



The Hidden Treasure of Tedbabe Mariam Monastery and Challenges of Heritage Management and Tourism Development

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ABSTRACT

South Wollo Zone is one of the Zones found in Amhara Regional Stat. It is endowed with different cultural and natural attractions which make the tourists entertained, amazed and creates breathtaking feeling. Among the treasures, *Rise Adibarat Wogedamat*(First among its peers and head of all churches and Monasteries) Tedebabe Mariam monastery is the most flagship one. The principal objective of this study is to investigate the hidden treasure of Tedbabe Mariam monastery in Ethiopia. Besides, this research aimed to disclose the major hindering factors of the Monastery to develop tourism. To meet this objective, the researcher used qualitative research approach. Primary and secondary data were collected so as to investigate the hidden treasure of the Monastery and to disclose some of the impediments of tourism development. To collect primary data; face-to-face personal interviews and participant observation was carried out. In order to analyze the collected data, the researcher employed descriptive data analysis method. The research identified that; the Monastery possesses precious and magnificent tangible, movable and immovable heritages. Within the enclosure of the Monastery there are various historic buildings, tombs and above all the treasure house which housed priceless treasures that has not been accessible for international and national tourists due to various impediments. Among the collections that are found in the treasure houses are more than 300 parchment books; some of which are not found elsewhere in the world. Above all, the history and location of the Monastery amplified its potential for tourism development and astounding visitors. However, due to poor road facility, and lack of standard accommodations and other touristic facility, the monastery treasures and its environs became inaccessible for international and national tourists.

Keywords: Tedbabe Mariam Monastery, Hidden Treasures, Tourism Development, Impediments.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as one of the world's socio-economic sectors and has been steadily expanding at average rates of about 4 and 4.5% annually during the latter half of the 20th century. In 2009, over 880 million people traveled internationally, generating US\$ 852 billion (WTO Barometer, 2009).

Similarly, tourism is a great contributor to Africa's development, both in terms of employment generation, contribution to Gross National Product as well as to export earnings. The tourism industry in Africa has reached 27.6 million arrivals and receipts of US\$10.7 billion in 2000, yet the

potential of the continent is much higher, both in strictly economic terms and also as a unique opportunity for many African countries to attain meaningful poverty reduction and an improvement in the standards of living of their people (Adrian et al., n.d).

Despite these promising figures a number of factors have undermined tourism development in many African regions; these include poor infrastructure, such as roads, electricity and water supplies, insufficient accommodation, unsatisfactory public health services, poor telecommunication facilities, and in a number of cases security problems. Furthermore, delays in applying more efficient management systems and the persistence of practices that impede their competitiveness have

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also contributed to slow development of the tourism industry (UNWTO, 2008; Chernet Tilahun, 2008). Ethiopia is one of the growing destinations of East Africa as tourist destination Region in the international tourism and travel market of the world. It has also great potential in terms of natural, cultural and historical tourism resources (Gebreaninya, 2011). Tourism for Ethiopia, is a half century phenomenon that is said to have been started in early 1960's, with the establishment of OAU in Addis Ababa and in preparation to host the founding summit of the leaders of the newly independent nations of the continent of Africa (Ayalew, 2009).

The Amhara Region is blessed more with an abundance and diversity of natural and cultural heritages. Similarly, as part and parcel of the Region, the South Wollo Zone is endowed with natural and cultural heritage including age old churches and monasteries. Of the historical and age old churches and monasteries that are found in the zone, are Tedbabe Mariam, Gishen Mariam, Aba Giorgis Zegasicha, Aba Tsiga Dingle Atronus Mariam, Haiyq Estifanos, Haiq Debra Egziabhare, Boru Sellase, and so on. Tedbabe Mariam is a magnificent ancient and historic monastery in the country in general and in the region in particular. Its age is traced back to 982 B.C. and is also one of the places that the Old Testament sacrifices were presented before the advent of Christianity (Hiruy, 2006; Wondosen, 2017).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Monastery (EOTC) holds many historical and religious treasures that are internationally significant. However, few are recognized and visited by both international and domestic tourists. Despite the fact that some fragmented research works such as Diana Spencer work of 1972 entitled "in search of St. Luke Ikons" and a senior essay by Wondosen Beyen in 2017 which is entitled "a historical survey of Tedbabe Mariam Monastery from its foundation to present" has been conducted, but there is no full length empirical research that reveal the hidden treasure of the site, identify challenges that hindered the monastery from becoming accessible for visitors and that utilizes its tourism resources. Therefore, the aim of this study is to assess the hidden treasure of Tedbabe Mariam Monastery and identify the existing impediments of heritage management and tourism development at the destination.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to identify the hidden treasure of Tedbabe Mariam monastery and impediment of heritage management and tourism development.

