Abstract

The seed of Orthodox Christianity sown on the land of Gedeo in the late 19th century following the state expansion to the south could survive the assault of the Fascist aggressors and could bear its fruit during the post-liberation period. The time witnessed a large-scale evangelization and the subsequent mass baptism of the local population. This was to be followed by the increasing number of newly constructed churches and expansion of their services in the region. The 1975 land nationalization policy of the Derg, however, demolished all these achievements of the EOC by dismantling the base of its economy, ye samon maret. The clergymen who based their life on the cultivation of these church lands deserted their church in search of any other means of economic survival and this was to threaten the existence of the Orthodox church among the Gedeo let alone its growth and development in the region. Though the Derg tried to mitigate this economic crisis of the church through financial subsidy, the support could not bring a meaningful solution since the amount was insignificant as compared to the large number of clergymen the church was administering by then. The problem was, therefore, to wait for its answer through the free market economic order of the post 1991 political era.

Keywords: Orthodox Christianity, holy arks, clergymen, expansion, land, economy, subsidy

1. Introduction

The Gedeo people are one of the fifty-six ethnic groups of the Southern Nation Nationalities and Peoples’ Regional State of Ethiopia and the term, Gedeo, denominates both the people and the land. The majority of the people inhabit the Gedeo land, while those numbering 300,000 reside in the region bordering the Oromia National Regional State (Taddesse Kippe, 2002:22; Mulugeta Gezahgn, 2011:1).
Gedeo Zone is bordered in the north by Sidama Zone and in the south, west and east by Oromia National Regional State. It covers an area of 1347KM² comprising six woredas (districts) namely Bule, Wonago, Yirgacheffe, Kochore, Gede and Dilla Zuria. Dilla and Yirgacheffe are also the two areas organized as town administration above the woreda structure.

Initially, the town of Dilla, which is now serving as capital of Gedeo zone, was a small village which emerged as a town in 1911/12 following the establishment of a customs office in the region by Dejjach Balcha Safo, the then governor of the region. During the Italian occupation (1936-41), the town became one of the Fascist administrative centers under the great “Oromo - Sidama” province of African Orientale Italian, AOI. Later in 1945, the town was made capital of the former [Gedeo] Awraja (sub provincial unit) of the then [Sidama] Teqlay Gizat(province) (Aklilu Habtu, 2001:15; National Urban Planning Institute, 1998: 1-22).

According to the 2007 census report, 10.6% of the total population of Gedeo are reported to be followers of Orthodox Christianity (FDRE Population Census Commission Central Statistical Agency, 2010). The aim of the present paper is, therefore, to explore how this religion of Orthodox Christianity evolved and developed among the Gedeo prior to the dawn of the EPRDF regime.

2. The Inception and Development of Orthodox Christianity among the Gedeo to 1936

After Christianity became the state religion of Ethiopia in the fourth century AD, it made its way to the southern part of the country during the early medieval time and this was to result in the introduction of the religion among the Gurage, Walayta, Kambata, Gamo and Kaffa (Bahru Zewde, 1998:35; Taddesse Tamrat, 1972:20). In the case of the Gedeo land, however, it was to wait for the incorporation of the region into modern Ethiopian empire under Menilek II in the late 19th century (Charles W. McClellan, 1988:21).

Emperor Menilik II led his forces against the Gedeo land in 1895 under the command of one of his generals, Dejjazmach Leulseged, and the conquering forces came through the eastern direction of Gedeoland departing from their temporary center at Shisha in Sidama. It was during this course of Emperor Menilik II’s expansion towards Gedeo that the seeds of Christianity were sown on the land of Gedeo as the experience was also common among the other southern regions brought under the Christian empire during the same time (Charles W. McClellan, 1978:60).
Bule, one of the districts in the current Gedeo zone, became the first site for the erection of the first Orthodox church in Gedeo land. *Dejjazmach* Leulseged, Commander in Chief of Emperor Menilik II’s force, constructed the 1st Orthodox church in Bule in 1895 following his camping in the region and dedicated the abode to the holy ark of the Holy Trinity (*Kidist Selassie*). Consequently, the religious functionaries or clergymen arrived in the region as agents of Christianity in Gedeo land and became part of *tiklegnoch* (those who settled first in the region). They actively preached Christianity in the region thereby baptizing the new converts (Charles W. McClellan, 1988:23; Ye Bule Kidist Selassie Betekrestian, 1994 Ethiopian Calendar [EC]:1). Among these early clergymen coming to the Gedeo land and preaching Orthodox Christianity in the region were *Memrie* Wondimu Mitike, *Memrie* Gebretsadik Araya-Yohannis and *Memrie* Woldeyesus Segedu who stayed in the region till the end of their life (Oral informants: *Ato* Asamnew Feyisa, *Memrie* Sahle Dinku and *Memrie* Ayele Uddo).

