

The Kingdom of Damot: Mythical Narratives versus Historical Realities

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Abstract

As indicated in medieval and pre-modern sources, Damot was one of the kingdoms of medieval Ethiopia. This kingdom was the largest and richest among kingdoms of Ethiopia. Unfortunately, the location of Damot was mistakenly recorded as if it was south of Abbay by later writers. The history of the people in general and its rulers in particular were defamed by hagiographers as pagans and evils. Curiously enough, some historians even today are entirely reluctant to acknowledge that Damot-proper was located north of Abbay in present-day West Gojjam. This paper attempted to exhaustively examine both primary and secondary sources and avers that the name Damot was associated with territories north of Abbay but provinces located south of Abbay had been identified by local names such as Bizamo, Gafat and Conch. Likewise, allegations of hagiographers that the people of Damot north of Abbay were pagans in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are virtually untrue.

Keywords: Damot, Gojjam, location, allegations, south/north of Abbay

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1. Introduction

The empire of ancient and medieval Ethiopia consisted of kingdoms. Among these kingdoms, the kingdom of Damot was one of them. As to the extent and location of Damot, it was described as “Going more to the west by the same extremities of the prester’s kingdoms, and principally to the west of the kingdom of Xoa, there is a very great country and kingdom which is called Damute.”¹ Similarly, Bermudez, who had been detained by Gelawdewos in Gafat, informs us that “The kingdom of Damute marches on the western side with the Gafates.”² In contrast, the Jesuits who came to Ethiopia in the seventeenth-century mystified the history of Damot in general and its geographical location in particular. For instance, Almeida, one of the Jesuits, reports that Damot was south of Gojjam beyond Abbay,³ and at another time he states as it was west of Gojjam.⁴ He also tells us that he was in Damot when that kingdom was under the rule of Buko.⁵ Strange to say, on the sketch map of Ethiopia, Almeida placed Damot south of Gafat adjoining Gurage.⁶ In reality, Gafat and Gurage were adjoining each other, so there was no space in between the two. Though he placed Damot adjoining Gurage on the map, Almeida says nothing about Damot in his narrative about Gurage, Alaba, Kambata and other provinces.⁷ Disappointingly, unlike medieval and pre-modern sources, later writers developed their own hypothesis as if historical Damot was south of the Abbay. Accordingly, nowadays, scholars predominately believe these narratives as established facts. In addition, later scribes, by rewriting the hagiographies of saints distorted the history of Damot as it was a pagan kingdom. This paper challenges the mythical narratives of the Jesuits and other later writers.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Either by misapprehension or deceit, the actual history of Damot has been entangled by diverse narratives. For instance, some Jesuit writers, contrary to the contemporary chronicle of Susenyos, asserted that Damot in the seventeenth century was located south of Abbay. Later writers, on the other hand, assumed that originally Damot was south of Abbay and then after that a new Damot was created in present-day west Gojjam. However, neither of these

¹ Lord Stanley(ed.), *Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Abyssinia During the Years 1520-1527*, (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1881), pp.347-348

² R.S. Whiteway(trans.&ed.), *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia, 1541-1543, as narrated by Castanhoso*, (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1902), p.234

³ C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford(trans.&eds.), *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593-1646: Being Extracts from the History of High Ethiopia or Abassia Together with Bahreys History of the Galla*, (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1954), p.18

⁴ Ibid. ,p.135

⁵ Ibid. ,p.86

⁶ Ibid. ,p.xcvii

⁷ Ibid. ,pp-143-171

writers knew the exact location of medieval Damot. Some say unidentifiably south of Abbay and some others attempted to associate it with Wolamo. Moreover, some hagiographers indiscriminately defamed the whole people of Damot and its rulers as pagans. Based on the above literature the following research questions are formulated:

1. Where historical Damot was located?
2. Was there really a pagan kingdom by the name Damot?

This paper has addressed these gaps and has the following two objectives, general and specific. The general objective of this paper is to show that Damot was one of the Christian kingdoms of medieval Ethiopia situated south of Lake Tana, and before the advent of the Oromos its provinces extended as far as Enareya. The specific objectives include (a) to reveal the actual history of Damot and its geographical location, and (b) to expose allegations against the people of Damot and its sovereigns.

2. Literature review

Damot was the topic of many writers both indigenous and foreign. From the chronicle of Amde Seyon up to the Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia (1769-1840) a lot has been written about the history of Damot by Ethiopian chroniclers. Furthermore, hagiographies are other indigenous sources that provide substantial evidence about Damot. Likewise, foreign writers namely Alvarez, Arab Faqih, and Bermudez who were in Ethiopia before the advent of the Oromos, inform us the exact location of Damot and its provinces. Regarding the location of Damot, the hagiographer of St. Tekle-Haymanot (1215-1313) stated that “ወነበረ አቡነ ተክለ ሃይማኖት ብሔረ ዳሞት መጠነ ፲ወ፪ ዓመት ወመልዓ ትምህርተ ክርስቶስ በሐውርቲሃ እስከ ምድረ ባሪያ ወእስከ ፈለገ ግዮን ወእስከ ፈለገ ሆመል”⁸ (For twelve years Abuna Tekle-Haymanot was in the country of Damot and filled its people with the faith of Christ up to the land of Barya[Benishangul], River Geyon, and River Homäl). During the reign of Amda Seyon(1314-1344) Damot was one of the four loyal kingdoms. The chronicle reported, “እሉ ከሉሙ ሰራዊተ ንጉሥ አምደ ጽዮን ወሰራዊተ የማን፣ ወፀጋም፣ ወሰራዊተ ፍፅም፣ ወከዋላ፣ ሰራዊተ አምጋራ ወሸዋ፣ ሰራዊተ ጎሣም ወዳሞት፣”⁹ (All these troops of King Amda Seyon, and the troops of the right wing and troops of the left wing, and troops of the vanguard and the rearguard were (composed) from Amhara and Shewa and from Gojjam and Damot). In the time of Zar’a Yae’qob (1434-1468) the daughters of the emperor were assigned to govern Tigray, Angot, Shewa, and other provinces. Likewise, Mädehn Zämäda,

⁸ IES-MS. 4550(*Gedle-Tekle-Haymanot*), p.185

⁹ Paolo Marrassini(ed.), *La Campagna di ‘Amda Seyon I Contro I ‘Ifat (1332)*, (Napoli: np, 1993), pp. 114&116

one of his daughters, was sent to govern Damot and the title for the ruler of Damot was *eraq masäre*(ዕራቅ ማሰራ), the same title with other kingdoms namely Shewa, Tigray, Begemder and Gojjam.¹⁰

3. Significance of the study

This paper is very important in revealing the actual history of Damot. It rectifies falsified narratives and sheds light on Damot, which was a Christian kingdom situated north of Abbay and its provinces extended as far as Enareya. The findings of this paper will inspire researchers to address other similar issues.

4. Methodology

The research design of this paper is qualitative. Hence, it employs a qualitative methodological approach. The data gathering tool of this paper is surveying of primary data and reviewing secondary sources, and the data analysis method is narrative. In the process of data gathering, I used chronicles, hagiographies and other accounts written by Ethiopians and foreigners.

