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LOCAL HISTORY IN ETHIOPIA from external sources

Local history is much studied and documented in European countries, some as formal research and some as a hobby by amateurs who feel closely attached to the home environment of their childhood.

In Africa there is less of it documented, even if living memory is as strong there as anywhere else. Sometimes there are African study projects to preserve the collective memory in taped interviews. Extensive notes on local history written by local people are not common. Most of the knowledge of it will be lost with the passage of time.

However, what was once written down and printed is usually preserved somewhere in the world and continues to be (in principle) available. In the case of Ethiopia, most of the records on paper of local history must be assumed to be in "external sources", not necessarily "foreign" in the sense that they were printed abroad, but probably with no copy kept for reading by those who have their roots in the particular area.

The concept of the present work is to *make extracts from printed "external sources"* (some produced in centres in Ethiopia but most of them printed in foreign countries) and to sort these extracts geographically and chronologically, so that references which concern a particular location at a certain time can be found together. This material could be used as a background having some guiding data for those who want to make their own studies concerning some local area.

Scope

The present work in principle concerns environment and events in the *countryside of Ethiopia* mainly from the early 1800s and onwards. The special effort is to shed light on places which are seldom mentioned in print and to make searchable the contents of various published sources (lately including even Internet, where the published contents are likely to disappear after a while).

The capital city Addis Abeba is completely excluded here, because it gets more than its proportional share in general literature. The other main centres like Gondar and Harar are treated lightly, mostly with only summaries and references rather than substantial text. The archaeology, ancient history and appeal to tourism of places like Aksum and Lalibela may be briefly indicated, with references to literature, but details of ancient places are in principle cited only when they concern later time of the 19th and 20th centuries. *Local* details are collected also for the main centres, while their part in "national history" is passed over lightly.

The boundaries of the area 'Ethiopia' are here taken to be the political boundaries of the 1990's, excluding Eritrea (which is often documented in the same literature as Ethiopia but which also has a large body of records separate from the records of present-day Ethiopia).

Alphabetical structure

The sorting of the compilation is alphabetical by names of places as written with the Latin alphabet, which is the script used in the sources. However, the alphabetical entries for locally important centres like administrative seats, townships, plantations etc are uniformly extended to cover also a surrounding circular area with a radius of 10 kilometres. Secondary names within such a circle are given *see*-references to the primary name used as alphabetical entry.

Local names in Ethiopia are derived from various languages, so it would not automatically solve the problem of ambiguous spellings to edit the alphabetical list in Amharic and transcribe all the foreign spellings into the Amharic script.

Spellings by the Latin alphabet are copied as found in the sources, but often supplemented with an entry form derived from principles of the Ethiopian Mapping Service as used from the 1960s onward. Alternatives are brought together by *see*-references. As *alphabetical entry among the alternatives* is generally chosen the spelling which seems closest to consensus in recent historical and geographical works.

Spelling of names on maps is usually simplified. Here also in this collection writing with special phonetic symbols has not been attempted for the names. Such characters are less easily handled when a standard word processing program is used in the computer. None of the several existing schemes for transliteration from Amharic into Latin script has been strictly adhered to, but the Ethiopian Mapping Service is naturally regarded as having particular authority.

However, the Mapping Service does in principle not use double consonants in the spelling of names. In this compilation such doubling has often been retained when it seems to assist the casual reader in finding a better pronunciation of the name (especially in short names e.g. Dilla not Dila) and in the many Oromo names where variants such as *furi* and *furri* have different meanings. If there are several potential doubling points in a name the rendering of it often becomes ambiguous (may be seen in personal names like Taddese, Tadesse, Tadesse), and in such cases a spelling all with single consonants (e.g. Tadese) may be preferred as conventional alphabetical entry.

Hyphens are usually omitted (Wel Wel or Welwel, not Wel-Wel) because this gives more straightforward automatic sorting by computer. In many encyclopedias Wel Wel and Welwel would be sorted in the same place, but here everything before an empty space is sorted *first* and sorting "by the next word" follows thereafter.

Spelling history

The British maps of the 1940s, used here as the starting source of local names, have most of their spellings copied from Italian documents. Ethiopian maps from the 1960's and later have spellings nearer to what one would expect in the English pattern. The *Gazetteer of Ethiopia*, USA 1982, aims at being a standard (for American military purposes) but as many older Italian-type spellings have been kept there, it is not used as a general authority here.

