



Domestic religious pilgrimage in Ethiopia: Validating Ethiopian orthodox Tewahido church monasteries sacredness through the name of Jerusalem and its significance

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ABSTRACT

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Christians have a long history of pilgrimage. The Ethiopian Orthodox pilgrims' journey to Jerusalem, in particular, was very well known and ancient. However, when Jerusalem was under the control of Muslim leaders, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Christian pilgrims used domestic pilgrimage as an alternative to the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The fall of Jerusalem at the hands of Muslim leaders and the recurrent problems of pilgrims while they travelled to the sacred places of Jerusalem were the turning points for the proliferation of holy places in Ethiopia. King Lalibela was a man of great inspiration regarding domestic pilgrimage (the journey to sacred places in Ethiopia). The domestic pilgrimage, initiated by King Lalibela to replace Jerusalem in Ethiopia, reached its climax in medieval Ethiopian history. This study explores how the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) validated and authenticated Ethiopian monasteries and other holy places' sacredness by the name of Jerusalem to develop and encourage domestic pilgrimage. It also shows the significance or implications of domestic pilgrimage in building good social values such as peaceful coexistence, kindness, compassion, and social harmony among diverse communities. By taking Debre-Libanos Monastery (DLM) and Gishen Debre Kerbe (GDK) as the litmus tests, this study shows that religious promises (*Qaliki-danoch*) written in hagiographies and other writings of the EOTC are the main ways for validating and authenticating Ethiopian monasteries sacredness. The religious promises promote and sanctify monasteries and other pilgrims' destinations. It initiates pilgrims to enter the seven-day prayer (*Subae*) and celebrate the saints' feasts. The practices and various experiences in the monasteries make pilgrims humble and kind, as well as teach them to develop the values of social harmony and peaceful coexistence. Apart from tourism attractions, therefore, these monasteries have a great possibility of significance for realizing good social values such as national unity, kindness, tolerance, social harmony, and peaceful coexistence. Thus, domestic pilgrimage should be encouraged, as Ethiopia is in the throes of ethnic divisions and the destructive effects ethnicization.

1. Introduction

Religious pilgrimage is a very ancient human activity. It is the common practice of most religions [1], and there are many reasons for such a pilgrimage. The worshipers of Christianity, like the followers of other religions, have made religious pilgrimage a part of

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their spiritual life. Especially after the 4th century AD, Christians sanctified some places (the places associated with Jesus Christ) and have made religious pilgrimage the most sacred undertaking in the Christian religion [2]. As a result, many Christians travelled to Jerusalem to visit these holy places. For EOTC pilgrims, Jerusalem is the sacred place that was once sanctified by the Jesus Christ. Traditionally, Ethiopians call other places in Israel 'Jerusalem'. Ethiopian pilgrims were among the first Christian pilgrims to visit the holy places of Jerusalem [3]. This pilgrimage of the Ethiopians to Jerusalem was more or less peaceful until the Muslims took control of Jerusalem in the last decades of the 12th century [4]. After the Muslims took control of Jerusalem and the places leading to Jerusalem, the Ethiopian pilgrims faced many challenges during their journey to the sacred places. Indeed, the relationship between Ethiopians and prominent Muslim powers was not hostile. However, after Muslims controlled Jerusalem, Ethiopian Orthodox pilgrims did not travel to Jerusalem without many ups and downs. Especially after the 12th and 13th centuries, Ethiopians faced many difficulties in visiting these holy places [5]. These difficulties were important junctures for the growth of domestic religious pilgrimage in Ethiopia [6].

King Lalibela played a paramount role in the growth of domestic religious pilgrimage. During the reign of Lalibela and other Zagwe kings, the eleven rock-hewn churches of Lalibela and other churches were constructed to strengthen domestic pilgrimage and attract Ethiopian pilgrims' journeys to the Ethiopian holy places [7]. Indeed, there is a consensus that originally Lalibela was created not only as the holy land in Ethiopia but also as a new Aksum [8]. In other words, in addition to the religious dimension, some argued that the rock-hewn churches were originally built as the political epicentres. However, this doesn't mean that Lalibela and other Zagwe kings didn't want these rock-hewn sites to be the churches of the EOTC. Instead, it is precisely argued that one of King Lalibela's main goals was to initiate and establish Jerusalem II (*Dagmawi Jerusalem*) or another holy place in Ethiopia. According to Daniel [7], Lalibela was very eager to substitute the holy places of Jerusalem for monasteries found in Ethiopia. Daniel goes on to argue that Lalibela accomplished this objective by building these rock-hewn churches. Due to the fact that Lalibela's approach was continued in the medieval history of Ethiopia, many holy sites were established in Ethiopia. Especially during the reign of Emperor Zara Yaqob, many holy places were established in many parts of Ethiopia. These holy places are continuing to attract many pilgrims. Indeed, one of the reasons why domestic pilgrimage was popular for many Christians was the contribution of Ethiopian kings and EOTC scholars. One of the ways in which these elites and scholars went to sanctify the Ethiopian monasteries was to recognize the sanctity of the places in the promises (*Qalikidanoch*) that were included in the hagiography of saints and other writings of the EOTC. Such promises could make Ethiopian monasteries sacred and popular for pilgrims.

This study argues that the hagiography of saints and the various EOTC literature sanctified Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido monasteries. In other words, the promises are the ways that validated and authenticated the Ethiopian monasteries to be considered Jerusalem II (*Dagmawi Eyerusalem*). This strategy is the common way the EOTC sanctifies religious places. This approach is attracting many Orthodox Tewahido Christian pilgrims composed of diverse ethnic identities to visit these holy sites. In other words, the holy places or monasteries could become the places where pilgrims with diverse identities meet and share their experiences. At the same time, these sacred places could become places where pilgrims take many lessons from the practices, experiences, and religious rules of the monasteries. As a result, beyond its contribution to domestic tourism, domestic pilgrimage contributes a lot for developing the values of peaceful coexistence, kindness, compassion, tolerance of diversity, and social harmony.

Studies have paid little attention to domestic religious pilgrimage, especially in relation to the ways the EOTC validated its monasteries in the name of Jerusalem and the significance of the holy sites in developing good social values. Indeed, many studies have been conducted on the EOTC. For example [9–13], conducted studies on the role of religious sites in tourism. However, the ways or strategies that show how the monasteries of the EOTC is validated as sacred in the name of Jerusalem and the role of these holy places in developing peace and social harmony have not been discovered. Thus, this study focused on two things: the ways that the EOTC sanctified the Ethiopian monasteries in the name of Jerusalem and the significance of these sanctified religious places for developing the values of peaceful coexistence, compassion, kindness, and social harmony among pilgrims with diverse ethnic identities.