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, there had been a tradition among the clergymen who formed the elite group of the society that they enjoyed a particular right to be assumed by their family members who want to preserve their priestly occupation (Tadesse, 1972: 112-113). Similarly, those clergymen coming first to the Gedeo land followed such a tradition. Some of the priests who worked even to these days in the earliest churches of Bule, Wonago, Yirgachefe, Fisehagenet and Dilla were succeeded by their respective family members enjoying the same right (Oral informants: *Aba* Nigussie Wolde-Tensay, *Woyzero* Sihne Tseg, *Ato* Zenebe Mamo and *Memrie* Adane Tsegaye). These clergymen also played an active role in laying the foundation of traditional education in Gedeo land starting *yegestihirt* (church school) to the local community and this was to become the only educational institute during this pre-Italian occupation period (Oral informants: *Ato* Birru Gada, *Ato* Mamusha Asrat, *Haji* Mehdi Shifa, *Memrie* Tilahun Birru, *Memrie* Dejenie Tseg, *Memrie* Sahle Dinku, *Ato* Asamnew Feyisa and *Ato* Zenebe Mamo).

The assigned local and regional governors were also active players in founding more churches in Gedeo land (McClellan, 1988:187). *Dejjazmach* (the future *Ras*) Leulseged Atnafseged, *Dejjazmach* Balcha Safo (*Aba* Nefso), *Fitawrari* Tessema Abdi, *Fitawrari* Melka and *Ras* Desta Damtew were good examples in this regard. Particularly, *Dejjach* Balcha and *Ras* Desta Damtew helped to erect the larger number of churches as compared to the rest regional governors mentioned above. For instance, *Ras* Desta, who was appointed as governor of the then [Sidama] province in 1932, established four churches namely, Kebado Michael (now in Sidama Zone), Dumarso Giyorgis, Chiriku Medihane’alam, and Fisihagenet Michael churches (Archival source dated Pagumie 3/1962EC with Ref. No. 491/62). Supporting this view, Almaw also states that there were about eighteen Orthodox Churches in [Sidama] *Tekleaygizat*, before 1935 out of which seven were constructed by *Ras* Desta four of which are found in the current Gedeo zone (Almaw Kifle, 2005:64).

Similarly, *Dejjach* Balcha, who was later replaced by *Dejjach* Luelseged, came to Bule and camped at a specific place called *Gooro* Balcha (locally called Balcha’s hill being named after his arrival in the region) and erected his first church in the region named *tabota Kidanemihiret* (the church of Kidanemihiret). However, when *Dejjach* Balcha left Bule for Abarra and then to Hagereselam in 1900, he took the holy ark with him and finally planted it at the town of Hagereselam permanently (Ye Bule Kidist Selassie Betekrestian Zikre Tarik, 1994EC: 1-2; Oral Informants: *Memrie* Sahle Dinku, *Ato* Asamnew Feyisa and *Memrie* Ayele Uddo).