5. The Extent and geographical location of Damot

The geographical setting of the study area extended from Lake Tana in the north to Abbay in the south. As testified by sources, historical Damot-proper was north of Abbay and the present-day West-Gojjam, Awi Zone, and BenishangulGumuz region were an integral part of it. On the other hand, territories south of Abbay had been identified by local names such as Bizamo, Gafat and Conch, even though they were provinces of Damot until disrupted by the advent of the Oromos. What is known as West Gojjam today and its environs is the oldest portion of the inhabited world, as old as human history itself. It is around here, as the Old Testament attests allegorically, where Adam and Eve lived. Moses stated, “ወተከለ እግዚአብሔር ውስተ ኤድም ገነተ ቅድመ መንገሰ ጽባሕ ወሢሞ ህዩ ለእንሰ እመሕያው ዘገብረ” (And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put [appointed] the man whom he had formed(Gen.2:8)). In accordance with the above, Diodorus verified, “Now, the Ethiopians, as historians relate, were the first of all men and the proof of this statement, they say are manifest. For that they did not come into their land as immigrants from abroad but were natives of it so justly bear the name of autochthones.”¹¹ Similarly, Stephanus of Byzantium as cited by Houston declared, “Ethiopia was the first established

¹⁰ Jules Perruchon(ed.), *Les Chroniques De Zar'a Yae'qob et De Ba'eda Maryam Rois D' Ethiopie De 1434 A1478*, (Paris: EmileBouillon, 1893), pp.14-15

¹¹ C. H. Oldfather(trans.), *Diodorus Siculus of Sicily with an English Translation*,(London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1967rpt), pp.89&91

country on earth and the Ethiopians were the first to set up the worship of gods and to establish laws.”¹²Houston added, “This old race of the Upper Nile, the Agu[Agaw] or Anu of the ancient traditions, spread their arts from Egypt to the Ægean, from Sicily to Italy and Spain.”¹³ According to Josephus, Saba was the former name of Meroe and Meroe, as written by Herodotus and others was the name of the city for Ethiopians.¹⁴ Some others still argue that Meroe was another name of the isle of present day Gojjam. Regarding this, Tellez testified, “It is also certain that there is no other island, in the said latitude, whence it follows of necessity, that if there be any sort of island in that part, it is the kingdom of Gojam that is the so renowned Meroe.”¹⁵Moreover, the present day Sudan was an integral part of the empire of Ethiopia. In connection with this, Lebna Dengel alluded, “Emperor of the great and High Ethiopia, vast kingdoms and dominion, king of Xoa,...and Saba, from where the queen of Saba went, Barnagays[Bahrä-Nägash]; lord of all Nubia, to the confines of Egypt.”¹⁶It was in the above justification that the names of Damot and Saba were discovered in the inscriptions of the Tigray Region un-vocalized as Sb and D’mt concurrently. Regarding this, Dugast and Gaida stated, “The existence of a kingdom called Da’amat is documented by several inscriptions. Though, what do the names D’mt and Sb’ exactly mean is not clear.”¹⁷The un-vocalized D’mt was mistakenly vocalized as Da’amat, instead of Damot. It was also known as al-Damutah by Arab writers mentioned in association with Queen Yodit.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the actual history of Damot was mystified by later writers, both indigenous and foreign. Some of them considered that the Kingdom of Gojjam extended from Abbay to Abbay from the very beginning and then after that more than half of it altered into Damot by immigrants. For instance, Tekle-Iyesus asserted, “ጎጃም የሚባለውም አገር ከወርያ እስከ በለያ፣ ከደብረ ጽሑፍ እስከ ቦረና ያለው አገር ነው። ዋናው ጎጃም በግዮን ውሃ የተከበበ ነው።”¹⁹ (What we call the province of Gojjam extended from Wärya to Bäläya and from

¹² Drusilla D. Houston, *Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire*, (Oklahoma City: The Universal Publishing Company, 1926), pp.18-19

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.50

¹⁴ William Whiston (trans.), *The Works of Flavius Josephus, in Three Volumes*, (Oxford: D.A. Tabloys, Vol. I, 1839), p.145.

¹⁵ F. Balthazar Tellez, *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia*, (London: J. Knapton, 1710), p.24

¹⁶ Michael Geddes, *The Church-History of Ethiopia*, (London: Rich Chiswell, 1696), p.71

¹⁷ Fabienne Dugast & Iwona Gajda, “Reconsidering Contacts between South Arabia and the Highlands of Tigray in the 1st Millennium BC according to epigraphic data,” in 18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies Movements /Eth. in Movement, Oct. 2012, DireDawa, Ethiopia(29Oct-2Nov.2012), p.15

¹⁸ Muse Tegegne, *ጸፋፋ ያሪት* “Gojjam “ the Stigma: The Abyssinian Pariah, (Geneva: Guihon Books, 1993), p.69

¹⁹ Girma Getahun(ed.), *Yä Gojjam Teweled Bämulu Kä Abbay eskä Abbay* (A Whole Genealogical History of Gojjam from Abbay to Abbay as Written by Aleqa Tekle-Iyesus Waqjira, (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press 2003 E.C.), p.25

Däbrä Tsemuna to Boräna. Main Gojjam was encircled by River Geyon). Tekle-Iyesus further claimed the following:

በጽሕፍን ልጅ በፊጠበድን ዕጣ በደጋው የተሰሩ ጅ መደብ ዳሞት የሚባሉ አሉ። አመጣጣቸውም እስላሞች በበረቱ ጊዜ[ከወላይታ] ተሰደው ነው። ስደታቸውም በጎጃም መሬት ብቻ አይደለም ለጁት ተከፍለው ጁዱ ክፍል ጉራጄ አጠገብ ጄኛው ኩሎ ፫ኛው ከፋ ነው። በከፋ የተሰደደው ሕዝብ የመተሎሜን ልጅ ይዞ ነው። መተሎሜ በፊት እስላም ስለሆነ በኋላ አቡነ ተክለ ሃይማኖት አሳምነውታል። የሐረርጌና የአውሳ ነገሥታትም የመተሎሜን መምጣት[መጠመቅ] በሰሙ ጊዜ ጦር አክተው[አስከትተው] መጥተው ወግተውታል። አገሩን ዳሞትን ዘርፈውታል፤ እርሱም በጦርነቱ ሞቶአል። የዳሞትም ሕዝብ የተሰደደ ከዚህ በኋላ ነው። ዘመኑም በአፄ ወደም አርዕድ መንግሥት ነው።²⁰

(There were five classes (of people) called Damot, who re-settled in the land of Fitäbäden, son of Tshenan. They came when Muslims who were getting strong migrated from [Wolayta]. Their migration was not limited to the land of Gojjam but was divided into four parts; the first part was nearer to Gurage, the second to Kullo, the third to Kafa. The people migrated to Kafa were with the son of Matelome. Matelome was a Muslim and then after was converted into Christianity by Abuna Teklehaymanot. And when the kings of Hararge and Ausa heard the baptismal of Matelome, they came with their troops, fought him, and robbed his country Damot, and Matelome himself died on the battlefield. Hereafter, the people of Damot began to migrate. This happened during the reign of Wedem Ar'ed[1299-1314]).

The assertion of Tekle-Iyesus is implausible. Firstly, the ancient geographical location of Damot was not mentioned by Tekle-Iyesus himself but was added in brackets as Walayta by the editor. Conversely, Beckingham and Huntingford inform us that among the three separated dynasties of Walayta, the first is said to have come from Damot in the time of Yekuno Amlak.²¹ Actually the appellation Walamo (changed into Walayta in 1976) did not exist at that time. It was founded between 1650 and 1700 and the appellation Damota might have emanated from the nineteenth century ruler of Walamo called ‘Damote’.²² Secondly, the

²⁰ Ibid. ,p.172

²¹ Beckingham and Huntingford(trans.&eds.), *Some Records of Ethiopia*,, p.ixv

²² Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia, 1500-1850: With Special Emphasis on the Gibe Region*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of London, 1983), p.142, the name Damote may indicate his belongingness from the kingdom of Damot. Besides, the ruler of Bäteramora in the sixteenth century was known by the name

reign of Wedem Ar'ed and the time when Damot was invaded by Muslims was quite different; the former was in the 14th century and the latter in the 16th century. In his another book, Tekle-Iyesus contends that Mätälomé was king of Zanjäro and Säymana.²³ He narrated as:

ከቤተ ዛን መንግሥት ሐፀይ የሚባል በነገሠ ጊዜ ብዙ ዘመን ሸዋን ገዛ፤ እስከ ጫጫና ወንጭት ድረስ ነው። አምልኮውም በሰይጣን ነበረ። ...ይኩኖ አምላክም ይትባረክን ገሎ ሸዋ ተመለሰ፤ ከመተሎሜ ጋራም ተዋጋ። አቡነ ተክለሃይማኖት አስታረቋቸው። ከዚህ በኋላ ይኩኖ አምላክ መተሎሜን ንጉሠ እናርያ አሰኝቶ ሾመው።²⁴

(When Hatsey was a king from the Zagwe Dynasty, he (Mätälomé) governed Shawa for several years, from Chacha to Wonchit and his faith was Satanism....After he killed Yetbarek, Yekuno Amlak returned to Shewa and fought with Mätälomé, reconciled by Abuna Teklehaymanot and hereafter Yekuno Amlak appointed Mätälomé as king of Enarya).