Excluding the introduction and conclusion sections, this article has five parts. The first part of this article states the conceptual notes. The second part explains the methodology of the study. The third part discusses the historicity of domestic pilgrimage in Ethiopia. The fourth section explores the ways that the EOTC sanctified its monasteries. The last parts state the various practices of pilgrims on pre- and feast days and the significance of such religious pilgrimages in developing the values of peaceful coexistence and social harmony.

2. Conceptual notes

In the preface of his book, Robert Dalton states that 'the whole universe is a beautiful creation of God. Still, some places are more scenic and sacred than others. These places have given and are still giving visitors peace and relief from the pestering burden of daily life [14]'. One of the ways human beings satisfy their thirst for these beautiful or sacred places is through pilgrimage. Kevin Griffin and Razaq Raj, acknowledging pilgrimage's historicity, argue that the motivation of pilgrimages may range from the spiritual to recreational matrixes [15]. But this paper focused on the religious (spiritual) pilgrimages at domestic places. In this regard, Webb clearly describes pilgrimages as journeys undertaken with the purpose of prayer [16]. Webb goes on to state that such a journey may include the journey to shrines of apostles (saints) or holy places [16]. Clearly, such pilgrimage destinations seem to be different from the comprehensive illustration of sites ranging from cathedrals and temples right down to local wells, rocks, and trees, which has been illustrated by Kevina Griffin [15]. This article understood pilgrimage more in light of Webb's illustration than Griffin's wider illustration. Indeed, Webb's description is very general because it does not describe what is behind the 'prayer' of the pilgrims. This general description seems to be clearly explained by the traditional and historical understanding of pilgrimage.

Traditionally and historically, pilgrimage has been defined as a physical journey in search of truth, in search of what is sacred or

holy [17]. It is a journey for purely religious reasons, beyond the call of everyday worship [18]. This search for truth, enlightenment, or an authentic experience with the divine or holy leads people to travel to sacrosanct sites that have been ritually separated from the profane space of everyday life [17]. This traditional understanding of pilgrimage is what this paper acknowledges for understanding the puzzle of pilgrims 'prayer' in Ethiopia. Focusing and recognizing the variety of the motivations of tourists, Oslen and Timothy describes pilgrims as the religious tourists who are motivated by deep spiritual or religious convictions [17]. Richard Barber precisely corroborates this issue and writes:

Pilgrimage can encompass penance for past sins and the search for physical benefits through the medium of a god or saint, either in the form of the resolution of mundane problems or the cure of a physical ailment. At one extreme, the pilgrim may pursue spiritual ecstasy by seeking out the place where the founder of his or her religion once lived and taught; at the other, he or she may look for a miracle that offers purely physical benefits [18].

Richard Barber's writing sums up the above definitions of Pilgrimage. Accordingly, it is a journey both outwards, to new, strange, dangerous places, and inwards, to spiritual improvement [18]. This paper, therefore, takes this definition as a departure to understand domestic religious pilgrimage in Ethiopia.

Taking the above understandings of pilgrimage into account, this study relies on Frank Fahey's conceptualization to interpret and identify the pilgrims. According to Fahey [19], faith, penance, sacred space, ritual expression, votive sacrifice, celebration, and perseverance are the main attributes to identify and describe pilgrims. Faith is to mean that, to be a pilgrim is to believe that there may be a mystery in life. In the case of this study, Orthodox Christian pilgrims expected a mystery in their lives after their journey to the monasteries of Debre Libanos and Gishen Debre Kerbe. The promises in the hagiographies and other books of the EOTC confirm this mystery. Penance is to mean, 'changing heart' in expectation of the reward from the God. To see the mystery and accomplish their objectives, pilgrims should change their hearts from evil to good or from cruelty and other vices to good virtues. Fahey goes on to state that the essential journey of the pilgrim is the journey inward to that sacred space within the heart where the Holy Spirit dwells. Pilgrims may also give ritual expression to that 'change' that has happened within. For example, pilgrims in the study areas considered confession (*Nisha*), subae, and other religious practices for avoiding their sin. The pilgrims then believe that they are free from sin once they have taken the prayer, confession, or other practices. The promises in the hagiographies confirmed that if a pilgrim takes the confession and Subae in these holy places, he or she is a good believer. His or her sin is cancelled once he or she takes the confession and other necessities in the monasteries. Once the pilgrims have accomplished their rituals, they will celebrate their victory. They will show their spiritual victory during the feast days. And lastly, pilgrims will have a votive offering or votive sacrifice. In this regard, in Debre Libanos and Gishen Debre Kerbe monasteries, pilgrims perform the vows (*Seeler*) and other activities. Precisely, in this study, pilgrims are a collection of the above features. In other words, in this study, the pilgrims were those who reflected the features listed above and arrived two or one week before the annual celebrations of the monasteries. The researcher also collected the data conveniently from those who arrived at the monasteries on the eve of the feast days.

3. Research methodology

The whole framework of this study is based on the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of social constructivism. Social constructivism as a research paradigm aspires to understand the world from an individual's viewpoint. The goal of such research is to rely as much as possible on the participant's viewpoint of the situation being studied [20]. This study relied on the subjective experiences of the participants to interpret and analyze the data collected in the study areas. To understand the significance of religious pilgrimage, assessing the experiences of the pilgrims and other relevant bodies is important. This study included the feelings, opinions, and ideas of the participants and provided interpretation and evaluation for them. With a qualitative approach, the views, opinions, and experiences of the pilgrims and other relevant actors' communities have taken the main stage in the study.

For answering the objectives, this study employed qualitative case study research design. In such design, the researcher explores a program, an event, an activity, process, and interactional dynamics within a unit of study. The cases are bounded by time, place, and activity, and the researcher collects detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures. A case could be an individual, a group, a community, an instance, an episode, an event, a sub-group of a population, a town or a city. In the present study, the researcher treats two monasteries as one entity on the basis of their possession of common markers of attributes.

Sampling technique: The participants for the fieldwork parts of this study were selected based on a purposive and convenient sampling technique. Indeed, in qualitative research, participants may be selected based on transparent criteria such as their knowledge, life experience, particular characteristics, role in a group or community, and conveniences. Hence, some interviewees for this study were selected on the basis of their knowledge of the issues concerned, their relevant knowledge in relation to the objective of this study, and other related experiences. The sample size in qualitative research is determined based on the point of data saturation. Accordingly, the data for this study were collected until reaching the saturation point. In relation to the purposive sampling technique for selecting the pilgrims, the pilgrims' stay in the monasteries before the annual celebration of the saints is the criteria for choosing the pilgrim interviewees. This is to get relevant information and understand the experiences of the pilgrims about the various issues related to their expectation, opinion, and other issues. The pilgrims who arrived more than two or one week before the feast days are very relevant to tell about the confession, seven-day prayer, and other practices in the monastery. The study also selected interviewees from the pilgrims who came to the monasteries on the eve of the feast days.

