



**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

**HYPOGEA HERITAGE TOURISM RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION
PRACTICES IN AMHARA REGION, ETHIOPIA: EXPLORATIONS
FROM LAY GAYINTWOREDA. SOUTH GONDAR**

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**JUNE 2023
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

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**Hypogea Heritage Tourism Resources and Conservation Practices in Amhara
Region, Ethiopia: Explorations from Lay Gayint *Woreda*, South Gondar**

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**A Thesis Submitted to College of Development Studies in partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Tourism Development and Management**

June, 2023
Addis Ababa

Declaration

I, the under signed, declare that this study entitled, “Hypogea Heritage Tourism Resources and Conservation Practices in Amhara Region, Ethiopia: Explorations from Lay Gayint *Woreda*, South Gondar” is my own work.

All information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. This study has not been submitted for award of any Degree/Masters/PhD program in this or any other institution and, I have fully cited, acknowledged and referenced all materials and results that are not original to this work.

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Acknowledgments

Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure.

Psalms 15:9

I have been indebted to many individuals because the completion of this study would not have been possible without the contributions made by them, who deserve my heartfelt gratitude here. My first gratitude goes to my advisor, Dr. Tesfaye Zeleke, whose unreserved efforts were the backbone for the completion of the study. His comments, suggestions, and moral support have made a lot of contributions to the process of the study.

My gratitude also goes to Denise E. Allen and her husband, Richard E. Allen, under their House of Zion Ministries, Inc. at Palatine Bridge, New York, for their financial support both for the course and field works of this training program.

I also would like to thank all my course instructors, particularly Dr. Shiferaw Muleta, Dr. Ephrem Assefa, Dr. Tamrat Tefera, and Dr. Aseffa Seyoum, who contributed in one way or another to the progress and finalization of this study. I'm also thankful to Dr. Worku Dera and Dr. Shiferaw Muleta for their evaluations and critical comments which have contributed to the improvement of this study.

Finally, I would like to thank all my informants and respondents in Nefas Mewcha, Mesenna, and Wukro for their unreserved information that they shared with me during the field work.



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Acronyms

CHM:	Cultural heritage management
CSA:	Central Statistics Agency
CTB:	Culture and Tourism Bureau
EOTC:	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church
ICOMOS:	The International Council on Monuments and Sites
ICH:	Intangible Cultural Heritage
MoCT:	Ministry of Culture and Tourism.
UNWTO:	United Nations World Tourism Organization
UNESCO:	United Nations Science, Education and Cultural Organization
WHL:	World Heritage List

Transcription of Local Terms

<i>Abune:</i>	Our Father
<i>Eka bet:</i>	Treasury
<i>Fitawrari:</i>	A man who lead a military unit during war
<i>Gedle:</i>	... of deeds, life
<i>Kebele:</i>	Locality, local administrative unit
<i>Kiddist:</i>	Holy
<i>Kine-Mahlet:</i>	Chanting room
<i>Menber:</i>	Altar
<i>Mekdes:</i>	Sanctuary (holy of holies)
<i>Ras:</i>	Head, chief
<i>Woreda:</i>	District
<i>Wo:</i>	And
<i>Yegzer Dildiy:</i>	God's Bridge

Abstract

Most of Ethiopia's ancient heritage tourism resources in general and the hypogea churches in particular in the remote areas are poorly traced, documented and conserved. This study aimed to explore the untapped potential heritage tourism resources and heritage conservation status of hypogea churches in Lay Gayint Woreda, northwest Ethiopia. To this end, data were collected through field observations, questionnaires, interviews, and examination of written sources. The study followed descriptive research design with qualitative research supplemented by quantitative approach. The result shows that the woreda is endowed with little known monolithic and semi-monolithic types of hypogea churches that hold different tourist attraction values. From environmental perspective, the churches have made a contribution by preserving remnants of protected sacred forests in a highly exploited area. Historically, some of the hypogea churches are attributed to Abune Muse, probably the second bishop of Aksum, and others to King Lalibela, the famous king of Zagwe Dynasty. Architecturally, the rock-hewn churches, with varying degrees, possessed different decorative and aesthetic embellishments, some of which shared similarities with the Aksumite and post-Aksumite architectural traditions. Despite this, the conservation practices on these sites are insignificant. The hypogea churches are deteriorating because of natural and anthropogenic agents. This status of the churches shows the current critical heritage management problems that challenge the future heritage tourism development of the woreda in particular the country in general. This study recommends urgent conservation practices for the sake of sustaining these incredible cultural legacies for the future generation.

