



Massacre of Religious Monks, Nuns and Destruction of Waldeba Monastery by TPLF Forces

Introduction

Waldeba Monastery (also transliterated Waldebba) is one of the oldest and holiest religious enclaves of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) in Ethiopia. It is also one of the oldest monastic schools in Africa which has produced many religious scholars and writers. According to many sources, the monastery was founded around 490 AD and is located in one of the most remote areas of the Amhara Region of northern Ethiopia and surrounded by the mighty Semien Mountain range. Waldeba Monastery is surrounded by four rivers, Semo in the north, Tekezze in the east, Zewereg in the west, and Zewa in the south. The monastery hosts hundreds of monks, nuns, and religious students every year.

Successive Ethiopian rulers have shown great reverence for Waldeba Monastery and what it stands for and went out of their way to protect and conserve it as a sacred heritage site. However, in the last 30 years, the monastery and its monks and nuns faced constant targeting and assaults from the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and its regime.

During this period, the holy site faced numerous invasions by the TPLF. For example, in 2012, the TPLF seized the land which contained the monastery for commercial development including growing sugarcane and establishing a processing plant. TPLF had also desecrated the holy grounds by moving heavy machinery for construction of a dam for irrigation and to pave highways for transporting various products and people. The plan was to erect a sugar plantation on the holy site, against the wishes of and in great offense against local residents. Undermining the heritage and disturbing the peace and tranquility of the monks appeared to be a non issue for the TPLF but was clearly an egregious crime by any standard of civilized behavior. The TPLF regularly attacked the monks and priests which lived extremely humble and minimalist lifestyles, working day and night, and having prayers for nation-wide peace. The pattern of attacks against the monastery and against its monks and nuns continued after TPLF's descent from central power and extended into the war in Northern Ethiopia which began in November 2020.

Since late July 2021, the monastery was under the control of TPLF (Tigrayan) forces, just like that of most parts of Aderkay (also transliterated Adarkay) and Maitebri (also transliterated May-Tebri) Telemt Woredas of the North Gonder Zone. The TPLF invaded and occupied Aderkay and Maitebri on July 24th, 2021. They controlled the monastery until allied Ethiopian forces liberated the area in October 2022. After the liberation of the monastery and the wider area from the TPLF, the Amhara Association of America (AAA) has verified that TPLF forces killed monks, nuns and destroyed property of the Waldeba Monastery on a large-scale.

The Waldeba Monastery consists of various temples located in various woredas of North Gonder Zone such as Aderkay and Maitebri. Some of the temples included under Waldeba Monastery are Etalo, Zendroka, Maidroka Maigaba, Sekuara, Abrentant, Aba Nata, and others. Almost all these monasteries were under occupation by Tigrayan forces. However,

this report particularly focuses on massacres of monks and destruction of property in the Abrentant temple, which is the largest of the Waldeba monasteries and considered the primary temple of Waldeba. Not only this, but under the ancient customs of the EOTC, with the exception of monks and nuns, visitation is prohibited into the Abrentant temple.

Massacre of Religious Monks and Nuns

In defiance to the local community culture and preaching of the EOTC, the TPLF forces entered into the Abrentant temple and killed, detained, and displaced monks and nuns. AAA sources managed to identify at least ten (10) monks and nuns who have been attacked by the TPLF forces in the Abrentant temple of the Waldeba Monastery. Among these, six were killed while the remaining four face life-threatening injuries.

The table below contains a list of identified victims (monks and nuns) killed or injured by TPLF forces in the Abrentant temple.

No	Victim Name	Means of Attack	Outcome of Attack
1	Aba Seifu	Gunshot	Death
2	Menagna Gebre-Selassie	Gunshot	Death
3	Aba Gebre-Mikael	Gunshot	Death
4	Aba Aklile Semayt	Hacked	Death
5	Aba Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Samuel	Gunshot	Death
6	Menagna Gebre-Mariam	Gunshot	Death
7	Aba Gebre-Hiwot Wolde-Samuel	Gunshot	Injured
8	Menagna Dawit	Beating	Injured
9	Aba Kiros	Gunshot	Injured
10	Aba Gelawdewos	Gunshot	Injured

In addition to the massacre and injured monks and nuns, AAA sources confirmed the

detainment of several monks by the Tigrayan forces. According to AAA's sources, there were several monks detained by the TPLF forces though the sources could not identify the number of detainees, their names, and personal details. Several others were also displaced and forced to live in various other areas.

“Besides the killings, there were monks and nuns detained by the TPLF forces, though I was not able to identify them by name and number. Several monks and nuns were also displaced from the monastery and lived in various areas. For instance, more than ten monks and nuns were living with my family for a long time. Later some of the monks and nuns who were aged more than 70 returned to their monasteries since the TPLF mostly targeted monks and nuns whose ages were below 60.”

Looting and Destruction of Monastery Property

Besides the attacks on the nuns and monks, property of the monastery, located both inside and outside the monastery, have been destroyed by the TPLF forces. According to AAA's sources, two buildings found in Adarkay town have been burned, destroyed, and looted by the Tigrayan forces. AAA sources described the destruction as follows:

“There were two buildings of the Waldeba Monastery in Adarkay town, which were aimed to generate income for the monastery. In one of the buildings, which was located near to the Adarkay bus station, there was a modern electric cereal mill that provided services to the local community and generated income for the monastery in return. There was also another ground plus one building that had more than 20 rooms for rent also to generate income for the monastery in front of a church called Asgadit Maryam. As soon as the TPLF forces controlled the area, they came up with a list of names of properties for destruction and looting. The properties of the monastery

were also included in their list. Then, they looted all the properties of the monastery in both buildings, including the electric cereal bird and the properties of the renters, and completely destroyed the buildings.”