Data collection instruments: This study employed different instruments to collect data from the fieldwork such as semi-structured interviews and observation.

Semi-structured Interview: Since interviews are an essential data collection instruments in qualitative research, this study included

semi-structured interviews with EOTC scholars at Addis Ababa Holy Trinity University (HTTU), EOTC scholars (teachers) at Debre-Libanos and Gishen Debre-Kerbe monasteries, and pilgrims of both Debre Libanos and Gishen Debre Kerbe. Most of the pilgrim interviewees are those pilgrims who arrived at the monasteries two or one weeks before the annual celebrations. The Holy Trinity interviewees were purposively selected because of their knowledge of the issues in this study, and the teachers of poetry (*qune*) and book interpretations' (*Yemetsihafe Tiregwame*) of the Gishen Debre Kerbe and Debre Libanos monasteries were also purposively selected because of their knowledge about the various pilgrims' activities around these monasteries.

As a result, two informants from HTTU, four interviewees from Debre Libanos Monastery (DLM) and Gishen Debre Kerbe Monastery (GDK) scholars (ecclesiastics including the teachers of interpretation (*Metsihafe Tiregwame and qune*) and thirty pilgrims were interviewed. A total of thirty six participants were interviewed for collecting the data.

The data for this study were collected in 2019. The target groups in this study are individuals. Conceptually, this study focused on two important issues. The main questions for this study focused on the way the EOTC validated monasteries sacredness in the name of Jerusalem and the significance of such holy places (the journey to such places) in promoting good social values such as peaceful coexistence, harmony, kindness, and compassion among diverse groups, taking the GDK and DLM as the litmus tests.

Observation: This method provided important information on many of the observable aspects of the pilgrims' practices. The author has significant experience at Debre Libanos and Gishen Debre Kerbe Monasteries for many years. This allowed the researcher to know and observe a wide range of pilgrims' experience. It then provided valuable input for this study.

Document and other secondary sources: In addition to fieldwork, the study used different documents such as hagiographies, and other secondary sources. Books and journal articles were used by evaluating their relevance to accomplish the objectives for this study.

Methods and procedures of data analysis: This study employed thematic analysis in order to provide a brief description and understanding of the outcomes of the study in line with the research objectives. Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis and then reducing the data into themes through the process of coding and condensing. It is important to produce an insightful analysis that answers a particular research objective. Consequently, the researcher of this study employed thematic analysis to arrive at a clear answer to the established research objectives. The data that were collected from interviewees through semi-structured interviews and other sources were structured into themes and patterns to allow a clear analysis of the results based on the established objectives.

Ethical consideration: Researchers should be guided by research ethics, which are universally accepted in all academic disciplines. They should respect the dignity of all research participants so as not to use them simply as a means to achieve research objectives. In order to ensure this ethical principle, the researcher in this study relied on the principle of informed consent. The researcher made the participants aware of the purpose of the study before taking any data from them. The researcher also kept whatever information the informants provided me confidential. Finally, the researcher withheld the names of the participants through the use of codes to secure their privacy.

4. Pilgrimage's historicity in Ethiopia

As Belhassen, Caton, and Stewart [21] pointed out, the history of Christian pilgrimage is tantamount to the nascent period of Christianity. Indeed, this view has been opposed by some scholars. For example, Joan Taylor [2] argues that the beginning of Christian pilgrimage was in the 4th century AD, with the contribution of King Constantine. Like other Christians around the world, Ethiopian Christian pilgrims were traveling to the holy places since Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia in the 4th century AD. But as most Ethiopians argued, before the beginning of Christianity in Ethiopia, Ethiopian pilgrims visited Jerusalem. For Ethiopians, the Ethiopian Eunuch pilgrimage to Jerusalem indicates the historicity and continuity of Ethiopian pilgrims' journey to Jerusalem [22]. For example, Patriarch Paulos noted that the Eunuch brought Christianity to Ethiopia and that he was a pilgrim to celebrate the Jewish festival [23].

Indeed, many Ethiopian historians have shown that Ethiopians' journey of pilgrimage to Jerusalem was historic. As Matteo Salvatore [24] clearly noted, inspired by the journey of queen Makida (Sheba) to Jerusalem in ancient times, Ethiopians were traveling to Jerusalem for pilgrimage. Queen Makida's visit to Israel is believed to have taken place before 950 BCE [25]. Ethiopians take this journey and event as inspiration and agree that Ethiopia's Christian pilgrimage is historic and ancient [42]. Indeed, there are many debates on the origin of Queen Makida. However, for Ethiopians, Makida is Ethiopian, and it therefore serves as a history of Ethiopians' journey to the sacred land of the Christians—Jerusalem. Especially after the fourth century, many Ethiopian Christian pilgrims travelled to Jerusalem. This Ethiopian's frequent journey has later led the Ethiopian pilgrims to be given the resting place (*Marefya Bota*) in the holy lands of Jerusalem. With time, the EOTC built monasteries at these resting places [25]. According to many EOTC scholars, Ethiopian Christian pilgrims were provided sacred places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem through the efforts of the Zagwe kings. This attracted a large number of Ethiopian pilgrims to visit the holy places of Jerusalem and other places [26]. And it also maintained the long history of pilgrimage for Ethiopians who occasionally left for study or prayer in Jerusalem [26]. Most Ethiopian Christian pilgrims who were visiting Jerusalem aimed at the search for 'authenticity' in objective senses. For example, the pilgrimage to see the grave of Christ at Jerusalem was one of the factors that inspired Ethiopian pilgrims' journey to Jerusalem.

Later, however, Ethiopian pilgrims' journeys to Jerusalem became rare due to the influence of Muslim leaders and the impact of the crusades. In this regard, Richard Pankhurst [27] indicates that the Turks had closed the way for Ethiopians to travel abroad, making them somewhat isolated from the world. Although Muslims did not declare war on Ethiopia during their control of Jerusalem, the Ethiopian pilgrims were not traveling to Jerusalem as much as before [28]. Indeed, it seemed the reason that boldly forced Edward Gibbon to write that, 'encompassed on all sides by the enemies of their religion, the Ethiopians slept nearly a thousand years, forgetful of the world, by whom they were forgotten' [29].

