



## Orthodox Christianity among the Gedeo, Southern Ethiopia: Inception and Development to 1991

Sintayehu Demeke Kassa\*; Buruk Wolde-Michael Jima\*\*; Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa\*\*

\*Hawassa College of Teachers' Education, Ethiopia  
E-mail: sintayehudemek@gmail.com

\*\*Jimma University, Department of History and Heritage Management, Ethiopia  
E-mail: buruk.woldemichael@gmail.com , tseg\_zlk@yahoo.com

Corresponding author: Buruk Wolde-Michael Jima, E-mail: buruk.woldemichael@gmail.com

<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v7i5.1873>

---

### **Abstract**

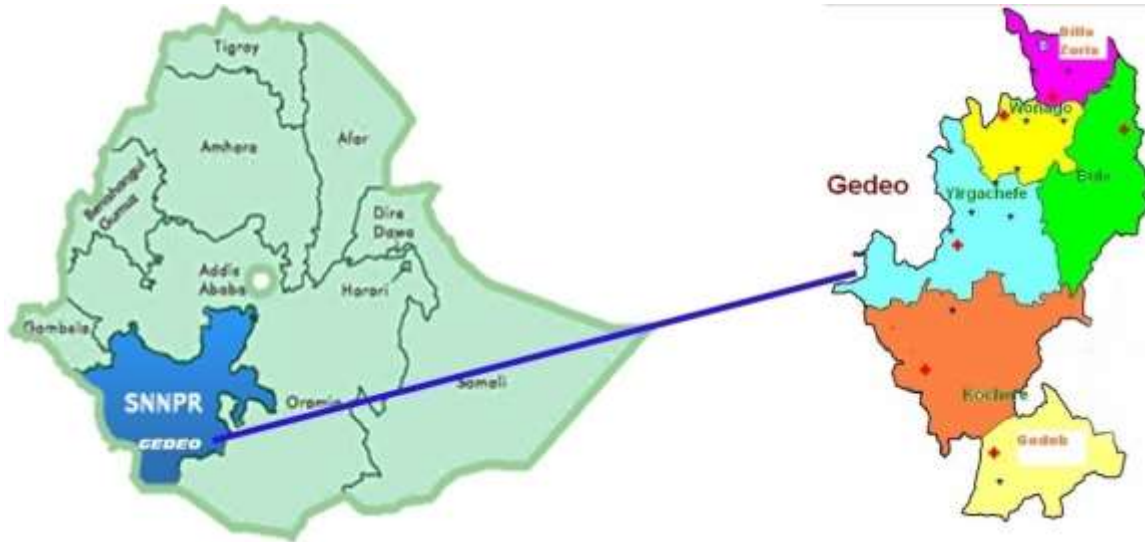
The seed of Orthodox Christianity sown on the land of Gedeo in the late 19th century following the state expansion to the south could survive the assault of the Fascist aggressors and could bear its fruit during the post-liberation period. The time witnessed a large-scale evangelization and the subsequent 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, denotes 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 (Tadesse Kippe, 2002:22; Mulugeta Gezahegn, 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 1347KM<sup>2</sup> comprising six *woredas* (districts) namely Bule, Wonago, Yirgacheffe, Kochore, Gedeb and Dilla *Zuria*. Dilla and Yirgacheffe are also the two areas organized as town administration above the *woreda* structure.



Source: <http://www.bestbridge.org/locations/about-snnpr/>

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; Tadesse 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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, Yirgacheffe, Fisehagenet and Dilla were succeeded by their respective family members enjoying the same right (Oral informants: *Aba* Nigussie Wolde-Tensay, *Woyzero* Sihne Tsega, *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 *yeqestimhirt* (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 Tsega, *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 Fisehagenet Michael churches (Archival source dated Pagumie 3/1962EC with Ref. No. 491/62). Supporting this view, Almwaw 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 (Almwaw 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). Almwaw Kifle even argues that Bule *Kidist* Selassie church itself was constructed by *Dejjach* Balcha himself (Almwaw 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:

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

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 4<sup>th</sup> July 1936 – 6<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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-Sellassie 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* Selassie, Kedida Teklehaimanot and Dumarso 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 Fascists' influence was limited. The holy arks of Bule Selassie, Amarro 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 Dumarso 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 Dumarso 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 Hintsä Miraqa Ba'al*, 1997E.C:2; Oral informants: *Woizero* Sihne Tesga, *Aba* Niguse Wolde-Tensay, *Memrie* Tesfa Golah, *Ato* Molla Wolde-Gebriel and *Memrie* Dejene Tesga).

The current St George holy ark of Dumarso 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 Hintsä Miraqa Ba'al*, 1997E.C:2; Oral informants: *Memrie* Tesfa Golah and *Ato* Molla Wolde-Gebriel).

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 (McClellan, 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, McClellan 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" (McClellan, 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 Aytel 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 Medhanealem church in 1945/6 in the district of Yirgacheffe. However, no new church was established in the district of Kochore 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 Betekrestian 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:35; 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 Debeke 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 *mikital 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 from 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 Betekrestian Hintsu Yamiraka Ba'al*, 1996EC:6-7; Mulugeta Gezahegn, 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 (Oydn M. Eide, 2000:111). Because of the land nationalization proclamation issued by the *Derg* on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1975, all the church lands known locally as *ye samon maret* were taken over from the church and handed to the peasants. This measure, therefore, made some two hundred thousand clergymen 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 *Awrajjja* 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. 456/1.361/85).

The economic crisis the EOC faced following the land nationalization policy of the *Derg* also caused the marginalization of the clergymen 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 *Awrajjja*, most of the churches stopped their services to their congregation due to the absence of clergymen 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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 Medhanialem 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 Aklilu Negash, *Ato* Molla Wolde-Gebriel and *Ato* Teklearegay Asdegdig).

The desertion of the numerous rural churches in Gedeo by their serving clergymen 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 Medhanialem 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 Nigussie 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

source dated Hidar 29/1970EC with Ref. No. 10/70; archival source dated Tahisas 17/1970EC with Ref. No. 30/70 and archival source dated Megabit 27/1970EC with Ref. No. 10/5/70). The same was also to happen in the two churches of Dilla town namely Dama Giyorgis and *Abune* Gebre-Manfaskidus in November 1988 (Archival source dated Tahisas 9/1981EC with Ref. No. 941/81). Generally speaking, the *Derg* regime was largely a challenging season for Orthodox Christianity to grow and prosper in Gedeo land.

## Conclusion

Orthodox Christianity made its way to Gedeo land in the late 19<sup>th</sup> 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 mare*t, 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.

## References

### I. Unpublished Sources

#### 1.1. Archival sources available at Gedeo zone office of the diocese

A letter from *Sewasew Birhan Sibkata Wongel* to [Sidama] *Teqlay Gizat*, dated Tahisas 10, 1955E.C. with Ref.No.149/35/55.

A letter from [Sidama] Province to Gedeo *Awraja* office of the diocese dated Tir 1972E.C. with Ref. No.384/136/72.

A letter from [Sidama] Province to Gedeo Zone office of the diocese dated Miyazia 18,1985E.C. with Ref. No.456/1/361/85.

A letter from [Gedeo] *Awraja* office of the diocese to *Gebez* of Dibandibe *Abuna* Gabra Manfaskidus dated Nehassie13, 1967E.C. with Ref. No.313/67.