Key words: Cultural heritage tourism, hypogea churches, tourist attraction features, conservation practices, Lay Gayint.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Cultural heritage tourism is the oldest, most common, and fastest-growing type of tourism industry in which cultural heritage and tourism are linked within the global economic industry. It is widely recognized through the increasing cultural offerings and experiences provided to tourists by cultural destinations. The distinctive and flexible nature and multitude of symbolical meanings of cultural heritage and the growing interest of tourists in visiting unusual cultural values are the foundation for the development of cultural heritage tourism across the world (Kaminski *et al.*, 2014: 3-6; du Cros and McKercher, 2015: 4; Keitumetse, 2016: 161; Schafranski, 2022: 336-338; Vidal-Matzanke, Esteve-Ibáñez and Vidal-González, 2023: 265).

As an industry reliant on past human creativity, the development of cultural heritage tourism can only be sustained through sustainable management and protection of cultural resources. In this sense, these two areas have a close relationship, and the development efforts in both areas are expected to employ mutual and collaborative approaches for better results (Li and Wang, 2016: 1345–1346; Vidal-Matzanke, Esteve-Ibáñez and Vidal-González, 2023: 265-266). In developing countries, where the “earth’s magnificent heritage” is found, cultural heritage becomes at the forefront of the developmental plans of governments. However, the incorporation of these resources into tourism development is hampered by a variety of factors, including limitations in collaborative implementation, a lack of financial and human resources, the legacy of colonialism, a lack of political and social will, illicit trafficking, war, poor documentation and conservation, and different natural factors that degrade cultural heritage. Cultural heritages in many developing countries are mainly illusive, untraceable, and vulnerable to different deteriorative agents (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009: 20–33; Keitumetse, 2016: 181 and 203).

As various kinds of literature demonstrate (Phillipson, 2009; Gosden *et al.*, 2009; McPherron *et al.*, 2010; Metasebia, 2016; Di Salvo, 2017; Ashenafi, 2019; Howard, 2021; to name a few), Ethiopia has huge capacity in its cultural and historical endowments, which not only signify the country’s worth telling and living history and culture but also foster economic, social, and

cultural development through the tourism industry. Amhara Region is rich with ancient cultural heritage, including some of the country's world heritage sites, such as Lalibela rock-hewn churches, the first UNESCO-registered cultural site in the country. It is also place to numerous but little explored hypogea churches, which are found in the rugged landscape of the region (Phillipson, 2009; Mercier and Lapage, 2012).

However, the utilization of the rich cultural and historical endowments of the country in general and the region in particular for the development of the tourism industry has not shown sufficient progress because of various reasons such as lack of documentation and conservation, lack of manpower in the areas of cultural heritage management (CHM) and tourism development, absence of basic infrastructural developments, lack of tourism resource promotion, illicit trafficking and theft, political instability, globalization, the government's less prioritization of the industry, absence of legal frameworks in and around tourist destinations, and fragile coordination between regional and federal authorities (Mulugeta, 2012; Tesfaye, 2015; Yimer, 2016; Robinson, 2016; Ephrem, 2018; Tilahun 2019; Getahun, 2023).

