

Potentials and Challenges to Heritage Tourism Development: The Case of *Tedbabe Mariam* Church, South Wollo Zone, Ethiopia***Firdiywok Abebe**abebe.fird81@gmail.com***Alubel Workie**alubelworkie@gmail.com

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mollanigus@gmail.com**Abstract**

This paper is intended to assess potentials and challenges of heritage tourism development in *Tedbabe Mariam* church. Qualitative research approach was employed to collect data from local community elders, Amhara Sayint culture and tourism office employees, servants and leaders of *Tedbabe Mariam* church, Amhara Sayint diocese, South Wollo Zone culture and tourism department employees selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Both primary and secondary sources were used to assess potentials and challenges of heritage tourism development in *Tedbabe Mariam* church. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, personal observation and focus group discussion whilst published and unpublished documents were employed as secondary sources. Results revealed that long history, mural paintings, tombs of saints, treasury house with collections of parchment manuscripts, crosses, icons, umbrella, and crowns were potentials of heritage tourism development in *Tedbabe Mariam* church. Despite *Tedbabe Mariam* church has such huge heritage tourism potentials, it has not yet been properly conserved and utilized due to poor handling system and lack of well-organized museum, underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of skilled manpower, lack of promotion and awareness, theft and illicit trafficking, and lack of documentation.

Keywords: Potentials, Challenges, Heritage, Tourism, *Tedbabe Mariam*, church**Introduction**

Ethiopia is an ancient country with remarkably rich linguistic and cultural diversity. Rich cultural landscape is further enhanced by representation of numerous religions including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and other traditional religions (MDGAF, 2013). Endowments with numerous tourism attractions make Ethiopia potentially important for tourism development (Kidane-Mariam, 2015). Ayalew (2002) states that ever since its introduction in the 4th century, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church produces numerous tangible and intangible heritages that have great heritage tourism potential. It consisted of many historical and religious internationally significant treasures such as rock-hewn and ancient churches, monasteries, stone paintings, and other frescos (Finneran, 2012). Many of these heritages are elements of a living faith, which are still in use as a site of worship (Elene, 2010). Despite these high potentials, tourism remains undeveloped in Ethiopia due to lack of financial resources, inadequate security system, unclear boundaries, lack of infrastructure, looting, lack of impact assessment, lack of local participation, and vandalism (ICOMOS, 2005). In addition, tourism resources especially new destinations are not identified and promoted for tourism development diversification and sustainability (Sefrin, 2012). Subsequently, only few tourism resources are recognized and visited by both international and domestic tourists (Ermias, 2014).

Tedbabe Mariam church, which was established 900 years before the birth of Christ is also one of the potential tourism sites of Amhara National Regional State of Ethiopia. It has different priceless antiquities donated by different emperors and dignitaries, holy articles, parchment, manuscripts and wooden curving tables. It was also one of the places where the first Judaic sacrifice was offered in



Ethiopia around 338 B.C (Kefyalew, 2001). Unfortunately, these priceless treasuries of *Tedbabe Mariam* church remained unstudied and not exploited for tourism development. In fact, different researchers have conducted researches regarding Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido churches' potentials and contribution for tourism development. For instance, Ermias (2014) assessed religious tourism potentials of *Gishen Mariam*; Aselefech (2014) studied the role of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church for development of adult education; and Binayew & Yiheyis (2016) studied potentials and contributions of tourism for economic development, etc. All of these and other researchers could not assess potentials and challenges for heritage tourism development in *Tedbabe Mariam* church. Main tangible and intangible heritages of *Tedbabe Mariam* church are not yet assessed as well as underutilized both by domestic and international tourists.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study was intended to assess potentials and challenges for heritage tourism development in *Tedbabe Mariam* church.

Methodology

Description of the Study Area

Amhara Sayint Woreda is one of the 22 Woredas in Administrative of South Wollo Zone which situated West of Dessie town at 200Km. It has 35 34 rural kebeles and 1 urban kebele (Amhara Sayint Woreda Communication Office, 2009 E.C). *Tedbabe Mariam* church is located at 28Km from Sayint Adjbar (town of Amhara Sayint Woreda), 228Km away from Dessie (town of South Wollo Administrative Zone) and 650km from Addis Ababa (Amhara Sayint Woreda Culture and Tourism Office, 2009 E.C). *Tedbabe Mariam* church is located at 11⁰ 06' 87" latitude and 30⁰ 45' 02" longitudes and has semi-tropical climatic zone.