The assertion of Tekle-Iyesus lacks compatibility. Regarding the migration of the people of Damot, Tekle-Iyesus claims that it happened after the death of Mätälomé in the time of Wedem Ar'ed(1299-1314). As a matter of fact, there is no evidence as the people of Damot were migrated towards the present day Gojjam at the time mentioned above, but it is certain that at the end of the 16th century the people of Gafat, Conch and Bizamo were forced to migrate not only to Damot but also to Gojjam and Begemeder. The resettlement of Yähabäta and Elmagozit in Damot, anachronistically mentioned by Tekle-Iyesus, happened in the seventeenth century. The chronicler writes, “ወምድርኒ ወሀቦሙወሰነ አምባሃ ወሠርዖሙ በማቻክል፤ በፍዪ፤ በዲኝ፤ ወበአርቡቅ ወበየሙኸል።”²⁵(He gave the land of Wasanä Amba and resettled them in Machakäl, Fetsé, Dign, Arbuq and Bāyämähel). These were the lands of Damot.

In the same manner, Huntingford speculates that the name Gojjam was changed into Damot by the immigrants of Damot. He claims, “On the west they occupied the whole of Gafat and Damot, driving the inhabitants across the Abbay and causing the names of these two regions

Damot. See, K. Conti Rossini(ed.), *Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel* (Malak Sagad),(Lipsiae: Otto Harrassowitz, 1907), p.24

²³ Sergew Gelaw(ed.) *Yä Ityopia Tarik*, (A History of Ethiopia), (Addis Ababa:Berhanena Selam Printing Enterprise, 2002 E.C.), p.29

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ F.M.Esteves Pereira(ed.), *Chronica de Susenyos, Rei de Ethiopia*,(Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1892), p.196

to be shifted across the river likewise.”²⁶ However, Huntingford admits that there is no ample evidence when the shift had occurred. He concedes that “One of the problems of this expansion is the date when Damot and Gafat were moved across the Abbay. The records do not give much in the way of clues, yet the time of the change is important.”²⁷ Disappointingly, Huntingford continues his suggestion as:

It is impossible to be precise about the date of this, because the records do not say, in so many words, that it took place. However, it was clearly spread over a number of years. Almeida, who wrote about 1630, says that Damot was south of the Abbay and shows it thus on his map, though he may have been giving the situation as it had been in the previous century. Such evidence as can be extracted from the HSD suggests that the name Damot was applied in Sarsa Dengel’s time to both the north and south sides of the Abbay.²⁸

Huntingford’s suggestion does not hold water. He cited as evidence the sojourn of Sarsa Dengel in Bizamo in 1574 but the place’s name was not Damot but Bizamo and written as “ወአሜሃ ገብረ ምክራም በቢዛሞ”²⁹ (At that time he stayed in Bizamo). What Huntingford identified as Damot was formerly south of Abbay recorded in seventeenth century Jesuit sources. But most Jesuit missionaries were ignorant where Damot was situated. Their ignorance was reported as:

It is surprising the Jesuits, notwithstanding their long abode in Gojam, have not known where this neighbouring country of Damot was situated, but have placed it south of the Nile. They were often, however, in Damot, when Sela[Se’lä]christos was attempting the conquest and conversion of the Agows.³⁰

Among Jesuit missionaries, Paez was in Ethiopia from 1603-1622, but he was ignorant about where Damot was located. Thus, he asserted, “Not only did the monks of the kingdom of Begmeder stir up many people against the emperor because he was commanding them not to keep the Sabbath, but the ones in Gojam were worse because they assembled the main

²⁶ G. W. B. Huntingford, *The Historical Geography of Ethiopia: From the First Century AD to 1704*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.138

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.143

²⁹ Rossini(ed.), *Sarsa Dengel*, p.45

³⁰ James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773*, (Dublin: William Porter, Vol. III, 1790), p.588

soldiery of that kingdom, who are called Damotes.”³¹ In reality, as stated in the chronicle of Susenyos, the kingdom was Damot and the name of the soldiers had been identified by different appellations.³² By citing Almeida, Huntingford asserted that “Gafat was between Damot and the Abbay River.”³³ On the contrary, Bermudez identified the location of Damot as “Damute, which lies nearly due west of Gafates.”³⁴ Surprisingly, in another book Huntingford put the kingdom of Damot eastward to Entotto area.³⁵ Medieval sources, on the other hand, testify that Damot-proper was north of Abbay and its provinces extended as far as Enareya. In connection with this, Damot was described as “Formerly the province of Damot extended across the Nile southward to the confines of Enarea; but since the conquests by the Galla, Damot is now confined to the north bank of the Nile.”³⁶ The claim of Huntingford that the name Gojjam was changed into Damot by immigrants is really unconvincing. Firstly, before the Oromo invasion, provinces of Damot situated south of Abbay were identified by local names such as Gafat, Bizamo and Conch, not by Damot. Secondly, the people who migrated towards Gojjam and Damot were not invaders, rather victims of an Oromo invasion. Above all, Damot as a kingdom had already existed in present day West Gojjam at least since the tenth century. With regard to this, Arab Faqih stated, “When he (Dahragot) heard how the Muslims were heading for the land of Damot, he was afraid of them, and fled to Gafat, one of the regions of Damot.”³⁷ Arab Faqih added, “The wazir Mujahid reached Addoli who was in a district called Tequr wāha in the land of Damot.”³⁸ Tequr wāha is another name of River Gerai in the district of Jabi Tsehnan in present West Gojjam.³⁹ Bizamo was another province of Damot. In this regard, Lobo, in his description of Nile, stated, “Then entering Bezamo, a province of the kingdom of Damot.”⁴⁰ In addition, Bermudez informed us that Conch was another province of Damot. He attested, “Up the Nile, towards the south, there is, on the

³¹ Tribe, Vol. II, p.266

³² P eirera, pp.253-254

³³ Huntingford, *The Historical Geography*, p.88

³⁴ Whiteway, p.234

³⁵ G. W. B. Huntingford(trans.&ed.), *The Glorious Victories of Amda Seyon, King of Ethiopia*,(Oxford: At Clarendon Press, 1965), p.2

³⁶ Isenberg and Krapf, *Journals of the Rev.Messrs Isenberg and Krapf, Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society, Detailing Their Proceedings in the Kingdom of Shoa, and Journeys in other parts of Abyssinia, in the Years 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842*, (London: Seeley-Burnside, and Seeley, 1843), p.61

³⁷ Paul Lester Stenhouse(trans.), *Futuh Al-Habaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia [16 century] by šihab ad-Din Ahmad bin Abd al-Qader bin Salem bin Utman, also known as Arab Faqih*, (Hollywood: Tsehai Publishers & Distributors, 2003), p.335

³⁸ Ibid. , p.337

³⁹ Charles T. Beke, “*Abyssinia-being a Continuation of Routes in that Country*”,(JRGS, Vol. XIV, 1844), p.5

