, or “*daḥmäma*”, “demolish, destroy”; the etymological form is likely “*daḥmäma*”, attested in Təgrəñña with the same meaning, see Kane (2000, vol. 2, p. 2014): “destroy, wreck, demolish”.

8. See Guidi (1894, pp. 55, 89, 90, 91, 93), who always adopts the form “Dammo”, either isolated or in connection with other words, “Dabra Dämmo” on p. 55 and “Debra Dammo” on pp. 91 and 93.

9. See Conti Rossini (1940, p. 45, n. 1): “*Quanto al nome principale del convento, la reduplicazione della m e la pronuncia stretta della o finale (come nell’italiano «orso») mi vengono assicurate dal dott. Mordini, che avevo pregato di precisarle sul posto.*” (“As for the main name of the convent, the reduplication of the *m* and the closed pronunciation of the *o* final (as in the Italian “orso”) are assured to me by Dr Mordini, whom I had asked to specify them on the spot”). Antonio Mordini used the non-geminated form in co-authorship with Derek Matthews (see Matthews & Mordini, 1959), but opted for the geminated one in his contribution as a single author, always using the form “Dabra Dämmò” (see for example Mordini, 1944–1945, pp. 145–148, “Dabra Dammó”, and similarly, Mordini, 1960).

10. See Krencker & von Lüpke (1913, pp. 168–194, and also *passim*).

11. As a confirmation of the well-known principle that *de nominibus non curant archaeologi (et multi plures!)*, with notable exceptions: see for example the “Archaeological Atlas of Coptic Literature” developed by the ERC-project PAThs at Sapienza Università di Roma, directed by Paola Buzi (<<https://atlas.paths-erc.eu/>>). For a confirmation of the rule, see Phillipson (2017).

12. See Krencker & von Lüpke (1913, p. 234b), “Debra Damo ‘Däbra Dämmō’”, according to a system consistently used in this index, that provides the more precise phonetic form in brackets: see for example on p. 234a “Beni Amer ‘Benī ‘Āmer’”, on p. 234b “Debaroa ‘Debārūā’”, etc.
13. See Littmann (1913, pp. 18, 19, and 23): “Bekannt sind Debra Dämmō, in Tigrē an der Grenze von ‘Agāmē, und Dämmō Galilā, südlich von Adua” (“Well known are Debra Dämmō, in Tigrē at the border of ‘Agāmē, and Dämmō Galilā, south of Adua”), also pp. 61, 82, and p. 94b, in the index. The integration in *DAE* no. 8 (see Littmann, 1913, pp. 18, 19, and 21 = *RIÉ* no. 186, see Bernand et al., 1991, p. 252), l. 21, is considered acceptable by Drewes (2019, p. 214), but this is not relevant here, where Littmann’s conjecture is only considered as evidence for the place name gemination.
14. Conti Rossini started to record the name in the form “Damo, Dâmo” in his first onomastic contribution—and all in all one of his first contributions, see Conti Rossini (1893, p. 407). The same Conti Rossini, however, adopted the geminated form in his later writings after the investigation on the spot carried out by Antonio Mordini, see for example Conti Rossini (1942, pp. 11 and 179, n. 6, “Debra Dammò”), but even in earlier contributions, see for example Conti Rossini (1909, pp. 274 and 312, “Dabra Dämmō”). In the *Storia d’Etiopia* the form is “Damò”, see Conti Rossini (1928, p. 159, “monte Damò” and “Dabra Damò”, also on pp. 160, 164, 233, 235, etc.). The same form is given in contributions of the 1930s, see Bombaci et al. (1937, p. 94, “DEBRA DAMO”) and Consociazione Turistica Italiana (1938, pp. 274 and 629, “Debrà Damò”).
15. For an emblematic case, see “Dabra Dāmo” in Dombrowski (1983, vol. 2, pp. 316–317, in the repertory of “*Geographische Namen*”, and on p. 352a, in the general index).
16. See for example the Təgrəñña sermon on Abunä Arägawi available on YouTube (<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2JX3RzrySU>>) at 20:34–44 [accessed on 29 February 2020], to which Mersha Alehegne drew my attention (“*abzi lomi ab hagära Ityopya ab mäd rä Təgray zərək kəb ‘abiy gädamom Däbrä Damo bäsīhom*”, “here, on this day He [Abunä Arägawi] arrived in the land of Ethiopia, to His great monastery that is found in the region of Təgray, Däbrä Damo”, in my transcription and translation). In this case, however, the preacher is an adherent of the Eritrean Orthodox Church and it is impossible to ascertain the degree of his acquaintance with the monastery and the surrounding area.
17. The form “Damô Debra” recorded by Beccari (1917, p. 105b) from writings, letters, and documents issued from the sixteenth century on by western missionaries who were well conversant with the contemporary Amharic-speaking clergy provides evidence that the non-geminated form was used at the time.
18. For example “Adwa” with initial *ayn*, according to the Təgrəñña pronunciation, not “Adwa” according to the Amharic one.
19. See for example a clear statement of this principle of toponymic research in Rivoira (2013, p. 64): “*forma ‘autentica’, vale a dire quella in uso localmente*” (“‘authentic’ form, that is, the one that is used locally”).
20. See the clear methodological statement in the authoritative *The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming*, by Taylor (2016, p. 70): “Place-names can thus be seen as cultural artefacts which arise from the interaction between language and environment. This means that to understand a place-name, when it was coined, by whom and with what motivation(s) in mind, it is important to collect as much information as possible from both sides of this interaction. While the environment is studied by site-visits, conversations with local people, and through detailed maps and plans, the language is approached above all through the collection of early forms and their context, although of course conversations with local people can play an important role here too”. The principle is a basic one of toponymic research and was clearly set forth by a pioneer in the field such as Giovanni Flechia (see Flechia, 1871, p. 9). For clear methodological statements, see a recent case study in Rivoira (2013).