In areas where cultural resources are inaccessible and little traced, exploration and documentation activities provide detailed information for researchers, heritage managers, tourism experts, and tourists. These activities provide the basic foundation to initiate, plan, and implement cultural heritage protection and tourism development in the areas identified as having the capacity to do so. However, the absence of the aforementioned activities is a serious problem with managing cultural heritage and developing cultural heritage tourism. The problem obviously hinders the process of conservation, promotion, and marketing of untapped cultural tourism resources, mainly in the remote areas of the region, particularly Lay Gayint *Woreda* (South Gondar), which is endowed with little explored cultural tourism resources, including ancient hypogea churches. Tourism development in this area is almost nonexistent, mainly because of the absence of exploration, recording, documentation, conservation, and promotion work. This study, therefore, was aimed at exploring the *woreda's* untapped potential hypogea tourism resources and their conservation status with intention to show the opportunities of the area for future heritage tourism practices.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The planning, developing and sustaining of cultural heritage tourism is depended on the practices made in the documentation, conservation and promotion of cultural heritage. These practices to enable the utilization of Ethiopia's cultural resources for tourism development have been made since 1960s. In the past six decades, few initiatives that have contributed to the documentation, conservation and promotion of cultural heritage as well as the development of tourism have been made. These include infrastructural establishments (such as transportation and accommodation), and institutional foundations (such as CHM institutions, tourism offices, tourism business organizations, and tourism policy, strategy and legislations). The country's efforts in CHM and promotion have contribution in the internationalization of about 13 tangible and intangible heritages which are registered by UNESCO's World Heritage List (WHL) since 1978 (Nair, 2016; Yimer, 2016: 20-26; Ayalew, 2017; Mengistu and Getachew, 2021, Getahun, 2023: 4).

If it is given the proper emphasis by cultural heritage researchers and tourism development experts, cultural heritage tourism is still a preferable form of tourism industry in Ethiopia. Ethiopia's endowment with tremendous cultural legacies of its past is its existing opportunity to establish an effective cultural heritage tourism practice. Unlike its neighbors, such as Kenya, "Ethiopia is best placed to play upon its [cultural] heritage" to develop cultural heritage tourism (Finneran, 2007: 266). Still, cultural heritages are the country's unique tourism resources that foster sustainable cultural tourism development by utilizing the qualities that these resources possess (Getahun, 2023: 8). Its cultural assets can also form a "spirit of originality" to promote the country as a main tourist destination in Africa. These endowments are also identified as being the major motivating factors for foreign tourists to plan their visit to Ethiopia (Altes, 2018).

Given the country's untapped tourism resource, which is dominantly cultural in nature, the Ethiopian government had a vision to make the country one of the top ten tourist centers in Africa by 2020 (Tegegne *et al.*, 2014). Its tourism development policy adheres to the need to develop existing and new tourist attractions in terms of variety, scale, and quality. In relation to this point, the protection and maintenance of popular tourist attractions and the identification and inclusion of new attraction sites into the tourism scheme are underlined in the policy (MoCT, 2009: 15–16). However, the development of the industry has not shown sufficient progress to attain the anticipated benefits, owing to the country's inability to transform its rich cultural and

natural heritage into tourism products. The existing tourism activity of the country is still reliant on a few known tourist centers, such as Aksum, Lalibela, and Gondar (Ashenafi, 2016, Yimer, 2016; Huber, 2021). The cultural heritage in these areas is better documented and researched from different perspectives (historical, archaeological, art, and tourism perspectives) as well as promoted as compared to others found outside of these areas (Phillipson, 2009; Mercier and Lepage, 2012; Di Salvo, 2017; Kubar, 2018; Muluemebet, 2019).

Generally, the development of the tourism industry in Ethiopia is thwarted by a number of problems. Firstly, the absence of tourism resources' documentation and protection efforts, among others, is a serious problem that hinders working towards sustaining potential base of the tourism resources. There is no adequate protection, development, and use of tourism cultural resources which negates the development of the industry (MoCT, 2009: 9; Yimer, 2016: 20). This gap is related to the absence of detailed documentation on the values and conservation status of cultural heritage in most parts of the country. According to Mulugeta (2012: 3), the cultural capacity of the country is less explored and documented, and this makes the available potential cultural resources untraceable, hindering the identification of the nature, values and conservation problems of available tourism cultural heritage as well as the possible protection measures that have to be taken against loss of cultural values. This situation hampers the initiation to foster cultural heritage tourism development by resourcing the potential tourism values. More importantly, the absence of documentation and research hinders tourists' access to information about potential sites and their motivation to visit sites that are little known.

Secondly, the absence of quality tourism infrastructure and proper marketing and promotion mechanisms is also contributing to the industry's underdevelopment (Mulugeta, 2012: 3; Robinson, 2016: 4). Thirdly, illicit trafficking and theft, political instability, and globalization are also obstacles to cultural heritage protection and tourism development in the country. The ancient movable antiquities are vulnerable to theft and illegal trading (Getahun, 2023: 10–15). Furthermore, until recently, the tourism sector in general faced marginalization, and government offices dedicated to developing the industry were less prioritized (Tesfaye, 2015: 109). This problem is caused by inadequate financing and staffing, which directly affect the development of the industry.