Based on the general objective, the research deals on the following specific objectives:

- To identify the various treasures of the church.
- To describe the role of the monastery for tourism development.
- To identify the impediments of heritage management and tourism development in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

Description of the Study Area

The Tedbabe Mariam monastery is situated in Amhara Regional State of South Wollo Zone in Saynt Woreda. It is located 600 km from Addis Ababa and situated in Woynadega (semi tropical) climatic zone. It is bordered by the Mota Woreda (district) in the west, Semada Woreda in the North, Mekidela Woreda in the South and Ajbar Town in the East. Beshilo River flows under the Plateau where the monastery is situated. The monastery is situated on the heart of the Plateau and is surrounded by dense indigenous forest trees such as juniper, olive, and so on. The forest is home to different wild animals and birds. As earlier said, the Monastery is situated on the hilltop, thus to enter and arrive at the Monastery there are 12 natural gates in different directions. Demographically, the entire residents of the area are Amhara ethnic group; almost 94% of them are Orthodox Christian and the rest 6% are Muslims.

Study Design

The researcher was entirely guided by the qualitative research approach. The reasons behind using this approach are; the first reason is, the research topic needs a detailed view. Secondly, the research design answers questions on how and what needs to be achieved.

Data Collection Instrument

The main sources used in this study comprise primary as well as secondary data. The primary data was collected from the sample population through interviews, focus group discussions and extended personal observations. In general 15 informants were participated for interview and 3FGD was conducted and each group have been comprises 5 individuals. Regarding the secondary data, the researcher consulted published and unpublished sources such as, books, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, articles and internet.

Sampling Procedure

For the successful implementation of this study, the researcher used a sampling procedure to get the necessary information from the sample frame. The researcher employed a non-probability sampling method. The respondents for interview purposes were selected purposively by considering their age and knowledge about the resources. Generally, the researcher selected the respondents from local communities' elderly people, Culture and tourism officers and monastery servants purposively. On the other hand, in order to understand the challenges related with tourism facilities, information was collected from tourists by using non-probability convenience sampling.

Data Analysis Method

There are a number of methods used by qualitative researchers to analyze their data. In order to analyze the contents of documentary materials such as books, magazines, newspapers and the contents of interviews, and personal observation, the researcher employed descriptive data analysis method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The History of the Church

According to legend, Menelik I returned from Jerusalem with the Ark of the Covenant and the firstborn sons of Israelites. Among those who came to Ethiopia, Amenadab was the most prominent one. Amenadab arrived in Amhara Saynt and propagated the Old Testament into the surrounding vicinity. At the same time, he constructed a temple in the area, where the present day Tedabe Mariam Monastery is established. After he accomplished the construction of the temple (church) he assigned Azarias (a High priest) as an administrator of the temple. Apart from this, Amenadab assigned biblical names to each village that is found nearby the church. These entire names represent the different place names of Israel, ; Gologota, Kebron, Gaza, Loza , Dabra tabor, Betanya, Gelila, Eyariko, Jerusalem Lebanos, Armonem, Demsaqo and Debra Faran. Thus, these names signify that a tradition of the Old Testament was practiced in this area before the introduction of Christianity into the vicinity and gives light that there had been Israelites in the area during the then period.

On the other hand, Azaryas who had been assigned as administrator of the temple gave the name Tedbabe Tsion to the present day Tedbabe Mariam; he coined the name to the memorial of his uncle, King Dawit (Amhra Saynt District Magazine, 2000; Informants Birhan Tesfa and Mola, Negus January, 2015).

After the advent of Christianity in Ethiopia in 330 AD, the first church of Axum was constructed. Since then, Christianity spread into different parts of the country. Alongside this, various churches were built in the area where Christianity was propagated. During that time, Amhara Saynt was one of the areas where Christianity was expanded (Informant Fiqire Mariam, January, 2016).