*Dejjach* Balcha ruled the then [Sidama] governorate general for some twenty-five years: 1898 – 1908, 1910- 1914, 1917- 1928 (McClellan, 1988:38). During this time, therefore, he became instrumental in the foundation of many more churches in Gedeo land. Except, Bule *Kidist* Selassie church, which was constructed by *Ras* Leulseged in 1895, almost half of the remaining oldest churches in the region were constructed by *Dejjach* Balcha (Archival source dated Pagumie 3/1962EC with Ref. No. 491/62). Almaw Kifle even argues that Bule Kidist Selassie church itself was constructed by *Dejjach* Balcha himself (Almaw Kifle, 2005:64). This argument, however, lacks strength since the church was constructed three
years before Balcha’s appointment as governor of the region, i.e. the church’s construction was in 1895, while Balcha’s appointment was in 1898 (McClellan, 1988:37; Ye Bule Kidist Selassie Betekrestian Zikre Tarik, 1994EC:1).

Generally, the following table summarizes the list of those early churches in Gedeo land established by the regional governors of the then period particularly during the pre-Fascist occupation period:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Zone</th>
<th>Current woreda</th>
<th>Name of the church</th>
<th>Year of foundation</th>
<th>Name of the founding regional lord</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gedeo</td>
<td>Bule</td>
<td>Bule Selassie</td>
<td>1895/6</td>
<td>Ras Leul Seged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gedeo</td>
<td>Bule</td>
<td>Mendo Michael</td>
<td>1915/6</td>
<td>Dejjach Balcha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gedeo</td>
<td>Bule</td>
<td>Laba Giyorgis</td>
<td>1928/9</td>
<td>Fitawrari Tessema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gedeo</td>
<td>Dilla Zuria</td>
<td>Chichu Gabriel</td>
<td>1925/6</td>
<td>Dejjach Balcha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gedeo</td>
<td>Wonago</td>
<td>Wonago Mariyam</td>
<td>1924/5</td>
<td>Dejjach Balcha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gedeo</td>
<td>Yirgachaffe</td>
<td>Dumarso Giyorgis</td>
<td>1933/4</td>
<td>Ras Desta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gedeo</td>
<td>Yirgachaffe</td>
<td>Chiriku Medhanealem</td>
<td>1933/4</td>
<td>Ras Desta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gedeo</td>
<td>Yirgachaffe</td>
<td>Kedida Teklehaimanot</td>
<td>1928/9</td>
<td>Fitawrari Melka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gedeo</td>
<td>Kochore</td>
<td>Fisihagenet Michael</td>
<td>1934/5</td>
<td>Ras Desta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SegenAkababiHizboch</td>
<td>Amarro*</td>
<td>KeleGiyorgis</td>
<td>1925/6</td>
<td>Dejjach Balcha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guji</td>
<td>Uraga*</td>
<td>Debre Guda Mariam</td>
<td>1920/1</td>
<td>Dejjach Balcha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidama</td>
<td>Darra¹</td>
<td>Kebado Michael</td>
<td>1932/3</td>
<td>Ras Desta</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Archival source dated Pagumie 3/1962EC with Ref. No. 491/62 (Available at Gedeo Zone Diocese Office)

From the above churches, the holy arks of those churches namely Laba Giyorgis, Mendo Michael and Wonago Mariyam churches were believed to have been brought from Bule Kidist Selassie church, while those of Fisihagenet Michael and Dumarso Giyorgis churches were believed to have been brought from Debre Guda and Goro Genet Mariam churches respectively (Oral informants: Memrie Sahle Dinku, Ato Asamnew Feyisa and Memrie Hiruy Kasa; Finote Loza, 1999EC:7; Ye Fisihagenet Kidus Mikael Betekrestian Hintsa Mireka Metsihet, 1998EC:7; Ye Dumarso Kidus Giyorgis Betekrestian Hintsa Mirikat, 1997EC:3).

No matter how there observed an expansion in the construction of churches in Gedeo land during this pre-Fascist occupation period, the conversion of the local people to the religion was not in large scale and the reason seems that the church was not active in preaching and converting the people during this early period. This development was rather to wait for the post-liberation period as it will be discussed in the forthcoming topics (Johnney Bakke, 1998:161).

