

## Religious Sites of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and Tourism in Ethiopia

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### Abstract

*The Objective of this article is to explore and identify the contribution of the EOTC religious sites play in promoting tourism in Ethiopia with particular reference to EOTC. It does not include all churches and their heritages, but to disclose the most common tourist attraction in the study area. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) was officially established in the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. During the time of Emperor Ezana who ruled Aksum and he officially decreed Christianity as the state religion in 330 AD. The EOTC has numerous churches and monasteries with their unique paintings, sacred objects and precious manuscripts which are tourist attractions. 50-60% of the international tourist market share in Ethiopia as compared to all the man-made attractions belongs to EOTC. However, only a few are recognized and visited by both international and domestic tourists.*

Key words: Religious Sites, Orthodox Church, Tourism

### 1. Introduction

Since, ancient time human being has been practicing spirituality. Due to this reason, he has constructed different edifices where he practiced worshipping. The religious buildings, signs and other arts have great contribution together with cultural, historical and natural sites for the promotion of tourism. Mainly, the development of religion has contributed to and promoted the growth of tourism in different parts of the world. Currently, many religions exist throughout the world. Each of them has their own contribution to the development of tourism (Sisay, 2002: 42).

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) the oldest in Africa and of the oldest in the world was built up through the centuries very much in isolation from the rest of Christianity. The church has numerous churches and monasteries with their paintings, sacred objects and precious manuscripts. Moreover, liturgy and song is one area of attraction for those people interested in religious art and history. The Timket celebrations are along the fascinating liturgies organized by the church annually (Little, 1969:2).

It is clear that, the EOTC, which is one of the oldest churches, was evangelized by St. *Fruementius* at the middle of the fourth century. It has got a precious spiritual heritage. About the share of the church's contribution Sisay (2002: 43) stated that "The EOTC attractions account for 50-60% of the international tourist market share in Ethiopia as compared to all the man-made attractions". The great resources and contribution of the EOTC tourism promotion in religious sites is very high. The heritages of churches are found in especial treasure built near churchyards. The heritages also damaged by moisture, mice, bats, etc. In addition to this fair also another case of destruction (Ayalew, 1991, EC.:11-14).

The EOTC holds many historical and religious treasures that are internationally significant. However, few are recognized and visited by both international and domestic tourists (Little 1968:3). It is true the tourist resources of the EOTC are immense; it is impossible to incorporate all of them in this limited space. Many of them that could be listed under UNESCO world heritage are not well recognized and still not visited (Mulugeta, 2014:2).

The point is why tourism is not benefiting the church; and why the churches close their door for tourism-related developments? Why it is not possible to make a difference with all the tourism potentials that the church is endowed with? In recent time, I visited some historical churches in Lake Tana monasteries. Nevertheless, some of the churches such as *Kburan Gebereal* (the monastery is found in the island of Lake Tana) and *Debre Berhan Selassie* (Gondar) have great potential for tourist attraction. However, in many churches researcher and tourists could not have a close look on heritages. As a result, there is not much study conducted pertaining to the issue raised in the area.

The vital objective of this study is to describe the contribution of the EOTC in promoting tourism development in Ethiopia, in its religious sites (architectural, sacred objects, paintings etc. and the major festival of the church).

## 1.2. Research Methodology

This paper is used qualitative approach and developed using primary and secondary data collected and analyzed from various sources. Primary sources are collected through field work. This field survey helped the researcher to show various monasteries, and churches including their sacred objects. The secondary sources that include related books, periodicals, articles and other published materials related to the research were searched in libraries.

## 2. Ancient Basilica church Building

In examining the architecture structural form of church construction in the history of EOTC, it's possible to identify three main type developments. The earliest common typology, which has been determined for the earlier churches, was the basilica style. It is believed that this style was reflective of the influence of the early Middle East Orthodox churches particularly Egypt and Syrian since 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D, (Salvo 1999:59).



Debere Damo monastery (Tigray-Adwa)

In relatively speaking, the ancient church building construction was mostly of Byzantine type of architecture. The cathedral of St. Mary (Axum Tsion) which has been destroyed by Ahmed Gragnin the 16<sup>th</sup> c., is said to have been the most remarkable the earlier basilica style in the country. The Monastery of Deber Damo in the same region is most revival- simplified basilica plan. The basilica form was also retained in the medieval period, but /and excavated monolithic or semi-monolithic churches of that period which incorporate the Aksumite character.