Research Design

Qualitative research approach along with cross-sectional and descriptive design was employed to identify and describe the existing situation of heritage potentials and challenges of *Tedbabe Mariam* church.

Target Population

Target populations of this study were local community elders living in the study area, Amhara Sayint Woreda culture and tourism office employees, servants and leaders of *Tedbabe Mariam* church, Amhara Sayint Woreda diocese and South Wollo Zone Culture and Tourism employees.

Sampling Techniques

A total of 35 interviewees were selected by using purposive and snowball sampling techniques from Amhara Sayint Woreda Culture and Tourism office (head of office, heritage inventory, tourism development and cultural values experts), South Wollo Zone culture and tourism employees (heritage conservation and tourism development experts), Sayint Woreda church diocese, local community elders, servers and leaders of *Tedbabe Mariam* church. Three focus group discussions were also conducted with purposively selected groups of religious fathers of *Tedbabe Mariam* church, Amhara Sayint Woreda diocese, and Amhara Sayint Woreda culture and tourism office experts.

Data Analysis Plan

Data collected through interview, field observation and focus group discussion were transcribed and translated as well as investigation and analysis of documents were conducted. Detailed analysis and interpretation were made using thematic categorization techniques. Finally, findings were written by applying logical order, flow of ideas and arguments.

Results and Discussion

History of *Tedbabe Mariam* Church

Tedbabe Mariam church is one among the magnificent ancient and historic churches in Amhara National Regional State. Its age is traced back to 982 BC (Moges, 2010). It is also one of the places that sacrifice had performed before the advent of Christianity (Leke Tiguhan Debebe interviewed on April 25, 2018).

During 333 AD, Amhara Sayint was one of the areas that Christianity was expanded (Bewketu, 2009 & Leke Tiguhan Debebe and Merigeta Habitam interviewed on March 25 and 28, 2018 respectively). The two brother kings, Abrha and Atsbha had come into Amhara Sayint and constructed church in the place where the temple was built by Amenadab. About 1618 years (from 333-1951 AD), *Tedbabe Mariam* church was rendered Patriarch. During the reign of kings, Abrha and Atsbha in 333 the first Patriarch of *Tedbabe Mariam* was Aba Merha Tsiyon and the last Patriarch of *Tedbabe Mariam* in 1951 was Aba Wolde Gebriel (Bewuketu, 2009). Then, these kings changed the name *Tedbabe Tsion* into *Tedbabe Maryam* to mean a place or a hill which elected to God. Church informant also said that the name *Tedbabe* is a Ge`ez word to mean edge (Aba Girum and Leke Tiguhan Debebe interviewed on March 29 and 25, 2018 respectively). After they established the church the two kings offered various material objects that belong to the kings such as crosses and other ecclesiastical relic which their name is inscribed on. These are still present in the treasure house and became testimony (Aba Muche interviewed on March 24, 2018).

The first temple was constructed in 982 BC and rebuilt in different times by different kings. After the birth of God, the first built church was during the reign of Ezana and Sizana in 330s AD (Hiruy, 2006). The church was also reconstructed in the reign of Atse Anbesa Wudim (890-910), Saint Lalibela (1157-1197), Atse Zeryakob (1468 – 1478), Atse Gelawdiwos (1533-1550), Adam Seged (1674-1698), and Atse Bakafa (1721 - 1730) (Bewuketu, 2009). The reasons to rebuild the church in different times were destroyed by old aged, promise to built and pattern to their mothball on the church of *Tedbabe Mariam* (Tekiletsadik, 1953). The construction of the existing church building was also started in 1906 and accomplished in 1907 by the order and sponsor of King Michael; who was the governor of Wollo provinces and one of the regional lords of Emperor Menelik II (Kefyalew, 2001 and Aba Muche and Leke Tiguhan Debebe interviewed on March 24 and 25, 2018 respectively).