2.1. Orthodox Christianity among the Gedeo during the Fascist Occupation Period (1936-41)

The arrival of the Fascist force in Gedeo land was not an easy task since the aggressors faced a stiff resistance from the Ethiopian force of the region commanded by Dejjach Debay Wolde-Amanuel. His forces successfully resisted the Fascists for more than three months, particularly from 4th July 1936 – 6th October 1936. When the Fascists assumed the air superiority, however, Dejjach Debay and his forces handed over their position. At the final battlefield of Jabassire near Hageremariam (today’s Bulehora town) on 6th October 1936, Dejjach Debay died and consequently, the Fascists penetrated the southern part of Gedeo land. This, on the other hand, created a good opportunity for the dissatisfied local people to

¹ These districts were under Gedeo territory by then.
avenge their expropriating *balabats*. The local community rose in opposition and began to attack the lords, who made them *gabbar* on their land (Seife-Sellasse Aba Wollo, 1953EC:104-105, 107-109; Harold G. Marcus, 1996:173; Oral Informants: *Aba* Belay Molla, *Ato* Birru Gada, *Ato* Mamusha Asrat, *Memrie* Tilahun Birru and *Ato* Zenebe Mamo). As a result, clergymen of the Orthodox churches, who were highly favored and protected by the lords, began to abandon the area and migrate to the north taking the holy arks with them. The churches of Wonago Mariam, Bule Kidist Sellassie, Kedida Teklehaimanot and Dummarso Giyorgis could be good examples in this regard. Their holy arks were taken by the clergymen because of the above incidence and the churches remained closed for the coming five years until the withdrawal of the Fascist force from the region (Finote Loza, 1999EC:35).

Most of the holy arks were harbored in caves within the territory of Gedeo, particularly in its northern and northeastern part where Fascist’s influence was limited. The holy arks of Bule Selassie, Amaro Giyorgis and Kedida Teklehaimanot were, for instance, harbored in areas of the northern and northeastern part of Gedeo near Dilla town. While those holy arks of the churches of Wonago Mariam and Dummarso Giyorgis were taken out of Gedeo territory and harbored in Midrekebed *Abune* Gebre-Manfaskidus monastery (currently in Gurage zone) and in Shewa respectively. With the exception of the holy ark of Dummarso Giyorgis taken to Shewa by a priest named *Memrie* Habte-Selassie, therefore, the rest holy arks were returned to their original places in Gedeo when the Fascists withdrew from the region in 1941 (FinoteLoza, 1999EC:35; *Ye Dumarso Kidus Giyorgis Betekrestian Hintsa Miraqa Bā’al*, 1997EC:2; Oral informants: *Woizero* Sihne Tesga, *Aba* Niguse Wolde-Tensay, *Memrie* Tesfa Golah, *Ato* Molla Wolde-Gebrigel and *Memrie* Dejene Tesga).

The current St George holy ark of Dummarso Giyorgis was brought by *Kegnazmach* Habteyes Moges, *Kegnacmach* Wolde-Michael and *Ato* Teshale Wolde-Michael from Goro Mariam church, in which it was in roommate with the holy ark of St Mary (*Ye Dumarso Kidus Giyorgis Betekrestian Hintsa Miraqa Bā’al*, 1997EC:2; Oral informants: *Memrie* Tesfa Golah and *Ato* Molla Wolde-Gebrigel).

The migration of the clergymen to the northern part of Gedeo together with their holy arks also helped the foundation of the two new churches of Giyorgis (Dama) and Teklehaimanot in the town of Dilla, though the latter disappeared following the return of the holy ark to its original place at Kedida (Oral Informants: *Aba* Belay Molla, *Ato* Birru Gada, *Ato* Mamusha Asrat, *Memrie* Tilahun Birru and *Memrie* Adane Tesgaye).

### 2.2. Orthodox Christianity among the Gedeo during the post-liberation Period (1941-1974)

The withdrawal of the Fascists and the subsequent restoration of the imperial throne witnessed the revival and large-scale expansion of the Orthodox church in Gedeo (Albert E. Brant, 1992:4). Particularly, in the attempt of redressing the gap created as a result of the divide and rule policy of the Fascist Italians, the restored emperor, Haile-Selassie, seemed to have determined to uphold societal assimilation by Christianizing the indigenous people. Hence, between 1941 – 1974, many more Orthodox Churches were constructed in Gedeoland unlike the preceding periods (McClelan, 1988:144-146).