## 3. Rock Hewn Church Buildings

Ethiopia is one of the ancient countries in the world known for its rock-churches. Some of these churches consist of grotto churches or churches built under protective roofs of rock or excavated churches, which carved from the rock, others semi-monolithic churches, with three sides more or less of the surrounding stone, and of course monolithic churches are free on all sides with only the base rooted in the living rock. These churches are mainly found in the regions of Tigray, Wollo and Shewa, while in other parts of the country are found very few number of similar churches (Gerster, 1970:13). Concerning their manner of structure and type of rock hewn churches in Ethiopia different writers classified as below: the rock excavator (built up) of the churches:- eg *Yimerehan Kiristosit*, The Rock hewn caves churches: eg. *Weqerost*. *Qireqos* (47 Kms from Mekele) and Monolithic churches: eg. *Bete Medhaniale*m, or *Bete Giyorgis*.



Bête Medhaniale

#### 4. Rectangular Church Building

Rectangular church buildings are in corporation of different styles from both the Axumite and the Byzantine world techniques. Some of the rectangular structures on the other hand, have forms of the Hebrew sanctuary. They are supposed to have been adopted from the *O.T* to remind the synagogue. Therefore, the old traditions of such architectural styles are said to have taken from the near eastern temple architectures, (KirsMagazine 5<sup>th</sup>, June 2004).



St Mary church at Wäybla Bäläsa north Gondar district  
(Photo by author, 5/3/2016)

Rectangular buildings remained valid in the EOTC at least until the 16<sup>th</sup> century; even though no record has been left to demonstrate the medieval basilica and rectangular styles have been transferred in to the round buildings, the latter said to have been very old. Northern Ethiopia has kept more of the tradition of rectangular churches, up to the present time. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries they were, sometimes round, and sometimes rectangular (Lindhal 1970:63).

#### 5. Round and Octagonal Church Building

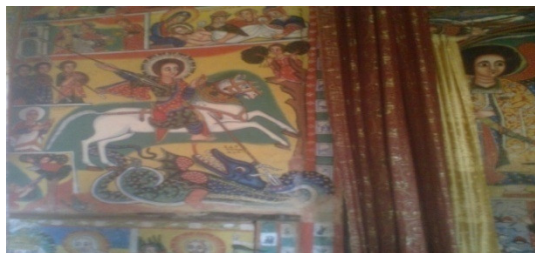
Round and octagonal style of church building, are the next architectural forms of the modern types. However, round church building believed to be introduced to EOTC in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Lindhal1990:64). The traditional round churches in Ethiopia are unique in the world. Silvia Pankhurst (1965: 168) marked that "centrally planned round church buildings are considered to be Ethiopia's' indigenous architectural styles.

All the EOTCS' have three fold division: *Kena Mahlet* (the place of hymn and where the chanters stand), *Qiddist* (holy) and the *QiddistQiddusan* (Holy of Holies). In the center of the *Maqdas*, there is *ManbereTabot* (Alter) which can be movable or immovable. The three-fold division was considered as a symbol of the Trinity. According to their significance, in EOTC there are three grades of churches: *Gedam* (those ministries services by monks), *Debir* (those churches served by married priests and monks, *Getter* (parish, which is also served by, priests however; they are less in rank than *Debir*).

#### 7. Church painting and Icons

The EOTC is the repository of ancient religious arts, which are tourist attraction. Indeed it appears in many illuminated religious books (Gospel) in paintings on wood also in church mural. Ethiopia religious paintings, according to the scholars have synchronized both oriental and Byzantine artistic traits with creation of Ethiopia wall painting, which up to the modern time is virtually an ecclesiastic (Adamu and Belaynesh 1997: 79). The magnificent paintings of the EOTC reaches back

almost fifteen hundred years. Ethiopian church paintings and Icons may divide in to two great periods, which are the medieval and the Gondarian. The medieval period paintings found in church of Gorgora on Lake Tana.



Urakidane mihirt2014( Tana monastery ) wall painting

The EOTC paintings and icons practice are also continued in Gonderian period. It began with the establishing of the capital in Gondar in the 1<sup>st</sup> part of the 17<sup>th</sup> c.(17<sup>th</sup>- 19<sup>th</sup> c.) Gonderian styles are found also in mss-illumination, icon and murals. In Gonderiane period paintings were almost religious.

### 8. Manuscripts (parchment)

Like all other Christian countries Ethiopian has also produced indigenous Christian manuscripts.