Indeed, it is clear that Edward's view is exaggerated and misunderstood. Because, in the words of Dervla Murphy, Ethiopians were

much more awake than they are now [30]. As she further noted, they (the Ethiopians) had built and painted such structures as the rock churches of Lalibela. They also had some contacts with the Arab world, particularly Egypt [23]. But Gibbon was right in some cases. Ethiopians had been encircled by Muslims. As a result, Ethiopian Christian pilgrims were traveling mainly to Jerusalem via Egypt. This was an event that discouraged the Ethiopian pilgrims' journey to the outside world. But this desperateness was a critical juncture that expanded, if not created, the domestic pilgrimage to reach a high point. During the fall of Jerusalem to the Muslims, Lalibela and other Zagwe kings built many rock-hewn churches in the province of Lasta or Roha [31]. Particularly, the eleven rock hewn churches are the symbols of heavenly and earthly Jerusalem [7]. As clearly put in the hagiography (*Gedile*) of Lalibela:

St. Lalibela had built eleven rock-hewn churches in Lasta to replace Jerusalem in his homeland, Ethiopia. One of the reasons he built these rock churches was to encourage Ethiopian Christian pilgrims to make pilgrimages within the country [41].

The name of these eleven churches of St. Lalibela and the surroundings are the witnesses to the fact that the churches of St. Lalibela were established to replace Jerusalem at home [41]. For example, Bethlehem, Gethsemane, Golgotha, Bethany, Jordan and the like are the names of the lands around Israel (Jerusalem), and these names are also used to name the places around St. Lalibela rock hewn churches and its surroundings. Besides, the stars of David are engraved on these buildings. This was the strategy of king Lalibela to make domestic pilgrimages popular, authentic, valid and symbolic for Ethiopian pilgrims.

Most Ethiopian EOTC scholars argue that after Lalibela's rock-hewn churches became real, Ethiopian Christian pilgrims encouraged domestic pilgrimages. Many have written that these domestic pilgrimages, which were encouraged and expanded during the Zagwe period, were widespread in the medieval history of Ethiopia. King Lalibela's method of attracting pilgrims seems to serve as a common tactic for attracting pilgrims in many Ethiopian monasteries and churches. For example, 'most Ethiopian saints' hagiographies' state that if the pilgrims visited these monasteries, God would consider their pilgrimage as the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Such promises pertain to sanctifying and respecting domestic pilgrimage destinations (holy places or holy fathers). Among many Ethiopian pilgrims' destinations, Debre Libanos monastery and Gishen Debre Kerbe Mariam, which reached a high point in the medieval periods of Ethiopia, became attractive sites for Ethiopian domestic pilgrimages. The following section shows the methods or ways that the EOTC used to make domestic pilgrimage (to Ethiopian monasteries or holy sites) popular, sacred, and attractive.

5. Validating sanctity in the name of Jerusalem

Places are often seen as humans' interpretations. As Yi-Fu Tuan clearly put it, place is a calm center of established values [32]. He, then, argues that place is an enclosed and humanized space. Human beings could make some places special and sacred. In this regard, there is a proverb that EOTC scholars often say: 'Man sanctifies places; a sanctified place sanctifies the man (ሰብእ ይቋቋሳል ሰብእ ነገር ይቋቋሳል ሰብእ)'. Accordingly, sacred places are what human beings make of them. In other words, sacred places are the results of the definitions or pronouncements of human values. There are many holy places in every society and culture. There are also different factors that contribute to the creation and multiplication of sacred or holy places. For example, for Christian pilgrims, as Denys Pringle clearly put it, pilgrims were experiencing difficulty and arduity in their journey to the holy places of Jerusalem, especially in the 12th and 13th centuries [33]. Such experiences have caused other holy places to be created in other parts of the world. Mostly, concerning Christian holy places, sacred or holy places are created by taking the experiences, miracles, teachings, and happenings related to Jesus Christ in Jerusalem (sites connected with Jesus) without deviating from the basic Christian doctrine [15]. In this case, the monasteries of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church are the litmus tests. Among these sacred places, or EOTC monasteries, Debre Libanos monastery and Gishen Debre Kerbe monastery are the most prominent examples.

Debre Libanos Monastery (DLM) is a monastery in the diocese of North Shewa, formerly known as Debre Asebo. This monastery was named Debre Libanos to commemorate the name of Father (*Aba*) Libanos, who once lived in the area as a hermit. In the history of the EOTC, Father Libanos was one of the main monks who preached and expanded orthodox Christianity in Ethiopia. Indeed, the present geographical feature of Debre Libanos monastery was shaped in the 13th century. It was founded in 1275 [7]. The founder of this monastery was Father Teklehaymanot. The monastery is 103 km from Addis Ababa. It is one of the largest monasteries in which Ethiopian Orthodox Christians enter seven-day prayer (*Subae*), practice many religious activities, and venerate saints.

This monastery has a chapel (*Tselot Bet*) (where pilgrims pray together), a reading place (*Nibab Bota*) (where hagiographies and other religious books are interpreted and scrutinized), and a cooking house (*Tegibar Bet*) (where monks' food is prepared). It has also a place where pilgrims are healed by the holy water (*Tsebel Bota*). These places are designed to attract pilgrims' spiritual lives and provide them with spiritual and physical salvation. For example, the reading place is a place where the work of various good and holy fathers is recited. It also aimed at preaching about the importance of peaceful coexistence, kindness, loyalty, compassion, pity and other good human values. Priests and other preachers expect the change of the heart of the pilgrims while they recited the good fathers. Indeed, its main purpose is to get the pilgrims to perform the lives of the saints or holy fathers. The cooking house is a place that shows how monks work and eat because monks need food to survive. According to the EOTC scholars in DLM, the main purpose is to teach that the pilgrims should eat like the monks' diet, which is highly limited, and to show that the monks are active at work. In other words, it is intended to show that a man can live by eating less food and that he should not be greedy. The monks eat once a day and they even invite strangers (mostly pilgrims) to share their limited food. This teaches how men can give to others even with limited resources. Or, it shows generosity and love. In this regard, a pilgrim added that sharing the limited food to other individuals teaches how men can live in love, compassion, peace and kindness with limited resources.⁴ The holy water is a place of healing for the sick and a special place for pilgrims to receive physical and spiritual healing [34].

January 2, May 20 and July 31 are the main days of pilgrimage to this monastery. January 2 is to commemorate the saint's (St. Teklehaymanot's) death, and July 31 is to celebrate St. Teklehaymanot's birth day [35]; and May 20 is his (father Teklehaymanot's)

skeleton feast day (the day that his skeleton was transferred from Debre Asebo to its present location). These places and feast days are appropriated in the religious promises that are written in father Teklehaymanot's hagiography (Gedile Teklehaymanot) in a way that can attract the attention and spiritual needs of the EOTC pilgrims. These religious promises which are written in Teklehaymanot's hagiography are the main reasons why pilgrims frequently travel to Debre Libanos monastery these days. As noted in the hagiography of Teklehaymanot, the God promised to do the following things for the pilgrims who visited Debre Libanos monastery in the name of father Teklehaymanot. These promises are written in Gedile Teklehaymanot in the Saturday reading (*Yeqidame Minbab*) as follows:

- If one goes to Debre Libanos monastery (father Teklehaymanot's monastery) for pilgrimage, the God considers the pilgrim's journey as a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (the sacred land of Christians); and the God considers pilgrims' journey to Debre Libanos as a pilgrimage to the sepulchre of Jesus in Jerusalem.