The idea seems to have been in line with the Ethiopian kings who believed that religious uniformity could result in political unity and integrity in the country (Eyayu Leulseged, 1990:6). Underlining this idea, McClelan also writes: “He [Emperor Haile-Selassie] decreed that the church should sponsor mass baptism in the south, believing that the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, like the monarchy, could help unify the country” (McClelan, 1988:145). Above all, the emperor was strongly committed and implemented his plan by using the church as integral part of his government. As George A. Lipsky clearly indicates, “… the church is like a sword and the government is like an arm; therefore, the sword cannot cut by itself without the use of arm” (George Lipsky, 1962:101). It seems partly because of this strong belief that the restored emperor decreed mass baptism. As a result, the clergies together with...
the land lords and government agents held a wide preaching campaign and enforced the emperor’s decree of mass conversion among the Gedeo in 1942 (Johnney Bakke, 1998:161; Yared Hassen, 1995:6). The Gedeo people were, therefore, baptized in mass along the banks of great rivers after having shaved their hair and they received the Holy Communion thereafter. As a common practice of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, they were also given baptismal names and tied at their neck a mateb, a chord which identified them as member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Albert E. Brant, 1992:4; Wondye Ali, 1990EC:71; Oral informants: Ato Asamnew, Ato Deyaso Bore and Ato Zenebe Mamo). This mass conversion, therefore, facilitated for the construction of additional new churches in Gedeoland like the churches of Ayte Michael in Wonago in 1941/42, Bula Michael in Dilla Zuria in 1945/46, Chorso Kidist Maryam in 1942/3 and Debandibe Abuna Gebra Manfaskidus in 1942/43, both in Gedeb district, and Wudesa Medhanalem church in 1945/6 in the district of Yirgacheffe. However, no new church was established in the district of Kochole during the first five years of the post liberation period except the church of Tore Giyorgis founded in 1945/46 and now located in the Tore Woreda of Borena Zone of Oromia Regional State (Ye Bule Kidist Selassie Betekrestrial Zikre Tarik, 1994EC: 1-2; Oral informants: Memrie Sahle Dinku, Ato Asamnew Feyisa and Memrie Ayele Uddo).

The post liberation period also witnessed the return of the exiled holy arks and their treasures in to their respective localities in Gedeo. The holy ark of Bule Selassie was, for-instance, returned to its original place in Bule town after four years of exile and the process of return was facilitated by Balambaras Dollo Shondo. Similarly, the holy ark of Wonago Mareyam was initially transferred to a locality called Bukisa by Kagnazmach Gumi Kumbicha, balabat of the neighboring Guji Oromo, and finally to its original place in Wonago by Fitawrari Demise Wolde-Tsadik, governor of the district, in 1946 (Finote Loza, 1999EC:55; Metshafe Ginzet, 1925; Oral informants: Memrie Sahle Dinku, Ato Asamnew Feyisa and Memrie Ayele Uddo). As noted in the above discussion, the original holy ark of Dumarso Giyorgis, however, remained in its exile area in Shewa.

Most of the churches during the post liberation period began to be constructed by Christian communities of the respective districts unlike the pre-Fascist occupation period during which most of the churches were constructed by the regional governors and land lords. Except the three churches of Debeka Teklehaimanot, Mora Gebriel and Bula Michael, the rest churches of the post liberation period were constructed by the labor and money contributions of the local Christian communities in Gedeo (Archival source dated Hidar 23/1957 E.C with Ref. No 542/57; Oral informants: Ato Molla Wolde-Gebriel, Ato Teklearegay Asdegdig and Ato Bedecha Ware).