The Christian literature of Ethiopia contains all the genres to be found in the oriental Christian cultures: doctrinal, liturgical and theological. In addition to Biblical mss, there are also some secular manuscripts (Belainesh and Adamu, 1997:13). Many of the EOTC Mss are written on parchments and remained unpublished, which exist in ancient churches, and others large mss collection are found in foreign countries Libraries and museums. There are an estimated 5,000 Ethiopian MSS in Europe, North America, Asia, and Oceania (Pankhurst2002:38-45). According to the studies of some writers, there are different period of Ethiopian Mss, which are:

**The Aksumite period** (approximately 4<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century) is the 1<sup>st</sup> great period in the history of Ge'ez and mss and was named after the town of Axum, which was the religious, cultural and political center. This period began with the inscriptions of king Ezana(339-351)inscriptions from the pre-Christian period have also survived. The adoption of Christianity, the Axumate period also saw the beginning of the practice of translating foreign works (Bible, The monastic rules of Pachuomius, Kerillos (Cyril) and Physiologies) from the Hebrew, Syrian and Greek and domestic work of Deggua, which was prepared by St. Yared(Andrzejwski, 1985:257-260).

**The classical period or golden age (14<sup>th</sup>\_16<sup>th</sup> centuries)** is also called the restoration of the so-called "Solomonic dynasty". The golden age of Ethiopic literature, however, came after Ge'ez ceased to be the everyday-spoken language of the country during 14<sup>th</sup>and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The greatest and foremost compiled books at this period are: the KebraNagast (Glory of the kings"), Mashafasa'atat (Horologium), ,MashafaGenzat,(phioxenus),weddaseMariam (praise of Mary), Arganona Mariam (Harp of Mary), AnqasaBrhan (Gate of light) ,Senkessar (Synaxurium), the synods and Did acolia, the lives and stories of sants, GadleSemma'atat (Acts of the martyrs), GadleHawaryat, (Acts of the Apostles), Ta'amera Mariam (the miracle of Mary), MatsehafeMistir (book of mystery), MashafaBrhan (book of light), FekkareIyasus (Explication of Jesus) etc. (David 1993:8).

**Gondarian period** (From 16<sup>th</sup>century on ward) may have encouraged the growth of Ethiopic mss. The scholars were active in translated religion mss from Arabic. There were further original and translations made of important religious text such as: *HaymanoteAbaw*(faith of the fathers), *MazgabaHymanot* (Treasure of the faith), *Ankasa Amin* (Gate of faith), *FethaNagast* (legislation of the kings) *FawsManfasawi*(spiritual medicine), *Enbakom*(HabaKkuk), the Liturgical text of the EOTC include the *Qeddase* the ritual for baptism, *GebreHimmamat* (passion week), *MetsihafeQeder*(Ritual for penitential baptism) and others and *MetsihafeMalkeamelk* (Image) and *Qene*(Poem). On the other hand, the war of 16<sup>th</sup> country did a great deal of damage to the cultural heritage of the nation (Getachew ,1999:54:55).

### 8. Holy Crosses

Cross is so many religious importances in EOTC. The holy cross is vital symbols of Christianity because Jesus Christ was crucified and sacrificed upon it. In fact" the symbol of the cross is an omnipresent in EOTC". The cross is the symbol of Christianity since *Frumertius* brought it from Egypt in the 4<sup>th</sup>c. Since then, the EOTC priests often hold the cross & bless the Christians. It is used during the celebration of the mass. The shapes of EOTC crosses are divided in to three periods in their artistic value such as: Axumite Crosses, Lalibela Crosses and GondariansCrosses (Teshome 1997: 81-82). Concerning the size and usage or the EOTC crosses we can describes as follow: Processional crosses, Hand Crosses and Apex (Architectural) Crosses.

## 10. Liturgical vestments

It is a well-known fact that the ministers of different Christian churches during the mass use Special vestments for the service. The sacred liturgical vestments have been made of many colors such as: white, red, blue, Violet, black and other attractive colors, which are often kept in the treasures of churches and monasteries (Aymro and Molovu, 1970: 72). In the church of Ethiopia have further different kinds of clothes, which had given by Emperor, princes, lords and other famous persons. On the other hand the sacred vessels which are used for the celebration of the Eucharist are: shale (the small paten), the sews (chalice), M as beware (golden mason), the church stone mills, water pots, Incense burners, *ErfeMesqel* (cross-spoon) kettle, *QandilMeron*, censer etc., (Geaster, 1971 :46). Those church heritages are considered as tourist attraction.