Mural paintings of *Tedbabe Mariam* Church

Several of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Churches' buildings are decorated with fascinated paintings (Abebaw, 2002). Besides its beautiful architectural styles, *Tedbabe Mariam* church is also decorated with different eye catching paintings such as Jesus Christ, saint Marry and different saint and martyrs paintings. Paintings transmit the messages of the history of Jesus Christ from his childhood to resurrection and all are biblical messages. Different kings and dignitaries are depicted on the wall with astonishing color. The entire paintings are painted by traditional Ethiopian painting style. Wall mural painting is open to tourist only from the date crucifix to June 12th but in other times it is closed with curtain (Aba Girum interviewed on March 25, 2018). Date of mural paintings, famous painters and sponsors wrote on East side of Meqides's window and all paintings were painted between 1913-1916 E.C by Aleqa Mengstu and Aleqa Alemu by the sponsor of Emperor Zewuditu and Emperor Haile Selassie with collaboration of local government leaders and church fathers (Aba Muche and Aba Sisay interviewed on March 24 and 26, 2018 respectively). Selection of the color and the way they decorated are very remarkable and has capacity to catch the eye of any visitor due to the fact that the whole paintings had more than 100 years old still they seems new.

Treasure House of *Tedbabe Mariam* Church

Treasure house of *Tedbabe Mariam* Church is located within the church compound at 50m away from the church in Northwest direction. It is as old as the church and built from stone and wood with one story building. Antiquities are exhibited in the upper floor which connects with the first floor by steer. This house is served as shelter for those priceless heritages for a century (Aba Muche and Mr. Belay interviewed on April 24 and 28, 2018 respectively).

The marvelous treasures of *Tedbabe Maryam* church house are as follows:

A. Parchment Manuscripts

Ethiopia is the only sub Saharan country that has its own alphabet to record and preserve its civilization since immemorial time. In ancient Ethiopia, documents have been recorded on parchments (refined animal skin). Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church has own great prestige throughout the world on its manuscripts prepared on parchment and still exist in various churches and monasteries (Natnael, 2012). *Tedbabe Mariam* is one that has a huge collection of manuscripts; consist of more than 160 parchment manuscripts (Worku and Yeshinew, interviewed on April 11 and 12, 2018 respectively). Among manuscripts, book of Hawi written in the 4th century, Hagiography of Adam and Giworgis Woldeamin, Abushahir, Sinodos, Kibrenegest, Tarikenegest, Sinkisar, Gedile Abriha and Atsibha, Metsehafe Liqawent, Metsihafe Menekosat and others. Some of them are obtained through donation, bequeath and some others are inscribed by the then church servants (Aba Muche and Aba Sisay interviewed on March 24 and 26, 2018 respectively). Nearly all manuscripts displayed in treasure house are religious in their content and hand written with Ge'ez, the ancient language of Ethiopia (Aba Teferie and Leke Tiguhan Debebe, interviewed on April 23 and 25, 2018 respectively). Most of them are written in ancient and medieval period (Aba Girum and Leke interviewed on March 25 and 29, 2018 respectively). There is also a unique gospel which is written in Arabic and Ge'ez language with red and black ink. There is also amazing book written in Aramaic language in local community known as '*Yeseleda Kidasie*' written in three columns and has the figures of Virgin Mary with the Jesus Christ and figures of St. Mika'el and Gebre'el. The sponsor of this manuscript was Aba Selama Kessate Birhan in the 4th century (Bewuketu, 2009 and Aba Girum, interviewed on March 29, 2018).

B. Crosses

Crosses are other most magnificent tangible heritages that amassed in treasure house of the church. Crosses of Abune Selama Kesate Birhan, the first Ethiopian bishop, Echege Yohannes's 'betre hosanna, Abone Anoriwos's and Aba Qerlos's hand cross are found in the treasure house (Aba Haile and Aba Brihanu, interviewed on March 29 and 26, 2018 respectively). Researchers also observed many other crosses in different size and types, such as, Axumite, Gondarine and Lalibela types 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 Saint Mary's is depicted or inscribed over it and making it attractive and indicated development of ironsmith during that period. There is also a cross called "Nii'wa Biigu", (Behold the Lamb) which is locally believed to be the cross of Saint John baptized Jesus Christ. This cross measures 20x16cm made of chased silver or silver dipped bronze. Researchers observed on the face of the cross there is engraved and gilded figure of Saint Mika'el faces right, his hands raised to his bent head, his wings flowing out behind him. On the reverse side, there is a single Cherub with four symbolic pairs of wings stretching along the four arms of the cross.