- A letter from [Gedeo] *Awraja* to [Sidama] province office of the diocese (List of churches) dated Pagumie 03, 1962E.C. with Ref. No.491/62.
- A letter from *Gebez* of Debeka Teklehaimanot to [Gedeo] *Awraja* office of the diocese dated Tikimt 30, 1969E.C. with Ref. No.4/67.
- A letter from [Gedeo] *Awraja* office of the diocese to Zelalem Birru, *Gebez* of Chorso St Mary Church, dated Miyaziya 30, 1967E.C. with Ref. No.227/67.
- A letter from Melese Desta, head of Fisiha Genet *woreda*, to [Gedeo] *Awraja* governor dated Hidar 23, 1957E.C. with Ref. No.542/57.
- A letter form Tarekegn Aleme, Amarro *Woreda* administrator, to [Gedeo] *Awraja* office of the diocese dated Ginbot 7, 1967E.C. with Ref. No, 1061/ 67.
- A letter from Kabado Michael Church to [Gedeo] *Awraja* office of the diocese dated Hidar 29, 1970E.C. with Ref. No. 10/70.
- A letter from Wonago Mariam Church to Wanago *Woreda* Police Office dated Megabit 27, 1970E.C. with Ref. No. 10/5/70.
- A letter from Bule *Woreda Betekihinet* to Bule *Woreda* Administration Office dated Tahisas 17, 1970 E.C. with Ref. No. 30/70.
- A letter from Gedeo *Awraja* office of the diocese to the five *Woreda* Offices of the Church dated Tahisas 9, 1981EC with Ref. No. 941/81.

## 1.2. Manuscripts

- “Metsehafe Ginzet.” (Book of prayers for the dead)(Available at Bule Selassie Church).
- National Urban Planning Institute. (1998 E.C) “Report on the Development Plan of Dilla Town.”
- “Ya Bule Kidist Selassie Betekrestian Zikre Tarik.” (1994 E.C.) (A history of Bule Kidist Selassie Church) (Available at Bule Selassie Church).

## 1.3. Theses and dissertations

- Aklilu Habtu. (2001). “The socio-economic and administrative development in Dilla town: 1900 – 1974.” BEd. Thesis, Dilla College of Teacher Education and Health Sciences, History.
- Almaw Kifle (2005). “A History of Sidama People, c.1889 -1991.” MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University (AAU), History.
- McClellan, Charles W. (1978) “Reaction to Ethiopian expansionism: The Case of [Gedeo] 1895-1935.” PhD Dissertation, Michigan State University, History.
- Mulugeta Gezahegn (2011). “A History of Yirgacheffe *Woreda* 1934/5-1999.” MA Thesis, AAU, History).
- Yared Hassen (1995). “Hardships hasten church growth: The case of Dilla District, 1955-1992.” BTh. Thesis, Addis Ababa Mekaneyesus Seminary, Theology.

## II. Published Sources

### 2.1. Official Publications and Newspapers

*Finote Loza ze Orthodox Tewahdo, Ye Wonago Kidist Mariyam Betekrestian* (A Bulletin prepared for the inauguration ceremony of Wonago St. Mary Church) 1999E.C.

*Ye Dumarso Kidus Giyorgis Beta Kristian Hints Mireqa Ba'al* (A Bulletin prepared for the inauguration ceremony of Dumarso St. George Church) 1997E.C.

*Ye Fisiha Genet Kidus Mikael Betekrestian Hints Mireqa Metsihet* (A Bulletin prepared for the inauguration ceremony of Fisiha Genet St Michael Church) 1998E.C.

*Yirgacheffe Kidist Kidanemihiret Betekrestian Hints Mireqa Ba'al* (A Bulletin prepared for the inauguration ceremony of Yirgacheffe St. Kidanemihiret Church) 1996E.C.

FDRE Population Census Commission Central Statistical Agency. 2010. *The 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia, Results for SNNPRS Statistical Report on Population Size and Characteristics. Part One*. Addis Ababa.

### 2.2. Book Chapters

Bakke, Johnney. (1998). "Models of leadership in Ethiopia: the missionary contribution" in *the Missionary factor in Ethiopian society, papers from a symposium, August 1996*. Ed. Getachew Haile, Aaslav Lande, et al. peter Lang. Lund University.