## 11. Church hymn (zema) and Accompaniments

The EOTC has a colorful church hymn, which is especially striking during major religious holy days. Most of foreign tourist is attracted by the ceremony, Church hymn (Zema) is still a major subject of the traditional church education in Ethiopia. A major aspect of the Ethiopian church hymn is the rhythmic religious movement (dance) that always accompanies the liturgical chant some writers have suggested that the liturgical dance, cestrum and prayer- sticks (*Meqamyä*) of the EOTC may have originated in ancient Egypt. However, in its contemporary manifestation a religious musical performance of the Ethiopian clergies reflects yet another and amore recent layer of cultural interactions with the world of the OT (2 Sam 6:2-5), (Taddese 1985: 141).



Priest dancing in Feast day Gondar 2008

The Ethiopian hymn was invented and introduced by a churchman known, as St. Yared. He also created ten notes after composing his hymns.

The EOTC has made her hymn (Zema with Ge'ez, Ezil and Ararary) appropriate to the spirit of her services adapting in to the essence of the religious functions, which are used for great feasts of the year. The EOTC hymn is performed by **choir** through an especial tone accompanied by Ecclesiastical hymns instruments. There are three basic instruments in EOTC system are: Maquwamiya (the prayer staff), Kebero (the Drum) and Tsenatsel (cestrum).

## 12. The Contribution of the EOTC in Promoting Tourism for the Country

As well known the EOTC is the oldest and for runner in Ethiopia, which is Ambassador, preacher and expander of Christianity in the country. Because of this the church holds Tourism potential, since its foundation. The contribution of the EOTC to Ethiopian tourism industry is 60%. It

indicates more of tourism sites are the treasures of the EOTC. Dr. SisayAyalew(2002: 43) also noted that "The EOTC attractions account for 50-60% of the international tourist market share in Ethiopia as compared to all the man-made attractions".

The EOTC has 80% contribution for Ethiopia economy though her tourism potential. However, tourism's benefit is unknown by the church. The church is known with main tourist sites; unfortunately, she has no tourism program and is no Tour agent or tourism department in the church until today. And also does not have, advertise its' tourist sites for foreigners by any means. Nevertheless, some of the parish church council on great feast days as tour agents is taking some of the congregation to festival sites such as, Lalibala, Aksum and the like.

The ETC gives contribution for EOTC through advertisings the Church for International Journalists, visitors etc., and the MOCT also by giving information about price, counseling, consulting, training, conserving the preservation of the relic and so on. On the other hand the ETC sees the church as helper for Tourism development program and repository of the country's heritages. Indeed the EOTC and ETC both are in need one another (Interview, 23/07/1997E.C).

Historically the EOTC is the guardian of the country heritages since her foundation in 4<sup>th</sup> century. Recently, in the history of the church, conservation of Heritage department has been organized by EOTC, and the church also opened modern museum in the compound the patriarchate head curator of the EOTC, but it is not strengthened. In addition, some churches like *Entotost. Mariam*, Paissa St, Georges church, holy trinity cathedral and Be'atale Mriam in Addis opened museums and they are earring very few money. Some museums are also constructed in Addis Alemst. Mariam, Axum *TSion Mariam* and Lake Tana monastery UraKidane Mihiret church. According to ARCCH, the EOTC has very great role on the history of the country and it's civilization like literature, Arts, Architectures etc. The church is the guardian of the history, culture and museum of the country. There is no question the contribution of the EOTC. Anyone can see the condition most of tourism sites are the treasures of the EOTC (Interview, 28/07/1997 E.C).

## Conclusions

Recently, tourism becomes an important dynamic and productive smokeless industry in the world, which as economic and social benefits. Today, religion gives great contribution for the promotion of tourism in the world. The EOTC which is one of the oldest churches in the world was built up through the centuries isolated from the rest of Christian countries. The church has monasteries and churches with their paintings, precious manuscripts, sacred objects and hymns, which are the most tourist attraction. It is true in Ethiopia, 60% of the country's tourist sites belong to the EOTC. However the church has no tourism development program. There are a number of obstacles to establish travel agent by the church, which include: lack of awareness, lack of well-educated manpower, lack of coordination between the churches, lack of standard administration and others. On the other hand, religious sites are very difficult to visit easily, because no enough infrastructures. Recently, the church constructed modern museum in Addis Ababa, It is important revival in the history of the church, this construction shows bright way to establish the department of Tourism industry in the church and encourage the preservation of the heritage in the future.

To present the necessity of tourism department in EOTC structure and to minimize the indicated problems, the writer suggests the following solutions:

- The church should open museum in each dioceses and large monasteries or churches to handle and display the invaluable treasuries without any personal contact.
- In addition to this, trainings should be given to concerned body of church authorities, in order to improve the existing traditional way of preserving and displaying artifacts. So that, the treasures would be safeguarded from theft and destruction.

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