There was no church in Yirgacheffe town until the establishment of the church of Kidanemihiret in 1953/54. The reason was that Dumarso was the earlier capital of Yirgacheffe mikitil woreda and hence, the church of Dumarso Giyorgis was actively attended by people of Yirgacheffe. With the rising number of Christian population of the town and the increasing difficulty to transport corpse of deceased individuals form Yirgacheffe to Dumarso, however, there necessitated for the establishment of the church of Kidanemihiret in Yirgacheffe in 1953/54. The holy ark was brought from Yirgalem and the contribution of those individuals like Ato Kebede Gete, Shambal Gebreyes and Memrie Haile was so paramount in this regard (Yirgacheffe Kidist Kidanemihiret Betekrestrial Hintsa Yamiraka Ba’al,1996EC:6-7; Mulgeta Gezahgen, 2011:28; Oral informants: Ato Molla Wolde-Gebriel, Ato Teklearegay Asdegdig and Memrie Tesfa Golah). The abode was initially constructed at Wanata. It was then moved to Suke and finally to its present site in Yirgacheffe town (Oral informants: Ato Molla Wolde-Gebriel and Ato Teklearegay Asdegdig).

The other feature of Orthodox Christianity among the Gedeo during this post liberation period was the strong competition in preaching it faced from the Protestant mission churches. The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) and the Norwegian Lutheran Missionary (NLM) were active Protestant mission churches in Gedeo by then. In the attempt of counter balancing this challenge, therefore, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church established a gospel preaching association known as Sewasewe-Brihan-Hiwot Sibkete Wongel
Mahiber in 1962/63 and the association could play a role in maintaining the church followers from being diverted to the missionaries (Archival source dated Tahisas 10/1955EC with Ref. No. 149/35/55).

2.3. Orthodox Christianity among the Gedeo during the Derg Regime (1974-1991)

One basic feature in the history of Orthodox Christianity in Ethiopia during the Derg regime was its separation from the state. During the pre-1974 period, the church was enjoying the strong backing of the religious Ethiopian monarchs as highlighted in the previous discussions. Following the coming to power of the Derg, however, all those special privileges the church used to enjoy for centuries were taken over and consequently, the church was exposed to serious economic crises (Oydnd M. Eide,2000:111). Because of the land nationalization proclamation issued by the Derg on 4th March 1975, all the church lands known locally as ye samon marat were taken over from the church and handed to the peasants. This measure, therefore, made some two hundred thousand clergy members of the church landless and hence, left them without any means of economic survival. It seems that it was in the attempt of redressing these socio-economic crises of the clergies that the Derg began to donate annual subsidy to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) since 1979 (Eide,2000:111). It was also because of this subsidy that some forty-five Orthodox churches in Gedeo Awrajja received annual subsidy amounting 4,635.00ETB from the patriarchate office in 1979 (Archival source dated Tir 1972EC with Ref. No. 384/1.36/72). This government’s financial support to the church continued even after the fall of Derg, particularly until 1993 (Archival source dated Miyazia 18, 1985EC with Ref. No. 456/1.36/85).

The economic crisis the EOC faced following the land nationalization policy of the Derg also caused the marginalization of the clergy members in the socio-economic system and their subsequent migration to other areas taking their holy arks and church treasures. Hence, many churches were closed and the surviving churches also limited their services. Particularly in the then Gedeo Awrajja, most of the churches stopped their services to their congregation due to the absence of clergy members and the subsequent migration of the holy arks to churches of major urban centers of the province. For instance, the holy ark of Chorso Kidist Mariam in Gedeb Woreda migrated and took shelter in Chichu Gebriel church near Dilla town on 8th May 1975. Similarly, the holy ark of Dibandibe Abuna Gabra-Manfaskidus of the same district was brought and placed in the church of Kidanemihiret of Yirgacheffe town in August 1975, and the holy ark stayed there until its return to its former site in 2002/03 (Archival source dated Miyazia 30, 1967EC with Ref. No. 227/67). The same was also to happen to the two holy arks of Debeka Teklehaimanot and Mora Gebriel: The former migrated and was placed in the church of Chelelektu Medhanalem in 1976, while the latter in the above Kidanemihiret church of Yirgacheffe town and it stayed there until its return to its original place in the same 2002/03 like the holy ark of Dibandibe Abuna Gabra-Manfaskidus (Archival source dated Miyazia 30, 1967EC with Ref. No. 227/67; archival source dated Nehassie 13, 1967EC with Ref. No. 313/67; archival source dated Tikimt 30, 1969EC with Ref. No. 04/69; Oral informants: Ato Adane Bekele, Deacon Akililu Negash, Ato Molla Wolde-Gebriel and Ato Teklearegay Asdegdig).