⁴⁰ Samuel Johnson(trans.), *A Voyage to Abyssinia, By Father Jerome Lobo, a Portuguese Missionary*, (London: Elliot&Kay, 1789), p.114

border of Damute, a large province called Conche. This is subordinate to Damute.”⁴¹ The name Conch still exists as a village name on the highway from Addis Ababa to the town of Neqemte. When Emperor Gelawdewos was campaigning against Conch in 1540 E.C., the people were living on the frontier of Damot. The scribe reported, “ወምክንያተ ሐረቱስ ከመ ይጽብኦ ለሀዝብ እለ ኢያመልክዎ ለእግዚአብሔር ዘይትመለክ ወኢይገንዩ ለመሲሁ ወእመንቱ ሕዝብ ኮኑ ህዳራነ በጽንፈ ምድረ ዳሞት ወዝንቱ ኮነ በሰመንቱ ዓመት እምዓመተ መንግሥቱ በሰብኦ ምእት ወአርብዓ ዓመት እምዓመተ ዓለም:”⁴²(He(Gelawdewos)has gone to fight because the people did not worship God, who deserves worship and do not bow to the anointed one and these people were residents on the frontier of Damot and this happened in the eighth year of his reign and seven thousand and forty years from the creation of the world).

Similarly, Bermudez who was an eye witness of the campaign of Gelawdewos, reported, “When we were in Damute this chief was in rebellion against the king of Damute; on this, king Gradeus said to me that, as a prelate and mediator of peace, I should send word to him, that his majesty was much enraged against him because of his rebellion and disobedience.”⁴³The expedition of Gelawdewos was from Damot to Conch and then after returned to Damot.⁴⁴ It seems that Gelawdewos had a strong attachment to the people of Damot because in addition to the aforementioned dialogue, his **Confession of Faith** was written at Damot in the year 1555.⁴⁵The reports presented by the chronicler of Gelawdewos and Bermudez are indicatives that the appellation Damot was confined only to the north of Abbay. Moreover, Bermudez made it clear that Damot was encircled by Abbay. He elucidated, “This province stands rather surrounded by the Nile on either side of it, for that river makes here many and considerable bends.”⁴⁶ Bermudez further elaborated:

The kingdom of Damute is large, with several subordinate provinces. The chief part is inhabited by Christians, but some provinces belong to pagans. In all are found great stores of gold and of rock crystal. All the country is well supplied and fertile, especially the part nearest the Nile, which has more hills and streams than the rest.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Whiteway, p.237

⁴²William El. Conzelman(ed.), *Chronique De Galawdewos(Claudius) Roi d’Ethiopie*,(Paris: Librairie Emile Bouillon, 1895), p.38

⁴³ Whiteway, p.237

⁴⁴ Ibid. , p.240

⁴⁵ Geddes, p.189

⁴⁶ Ibid. , p.234

⁴⁷ Ibid. , p.235

Likewise, Lobo described Damot as follows:

That province of the kingdom of Damot which I was assigned to by my superior, is called Ligonous[Lej-Ye-negus], and is perhaps one of the most beautiful and agreeable places in the world. The air is beautiful and temperate, and all the mountains, which are not very high, shaded with cedars. They sow and reap here in every season; the ground is always producing, and the fruits ripen throughout the year. So great, so charming is the variety that the whole region seems a garden, laid out and cultivated only to please.⁴⁸

As regards the location of Damot, historians like the late Tadesse and Merid, who were well-versed in Ge'ez literature, had opportunities to rectify unworthy-narratives written by Jesuits and others. It is unfortunate, however, that their assertions were rather very misleading. They were reluctant even to acknowledge pre-modern Damot in present day West Gojjam. For instance, Tadesse contended:

Almost nothing is known about this very ancient African Kingdom, but the traditions referring to it clearly show that long before the advent of either Christian or Muslim principalities in the area the kings of Damot had effective hegemony over the whole region of the Shoa plateau.⁴⁹

Similarly, Merid argued, "Although described by Alvarez as one of the biggest and richest provinces, there is scarcely any definite information on the size and extent of Damot."⁵⁰ Vis-à-vis the above point, Merid speculated that "Damot lay to the west of Shawa and Ganz. It probably began near the Nonno or the Guder. On the west it may have been separated from Bizamo by the Anger River."⁵¹ His dissertation covered the period from 1508-1708 and in this period the location of Damot was indubitable but Merid unabashedly asserted:

Gojjam, one of the largest provinces, lay to the south of Lake Tana and the small Abbay. It was bounded by the Blue Nile in all directions except the west, where the Dura River separated it from Chara, Matakal and Wambarya. The inhabitants of the

⁴⁸ Johnson, p.120

⁴⁹ Tadesse Tamrat, "The Horn of Africa: The Solomonids in Ethiopia and the States of the Horn of Africa," in D.T. Niane(ed.), General History of Africa IV: Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century,(California: UNESCO, 1984), p.423

⁵⁰ Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom 1508-1708, With Special Reference to the Galla Migrations and Their Consequences", (Unpublished Ph D Dissertation, University of London, 1971), p.53

⁵¹ Ibid.

province could be distinctively divided into two groups, Christian Amhara and pagan Agaw.⁵²

The allegation against the people of Agaw seems intentional. Let alone in the aforementioned period, Paez acknowledged that the people of Agaw were Christians.⁵³

As stated above, Huntingford suggested that the name Damot was used in Sarsa Dengel's time to both the north and south sides of Abbay. However, his suggestion could not be supported by testimonies. Prior to this period, in the sketch map of Ethiopia drawn in the time of Portuguese expedition indicated that the appellation Damot was located north of the Abbay, adjoining Gojjam.



⁵² Ibid., p.37

⁵³ Paez, Vol. I, p.244

Source: Elaine Sanceau, *The Land of Prester John: A Chronicle of Portuguese Exploration*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), p.70. See also, *Paez's History of Ethiopia*, Vol. I, p.308

On the other hand, it is pretty clear that Damot was invaded by Oromos in the seventeenth century. The first invasion against Damot began by BirmajeGäda (1578- 1586). Regarding that invasion, Abba Bahrey stated that “**ወቢርመጂ ዘቦረን ዓገታ ለምድረ ዳሞት ወዲወወ ሰብአ ወእንስሳ ሶበ ረከባ ለሀገር እንዘ አልቦ ዘያድህን ወዘይባልሕ፡፡ወአሜሃ ኮነ ደጅ አዝማች ዐስቦ ወተማከረ ምስለ አጎቂሁ ወአስተጋብአ ሠራዊተ ወደገኖ ወበጽሐ ንበ ሀለወ ይትካፈል ምህርካሁ፡፡**”⁵⁴ (When the land was without a saviour and helper, Birmaje of Boran, invaded the land of Damot and captured the people and livestock. At that time, Asbo became Dajjazmach and discussed with his brothers, gathered troops and followed (them) and caught up with them where they were dividing their booties). It was during the Birmaje Gäda that Fasilo-the shorter form of Fasiledes, was killed and his son Susenyos captured. In line with this, the chronicler informed us that “**ወእንዘ ሀሎ በቤተ አቡሁ መጽኦ ጋላ ዘስሙ ቦረን ወቀተለ ኩሎ ሰብአ ሀገር ወለአቡሁኒ ቀተሎ ወለውዕቱኒ ዪወዎ ወወሰደ ንበ ህላዊሁ፡፡**”⁵⁵ (While he was in his father’s house , Galla, whose name was Borän came and killed all the people of the land and killed his father and captured and took him). Susenyos remained in captivity for more than one and a half years and in another invasion the scribe reported, “**ወእንዘ ሀሎ በዪዋዊሁ ውስተ ቤተ ጋላ፤ ወዕኦ ጋላ ከመ ይፅባእ ምድረ ዳሞት ወተራክበ ምስለ ደጅአዝማች ዐስቦ፡፡**”⁵⁶ (While he (Susenyos) was in captivity in the hands of Galla, the Galla came to fight the land of Damot and met with Dajjazmach Asbo). At this time the invaders of Damot were defeated by Dajjazmach Asbo and hence he compelled them to return Susenyos, the son of Fasilo from captivity.⁵⁷ Despite the sources from Abba Bahrey and the chronicle of Susenyos testifying that the invasion made by Borana Birmaje was against Damot, Mohammed reported that it had been against Gojjam.⁵⁸