In many areas of the country, including South Gondar, the absence of research-based literature is a serious problem for tracing potential tourism resources and their conservation status. Without tracing the potential tourism resources, it is less probable to think of protecting cultural resources against deteriorative agents, developing the potential resources into tourism products, and establishing tourism infrastructure (such as transportation, accommodation, and other basic establishments needed in the industry) in the area. Very scant research is available to trace and understand the potential tourism resources in this area. Bantalem (2017) and Behailu and Haftamu (2017) attempted to assess the different potential values and existing challenges of cultural tourism resources, including ancient built-up and rock-hewn churches found in South Gondar. Ertiban and Fridiywok (2018) also assessed the tourism potential of the Gafat industrial legacy near Debre Tabor.

However, these studies do not give a clear and detailed picture of the cultural tourist attractions in that area. The heritage tourism attributes of the rock-hewn church of Wukro Medhane Alem, for instance, are almost missed and sometimes incorrectly described (see Bantalem, 2017: 5462; Behailu and Haftamu, 2017: 7). Moreover, there are still many more potential tourist sites that are not explored, assessed, or promoted by researchers and tourism experts. Because of this, there is no well-known site that regularly attracts tourists between Lalibela and Bahir Dar-Gondar. This is closely associated with the absence of documentation, research, and promotion works that support developing the area as an alternative tourist destination in the country. A preliminary record in Lay Gayint was made by the researcher (see Tsegaye 2019b) but it does not show a full account of the sites in a wider context and still recall the need for research works in the area. This case is, thus, found to be a pressing issue in the area of sustaining and developing cultural tourism resources and cultural heritage tourism. The potential cultural resources in Lay Gayint *Woreda*, South Gondar, are found to be long forgotten, poorly managed, and least known to academia, heritage managers, tourism experts, and cultural tourists. This study intends to fill the gap in the absence of exploration and documentation activities about the long forgotten hypogea religious heritage resources and the conservation status of Lay Gayint *Woreda*.

1.3 Research Questions

- ✚ What are the types and historical narrations of hypogea churches found in Lay Gayint *Woreda*, South Gondar?
- ✚ What are the potential tourist attraction features of the churches?
- ✚ What seem like the conservation practices and problems of the hypogea churches?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1.4.1 General Objective

The general objective of this study was to document the potential heritage tourism resources and heritage conservation practices of hypogea churches in Lay Gayint *Woreda*, South Gondar, Amhara Region.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were the followings:

1. Describe the type and historical narrations of ancient hypogea churches in Lay Gayint;
2. Describe the potential tourist attraction elements of the hypogea churches; and
3. Explain conservation practices on the hypogea churches.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Given its completion as per to the objectives setting up above, this study will have significances from the perspectives of policy formulation, tourism development, and research and academia.

1. The significance of the study for policy

The result of this study will have significance for policy and strategy formulation, particularly in the areas of CHM and tourism development. In the area of CHM, it will be an important document providing detailed information about the values and heritage management status of the churches for heritage managers and experts at local, zonal, regional and national levels. Tourism experts may also use it as a source of information to prepare tourism policy and strategy in order to develop heritage-based tourism in the area. The result of the thesis will help policy makers in

both areas develop a plan in order to select potential cultural sites for heritagization and promotion plans at regional, national and internal levels.

2. The significance of the study for tourism development in the area

The assessment which was made on the potential tourist attractions of the churches will be used as source of information for tourism operators and tour guides to consider Lay Gayint as tourist destination and to use it as a guide of site interpretation for tourist, and governmental tourism experts to plan for the development of tourism infrastructure in the area.