According to different informants and different parchment books found in the church, the two brother kings, Abrha and Atsbha had come into Amhara Saynt and constructed a monastery in the place where the temple was built by Aminadab. Then these kings changed the name Tedbabe Tsion into Tedbabe Mariam, to mean a place or a hill which elected to God (Hiruy, 2006). Monastery informants also said that the name Tedbabe is a Ge'ez word which mean an edge (Informant Aba Lakew, January 2015). After they established the church, the two kings offered various material objects that belonged to the kings such as crosses and other ecclesiastical relic with their names inscribed upon. These are still present in the museum and became testimony since the monastery is ancient and historic.

As stated above, according to church historians and local informants the first monastery (temple) was constructed in 982 BC. Since its establishment, the church was rebuilt nine times (Amhra Saynt District Magazine, 2000; Hiruy, 2006). After the introduction of Christianity, it was reconstructed about four times, with the first during the reign of Ezana and Sizana (340AD). It was also reconstructed in 882 AD by king Gelawdiwos and in 1550s by the host community. The construction of the existing church was started in 1906 and accomplished in 1907 by the order and sponsor of King Michael, the then governor of Wollo provinces and one of the regional lords of Emperor Menelik II (Amhra Saynt District Magazine, 2000; informant Aba Mefkerei, 2016). The construction materials had been brought from distance areas; bamboo from south Gondar, Esta, stone and limestone from the surrounding villages called uqir and indigenous juniper from Albiko and Kalu districts. Horse and human labor was used to transport the construction materials (Amhra Saynt District Magazine, 2000; Local Informant, Aba Gebre Egziabhare). The mason and carpenter who constructed the monastery come from the vicinity and distance area.

In general, currently there are four buildings in the churchyards, these are, the Church, the treasure house, the tombs which different saints coffin are amassed, and the Dejeselam (the house which food and beverage are served to priests, Dabitera and deacons). In addition to these it is said to have been an area rich in archaeological sources. According to oral tradition and as asserted by many local informants there are unearthed palaces and churches within the churchyards. Different artifacts are found by farmers while they are tilting in the demarcated archaeological sites according to Lakew, my local informant.

Figure 1. Picture of Tedbabe Mariam church



Source: Memeher Haylmariam

The Treasure House of Tedbabe Mariam Monastery

The treasure house of Tedbabe Mariam monastery is located within the church compound, 50 Meters away from the church. It is as old as the church and built from stone and wood. It is a one story building. Initially, it had thatched roof but was changed to corrugated iron sheet. The antiquities are exhibited in the upper floor which connects with the first floor by stair. This house served as shelter for those priceless heritages for a century.

For many years, there was one monk who was responsible for guarding the collections. Unless the guard gives permission no one could visit the treasures. Even those who obtained permission to visit only selected portions of the collection due to security reasons. Thus, some others are not accessible for the general public. Due to lack of show case, some of the splendid heritages are placed in the wooden box and some of them are either hanged on the wall or simply placed on the floor (Informants Kindu and Mola, interviewed on January 2015).

Tangible Movable heritage found in the treasure house

Besides the tangible immovable cultural heritages, there are marvelous treasures in Tedbabe Mariam church, which their age dates back to the history of the Church. Some of these heritages are not found

elsewhere in the country even in other worlds (Amhra Saynt district magazine, 2000; Diana, 1972). Among these tangible moveable cultural heritage resources the following resource are the major one.

Parchment Manuscripts

Ethiopia is the only sub Saharan country, which has designed its own alphabet to record and preserve its civilization since historic period. In ancient Ethiopia, documents have been recorded on parchments (refined animal skin). In this regard, the EOTC has won great prestige throughout the world on its manuscripts prepared on parchments. These valuable manuscripts still exist in various churches and monasteries (Beli, 1992). Tedbabe Mariam Monastery is the one that has a huge collection of manuscripts and comprises more than 300 parchment manuscripts. The monastery acquired these manuscripts in different ways. Some of them are obtained through donation; bequest and some others are inscribed by the then church servants.