⁵⁴Rossini, Sarsa Dengel, p.227

⁵⁵ Peirera, p.4

⁵⁶ Ibid. , p.5

⁵⁷ Ibid. ,pp.5-6

⁵⁸ Mohammed, p.249

Fasilo, erroneously nicknamed Gāram Fasil(Fasil the naive) by Tekletsadiq, was Sarsa Dengel’s rival and hence by the recommendation of his advisers, reconciliation had been made between them. The chronicler stated:

ይኔይሰነ ንትግረቅ ምስለ ፋሲሎ ወንኩን ከሐደ ምስሌሁ ወዘንተ ምክረ ፈጸሞሙ ሐሩ መንገል ዳሞት ከመ ይትራከቡ ምስለ ፋሲሎ፤ ወሶበ ሰምዓ ፋሲሎ ምጽአተ ሐዲኔ አፍጠነ መጸኢ እማእከለ ምድረ ባርያ እስመ ህየ ነበረ፡... ወእምድጎረ ጎዳጥ መዋዕል እምነ በአቱ ለፋሲሎ ውስተ ከተማ ተንገሥኦ ምክር በእንተ ምክራመ ሐዲኔ፤ መከረ ፋሲሎ ወይቤ ይኔይሰ ምክራመ ሐዲኔ በምድረ ባርያ፤ እንዘ ንበልዕ እክለ አረሚ ወእንዘ ንመሀርክ ንዋየ አረሚ እስከ ደቂቆሙ ወአንስትያሆሙ፤ ወአትቁገርኒ መከሩ ይኔይሰ ምክራመ ሐዲኔ በሸዋ፤ ማዕዜ ከረመ ንጉሥ በዳሞት፡፡⁵⁹

(It is better for us to make peace with Fasilo and unite with him. Having completed their counselling they went to Damot so as to meet with Fasilo and when Fasilo heard the coming of the emperor, he came quickly from the centre of the land of Barya, where he was.... After a certain period of time that they had entered the town of Fasilo, where the emperor passed the season discussing issues. Fasilo advised that it would be better for the emperor to stay in the land of Barya, consuming food from the pagans and capturing the property of pagans including their sons and daughters and Atqežr advised that it would be better for the emperor to stay in Shewa; at this time the emperor stayed in Damot).

Following this reconciliation, in 1567 Sarsa Dengel removed Teklo from his position and instead designated Fasilo Dajazmach of Damot.⁶⁰ The above description given by the chronicle of Sarsa Dengel is irrefutable evidence because it showed where the kingdom of Damot was situated before the Oromo invasion. Historically, the kingdoms of Gojjam and Damot were adjoining each other. In relation to this, Bermudez said that “we came to the kingdom of Gojame, which adjoins Damute.”⁶¹ Other sources testify that Damot was situated in the western part of Ethiopia. Arab Faqih, for example, stated that “When the king heard that he was the cousin of the imam he had him sent off to a distant part of the land of Abyssinia called Damot.”⁶² Likewise, Leo Africanus reported the location of Damot as:

⁵⁹Rossini, Sarsa Dengel, pp.29-30

⁶⁰ Ibid. ,p.31

⁶¹ Whiteway, p.241

⁶² Stonehouse, p.54

The kingdom of Damut(as Sanutus) affirmed doth border upon the kingdom of Xoa, and is enclosed on either side of lake of Barcena, and the land of Zanguabar. However, others place Damut between the kingdom of Vangue and Gojame toward the west, which opinion seems most probable.⁶³

Although place names like Zanguabar and Vangue are vague, expressions like enclosed on either side by Bahrä Tsana or River Abbay and towards the west, clearly show the exact location of Damot. This was true during the reign of Susenyos. Tekle-Sellassie confirmed, “ወበጽሐ ኅበ ምድረ ጸ.ማ ሢሞሙ ለየማነ ክርስቶስ ብሕት-ወደድነት ወለዮልዮስ እም ወሰነ ፈለገ አብያ እስከ ጽንፈ አባባ ዘምድረ በድ ምስለ ዳሞት ጸሐፊላምነት።”⁶⁴(After he arrived at Tsimä, (he) appointed Yämanä Kristos Behtewädädenät and Yolyos from the border of River Abäya to the border of River Abbawi of the land of Bäd with Damot Tschafälamnät). Tekle-Sellassie added that “ወእምድህረ ተስዕረ ሢሙተ ኅዣም በምክንያተ ዕልዎቱ ቀዳማዊ፤ ሢሞ ንጉሥ ሢሙተ ዳሞት ጸሐፊላም ምስለ መንፈቀ ኅዣም።”⁶⁵(After he lost the appointment of Gojjam due to his first disloyalty, the king appointed(him) Damot-Tschafälam to govern half of Gojjam). Alemu, distorted the phrase ‘ዳሞት ጸሐፊላም ምስለ መንፈቀ ኅዣም’ as የኅዳምን ግማሽ የሆነውን ዳሞትን⁶⁶. As stated above, River Abäya was one of the borders between the two kingdoms and River Godeb was another. Regarding the latter, the chronicler of Bäkäffa stated, “ግዕዝ ንጉሥ እምደልማ ወነደረ ጎዴብ ዘውዕቱ ወሰነ ዳሞት ወኅዣም።”⁶⁷(The king went from Dälma and stayed overnight at Godeb which is the border of Damot and Gojjam). Similarly, Beke confirmed that “On crossing this river [Godeb] for the last time, we quitted Gojam and entered Damot, and a vast difference between the two provinces was soon perceptible.”⁶⁸ These two kingdoms remained under the sway of local nobles until 1881 and then after they were joined together by the name Gojjam for the first time under the sceptre of King Tekle-Haymanot, whose extraction was both from Damot and Gojjam.

6. Allegations against the people of Damot and its sovereigns

⁶³ Robert Brown(ed.), *The History and Description of Africa of Leo Africanus*,(London: Hakluyt Society, 1600), p.41

⁶⁴ Pereira, pp.137-138

⁶⁵ Ibid. ,p.169

⁶⁶ Alemu Haile(trans.), *YäItiopia Tarik(1597-1625E.C):Yä Atse Susenyos Zena Mäwae'l(A History of Ethiopia(1604-1632): The Chronicle of Emperor Susenyos)*, Addis Ababa: Sirak Printing Press, 2005E.C.),p.124

⁶⁷ Ignatius Guidi(ed.), *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I, and Bakaffa*,(Lipsiae: Otto Harrassowitz,1903), p.282

⁶⁸ Beke, p.3

Lake Tana is one of the sacred places in Ethiopia. For about a millennium it was the seat of the Ark of the Covenant until the Aksumite expeditionary forces had taken it to Aksum in the fourth century A.D.⁶⁹ Moreover, it is believed that Lake Tana is the place where St. Mary and her child sojourned for about three months and ten days. Moreover, Christianity is introduced in this part of Ethiopia by the eunuch of Queen Candace and St. Matthew the Apostle in the first century A.D.⁷⁰ and these make Lake Tana holy and to share from its holiness, several Ethiopian Emperors prefer to be buried within the monasteries of Lake Tana. Thus, the remains of Dawit, Zer'a Yaeqob, Susenyos and Fasiledes were transferred from graveyards to Daga. For example, the chronicler of Naod stated, “ወ፫ዓመተ መንግሥቱ አፍላሱ ሥጋሁ ለንጉሥነ ዘርዓ ያዕቆብ እምድገረ ሞተ በ፴ ዓመት ወአብዕዎ ደሴተ ዳጋ ወነበ አዕረፈ ሥጋሁ ምስለ አስከሬን ታሕተ ያም ዘትሰመይ ምዕራፈ ጻድቃን።”⁷¹(In his third year (of Naod) the corpse of our king Zer'a Yaeqob was exhumed after thirty years of his death and was interred on the island of Daga and his corpse rested with other corpses under the tree called the seat of saints).