The desertion of the numerous rural churches in Gedeo by their serving clergy members also exposed their holy arks and church treasures for stealing and robbery. From Amarro Woreda, for instance, three holy arks were stolen at a time in May 1975 (Archival source dated Ginbot 7/1967EC with Ref. No. 1061/67). The holy ark of Abune Teklehaimanot from Chelelektu Medhanalem and that of Tabote Giyorgis from Dumarso were also stolen in 1985 and 1988 respectively (Archival source dated Tahisas 9/1981EC with Ref. No. 941/81). It was fearing this stealing of the holy arks that the holy ark of Aytle Michael was brought initially to Dama Giyorgis and then to Abune Gebre-Manfaskidus in Dilla town (Oral informants: Memrie Tilahun Birru, Memrie Meseret Negussie and Ato Mamusha Asrat).

Many of the churches also lost their treasures during the period under discussion. In this regard, Kabado Michael, Bule Selassie and Wonago Mariam churches can be mentioned as good examples. The first two churches lost their treasures in December 1977, while the last church in April 1978 (Archival

Conclusion

Orthodox Christianity made its way to Gedeo land in the late 19th century following the territorial expansion process of Emperor Menilik II to the region. Representatives of the imperial throne in the area played an active role in entrenching and consolidating the faith among the local people during this early period. The Fascist aggression, however, threatened the growth of the church in Gedeo land as it stood against whatever favored by the pre-existing imperial administration. The clergymen migrated together with their holy arks and as a result, most of the churches remained closed providing no service to their congregation. The withdrawal of the Fascist force and the subsequent restoration of the imperial throne, however, witnessed the rebirth of the Orthodox church on the soil of Gedeo reversing its preceding marginalized position. Most of the migrating clergymen and their holy arks were returned to their original places and resumed their services. The large-scale evangelization and the subsequent mass baptism of the local people the church conducted during this period also proved the rising number of local converts and the subsequent beginning in the construction of new churches by the local people themselves unlike the preceding periods. The land nationalization policy of the Derg, however, drained the basic means of survival of the Orthodox clergymen by taking over their large tracts of land. This, therefore, exposed the church to the second era of difficulty next to the Fascist occupation period. Following the migration of the clergymen as a result of their loss of ye samon maret, most of the churches of particularly rural areas of Gedeo became closed again and their holy arks were transferred to those churches in and around urban centers. The stealing of holy arks and robbing of the priceless treasures also became prevalent in most of the churches since they were left without protecting clergymen. Though the government tried to mitigate this crisis through financial subsidy to the church, the support could not bring a meaningful solution since the amount was insignificant as compared to the large number of clergymen the church was administering by then. In general, the heavy dependence of the EOC’s economy on land seriously challenged its survival among the Gedeo during the Derg regime and this was to find its answer in the free market economic order of the post 1991 political era.

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2.3. Books


### III. List of Oral Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Place of Interview</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Adane Bekele (Ato)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Dilla</td>
<td>02/05/2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Adane Tsegaye (Memrie)</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Chichu</td>
<td>29/11/2015</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Aklilu Negash (Deacon)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Yirgachefe</td>
<td>06/11/2015</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Asamew Feyisa (Ato)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Bule</td>
<td>26/11/2015</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Ayele Uddo (Memrie)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Bule</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Bedecha Ware (Ato)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Dilla</td>
<td>11/04/2015</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Belay Molla (Abba)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Chichu</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Biru Geda (Ato)</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Dejene Tesga (Memrie)</td>
<td>82</td>
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<td>11/01/2015</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Deyaso Bore (Ato)</td>
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<td>Heruy Kassa (Memrie)</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Mamusha Asrat (Ato)</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Mehdi Shifa (Hajji)</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Guangua</td>
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<td>15.</td>
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<td>Yirgachefe</td>
<td>28/02/2015</td>
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<td>Sahle Dinku (Memrie)</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Sihne Tesga (W/ro)</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>Tesfa Golah (Memrie)</td>
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<td>Dumarso</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Zenebe Golah (Ato)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Dilla</td>
<td>11/03/2015</td>
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