All the manuscripts displayed in the treasure house are religious in their content and hand written with Ge'ez, the ancient language of Ethiopia. These manuscripts have a number of data. Among the manuscripts, those exhibited in the museum are the four Gospels coated with a gold plate and Digwa (book of the songs), which is too big. The head of its pages are beautifully decorated with various colors and designs giving it more power to catch the eye of visitors. Even the borders of the pages are adorned with various designs such as grasses, leaves and geometrical designs. However, much of the manuscripts are wooden covered and laminated with tan leather. An elaborated cross design is stamped over the tanned leather, which creates an impressive view. *Mahider* (a bag which is made from a tanned skin is used for hanging and carrying the parchments) is also exhibited in the treasure house. Most of them are written in ancient and medieval period. Among these, the Hagiography of Adam is found only in Tedbabe Mariam and some selected Ethiopian Orthodox Church. However, a book entitled Giworgis Woldeamin is found solely in Tedbabe Mariam. There is also a unique Gospel which is written in Arabic and Ge`ez language with red and black ink (Amhara Saint Magazine, 2000).

Crosses

Crosses are the other most magnificent tangible movable heritage that amassed in the treasure house of the Monastery and some of these are discussed here. The crosses of Abune Selama, the first Ethiopian bishop, Echege Yohannes's hand cross and Aba Qerlos's hand cross are found in the treasure house. There are also many other crosses in different size and types such as, Axumit,

Gondaryan and Lalibela types. They are made from gold, silver, bronze and wood. Besides this hand crosses, there are various processional crosses with different style and made with different materials like that of hand crosses. In these cross, the symbol of crucifixion and that of St. Mary's is depicted or inscribed over it making it more attractive and unique. Furthermore, it indicates the development of ironsmith during that period (Diana, 1972).

The other astonishing movable treasures of the monastery are the three historic shields which are adorned in gold, silver and leather. There is also a very magnificent and glamorous historic chair which still seemed new and different arrows that was handed to the monastery by different dignitaries.

Table 1. List of some crosses found in Tedababe Mryam church

No	Type of cross	Benefactor	Number	Material that the cross is made
1	Hand cross	Aba selama the 1 st Ethiopian pop	1	Gold
2	Two fold Processional cross	Unknown	2	Silver
3	Hand cross	Ichega Yohannes	1	Adorned with gold
	Different size Processional cross	Unanimous benefactors	5	
4	Hand cross	Abune Anoriwos	1	

Source: Amhara Saint Magazine, 2002

Icons

There are different movable paintings and icons in the monastery and the treasure house of Tedbabe Mariam. There is a big leather painting that reveals the history of Jesus Christ; his childhood when he performed different miracles, his crucifixion and resurrection. It is adorned with different inks. Another very astonishing icon is the triptych icon of St. Mary with the frames of each panel carved from one piece of wood. The wooden panels were joined together using leather strings by drilling at the junction of the two panels.

According to Heruy (2005) and local informants there is an ancient hair in the treasure house. It is said to have been the hair of St. Hana, the mother of Virgin Mary. It is stored in an ancient well decorated pot. According to church fathers, the hair is said to have been introduced into the monastery during the time where the Israelites came into the area.

Apart from this, the monastery is house to many mummified remains of saints, which are said to have been brought from Egypt and Israel. Along these, it is said to have been believed as the remains of six Ethiopian kings including, king Gelawdiwos and other four remains of Echege (traditionally the highest Ethiopian ecclesiastic in the Ethiopian Orthodox church) are found in the separated house within the churchyard (Hiruy, 2006).

Vestments

There are different varieties of vestments within the collection of Tedbabe Mariam treasure houses. Many of the vestments are old aged and have great historical significance. Different personalities had presented these colorful vestments to the monastery

of Tedbabe. The ceremonial clothes of Emperor Yohannes IV, Menelik and ceremonial cloth of empress Zwditu are found there which were presented to the monastery by the kings and queen themselves. There are also different clothes such as robe adorned with gold and silver which are offered to the monastery from various individuals and royal families (Amhra Saynt district magazine, 2000; Hiruy, 2006).