Regrettably, however, the people of Damot and its sovereigns living south of Lake Tana were defamed as pagans. There seems that a coordinated defamatory campaign was made against the people of Gojjam and Damot by hagiographers. For instance, in Gadla Abuna Salama, compiled in the nineteenth-century, the Isle of Gojjam was defamed as “a wild place inhabited by man-eaters ‘resembling dogs and snakes’ who attempted to kill abuna Salama.”⁷² Similarly, the people of Gojjam and Damot encircled by Abbay were libelled as:

ወይቤሎ አቡነ ለእግዚእነ መሐርሙ ለኩሎሙ ኢትዮጵያ ወኢትሌሊ ኢሐተ፤ ወይቤሎ እግዚእነ እምህር ለከ ወሰና ለግዮን ለባሕተቶሙ ለኢትዮጵያ፤ ወይቤሎ አቡነ ለምንት ትሌሊ ጎዛመ እለ ሀለው ማዕከለ ግዮን፤ ወይቤሎ እግዚእነ እወ ኢይምህር እስመ እሙንቱ እለ ሥራዩ ያበዘሁ።⁷³

(Abuna says to our Lord Make mercy upon all Ethiopians and discriminate none, and our Lord says I will make mercy to you- for Ethiopians only, bordered by Geyon, and

⁶⁹ Graham Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal: The Quest for the Lost Ark of the Covenant*, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc, 1992), p.446
⁷⁰ Henry Yule (trans. & ed.), *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1916), p.222, See also, F. S. Ellis(ed.), *The Golden Legend, or Lives of Saints*, (London: J. M. Dent & Co. , Vol. V, 1900), p.150
⁷¹ Jules Perruchon(ed.), *Histoire D' Eskender D' Amda Seyon II Et D' Naod*, (Paris: Imprinerie Nationale, 1894), p.36
⁷² Iosif Fridman, *The Aksumite Kingdom in the Lives of Aksumite Saints* (Moscow: n.p.&n.d), p.21
⁷³ MS.(ብቤ-213)-National Library Agency, p.144

Abuna says why you discriminate against Gojjames- who are living encircled by Geyon, and our Lord says yea I will not have mercy on them who frequently practice sorcery).

The expression ‘for Ethiopians only’ (ለባሕተቶሙ ለኢትዮጵያ) indicates that the writer of Gadla Manfas Qedus entirely denies that Gojjam was part of Ethiopia. In addition, Queen Yodit, Mätälomé and a certain ruler of Gojjam identified by the name Särä- Qemes and Jan Chuahay of Agaw similarly were defamed by nineteenth-century hagiographers.

Queen Yodit was the most powerful queen who came to power by force and ruled most part of Ethiopia for about forty years. Her territories over which she reigned was described as “ዮዲት አጼ እሳት የተባለችው ትግሬን፣ ቤገምድርን፣ ጎጃምን ገዛች። ላስታና ሸዋ አልተገዛላትም።”⁷⁴ (Yodit called Atse Esat, ruled Tigray, Begemeder and Gojjam but Lasta and Shewa were out of her rule). Ibn Hawqal, a contemporary Arab writer, verifies her rule as:

As regards Abyssinia, for many years it has had a woman as its ruler. It is she who killed the king of Abyssinia who was known under the title of hadani (Eth. hade), and she continues to this day to dominate her own country and the neighbouring regions of the land of the hadani in the west of Abyssinia.⁷⁵

In the history of the patriarchs of Alexandria, Yodit was described as a queen of Bani-al-Hamwiah and her kingdom as al-Damutah.⁷⁶ Some writers assumed that Bani-al-Hamwiah was the proper name of Yodit, but the phrase Bani-al-Hamwiah is an Arabic word, which means the daughter of Hamwia/ Hawiya, an ethnic of Agaw in Damot.⁷⁷ Some scholars had attempted to interpret Bani-al-Hamwiah differently as “I. Guidi the name as Yahoudya (Jews) while J. Halevy believed it to be Haghouya (Agaws) , but C. Conti Rossini differed. His view was that it was Damoutah, a region in West Gojjam where a very strong Kushitic kingdom existed until the close of the thirteenth century.”⁷⁸ Similarly, Budge reported:

But Perruchon thinks (Vie de Lalibala, Paris, 1892, P. Xii), and Rossini agrees with him (Sulla Dinastia Zagwe), that the words which Guidi emended into din-al-yahudiah should be read Bani-al-Haghwiah, and would translate “Queen of the sons of the Haghwiah” i.e. the original inhabitants of the country, or the Agaw.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Sergew, Yä Ityopia, p.22

⁷⁵ Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*, (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972), p.230

⁷⁶ Muse, p.69

⁷⁷ Jon Abbink, “*The Enigma of Beta Esra’el Ethno genesis: An Anthro-Historical Study*” in *Cahiers d’Etudes africaines*, 120, XXX ,4, 1990, p.436

⁷⁸ Sergew, Ancient, p.230

⁷⁹ E.A. Wallis Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia and Abyssinia*, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, Vol. I, 1928),

Contrary to the above, Tekletsadiq and Taddesse, although they cited Rossini, both of them surreptitiously denied her belongingness to Agaw of Damot. For instance, Tekletsadiq contends that “Conti Rossini suggested that the word Al-Hamwiah in the title of the queen be read as Al-Damuta, which might indicate the region of Damot-to the south and south-east of the Blue Nile-as her land of origin.”⁸⁰ Likewise, Taddesse reported that “Conti Rossini has proposed the reading al-Damutah for the name of the people, and indicates that she was probably of Damoti (Sidama) origin.”⁸¹ Taddesse was familiar with the book of Cosmas and cited it several times as the Aksumite king was conducting trade through the Agaw ruler in Damot in the six century and Conti Rossini undoubtedly associated the origin of Queen Yodit with the Agaw of Damot, but Taddesse unreservedly attempted to associate the origin of Yodit with Sidama. Even in the tenth century, the appellation Sidama was not mentioned in the informative chronicle of Susenyos, who was around there in fighting Sidi of Hadiya. According to the study, there were no people by the name Sidama before 1650.⁸²

Queen Yodit was the restorer of the throne of her ancestors which had been destroyed by the Aksumites and she has also contributed a lot in developing the Amharic language.⁸³ Unfortunately, the identity of Yodit has been falsified by later writers. In a manuscript compiled by *qésä gäbäs* Tekle-Haymanot of Aksum, Yodit was described as “ወእምዝ ንጽሕፍ ታሪክ ዘገዲት በልሳነ ትግራይ ትሰመይ ገዲት ወበእምሐራ ትሰመይ እሳቶ ወበልሳነ ጥልጣል ትሰመይ ጋዕዋ።”⁸⁴(Now we shall write the history of Gudit, in the language of Tigray (she) was called Gudit, and in Amhara Esato(fire), and in the language of Tiltal, Gae’wa). The name Gae’wa belonged to a queen of Säläwa, a contemporary of Gelawdewos and a collaborator with Turkish invaders against Ethiopia.⁸⁵ Yodit was reviled and labelled as evil and for some she was a Jew and for others pagan. Moreover, these writers accused her of destroying churches including the churches of Aksum and Martula Maryam. With regard to this allegation, Alvarez tells us that he has visited the church of St. Mary of

p.215

⁸⁰ T.T. Makouria, “*The Horn of Africa*” in M. Elfasi (ed.), *General History of Africa-III. Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century*, (Heinemann- California UNESCO, 2000 rpt), p.566