Sometimes authors mention a rule of thumb "vowels as in Italian, consonants as in English" for the writing of Ethiopian names, and that is roughly the pattern followed also here.

Names that were found without known origin of language may be kept with e.g. Italian-looking spelling, in order not to introduce unconfirmed interpretations of the pronunciation. However, when transfer from Italian-type or French-type to English-type spelling follows an

obvious pattern (such as Giggiga or Djidjiga into Jijiga) an English-oriented spelling alternative may have been actively added during the editing of the alphabetical list for better conformity throughout the whole list. Such modification without confirmation in the sources is added mostly for consonants. Vowels when recorded by non-local speakers are often so ambiguous not only in spelling but also in sound that active "correction" is not advisable. Amharic spelling of Oromo names etc may not always be quite true to the original pronunciation (Melka or Malka best?).

Spellings derived from other than Italian and English texts may have a short explanation of what language is involved (Ger., Fre., Swe: for German, French, Swedish etc) and Ethiopian languages are indicated when explanation of the meaning of a name is attempted (A, O, Som, T for Amharic, Oromo, Somali, Tigrinya). Explanations of names as words are here derived from dictionaries and not from personal knowledge of the languages in question, so there are probably many irrelevant attempts at translation of names.

Codes for geographical identification

Map codes like HDE93 refer to squares 10x10 kilometres of the grid used in the British War Office maps. Codes used for listing give the map square in which the place is shown on the W.O. maps, not the location it ought to be by more recent data of latitude and longitude, even if these data may be cited as remarks.

Codes for additional names found on other maps than the W.O. maps have been derived from relative distances to known places.

An extra "c" as in HFF92c means "circa square HFF92" when the place is not named on the W.O. maps and its location has been roughly determined from some other source.

Geographical coordinates like 08/42 indicate Latitude North/ Longitude East with figures for degree only, and no further subdivision. The sources cannot always be trusted to give better accuracy than this.

Sources of name and position are indicated by brief codes within square brackets for the principal sources used:

- [WO] British War Office maps produced mostly from Italian originals in the early 1940's and sold openly from the late 1940's
- [AA] map sheet Addis Ababa, scale 1:250,000, prepared in Washington in 1967, published in Ethiopia in 1969
- [MS] Mapping Service: either map sheet 1:2,000,000 by the Ethiopian Mapping Service around 1969 or later maps (such as tourist maps) believed to be derived from official maps
- [LM] Location Maps produced by the Ethiopian Mapping service from the 1960's and onwards
- [LM WO]
[WO LM] when more than one source is mentioned, the code that is written first indicates the origin of the spelling used as alphabetical entry
- [Ad] Ethiopian administrative texts, such as e.g. Statistical Abstracts
- [Br] Philip Briggs, Guide to Ethiopia, Bradt Publications 1996
- [Ca] Camerapix /ed./, Spectrum guide to Ethiopia, Nairobi 1995
- [Ch] R. E. Cheesman, Lake Tana and the Blue Nile, London 1936; maps at the end of the book
- [Gz] Gazetteer of Ethiopia, Defense Mapping Agency, USA, August 1982, 663 p, about 30,500 entries (of which many *see*-references and 14% for Eritrea and names of regions).
Much of the same material is found at www.calle.com/world/Ethiopia on Internet
- [Gu] Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana, Consociazione Turistica Italiana, Milano 1938

- [Ha] W. Cornwallis Harris, *The highlands of Aethiopia*, London 1844; map opposite page 1 in volume I
- [It] Various Italian or Italian-influenced sources
- [Mi] Danilo A. Jelenc, *Mineral occurrences of Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa 1966
- [n] various newer sources published in the 1990s
- [Ne] L.M. Nesbitt, *Abyssinia unveiled. Desert and forest*. 1934 (Desert and forest. Penguin Books 1955)
/his travel was made in 1928/
- [Pa] Publications by Richard Pankhurst, especially: *The Ethiopian borderlands*. The Red Sea Press 1997
- [Po] lists of post offices
- [q] q added during the editing as an alternative to k' in the Mapping and Geography Institute's system of phonetic spelling, for example Kechema (K'ech'ema, Qechema)
- [Ro] road map published by Mobil/ETO in the 1960s
- [Te] Board of Telecommunications map and telephone directories 1954-1967, with inconsistent spellings and possibly some expatriate influence
- [Wa] war time map sheet "Schropp's Karte vom Abessinischen Kriegsschauplatz" published 1935 in Germany but with English-influenced spellings of names
- [x] source from 1900-1990 not explained in the list because it provided only a few additional names or spelling variants
- [Yo] John Young, *Peasant revolution ...*, 1997
- [18] sources from the 1800s (other than Ha = Harris)
- [20] sources published in or after year 2000
- [+ WO] the sign + in the first position indicates that the *spelling of the alphabetical entry was modified* during editing, as guided by known language patterns; spelling without the modification is also listed, with a *see*-reference added when deemed useful; variants may be given a *see*-reference even when they are rather obvious mistakes (e.g. Ahd er Rafi for Abd er Rafi) if they were found in a printed source that may have had a wide distribution