Crowns

There are various crowns in the treasure house of Tedbabe Mariam church, which is made and adorned with gold and silver and handed to the monastery from different personalities such as, crown belong to Emperor Gelawudious, the crown of King Michael and so on. Besides, there are different swords, shield and rifle, which different emperors and personalities used during various battles. For instance, there is a rifle which is said to have been brought in the 16th century by the Portuguese soldier and rendered to emperor Gelwudios. There is also a big drum that belongs to emperor Gelwudios which he brought from the Adal Sultan following his victory in the war (Hiruy, 2006).

Tent

There is one big tent in the monastery which is said to have been made in 1329 AD. According to oral tradition, 18 different kings performed their coronation within this tent. Nevertheless, there is no authentic evidence on who and when they were coronated.

Challenges for Heritage Tourism Development in Tedbabe Mariam Monastery

As stated above, the antiquities were housed in small treasure houses for hundreds of years. Due to lack of space and awareness they had been placed one over the other without distinguishing the material they made and periodical inspection. Thus, they are exposed to wear and tear. Due to this and other reasons, some of the antiquities are disfigured, or broken down. Particularly, heritages made from organic materials are wearing down than organic ones. For instance, some of the parchment books inscriptions are discolored and the paintings that paint over it are disfigured due to moisture and dust. The wooden plats that coat the manuscript are broken and the leather string that used to join the wooden coat is cut down. Some of the vestments are tore and the gold and silvers that used to decorate the robes and wooden cover are detached and lost due to old age and lack of proper handling. Besides its narrowness and absence of proper space, the treasure house did not get enough light; thus, it exacerbates the damage over the antiquities.

Tremendous antiquities are amassed in an old treasure house due to the lack of modern and standard museum. However, construction of a new museum was started by collaboration of Federal and Regional Culture and Tourism Office and Bureau respectively so as to mitigate the recurrent problems, still not yet completed; therefore, these spectacular heritages continued to be placed in a very narrow and inappropriate room.

Regarding the road, the Monastery is not accessible by car; therefore, after a few kilometers from the district town of Ajibar, visitors are obliged to travel on foot for about 3 or 4 h (Informant Mola Nigus, 2017).

Another challenge is lack of trained man power in the area of heritage conservation and tourism management who can help to identify, conduct regular heritage inventory and promote the existing tourism potential of the monastery to the target market. Due to the lack of a heritage conservator and other related problems, these indispensable heritages are on the verge of extinction.

Lack of a website and web peg is also another problem that the monastery faces. It is clear that in the era of information, having websites is indispensable to communicate with the global population. Due to lack of this page, those priceless and spectacular heritages are not able to communicate with international and national tourists; rather they become hidden from tourists contact.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

This study attempts to assess the heritage tourism potential of Tedbabe Mariam Monastery and the hindering factors that challenge heritage tourism development in monastery. The area is rich in history and heritage of Tedbabe Mariam which is a living testimony about the pre-Christian and Christianity period of Ethiopia. The treasure house comprises priceless heritages such as parchment manuscripts, various types of crosses that were made with different organic and inorganic materials, vestments and other ecclesiastical and ceremonial and historical antiques.

The geographical setting of Tedbabe Mariam, that is, its panoramic view increases the heritage value of the site. The research findings reveal challenges that have hindered the churches from developing heritage tourism as its potential include lack of tourist's facility like hotels, lodges, restaurants, internet access and lack of promotion works. Lack of documentation and well-organized information about the churches, poor handling system of the treasures and the lack of a standard museum are also contributing factors. Unprofessional conservation and lack of trained tour guides are other challenges that the site faces over time.

Recommendations

To attract more tourists to the churches and develop tourism, the following recommendations are forwarded. To be accessible Tedbabe Mariam for tourists, the road from Ajibar to Tedbabe Mariam should be constructed by collaboration of the federal and regional state government as well as in collaboration with Wollo University; but above all, to rescue the priceless treasures, the newly built museum of Tedbabe Mariam should be accomplished within the given time and provide appropriate services. Besides, the monastery should work to promote its heritage tourism potential through different printing and electronic media through and creating collaboration with travel agent and tour operator. However before promoting the site, accommodation and recreational places should be constructed particularly in Tedbabe Mariam; at least a guest house should be constructed since the monastery is situated far from the nearby town.

Recommendation for Further Study

As far as focus of this study is to disclose the tourism potential of the site and revealing hindering factors, it is of paramount importance that some research will be conducted on the heritage conservation and preservation issues.

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