⁸¹ Taddesse Tamrat, “*Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527*,”(A Thesis Submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of London, Feb. 1968), p.74

⁸² Mohammed, p.142

⁸³ Muse, p.65

⁸⁴ Sergew, Ancient, p.226

⁸⁵ Conzelman, pp.77-78

Aksum, which had been built by Queen [Hendeke].⁸⁶ This ancient church was destroyed in the sixteenth century by Ahmad Gragne. In relation to this, Valentia stated:

I learned from the books in this place, that the first Christian church at Axum was built eleven hundred and forty years ago, at the same time as that of Abrahah, and was destroyed by Mohamed Gragne in the year 1526 (E.C.); the present church was built by Sultan Ayto Fasil, son of Ayto Socinios, in the year 1657(E.C.).⁸⁷

Valentia also adds that “in the year 1070, a female named Gadit[Gudit], in great authority came from Amhara, and from a superstitious motive, destroyed, as far as she was able, these remains of ancient art; threw down the obelisks, broke the altars having been broken by great force, and removed from their places.”⁸⁸ The year 1070 is inaccurate. According to scribes her reign was from 850-890 but according to Ibn Hawqal it is estimated to be from 945- 985. The phrase ‘came from Amhara’ indicates her belongingness. If Yodit had been a pagan, her choice for destruction would be the church rather than the obelisks. Similar to that of Aksum Zion, the destruction of Martula Maryam anachronistically was associated with Queen Yodit. Yodit lived in the tenth century whereas the church of Martula Maryam was built by Queen Eleni in the sixteenth century. The renowned church of Martula Maryam was destroyed first by Gragn and then after by the Oromos.⁸⁹ Demonizing the whole deeds of Queen Yodit by later writers appears to be an antidote to her bravery.

Mätälomé was another king of Damot, who has been treated by hagiographers as a monster. The time during which Mätälomé was king of Damot and whether Mätälomé was his proper name or nicknamed by hagiographers is still unresolved. In the hagiography of Tekle-Haymanot his name was spelt as **ሞተሎሚ**; in the acts of Yared and Pantaleon as **ሙተሎሚ** and in the chronicle of Menelik II as **ሞተሎሚ**. Tekle-Iyesus is the only writer who attempted to interpret the name Mätälomé and who mentioned his father’s name as “**ሙተሎሚ ማለት በኦሮሞኛ ቋንቋ የ፪ አገር ንጉሥ ማለት ነው፤ የሰይሚና፤ የዛንጀሮ ንጉሥ ነበረ እናቱ እስላንዴ አባቱ ሙቶቂል ነበረ።**”⁹⁰ (In Oromo language Mätälomé means king of the two countries; he was king of Saymana and Zanjero and his mother’s name was Eslande and his father’s name was Mätoqil). His assertion, however, do not have any support either in the hagiographies of

⁸⁶ Stanley , p.81

⁸⁷ George Viscount Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, The Red Sea, Abyssinia and Egypt in the Years 1802- 1806*, (London: William Miller, Vol. III, 1809), p.88

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* ,.98

⁸⁹ Jonathan Good(trans.), “Reflections on the Notion of ‘Empire’ and ‘Kingdom’ in the Seventeenth Century Ethiopia: Royal Power and Local Power,” in *Journal of Early Modern History*, 8, 3-4(2004), p.30

⁹⁰ Sergew, *Yä Ityopia*, p.29

saints or chronicles of emperors. Furthermore, the association of Mätälomé with an Oromo language is unjustifiable. Merid claims that the name Mätälomé was a title of kings of Damot.⁹¹ His claim is a mere speculation. Regarding the kingdom where Mätälomé was a king, the hagiographer of Tekle-Haymanot tells us that he was king of Damot.⁹² On the other hand, Gebre-Sellassie narrates, “ወላም በሚባለው አገር ቀድሞ ሞተሎሚ የሚባል የአሕዛብ ገዥ ነበረ።”⁹³ (In the country of Wolamo, there was a ruler of infidels who was called Motälomi). Wolamo was the former name of Walayta. So the association of Mätälomé with Wolamo is very misleading.

As regards the time, hagiographers related the name Mätälomé from Zagwe period up to Amde Seyon. In Gädlä Yared, he mentioned the following:

ወነግሡ አሕዛብ እለ ይሰመዩ ዛን እስከ ዜና ጴጥሮስ፡ወውዕቱ ዜና ጴጥሮስ ሐረ ከመ ይግበር ፀብአ ብሔረ ዳሞት ምስለ ኩሉ ሠራዊቱ፤ ወካህናተ ደብተራ ምስለ ታቦቶሙ፤ ወበውዕቱ መዋዕል ሀሎ መኮንን ዳሞት አረማዊ ዘስሙ መተሎሜ ዘያመልክ ጣዖተ ወገብረ ፀብአ ምስሌሁ ወሞክ መተሎሜ ወመተረ ርዕሶ ለዜና ጴጥሮስ ወኩሎሙ ሠራዊቱ ጎዩ።⁹⁴ (Infidels who were called Zagwe became kings up to Zenapetros and this Zenapetros went so as to fight against the people of Damot with all his troops, and the priests of Zion with their Ark. And at this time there was a pagan ruler of Damot called Mätälomé who was idolatry and did battle with him and Mätälomé won and beheaded Zenapetros and all his troops dispersed).

In the list of emperors of the Zagwe dynasty, Zenapetros is unknown. For instance, in the annals of Iyasu II and Iyoas the eleven emperors of the Zagwe dynasty were listed as Mera Tekle-Haymanot, Wedem, Žan Seyum, Girma Seyum, Yimrhane-Krstos, St. Arbie, Lalibela, Nä’akuto Lä’ab, Yitbarek, Meyrari, and Harbey.⁹⁵ So the campaign of Zenapetros against Damot remains uncertain. Moreover, the hagiographer asserts that the priests of Zion remain in Damot for many years and converted the people into Christianity and the soothsayers were killed with the order of the ruler of Damot, and finally these priests returned to their homeland by the troops of Amde Seyon.⁹⁶ The claim has no substance and lacks historicity.

⁹¹ Merid, p.73

⁹² IES-MS-4550-Gadla Teklehaymanot, p.34

⁹³ Gebre-Sellassie, *Tarike Zemen Zedagmawi Menelik Neguse Negest Ze Ityopia*, (Addis Ababa: Np, 2008 rpt), p.167

⁹⁴ K. Conti Rossini (ed.), *Acta Yared et Pantaleon*, (Romae: Louvain- Imprimere Orientalisinte L. Durbecq, 1904), p.23

⁹⁵ Ignatius Guidi(ed.), *Annales Regum Iyasu II Et Iyoas*, (Lipsiae; Otto Harrassowitz, 1910), pp.5-6