C. Umbrellas and Crowns

Umbrellas with different sizes and colors are exhibited in the treasure house. Many of them are as old as the church. *Debab* (large processional umbrella) is the biggest, which is held over a gospel to cover it when the priest read it. It is also used to cover *Tabot* when it is withdrawn from its altar during various feasts (Aba Teferi and Aba Sisay interviewed, on March 26 and 23, 2018 respectively). The smaller one is used during funeral procession and baptism. Different figures such as the figures of Christ, Virgin Mary and her son, saints and angles are depicted over the outer layer of it. Its edge is also decorated with different designs and their handles are totally made from silver and golden (Amhra Saynt Woreda Administration, 2002 and Aba Girum, interviewed on April 29, 2018). There are also various crowns in the treasure house of *Tedbabe Mariam* Church, which are made and adorned with gold and silver and hands to the church from different personalities such as, crown belong to Emperor Gelawdiwos, crown of King Michael and so on.

D. Tomb of Saints

The church is house of many mummified remains of saints, which is said to have brought from Egypt and Israel and five children remains that were killed by King Herodias. Some Ethiopian kings' remains are also presented in the house which is locally called 'Enkullal Ginb'. According to Moges (2010) and Aba Girum and Leke Tiguhan Debebe (interviewed on April 25 and 29, 2018 respectively), skeletons of six Ethiopian kings: Emperor Tewodros I (1403-1406), Emperor Yishaq (1429-1430), Emperor Endirias (1430-1433), Emperor Eskindr (1470-1487), and Emperor Minas (1551-1556), and Tsehafie Lahim Bisrate Michael, Lord of Shewa and Gondar as well as Etege Romane Worq (wife of Emperor Naod) with king Gelawdiwos (1533-1551) are found in this tomb (Bewuketu, 2009).

Challenges of Heritage Tourism Development in *Tedbabe Mariam* Church

Threats to the churches can be seen in two ways: physical deterioration of the church itself and tangible treasures because of human made and natural agents, and constitutes threats to intangible heritages, for which tourism take the lion share (Natnael, 2012). The following are challenges that hinder the development heritage tourism in the study area.

A. Poor Handling system and Lack of well-organized museum

Tremendous and priceless treasures of *Tedbabe Mariam* church are housed in an old small treasure house 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. Researchers observed that treasures are exposed for wear and tear. Because of these and other reasons some of the antiquities are disfigured. Particularly, heritages that made from organic materials are wearing down than organic one. For instance, some of the parchment inscriptions are discolored and the paintings that paint over it are disfigured due to moisture and dust. Besides its narrowness and absence of proper space, the treasure house did not get enough light, thus it exacerbate the damage over the antiquities.

B. Lack of Documentation

To conserve, preserve and promote the heritage resource, there should be sufficient information about heritage sites (Zelalem, 2013). There are lots of historical assets and resources which can express the church of *Tedbabe Mariam* in meaningful way. But there is no well-organized document about the history of the site and other heritage resources. They are found as oral tradition rather than documented and kept in software and hardware system to transfer to the next generations. Precious heritages of the church are found without proper registration and documentation of their age, use, history, materials made from and other related issues. Some parchment books and written documents do not have number, date and Year. This also has influence on how to relate with history and used as evidence to prove some historical and religious aspects (Yalemwork, interviewed on 13, 2018).

C. Lack of Skilled Manpower

Conserving church and its heritages requires not only knowledge, skill, competency and understanding of methods of conservation but also the culture itself to ensure these cultural values (Natnael, 2012). Most participants of focus group discussion repeatedly asserted that lack of trained manpower in heritage conservation and tourism management to identify, conduct regular heritage inventory and promote the existing tourism potentials of the church to the target market is another challenge. Elders who have some knowledge and skills about the church's antiquities are passed away. Heritages of the church are damaging and losing its historical, aesthetic, scientific and cultural values and finally verge of extinction (Firiezzer and Suliman, interviewed on April 11 and 18, 2018 respectively).

D. Theft and Illicit Trafficking

Many priceless treasure of the church like manuscripts, icons and crosses are victims until today and the main target of theft (Mengstu, 2008). *Tedbabe Mariam* Church is one of the victims by theft, for instance, in 1780s one robber has stolen, gold processional cross, gold hand cross, gold

chalice, gold Tsahil (incense burner), two silver Shields, 11 silver Bayonets, 11 silver Prominences, three silver Halos, copper *Aklil*(crown), Tumbler Explosive, tiger robe, and six vestments. In addition in 1984, silver crown of Gelawdiwos, silver processional cross, benefactor of empress Zewuditu, gold *Aklil* (crown) and benefactor of Ras Alula and other treasures were stolen. Even today, treasures are not guaranteed since they are stored in traditional handling system. Due to absence of museum and fear of theft, the treasures of *Tedbabe Mariam* Church are not accessible for visitors. Therefore, theft and illicit trafficking has hindered development of heritage tourism in *Tedbabe Mariam* Church (Leke Tiguhan Debebe, interviewed on March 25, 2018).