---

## ABSTRACTS

The historical place-name of one of most famous monasteries of Ethiopia in northern Təgray has a split tradition of transcription, since it is widely known under the two non-matching forms of “Däbrä Damo” and “Däbrä Dammo”, only distinguished by the opposition of gemination vs non-gemination. Researches in the past and recent interviews on the spot provide clear evidence, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the form used by the local Təgrəñña speakers was and still is the geminated “Däbrä Dammo”. In a region that is the geographical heart of the Təgrəñña-speakers area, this form is the authentic form of the place name. Yet, the question arises why a competing Amharic-speaking ecclesiastic tradition, largely accepted, not always wittingly though, also in scholarly contexts, supports the non-geminated form. A different consonantal length contrasts perception might have played a role in this.

Le toponyme historique de l'un des plus célèbres monastères d'Éthiopie, situé dans le nord du pays, dans le Təgray, a une double tradition de transcription, puisqu'il est largement connu sous les deux formes non concordantes de « Däbrä Damo » et « Däbrä Dammo », qui se distinguent uniquement par l'absence *versus* présence de la gémination. Des recherches passées et des enquêtes récentes sur le terrain prouvent clairement, au-delà de tout doute raisonnable, que la forme utilisée par les tigrinophones (parlants təgrəñña) locaux était et est toujours « Däbrä Dammo », avec la nasale gémignée. Dans une région qui se trouve au cœur géographique de la zone des tigrinophones, cette forme est celle authentique du nom de lieu. Cependant, la question se pose de savoir pourquoi une tradition ecclésiastique amharique concurrente, également largement acceptée, mais pas toujours à bon escient, dans les contextes scientifiques, soutient la forme sans la nasale gémignée. Une perception différente des contrastes de longueur des consonnes pourrait avoir joué un rôle à cet égard.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** toponymie, Éthiopie, Tigré, tigrigna, amharique, interférence

**Keywords:** toponymy, Ethiopia, Tegray, Tigrinya, Amharic, interference

## AUTHOR

ALESSANDRO BAUSI

Universität Hamburg

alessandro.bausi@uni-hamburg.de