Having connected Debre Libanos Monastery with Jesus's sepulchre place (Jerusalem), this hagiography lists more promises of the God as follows:

- Let alone those who come in life, for those who buried in the territory (compound) of father Teklehaymanot's monastery (Debre Libanos), the God gives his mercy for them in the name of father Teklehaymanot.
- The God gives the reward of righteousness (free from guilt or sin) for those who feed others in the name of father Teklehaymanot in Debre Libanos monastery. The God blesses those who celebrate the feasts (commemoration) of Teklehaymanot. And the God also blesses those who eat the food in Debre Libanos monastery in the name of Teklehaymanot.
- The pilgrims who came to Debre Libanos monastery from far and near, for praying and fasting, for the purpose of healing, in search for holy water, and taking the Holy Communion in this monastery, his (pilgrim's) name will be written in gold in heaven, and his sins will be blotted.
- One who comes to Debre Libanos monastery and hears the recitation of Teklehaymanot's death, who hears and interprets Teklehaymanot's hagiography, those who smells the fragrance of the monastery, those who pleads with the cross, will be healed of any physical and spiritual problems.

The following images (image 1 and 2) indicate the cathedral of DLM.



The above photos show the physical features of Debre Libanos monastery's cathedral, with its gorges. The first is the feature of the monastery in rainy seasons, and the second indicates the image of the monastery in non-rainy seasons.

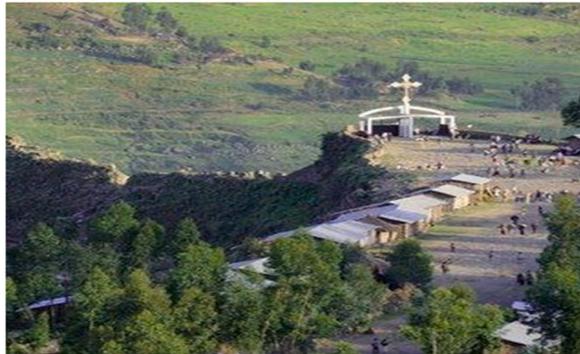
Gishen Debre Kerbe (GDK) is a mountain located in the South Wollo Zone, Ambasel district (Woreda). The former name of this mountain was Debre Negodguad [36]. The monastery was established in the 15th century, during the reign of Emperor Zara Yaqob. And it has become the destination of many pilgrims since its establishment. Emperor Zara Yaqob's father, Emperor Dawit, made great efforts to bring the cross of Jesus Christ (one part of the cross) to Ethiopia. But it was Zara Yaqob who made his father's effort real [36]. After bringing the cross to Ethiopia, Zara Yaqob saw a dream that has the meaning, "Put my cross on a cross-shaped place." He then

checked most of the Ethiopian mountains for three years to find the place. Finally, in the Wollo Diocese, he found Gishen Amba (the cross-shaped place) in the Ambasel Mountains. In this cross-shaped place, a temple was built, and the cross of Jesus Christ was placed in the foundation of the temple. This cross was covered with gold, silver, and copper [36]. After the cross of Jesus Christ was placed in the mountain, Gishen Debre Kerbe (formerly known as Debre Negodguad) was considered as 'Jerusalem II'. This place of the cross was proclaimed to be the centre of righteousness and blessings by King Zara Yaqob and EOTC highest clergies of that time. October 1 (*Meskerem 21*), March 19 (*Megabit 10*) and May 9 (*Ginbot 1*), and January 29 (*Tir 21*) are the days of feasts of Gishen Debre Kerbe. October 1 is the holy Crosse's day, which was intended to celebrate the cross of Jesus Christ that placed on Gishen Debre Kerbe. May 9 is the feast day that Virgin Mary was born. March 19 is the anniversary of the discovery of the lost cross of Jesus Christ. January 29 is the anniversary of Virgin Mary's death. According to the book of Tefut [36], the God promised the following things to Gishen Debre Kerbe.

➤ If one visits Gishen Debre Kerbe, his visit is considered to have visited the tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem (Golgotha).

Having showed the similarity of Gishen Debre Kerbe Monastery and Golgotha, the book of Tefut lists more promises of the God:

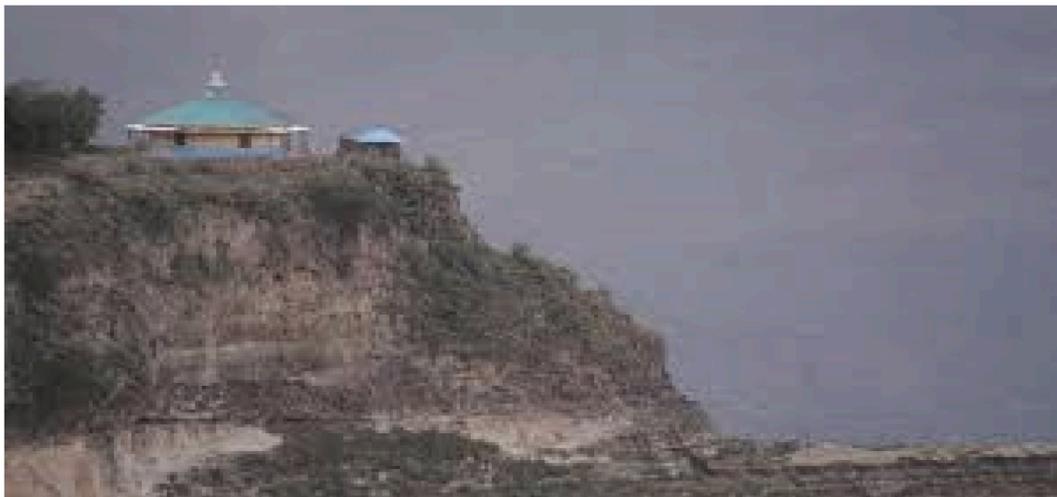
- Anyone who came from far and near and visited Gishen Debre Kerbe monastery, his sins would be blotted out and he would become like a new born baby.
- Anyone who accepted the ups and downs to have a pilgrimage to Gishen Debre Kerbe will be relieved of his sins.
- Anyone who prays and begs in Gishen Debre Kerbe monastery will be informed what their future life will be in the form of a dream.
- Anyone who hears the reading of the book of Tefut and the history of the cross in Gishen Debre Kerbe will be pardoned from any sin.