Eyayu Leulseged (1990) "Why do the Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia identify their faith with their nation?" in *Proceedings of the First National Conference of Ethiopian Studies Addis Ababa, April 11-12, 1990*, Ed. Pankhurst, Richard, Ahmed Zakaria *etal*. Addis Ababa.

### 2.3. Books

Bahru Zewde (1998). *A Short History of Ethiopia and the Horn*. Addis Ababa.

Brant, Albert E. (1992). *In the Wake of Martyr: A Modern Saga in Ancient Ethiopia*. Canada.

Eide, Oyand M. (2000) *Revolution and religion in Ethiopia: The Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974 - 85*. Addis Ababa, Athens, Oxford.

Lipsky, George A. (1962) *Ethiopia: its people, its society, its culture*. Washington.

Markakis, John. (2006) *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a traditional polity*. Addis Ababa.

Marcus, Harold G. (1996). *Haile Selassie I: The Formative Years, 1692-1936*, Lawrecevile, Asmara.

McClellan, Charles W. (1988) *State Transformation and National Integration: Gedeo and the Ethiopian Empire, 1895-1935*. African studies center, East Lansing, Michigan State University.

Saife-Selassie Aba wollo.(1953E.C.). *Ya tarik qirs: the 1928 E.C.ye Dabub Itayoopia ya Sidamo torinet: Ye jagnochu getoch yene kibur Ras Desta Damtew ye hiwot tarik (The legacy of history: The 1935/6 war in [Sidama] of southern Ethiopia, The campaign of the heroes: his excellency Ras Dasta Damtew’)*, Addis Ababa.

Tadesse Kippe. (2002). *Five Thousand Years of Sustainability?A Case Study on Gedeo Land Use*. Wagengen.

Taddesse Tamrat (1972). *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527*. Oxford.

Wondye Ali.(1990E.C) *Bamakara Wust Yababach Betekrestian: Ya Iteyopia Kale Hiywot Betekrestian Tarik: 1920-1933E.C. (‘ A Church flourishing in hardships: The History of Ethiopian Kale Hiywot Church: 1928-1941) Vol .1*. Addis Ababa.

### III. List of Oral Informants

No.	Name	Age	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
1.	Adane Bekele (Ato)	45	Dilla	02/05/2015
2.	Adane Tsegaye (Memrie)	81	Chichu	29/11/2015
3.	Aklilu Negash (Deacon)	41	Yirgacheffe	06/11/2015
4.	Asamew Feyisa (Ato)	82	Bule	26/11/2015
5.	Ayele Uddo (Memrie )	65	Bule	29/11/2015
6.	Bedecha Ware (Ato)	78	Dilla	11/04/2015
7.	Belay Molla (Abba)	72	Chichu	29/12/2015
8.	Biru Geda (Ato)	94	Dilla	15/12/2015
9.	Dejene Tesga (Memrie)	82	Wonago	11/01/2015
10.	Deyaso Bore (Ato)	79	Dilla	11/04/2015
11.	Heruy Kassa (Memrie)	85	Bule	26/12/2015
12.	Mamusha Asrat (Ato)	79	Dilla	04/01/2015
13.	Mehdi Shifa (Hajji)	97	Guangua	23/03/2015
14.	Meseret Nigussie (Memrie)	78	Dilla	14/01/2015
15.	Molla Wolde-Gebriel (Ato)	73	Yirgacheffe	28/02/2015
16.	Niguse Wolde-Tensay (Aba)	97	Wonago	09/01/2015
17.	Sahle Dinku (Memrie)	68	Bule	05/12/2015
18.	Sihne Tesga (W/ro)	87	Wonago	14/02/2015
19.	Tilahun Biru (Memrie)	92	Dilla	11/03/2015
20.	Teklearegay Asdegdig (Ato)	79	Yirgacheffe	08/04/2015
21.	Tesfa Golah (Memrie)	48	Dumarso	03/01/2015
22.	Zenebe Mamo (Ato)	63	Dilla	11/03/2015

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).