3. The significance of the study for future research endeavors

This study will be a stepping stone for future research works in the area of historical archaeology, CHM and heritage tourism development. Researchers may use it as a reference and it will be a good contribution for literature in the study of Ethiopian rock hewn churches.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is defined by its spatial, thematic (conceptual), methodological, unit of observation and target group aspects. Spatially, the study was confined to Lay Gayint *Woreda*, which is bordered by different *woredas* that possess potential cultural resources that need similar research works, hoping to be covered by other researchers in the future. Thematically (conceptually), the study was focused on hypogea churches, emphasizing assessing their potential tourism values and conservation challenges. Though the *woreda* has other cultural segments, including masonry churches and other different cultural buildings, natural features, and other living socio-cultural practices, the research was limited to the rock-hewn churches, which have unique conceptual attachments to the monumental typology of cultural heritage that need a specific treatment to produce a detailed research document.

Methodologically, the study predominantly followed a qualitative research approach (which is an effective method in unquantifiable cultural research areas) supplemented by a statistical research approach with a descriptive research design. The unit of analysis of this study is *woreda* level hypogea churches, with some reflections associated with the wider context of rock-hewn churches of the country. The target groups who participated either through questionnaires or

interviews were the local communities around the study sites and the culture and tourism officers at Lay Gayint *Woreda*.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

This study has faced different limitations in order to address all its objectives in an effective manner. Methodologically, the data analysis and discussion made on the ancient treasures of the churches was merely made by using data collected through questionnaires and interviews. It was not supplemented with data collected through observation of the objects of the churches. Due to this, the presentation, analysis and discussions were somewhat shallow as the data collected was scant. The church leaders were not able to disclose the necessary information about the treasures, mainly because of the current political instability that occurred in the region following the assassination of a government official on April 28, 2023. An attempt was made to minimize this gap by using the records that were available in the Culture and Tourism Bureau (CTB) of the *woreda*. However, the officers were reluctant to make the available records accessible for research purpose. There was also problem in the sampling of informants and respondents. The number of the key informants was few and it was limited to church administrators and CTB officers. It would be more reliable if it was supported with more interviews including the local communities' view towards the heritage sites. The sampling of the respondents was also taken from the general population of the *woreda*. However, this would have problem in the accuracy of the sampling since it excluded the population below 18 years. Moreover, archaeological methods such as excavation were significant in coming up with deep information about one of the sites of the study, but this required professionals with legal backgrounds to do it. Therefore, data that could be gathered through this method was lacking in this study. Theoretically, it was difficult to get a well-developed and defined theory and conceptual framework that illustrate the relationship between cultural heritage management and tourism development. The effort made to prepare a conceptual framework from the literature review may not be adequate to briefly show the scope of this study.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter incorporated the introductory part of the study. The second chapter included a literature review that rigorously and critically reviewed

conceptual and theoretical frameworks and some empirical research. The methodology of the study formed chapter three of the thesis. In this section, the study area, research design and approach, sources and methods of the study, data analysis, and ethical considerations have been stated. The fourth chapter of the study provided a detailed description of the potential values of the rock-hewn churches and their heritage management problems. The last chapter included concluding remarks and recommendations. Additionally, references and appendices are added at the end of the last chapter.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

The following terms are defined for the purpose of this study. They are expressive to understand the context of the study and are help full to shape the discussion of the study from academic perspective.

- **Cultural heritage:** Both the tangible and intangible traces of human creativity of the past which is inherited, valued, owned by the present and transferred to the future generation (Jimura, 2022). This term is important to clearly understand the area of the study, hypogea churches which are part and parcel of cultural heritage.
- **Conservation:** Any human interventions to restore, maintain, rejuvenate and sustain cultural values for the benefit of the present and future generations (Srivastava, 2019). This concept is defined here because it helps guides the study in briefing the different aspects and limitations of local conservation works.
- **Documentation:** The already stock of information and compiled document that can be used as a future reference for any kind of existing, change or loss in cultural values (Letellier, 2007). This term is conceptually significant for the study since it is research based documentation.
- **Cultural heritage tourism.** The temporary movement of tourist to cultural destinations for the purpose of recreation, education and experience (Jordan, 2013). Conceptually, this definition represents the two important areas: cultural heritage and tourism. So, it is significant to understand the interplay between these concepts and this shapes the presentation, analysis and discussion of the study.