The above picture shows the near location of the cathedral in the top land of Gishen Debre Kerbe monastery in the mountain of Ambasel.



The above picture shows the gates for the mountainous cathedral of Gishen Debre Kerbe in Ambasel Mountain.



The above picture shows one of the cathedrals of Gishen Debre Kerbe in the mountain of Ambasel.

The EOTC has established holy places for pilgrims by connecting itself with Jerusalem (the sacred land of Christians). This EOTC's deed is what Belhassen et al. [21] call the act of authentication. The greater the claim for a given site's authenticity, the more likely it is that Christian tourists will be attracted to visit and thus provide a source of revenue for the community that owns it [2]. For Christians, Jerusalem is a place where genuine and authentic holy places are found. It is clear that Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Capernaum and Gethsemane are the main holy places that most Christians of the world give the highest glory in religious life. In this regard, Joan Taylor [2] stated that some of these places are rocks or areas where Jesus had fallen and his blood sanctified it. Some others are also the places where Jesus did many miracles and he had been tested with bitter earthly challenges. Scholars wrote that these places became sacred sites for Christians, especially after Constantine became the king of Byzantine Empire in the 4th century AD (see for example, [2]).

Emperor Constantine of Byzantium was the king who made these places holy sites for Christians. It is further argued that before Constantine, these places were under the control of the pagans. Taylor also argues that before the 4th century AD, these places were not places where Christian pilgrims travelled. Rather, the sacredness of these places seems to be the result of Constantine's decrees. Constantine used this place's historicity in relation to Jesus to authenticate the holiness of these places. Constantine had, therefore, shown us that Tuan's [32] assertion that 'places are human meanings or values is correct.

The EOTC scholars and Ethiopian Christian kings had done the same thing as king Constantine did to sanctify their Ethiopian monasteries and other sites. For example, just as father Teklehaymanot and his apostles' honoured and exalted Debre Libanos monastery, emperor Zara Yaqob and the then EOTC scholars had made Gishen Debre Kerbe a holy place. Indeed, most of the Ethiopian monasteries had grown up, expanded, and honoured during the reign of Emperor Zara Yaqob. Besides, Emperor Zara Yaqob wrote many EOTC books [37]. 'Promises' written in the hagiography and other books of the EOTC are the main means of honouring and sanctifying most Ethiopian monasteries. These hagiographies and promises were written by EOTC scholars and righteous fathers [7]. In any case, it is enough to look at the promises written in the Ethiopian hagiographies to show that the Ethiopian monasteries were sanctified by EOTC scholars and Christian kings. For example, according to the promises listed above, the Ethiopian monasteries are the sacred places, which had been sanctified by linking with the sacred places of Jerusalem. Surprisingly, most Ethiopian pilgrims believe that they are going to Jerusalem II. For these pilgrims, Gishen Debre Kerbe and Debre Libanos are the main replacements for Jerusalem (the sacred land of Christians).

Both Debre Libanos and Gishen Debre Kerbe 'promises' teach that the blessings and salvation that Ethiopian Christian pilgrim would receive if he/she visited Jerusalem would be given this blessing if the pilgrims visited the Ethiopian monasteries. Indeed, the EOTC's method of connecting the Ethiopian monasteries with Jerusalem is to authenticate the sanctity of these holy sites. These Jerusalem-related promises play an effective and major role in attracting pilgrims to these monasteries. Most interviewees noted that 'promises' given to Gishen Debre Kerbe and Debre Libanos monastery (father Teklehaymanot) attracted the pilgrims to invoke and celebrate the commemoration of saints in both monasteries. Most of them also pointed that their pilgrimage to Gishen Debre Kerbe and Debre Libanos could bring the blessing and salvation that they would get if they visited the sepulchre of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem. An informant in Debre Libanos monastery, for example, explains:

When I came to Debre Libanos, I was thinking about the promises made by God to Father Teklehaymanot. To me, Debre Libanos monastery looks like Jerusalem, where Jesus Christ went through many ups and downs. Just like Jerusalem is the city of God, Debre Libanos is the city of God. I am sure that I can find the same blessings that one pilgrim gets by visiting the sepulchre of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem at Debre Libanos monastery. Because I am sure that God will fulfil his promise to the father Teklehaymanot of Debre Libanos.

The EOTC scholars were not deviating from the basic Christian canon when writing about the hagiography and promises given to saints. They use the Gospel of Matthew to show that the EOTC is right in this regard (see, Matthew 10:38–42). For example, Matthew (10:41) says that ‘one that received a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward.’ The EOTC did this, and it consolidated pilgrims wholehearted journeys to the monasteries. Because, according to most pilgrims of Ethiopian monasteries, the promises written in the hagiography of saints and some related books of EOTC, are the true promises of the God which pilgrims could get by visiting such sacred places. A Gishen Debre Kerbe pilgrim explains:

When I visit Gishen, I am thinking of the suffering of Jesus Christ. I feel that I am journeying to Jerusalem when I come to Gishen Debre Kerbe because of the presence of the half-cross of Jesus and the God’s promise to this monastery. I know the God’s promise to this monastery. Accordingly, a pilgrim visiting Gishen Debre Kerbe is considered to have visited Jerusalem. When I visit Gishen, I am cleansed from my sins, and God loves me and forgives me.

Astonishingly, most of the pilgrims that we interviewed did not read the hagiography of father Teklehaymanot or the Book of Tefut. But they are fully aware of the promises written in these books. EOTC scholars argue that this familiarity with promises of hagiographies is a result of the teaching of EOTC in all churches (EOTC) of Ethiopia. This is why pilgrims who visited both monasteries believed that their pilgrimage is considered to be a visit to Jerusalem. In so doing, the EOTC has been able to build Jerusalem II in Ethiopian monasteries. In other words, the EOTC successfully created and developed Ethiopian Jerusalem by validating these places in the name of the holy place of Christianity (Jerusalem). Promises given to places or saints are the main ways that validates the sacredness of these Ethiopian monasteries. In the following part, by stating the religious practices of EOTC pilgrims in the two monasteries, this paper explores the significance of such domestic pilgrimage beyond its contribution of tourism.

6. Pilgrims in the pre and eve of feasts

I noticed two types of pilgrims in Debre Libanos and Gishen Debre Kerbe monasteries. The first are pre-feast pilgrims, and the second are pilgrims that journeys on the eve of feasts. Pre-feast pilgrimage is a practice in which pilgrims go to monasteries before the feast day and pray for a week or more. This type of pilgrimage is to perform a Subae (seven day prayer). A Subae means seven day; and a pilgrim can enter one or more subae. Subae is a system of prayer and inspiration in silence and is a common practice in Ethiopian monasteries. Pre-feast pilgrimage can be practiced in a group or individual. Therefore, in the case of Subae, pilgrims who intend to go to these holy places prepare their food at least seven days before the main feast. The food that the pilgrims take to the monasteries may include dry flat bread (*Dereq Injera*), barely flour (*Beso*), very dry small bread-like rolls (Dabo Qolo) and chickpea. Dry and non-sweet foods are generally the best choice for the Subae. This is because in the spiritual struggle for the subjugation of flesh to the soul, the weakening of the flesh is the main tool. These foods reduce the energy. Instead, the soul takes the flesh’s strength.