The photographs below show some of the destruction incurred by TPLF forces on the buildings of the Waldeba Monastery in Adarkay town.



(a) Damages to building structure and external roofing



(b) Tin roofing components shown scattered along the floor of the compound



(c) Damages to internal structures including building foundation, walls and staircase



(d) Damages to internal structures including building foundation, walls and staircase



(e) Damages to building structure and roofing



(f) Damages to building foundation, walls internally and externally

Figure 1: Photographs of damages incurred to Waldeba Monastery showing damages to internal and external structures.

In addition to these, AAA's sources reported the destruction of more than 550 beehives and several tones of honey bees from the Abrentant temple of Waldeba Monastery by the TPLF militants. According to the sources, beehives that were found in four different sites, Maykok, Maysye, Lay Atena, and Tach Sfira Begoy, are completely burned and destructed by the terrorist group. Moreover, several tones of honey have been looted by the TPLF. However, the AAA sources could not identify the exact amount of honey bees looted by the TPLF militants.

Furthermore, AAA sources identified that several cereal items stored in different places including, in Adarkay town, were looted by the militants. Even though the sources were not able to identify the exact amounts of each cereal item, they managed to ascertain the list of cereal items looted. Some of the cereal items include oilseeds such as linen, sesame, and nugget; crops (sorghum, dagusa, and teff); and grains (turnip and bean). Moreover, the TPLF forced looted items that can be used for the daily consumption of the monks and nuns such as pepper, bar salt, sugar, salt, batteries, flashlight, solar, and clothes.

AAA source reported the cereals, crops, grains, and items of daily consumption looted and destroyed by the TPLF forces as follows:

“I was not able to identify the exact amount of cereals and crops destroyed and looted from Abrentant temple of Waldeba Monastery. But I can assure you that it is very huge and more than what we (AAA source and investigator) can imagine. There were several tankers of cereals and crops in different places, such as in Adarkay town, with various sizes. The largest tanker, for instance, had crops such as teff that can serve monks and nuns at least for ten (10) years. At the moment, all the tankers are either destroyed and looted. Not only cereals or crops but the tankers themselves are also wiped out at the moment.”

Besides the various types of cereal and crops, the TPLF forces killed and looted cattle of

Abrentant temple of Waldeba Monastery including 46 oxen, 19 cows, 32 goats, and 15 donkeys. The AAA sources described the killed and looted cattle as follows:

“More than 112 cattle were hatched and looted by the TPLF forces in the Abrentant temple of Waldeba Monastery. Some of the cattle such as 46 oxen, 19 cows, and 32 goats were cut down and used for food by the TPLF militants immediately. While the 15 donkeys were used to carry out the looted cereals and related items of the monastery.”

AAA sources also confirmed that money donated from Ethiopian diaspora across the world for rebuilding efforts was also looted by the TPLF militants before it was deposited into the Abrentant monastery bank account. The source reported 19 million ETB in cash was looted by the TPLF forces as follows:

“Ethiopians across the world donated and sent around 19 million birr for the Waldeba Monastery. However, before it was transferred to the monastery account, the TPLF forces, hijacked and looted the entire amount in Adarkay town. I think they had sources from the monastery that informed them of the donation and location of the money, including the identification of the individual who handed it.”

The table below shows property of Waldeba Monastery that were destroyed or looted by the TPLF militants.

No	Type of property	Specific article	Amount of Items	Outcome
1	Cattle	Oxen	46	Slaughtered
2	Cattle	Cows	19	Slaughtered
3	Cattle	Goats	32	Slaughtered
4	Cattle	Donkeys	15	Looted
5	Oilseed	Linen	Undisclosed	Looted

6	Oilseed	Sesame	Undisclosed	Looted
7	Oilseed	Nugget	Undisclosed	Looted
8	Crops	Teff	Undisclosed	Looted
9	Crops	Sorghum	Undisclosed	Looted
10	Crops	Dagusa	Undisclosed	Looted
11	Grains	Turnip	Undisclosed	Looted
12	Grains	Bean	Undisclosed	Looted
13	Honey bees	Beehives	550	Destroyed
14	Honey bees	Honey	Undisclosed	Looted
15	Houses	Ground plus one building	One (with 20 rooms for rent)	Destroyed
16	Houses	Business center	One	Destroyed
17	Houses	Electric Cereal bird	One	Looted
18	Household items	Pepper	Undisclosed	Looted
19	Household items	Bar salt	Undisclosed	Looted
20	Household items	Sugar	Undisclosed	Looted
21	Household items	Salt	Undisclosed	Looted
22	Household items	Batteries	Undisclosed	Looted
23	Household items	Flashlights	Undisclosed	Looted
24	Household items	Solar	Undisclosed	Looted
25	Household items	Clothes	Undisclosed	Looted
26	Money	Cash in ETB	19 million birr	Looted

About Amhara Association of America (AAA)

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) is a non-profit civic organization located in Charlotte, North Carolina that investigates and documents human rights atrocities and repression against Amharas in Ethiopia. AAA seeks to inform U.S. policymakers, international human rights organizations, media, and all Ethiopian stakeholders to pressure Ethiopian leaders to change laws, policies, and practices in Ethiopia so perpetrators are held accountable and victims receive justice. AAA also collaborates with Amhara organizations in the U.S., supports independent Amhara organizations in Ethiopia, and provides humanitarian aid for Amharas impacted due to targeted ethnic attacks. AAA's funding comes directly from members and supporters; the organization is not affiliated with any Ethiopian or American political or governmental entities.

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