E. Lack of Promotion and Awareness

Promotion plays a pivotal role in supporting conservation efforts, bring about public understanding and increase tourist flow. If moveable heritages are visited, they will be arrested by the community in the situation of theft and illicit trafficking (Natnael, 2012). Because of insufficient promotion, the church and local communities cannot get expected amount of benefit for heritage conservation, museum construction and to supplement their livelihood. Sometimes, district culture and tourism office tries to promote in electronic (such as television and radio) and printed (brochure) Medias. But because of awareness problem, local communities considered that exposing heritages to tourists is exposing assets to theft, illicit trafficking, losing of holiness, and damage (Firiezzer and Yeshinew, interviewed on April 11 and 12, 2018 respectively).

F. Lack of Infrastructure

There is strong relation between development of infrastructure sector and tourism industry. The presence of developed infrastructure paves way for growth of tourism activities. Under developed transport sector is among the factors that created obstacle for the development of tourism in the area. The church is not accessible by car; therefore after a few kilometers from Ajibar, visitors are obliged to travel on foot for about three or four hours. Inaccessibility of tourist facilities like hotels, lodges and restaurant as well as souvenir shops, water supply and electric power are other serious challenges in the study area (Worku Suliman and Yalemwork, interviewed on April 11 and 13, 2018 respectively).

Conclusion

This study is attempted to assess heritage tourism potential of *Tedbabe Mariam* and the hindering factors that challenge heritage tourism development in the monastery. The area is rich in history and heritage tourism potential. *Tedbabe Maryam* is a living testimony about the pre-Christian and Christianity period of Ethiopia and the monastery is paramount important to study medieval Ethiopian history particularly church educations. The monastery houses indispensable and priceless treasures particularly substantial number of manuscripts. The church treasures with its invaluable religious and secular antiquities have also the most important heritage tourism potential to draw both international and national tourists.

However, because of the presence of different hindering factors such as poor handling system and lack of well-organized museum, lack of documentation, lack of Skilled Manpower, theft and Illicit Trafficking, lack of Promotion and awareness, and lack of infrastructure, heritages of the church are not properly utilized and the flow of tourists is not satisfactory. Therefore to transfer the priceless heritages of *Tedbabe Mariam* church to upcoming generation with their cultural, historical and scientific values, all concerned stakeholders should work cooperatively.

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Heritage Tourism in Ethiopia Addis Ababa Entoto St. Mary Museum: The Oldest Ethiopian Church Museum. Jan 2008. G Mengistu. Mengistu G (2008). Addis Ababa. Aspects of Tourism: Tourism and Development Concept and Issues. Jan 2002. Dj Richard. Richard DJ (2002). The case study presented is the Church of Saint Mercurius (Abu Sayfayn) in Old Cairo, due to its historical and architectural significance. An analysis is conducted using an innovative tool; semiotics, for the worship space itself. Semiotics is concerned with the study of signs and sign systems, it is a discipline recognized internationally. The analytical framework utilized in this research paper is based on the work of Gerard Lukken and Mark Searle, as applied on a particular church; SS. Potentials and Challenges to Heritage Tourism Development: The Case of Tedbabe Mariam Church, South Wollo Zone, Ethiopia. Alubel Workie Eyassu, Firdiywok Abebe Yehuwala, Molla Nigus. 2018. This paper is intended to assess potentials and challenges of heritage tourism development in Tedbabe Mariam church. Qualitative research approach was employed to collect data from local community (More). South Wollo (Amharic: ሰላሳ ወረዳ) is one of 10 Zones in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia. It acquired its name from the former province of Wollo. South Wollo is bordered on the south by North Shewa and the Oromia Region, on the west by East Gojjam, on the northwest by South Gondar, on the north by North Wollo, on the northeast by Afar Region, and on the east by the Oromia Zone and the Argobba special woreda. Its highest point is Mount Amba Ferit. Towns and cities in South Wollo include Kombolcha, Hayq