Upon arriving at the monastery, the pilgrims take off their shoes outside the monastery. Then they go to the hosts of monastery, having kissed the fence of the monastery. The pilgrims are given the necessary accommodation or place to their Subae. This subae place could be a common hall, cave, hut or graveyard. The common hall is a house that is mostly given to the pilgrims where there are not enough private places of prayer for all pilgrims that come to the monastery. It is a place where pilgrims can pray in a common home but in private consciousness. In these Subae days, pilgrims remain in fasting, praying, and prostration until the eve of feasts. A pilgrim can eat only very little meal during the Subae. During the Subae, it is not only the meal that should be very little but it is also a sleep that should be reduced. In this case, when the flesh is weak, the spirit/soul is strengthened. The humanity that is defiled by various sins will also be renewed (Matthew 26:41). On the eve of the festival, however, they leave their home (Subae place). Then they celebrate the feast with other pilgrims who come from near and far on the eve of the feast.

It is absolutely necessary to be pure to receive the blessings of the righteous, as it is written in the hagiography of Teklehaymanot and the Book of Tefut. As a result, some pilgrims who come to these monasteries are holding Subae to be perfect. Then they can find the promises that God made to father Teklehaymanot and Gishen Debre Kerbe. According to the interviewee in Debre Libanos Monastery:

Subae is one of the ways in which the saints have lived in earth. Subae is the act of learning only goodness, in which I find the perfect peace and exhaustion of the flesh. I beseech the saints to be with me in these difficult Subae days. Father Teklehaymanot always supports me, he hears my prayer, and he blesses me. When I was hungry, I remembered Jesus Christ fasting for forty days. When I became weak, I think what Christ has done for me. The hunger, the fatigue, the thirst gives me more spiritual values. This is true; for the God does not break His promise to the righteous.

As noted by most informants, *Subae* is a way that a pilgrim could avoid the evils for getting blessings from his God. Subae is a prelude to goodness. It is an antidote to evil and a way to open the door to goodness. In return, most pilgrims believe that after they enter the prayers in the monasteries, they believe that they will get the eternal and worldly blessings.

Events during the eve and feast days: On the eve of the feast, the pilgrims who came to these monasteries on the eve of the feast and who arrived at the monasteries before the eve of the feast (who hold *Subae*) spend the night together by singing hymns, preaching and vowing. If it is not the day of fasting the next day, most pilgrims will perform the Mass. During this liturgy, most of those who repented and spent the *Subae* will receive His flesh (Eucharist). But most of the pilgrims do not do this. Rather, all the pilgrims escort the Ark of the Covenant (*Tabot*) until its entrance into the temple. They make religious ecstasy. Pilgrims think that it is the time to receive and take the monastery’s blessings starting from on the eve of the feast to the end of the commemoration. They try to take all the sources of the blessings from the monastery. They think that the God has fulfilled his promises to these monasteries. The following is one of the major events that took place from the eve of feasts to the end of the feasts. Indeed, such activities are the building blocks of good human values.

Vows (Seelet) of Pilgrims: This is an event in which pilgrims say that their vows are fulfilled on the eve of the feast and during the feast days. In other words, it is the activity that a pilgrim says he has found what he is looking for; and it is the time that the pilgrim praises the saints that did this. This event is also a time that pilgrims make a vow to get what they need in the future. In both monasteries, Debre Libanos and Gishen Debre Kerbe, pilgrims whom their dream fulfilled upon the help of the saints tell the pilgrims what the saints had done to them by giving the material they vowed to the monasteries. This is an event that uncovers the miracles of the monasteries. As Richard Barber clearly noted, Christianity, more than any other major religion, enshrines miracles as part of its central belief: just as miracles in the New Testament are proof of Christian's authority, so the power of the individual saints was judged by the ability of their relics to work miracles [18]. He further states that the saints, who could generally only do so after their death, when their sanctity was known to be real. I noticed that the pilgrims of Debre Libanos Monastery and Gishen Debre Kerbe testified that they were visibly healed in the name of the father Teklehaymanot of Debre Libanos and Virgin Mary of Gishen Debre Kerbe. At Gishen Debre Kerbe Monastery, on Meskerem 21, one pilgrim says the following:

Gishen Debre Kerbe's Virgin Mary fulfilled my wish. I am healed of my illness. I swear I will come back in the future. If I get well for the next one year, I will come and give three thousand birr to Gishen Debre Kerbe.

As we can understand from this informant, vows are the reunion events. One Debre Libanos Quine teacher describes the general situation as:

Pilgrims with health problems will vow before God that their health to be restored. Those who have not a child will vow to have a child; the unmarried pilgrims will vow to get couples; unemployed pilgrims will vow to be hired.

Vows have great values that can make a person good and kind. This is because pilgrims who want vows to be done so should do good things in their day to day life. As we have seen in both monasteries, vows are the ropes of goodness. Anyone who wants to see his vow real, he must first be good to his God and the people. And then God will give him the desire of his heart. In addition to Subae, vow is the way of goodness and humility. *Seelet* (Vow) is, therefore, not only a door to goodness but also a source of hope for mankind.

7. Significance of the domestic pilgrimage

The role of domestic religious pilgrimages in shaping pilgrims is more than a collection of cosmetic words. In the case of Debre Libanos monastery and Gishen Debre Kerbe, pilgrims exchanged and learned many lessons about different good social values. The teachings, the rituals and practices, the rules of the monasteries, and other aspects have a very profound importance for pilgrims. In other words, beyond the spiritual dynamics, as a result of the experiences and practices of the monasteries, pilgrims develop good social values such as peaceful coexistence, compassion, harmony, kindness, and other good values. In this case, it is possible to argue that such monasteries are the main holy places that kept the unity of Ethiopians. The pilgrims are composed of various ethnic identities. So the practices in the monasteries are disseminated to all these diverse pilgrims. The diverse pilgrims, in turn, serve as peace ambassadors while they return to their homes. They can preach about good human values based on their experiences in the monasteries. The pilgrims experience sharing has its own contribution to make in condemning the present political situation of the country, which is characterized by ethnic hatreds, killings, and persecution.