Neighbourhood of centre points

The name of a relatively important location is used for keeping together a local circular area with a radius of 10 kilometres with the principal place in the centre.

Names included/excluded

The compilation covers essentially "localities on dry land" including names of *areas not larger than an awraja* (sub-province). Foreign-language elements like Valley, Plain, Lake, Mount are never included into the local names themselves (unless the whole name is manifestly foreign like Mount Smith, Mussolini Pass, or Colaris Concession). Added Amharic words like Bota, Hayk', Tereter, very common in the Gazetteer, are not treated as being part of the name.

Names of mountains are generally included as entries, especially as there are often a village and a highly visible hill/mountain near each other having the same name. The indication Tulu, Gara, Amba etc before names of mountainous places is sometimes (but not generally) placed first in the form written for alphabetical entry.

Names of lakes and watercourses are not generally used as alphabetical entries as they cannot contain settlements, but they may occur when describing further the environment of a "place". Rivers are treated rather as valleys, and on the whole naming of areas extending across long distances is avoided.

Names of islands are usually included because they represent "land".

Springs/waterholes/wells without villages based on them are included as entries if they are marked on maps or included in the Gazetteer or otherwise useful for orientation in an area.

A rough distinction is attempted between "area" and "built-up place" (township, village, church etc) giving them separate entries even when having the same name, but especially the distinctions between "wide area" / "area" / "hill" / "mountain" is very vague as long as derived from a map and not from a description in text.

Altitude

Figures given for altitude are not to be taken as exact, especially as its reference point on the ground is seldom specified, but even so the figures should give some useful information on climate and lowland/highland character of the location. Altitude of a mountain area probably refers to a peak. Widely differing alternative figures may refer one to a built-up place and the other to a nearby hill or mountain. Differing figures found in different sources are often both (or several) cited, unless it is known which one to regard as more reliable.

Calendar

Years, months and days are given according to the Gregorian ("Western") calendar, as few of the sources used here supply also dates according to the Ethiopian calendar. When such cases are cited, the indication 'Eth. cal.' is added.

Selection of sources

The sources used so far were those near at hand to the compiler (private library, public libraries in Stockholm), and they have been studied in such order as seemed suitable for the process of filling the alphabetical list of names first and adding subject matter later.

Quantity

In late 2001 the collection corresponds to over 17,000 place and area names, with many variants of spelling. When new additions are found, they are inserted in their alphabetical place, but the intention is also at some time to supplement "backwards" to the starting list arranged in order by map codes. In late 2004 there may be 30,000 localities + *see* added.

Contents of citations

Text of the sources has often been abbreviated to keep the volume of the collection manageable. Serious researchers should go to the original texts as found from the references. Word-by-word citation is usually written between marks "---" and with exclusions indicated by -- while parts inserted by the compiler are within slashes /---/. Normal parentheses (---) indicate that they were found in the original and were copied from there.

Texts longer than about half a page are seldom cited in full, so there the original source will be important.

Sources may have political, religious or ethnic bias and this has in principle also been kept in all citations so that the character of the source shall not be hidden. In some contexts explicit use of the contents may be controversial.

The compiler (Bernhard Lindahl) regards 'Local History' as a hobby project, which has filled some years, and claims no personal copyright for the text. However, many part of the text as well as pictures given references may still have their original copyright actively guarded by authors/publisher. This must be taken into account if data base or print publication is contemplated for more than excerpts. As source for research it can be used like any other source, having the special advantage that information is directly found by place names which in most cases would be impossible to actively trace by a normal researcher in catalogues of libraries and collections, as the names are scattered within documents at innumerable sites in the world.