⁹⁶ Rossini, *Acta Yared*, p.25

As stated above, the priests were with Emperor Degenajan(r.830-849) and then after he made them followers of Zenapetros, who was considered infidel. The assertion that the people of Damot were pagans during the Zagwe period is an invented allegation. Even in Gädlä Abba Sälama, Washera was admired as having a great faith in Christ.⁹⁷ Because Washera was the beacon for traditional education in Ethiopia, and more specifically, it was here at Washera in Damot that Qené, a kind of philosophical church education, started in the ninth century CE.⁹⁸ According to scribes, St. Tekle-Haymanot lived between 1215 and 1313 and before his birth, Mätälomé had invaded Shewa and captured his mother, Egzi- Hareya and took her to Damot. By divine intervention his mother returned to her husband and then after Tekle-Haymanot was born. In Dabra Libanos version, it is reported, “Then the voice said unto him. Rise up and depart forthwith into the country of Damot, so that thou mayest bring back to Me as much spoil as thou didst formerly.”⁹⁹ On the other hand, the Waldban version narrates, “And Matalome came again to that country, and he slew very many people with the edge of the sword, and he carried of the people into captivity, and the holy man also went with him, being prepared to endure martyrdom.”¹⁰⁰ The discrepancy between the two versions and other untrustworthy narratives forces me not to consider the document as historical. Had the narrative that Damot was converted by Tekle-Haymanot been authentic, subsequent chroniclers would tell us in the chronicles of Ethiopian Emperors. It is certain that Tekle-Haymanot was made a monk by Abba Iyesus Moa and in the acts of the latter it is written as “ወአባ ኂሩተ አምላክ ዘደብረ ዳጋ፤ ሰበክ እሂዞ እምድረ ሳርካ እስከ ጋዝጌ፤ ወለኩሉ ምድረ አለፋ፤ ወምድረ አገው”¹⁰¹(Abba Hirute-Amlak of Daga preached from the land of Sarka up to Gazgie, and all the lands of Alefa and of Agaw). What is more, in the acts of Zer’a Abraham, Damotes were described as:

ወአሐተ ዕለተ አስተርአይዎ ለዝንቱ ጻድቅ አቡነ አኖሬዎስ ወአቡነ ፍሬምናጦስ ወይቤልዎ ሰላም ለከ ኢትዮጵያ ወኢትዮጵያ እስመ አንተ ወንጌላዊ ምስለ ሰብአ ዳሞት ጎሩያን ወቅዱላን፤ ዕሩያን ትኩረት ወብዙጎን ሀለው በሀገረ ዳሞት ብዙጎን መነኮሳት ገዳማውያን ወተሐራምን ጸማውያን ወመስተጋድላን።¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Fridman, p.21

⁹⁸ Semachew Nigatu and Mesert Asrat, *Maedot: Matsehafa Awaji and Agebab*, (Bahir Dar: Np, 2009 E.C.), p.24

⁹⁹ E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Life of Takla Haymanot in the Version of Dabra Libanos*, (London: Lady Meux, 1906), p.93

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. , pp.358-359

¹⁰¹ Stanislas Kur(ed.), *Actes De Iyasus Mo'a*, (Louvain: Secretariat du Corpus SCO, 1965), p.35

¹⁰² Boryssus Turaiev(ed.), *Acta S. Fere Mikael et S.Zar'a Abreham*, (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbeq 1955 rpt), p.19

(Once upon a day revealed to this saint Abba Anorewos and Abba Frumentius said to him peace be upon you, do not be afraid and do not hesitate, since you are an evangelist with the people of Damot-selected and of saints. (You) will be equal with the many who are in the land of Damot, many monks, hermits and servants, toilers and contenders).

In contrast, Gädlä Abuna Za-Yohannes asserts that Jan Chuhay and the people of Damot living south of Lake Tana were alleged to believe in a serpent. The hagiographer continues his narrative that the serpent died with the prayer of the saint and when Jan Chuhay, ruler of Agaw, heard the death of that serpent, in retaliation, he imprisoned Abuna Za-Yohannes at a place called Amädamit and following the imprisonment of Abuna Za-Yohannes, Amde Seyon declared war against Jan Chuhay and finally the troops of Amde Seyon killed him.¹⁰³ The above narratives all in all are fictitious. Firstly, Amädamit was situated in the interior part of Damot and had never been part of a territory of Agaw. Secondly, Chuhayb (spelt as ኃህይ in the chronicle without the prefix Jan) was native to Mätäkäl and ruler of Agaw during the reign of Iyasu I (1682-1706)¹⁰⁴ and there was no evidence showing a ruler of Agaw by the name Chuhay who ruled before this period. Moreover, the assertion that Amde Seyon had made a campaign against Jan Chuhay is not supported by the chronicle of Amde Seyon. For instance, the campaign against the renegades in Semien, Wägära, Sälämt and Sägädé was mentioned in the chronicle¹⁰⁵ but not against Damot in general or Jan Chuhay in particular.

All the aforementioned allegations against Damot are fabricated by hagiographers anachronistically and hence *none* of them are supported by the chronicles of medieval Ethiopia. On the contrary, the contribution of Damot for medieval Ethiopian emperors was so immense. To mention some, the kingdom was known for providing gold and brave fighters for Ethiopian emperors. Gold mining was an ancient practice in Damot, especially in a region currently known by the name Benishangul. Regarding this, Cosmas tells us that “The king of the Axomites accordingly, every other year, through the governor of Agau, sends thither special agents to bargain for the gold, these are accompanied by many other traders-up wards, say, of five hundred-bound on the same errand as themselves.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Madeleine Schneider (ed.), *Actes de Za-Yohannes de Kebran*, (Louvain: Secretariat Du Corpus SCO Waversebaan, 49, 1972), pp. 16-17

¹⁰⁴ Guidi (ed.), *Annales Iohannis I*, pp. 220 & 225

¹⁰⁵ Paolo Marrassini (ed.), *La Campagna di Amda Seyon I Contro I' Ifat (1332)*, (Napoli: Np, 1993), pp. 66 & 68.

¹⁰⁶ J.W. McCrindle (ed.), *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, (London: Hakluyt

The gold mines along the River Nile also were reported as areas “where are found most rich mines of gold; amongst which are the mines of Damut and of Sinassij [Shinasha?], wholie in the possession of the Gentiles which pay tribute unto the Prete[Prester].”¹⁰⁷

Despite allegations against the kingdom, Damoest were loyal in serving their country and emperors by being soldiers. In relation to this, the contribution of Damot during the Gondarian period attested that “አስመ ቀዳማዊ ውዕቱ ዳሞት በከዊነ ጨዋ እምነ ኩሉ ኩነተ ጨዋ”¹⁰⁸ (Damot was the first by becoming soldiers (of Ethiopian emperors) from all (others) being soldiers). In medieval Ethiopia the contribution of Damotes as an army of emperors is well discussed by chroniclers of Amde Seyon, Zar’a Yaeqob and Bae’da Maryam. For example, during the reign of Zar’a Yaeqob(1434-1468), it was the regiment of Bäsärshotäl(በፀር ጅተል) who came from Damot also known as Damot Hädary or natives of Damot and who killed Mahiko, the rebel leader of Hadiya and for their achievement Zar’a Yae’qob gave *Gult*lands (fiefs)for them in his own country.¹⁰⁹

8. Conclusion

Damot was one of the medieval kingdoms of Ethiopia. In the inscriptions discovered in Tigray it was spelt by archaeologists as Da’amat and by the Arab writers as al-Damutah. Damot was the homeland of Queen Yodit who ruled Ethiopia for about forty years in the tenth century. Before the advent of the Oromos, the kingdom of Damot was one of the largest kingdoms, extending from Lake Tana in the north to Enareya in the south. During the reign of Susenyos and other subsequent emperors the territory of Damot was limited in the south by the Abbay gorge, in the north by Lake Tana, in the east it was bordered by two rivers namely Abäya and Godebin Gojjam and in the west its border was certainly unknown. Despite its highly diminished territory, Damot was still a powerful province during the Gondarine period and finally in 1881 when Ras Adal Tesemma became king of Gojjam and Kaffa, by the name Teklehaymanot, Damot was united with Gojjam. The assertion that Damot was originally south of Abbay is unfounded and defamatory narratives such as the people of Damot and its rulers in general were pagans in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are fabricated allegations, not supported by irrefutable sources.

Society,1897), p.52

¹⁰⁷ Brown, p.31

¹⁰⁸ Guidi (ed.), Annales Iohannis I, pp.145&293

¹⁰⁹ Jules Perruchon(ed.),Les Chroniques De Zar’a Ya’eqob et de Ba’eda Maryam Rois D’Ethiopie De 1434 A 1478, (Paris: Emile Bouillon, 1893), pp.18-22

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