Following the post-1991 Ethiopia's state structure, Ethiopians developed suspicious relationships [38,39]. Due to the ethnic state structure and its trimmings, one ethnic group considers others in suspicion or some also further stretched to identify other groups as enemies [40,43]. Obviously, things like pilgrimages are important to avoid this bad political influence. After returning from the monasteries, the pilgrims are more likely to be role models (peace ambassadors) for the community in which they live. One of the interviewees from EOTC scholars in DLM states:

Pilgrimage is a big knife to kill hate. It is a drug that cleanses the bad attitude. A believer who visits the holy places such as Debre Libanos learns how to live with others. A pilgrim learns the lives of the saints. He tries to do the work of the saints. A pilgrim generally learns good social life, as such monasteries are the places of cooperation and love. Pilgrims are preached to about peace and harmonious relationships among diverse identities during the weeks or days they stay at the monastery. They are taught and preached about peaceful coexistence, respecting others, humility, kindness, and compassion. When pilgrims come to these monasteries, they not only learn about these values, but they also learn that obeying them is their duty. They are taught that God only accepts their prayers when they practice and teach such values to their community upon their return.

To realize or meet their needs after returning from the monasteries, the pilgrims should adhere to the values they learned at the monasteries and consider it one of the main tasks in their localities. They teach what they have learned in their respective areas. The practices in the monasteries pilgrims during the feast days and in the pre-feast days shaped the pilgrims to be pro-good values such as tolerance, peaceful coexistence, compassion, and kindness. In addition, as can be seen from all the pilgrims' experience, they strongly condemn and hate racial politics. On the day of May 20, one pilgrim stated his stay as:

I am an Oromo in ethnic identity. When I came to this monastery, he learned that I am only a human being. To tell the truth, this is my third visit to this monastery. God has done all that I have asked. I will teach what I learned in this monastery to my locals. At least in the areas where I live, I don't hate people for their ethnic identities.

As these pilgrims who come to these monasteries come from many ethnic groups, they could make a significant contribution to the peaceful coexistence and unity of various communities in the country. From the eve to the end of the feast, love, humility, harmonious relationships, forgiveness and patriotism are the most common words that are preached in the monasteries. Every pilgrim in the

monasteries should only talk about love, compassion, peace, and other good values. The words of love, unity and love are spoken even on the stage of the feast. A pilgrim who came from Southern Nation and Nationalities region to GDK narrates his experience in the monastery, 'Even the walls and trees of the monasteries preach peace. One knows in the monasteries that everyone is equal because only one is a human created by God. Our time in monasteries teaches us that everything we fight about ethnicity, extremism, inequality, and other bad traits in our localities is unnecessary.' A pilgrim from that come from Tigray region to Debre Libanos monastery on the eve of January 2, 2019 also says:

We are all Ethiopians. We are children of the same father. We must unite in love and save our country from collapse. Our country is a city of God. We must be a city of God. We must not fight with each other. Politicians are narrating hatred for their own benefit. Please let's live in love.

In pre-feast and feast days of both monasteries, I have seen such voices being uttered by pilgrims from many ethnic groups including Oromos Gurages, Amharas, Keffas and etc. To be true, such religious pilgrimage seems to be the promising rope in today's Ethiopia where the hope of unity, unity and coexistence is spoken and encouraged. It is only in such events that one could see individuals from all ethnic groups in Ethiopia condemn racism in one word. As I have seen from the experience of these two monasteries, the religious pilgrimage seems to hammer racism; and encourage peace, unity, patriotism and love among Ethiopians.

8. Conclusion

This study explores how Jerusalem II (Dagmawi Jerusalem) was created in Ethiopian monasteries and the roles of these holy monasteries and sacred places in building good social values such as harmony and peaceful coexistence among diverse communities. In other words, it explores the significance of domestic pilgrimage by uncovering the ways that the EOTC scholars and kings used to make domestic pilgrimage popular. The historicity of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem dates back before the birth of Jesus Christ. But Ethiopian scholars emphasized the post-4th-century AD pilgrims' journey to Jerusalem. Indeed, according to EOTC scholars, the Ethiopian eunuch's journey to Jerusalem in 34 AD shows that Ethiopians were the pioneers in visiting the holy land of Jerusalem. But recent studies have noted that the pre-4th century AD pilgrimages were considered a pagan practice. Such studies further noted that no pilgrimage was performed in the pre-4th century AD. Therefore, many scholars argue that Ethiopian pilgrims have been visiting the holy places of Jerusalem since the 4th century AD. But later, when Jerusalem came under Muslim influence and Ethiopian pilgrims encountered dangers on the road to Jerusalem, domestic pilgrimage was preferred.

King Lalibela was at the forefront of making domestic pilgrimages popular. Lalibela's rock-hewn churches are the temples built to replace the Ethiopian Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem in Ethiopia. Although Lalibela made great efforts to make Jerusalem II in Ethiopia, history shows that domestic pilgrimage was rare until the medieval history of Ethiopia. The medieval Ethiopian history, however, was a time that many Ethiopian monasteries were validated and authenticated as Jerusalem II, and the number of holy places in Ethiopia was multiplied by the efforts of the EOTC scholars and kings. Among these holy places, Debre Libanos and Gishen Debre Kerbe are more known in comparison to others. These places are the prime examples that could show the authenticity of monasteries' sacredness in the name of Jerusalem. EOTC Scholars and kings of the EOTC were using hagiographies and other writings to make these places Jerusalem II. According to these writings, a pilgrim who visited these monasteries is considered to have visited Jerusalem. Such a promise could attract many pilgrims to the monasteries during the feasts (the saint's commemoration days).

This domestic pilgrimage has much significance. It is one of the ropes for Ethiopians to live together in love, peace and harmony beyond tourism wealth and spiritual healing. Multi-ethnic pilgrims' activities before and after the eve of the feasts, as well as various lessons, highlights coexistence and love, contribute to national unity and coexistence. It seems to be a shining light, especially for Ethiopia, which is being torn by ethnic politics.

Exploring the issue of domestic pilgrimage, the ways of authenticating or validating monasteries sacredness through the name of Jerusalem, and the significance of pilgrimage in developing the values of peace and social harmony has both policy and theoretical significance. Policymakers can take lessons on how to promote peace and social harmony among diverse communities from the practices of pilgrims. This is the most essential lesson for an ethnically divided state such as Ethiopia. Theoretically, this study is an important addition for pilgrimage-related issues in general and for religious pilgrimages in particular.

The main limitation of this article is the unavailability of secondary sources on the religious pilgrimage in the Ethiopian monasteries. However, this limitation was avoided by using primary sources such as hagiographies and fieldwork data. This article recommends the investigation of further studies to unravel the whole puzzle of domestic religious pilgrimage in the realm of the EOTC.

Ethical statement

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Solomon Molla Ademe: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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