- **Hypogeum:** Rock-hewn feature which is carved by man from bedrock which is naturally attached with a certain natural landscape such as mountains, hills, escarpments and gorges Phillipson, 2009). The term is interchangeably used with rock-hewn throughout this study.
- **Rock-hewn:** Synonym with hypogeum (Phillipson, 2009). Conceptually, rock-hewn is applied to distinguish hypogea churches from conventional or masonry built up churches. The term interchangeably with hypogeum is used throughout the text of the study.
- **Monolithic:** A rock-hewn structure completely carved and detached from the main bed-rock in all or some of its facades (Finneran, 2007; Mengistu, 2012). This term is applied to identify the typology of the hypogea churches included in this study.
- **Semi-monolithic:** partially carved and detached from the main bed-rock in its one or more sides (Finneran, 2007; Mengistu, 2012). It is applied to designate churches which are semi-carved.
- **Cave:** A rock-hewn feature which only exhibits only interior human workmanship (Phillipson, 2009). This term is adopted to distinguish monolithic hypogea of this study from others which are simply carved within rocky landscapes.
- **Architecture:** The different styles, artistic, symbolical and decorative motifs of historical and religious buildings and monuments which create excitement for viewers (Janetius, 2020). This term is important to understand human creativities manifested on ancient monuments. This is helpful to understand the different human workmanships evidenced with in the study sites in terms of art and architecture of the churches.
- **History:** The study of the human past including all human activities such as socio-economic, cultural, economic, technological, religious, etc. History is a mirror to understand the past through the analysis of archives, and from this perspective this term is adopted to understand the historical background of the sites of this study in the use of archival analysis.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cultural Heritage Management and Tourism Development: Conceptualization

This chapter reviews different scholarly works that are related to the concepts of cultural heritage, conservation, and cultural heritage tourism. The discussion is made in a way that shows the mutuality and collaborative nature of CHM and tourism development so as to ensure the sustainability of practices in both areas in the context of places where tourism is not yet developed and resources are not traceable. Literature on the causes and consequent problems of cultural heritage conservation is also reviewed here.

2.1.1 Cultural Heritage Conservation and Management: Definitions

2.1.1.1 Cultural Heritage

The term cultural heritage started to appear in the Hague Convention of 1954 to ascertain the need for the protection of the cultural heritage of all humankind from destruction (Vecco, 2010: 322). Since that time, different approaches and concepts have been forwarded to understand it. In a simplistic definition, cultural heritage is defined as a process by which the past is inherited and used. It is interwoven within the life and power dynamics of society and identity construction (Harvey, 2008: 19). It is about everything that people assume to have significance and want to save. It is an inherited resource composed of values, beliefs, knowledge, practices, and the environment as a whole, reflecting the interaction between man and nature (Kaminski *et al.*, 2014: 5).

Cultural heritage includes all aspects of past human socio-cultural, economic, political and religious footprints. Scholars agree that vast of the world's cultural heritage belong to religious heritage or sacred heritage which includes sacred spaces, treasures and living spiritual practices. In this regard, religious sites which include sacred structures, symbolic and architectural manifestations and sacred landscapes, are central to the concept of cultural heritage as these are the first to be considered as heritage of human kind and represented the largest heritage list of the world (Thouki, 2022: 1037).

The concept of cultural heritage either religious or secular is seen from different perspectives including typology and valorization that includes present and future-centered perspectives of cultural heritage. The typological aspect of cultural heritage implies the categorization of cultural heritage into approachable divisions. The earliest typology was formulated by UNESCO under its 1972 Convention, which categorizes cultural heritage into monuments, buildings, and sites (UNESCO, 2005). However, this categorization is criticized by different scholars as it pursues Euro-centrism and neglects portable cultural antiquities and intangible aspects of human practices. The tangible and intangible cultural typology is now widely recognized as it addresses the holistic nature of cultural heritage (Smith and Akagawa, 2009: 1-4; Jimura, 2022: 7). The following definition may better elaborate this typological aspect, in that cultural heritage denotes:

“Any tangibles and intangibles inherited from the past and used for contemporary purposes, including tourism, that are associated with personal and/or collective identities and can be enhanced or damaged through engagement with host and guest sides of tourism” (Jimura, 2022: 2).

Despite the interwoven nature of tangible and intangible heritage types, this categorization demonstrates an easy understanding of cultural heritage. Tangible heritage is defined as the spatial representation of culture, whereas intangible heritage represents the behavioral aspect of culture, which can be manifested through tangible materials (Rudolff, 2006: 29). The aspect of tangible cultural heritage may refer to all assets that have physical embodiments of certain cultural elements, including, among others, battlefields, museums and collections, historical towns and settlement sites, historic buildings, cultural objects, and religious sites. In this context, religious sites include churches, cathedrals, mosques and temples that have architectural, artistic, and spiritual values (du Cros and McKercher, 2015: 66; Jimura, 2022: 7). More precisely, du Cros and McKercher (2015: 70) classified tangible heritage into three categories: buildings and archaeological sites; heritage sites, cultural routes, and cultural landscapes; and movable cultural property and museum collections.

However, the above categorization has missed monuments that have irreplaceable historical, cultural, social, and religious values. Historic monuments either secular or religious structures are important for their remarkable architectural heritage which has been constructed in the course of time (Worthing and Bond, 2008: 56). For the sake of this study, the definition of monuments under UNESCO’s 1972 Convention is provided below:

“works of monumental sculpture, architectures, painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science” (UNESCO, 2005: 10).

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) started to be given more emphasis since the late 1980s when discussions were carried out about the importance of indigenous knowledge as a heritage of humanity, in the cultural realm of UNESCO. Demands from state parties about the protection of these types of heritage also increasingly wanted to be considered under UNESCO which later on formulated its 2003 “Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage” (Bigambo, 2019: 19-20). Gradually, discussions were made on its different domains which includes handicrafts and visual arts that demonstrate traditional craftsmanship; gastronomy and culinary practices; social practices, rituals, and festive events; music and the performing arts; oral traditions and expressions, and knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe which provided the conceptual base to understand this type cultural heritage in terms of five domains including handicrafts and visual arts that demonstrate traditional craftsmanship; gastronomy and culinary practices; social practices, rituals, and festive events; music and the performing arts; oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage, and knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe (UNWTO 2012, 2-3, du Cros and McKercher 2015, 88-94).

However, some scholars argue that dichotomizing cultural heritage into distinctive tangible and intangible types lacks harmonization with the nature of culture in Africa, as this approach is still not far from the influence of Euro-centric cultural view. In one hand, living cultures are interwoven with and manifested by the tangible aspect of cultural heritage, and these two categories are complementary. On the other hand, in the context of Africa, heritage is not mere knowledge; it is embodied and interwoven within the people’s identity intrinsically (Keitumetse, 2016: 12).

In addition to the above categorizations, cultural heritage also are classified into movable and immovable types, which predominantly consist the tangible types. The former include different types of historical buildings, monuments and archaeological sites (such as furnace) which are usually attached with a certain ground. Paintings, sculptures, furnitures, wall paintings, and

documents are considered as movable cultural heritage which can be easily moved from place to place without any destruction (Shyllon, 2016: 56; Nilson and Thorell, 2018: 11).

Some scholars view cultural heritage from present-future-centered value perspective. Ashworth, Graham, & Tunbridge (2007: 2-3 & 39-40) define it as a present-centered resource with multiple producers and uses to manage present needs. This definition is extended to link cultural heritage with development and treat these values as resources. More precisely, cultural heritage is a present centered resource by which the past legacy is transformed into usable product intending to satisfy the demands of the current consumption. From this perspective, heritage is considered an “economic savior” through the mobilization of cultural resources into the tourism industry (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009: 20).

Cultural heritage is also discussed in different literatures from its multitude values (uses) perspective. Identifying the values of heritage has different purposes, including facilitating conservation efforts (for value-based conservation activity), taking informed decisions, and using heritage according to its value (Avrami, Mason, and de la Torre, 2000: 7-9; Worthing and Bond 2008, 53-54). For scholars such as Worthing and Bond (2008: 47), this valorization perspective is defined as cultural significance implying the identification of the multitude values of a cultural place and why it becomes worth. This concept consists of the fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places, and related objects of the place, which is assumed to be a heritage place.

Mason (2002: 10) provides detailed concepts on the valorization of cultural heritage. According to him, heritage values are typologized into two categories. The first is socio-cultural value, which includes historical, symbolic (cultural), social, spiritual, aesthetic, and political values. The second valorization typology is economic value, which is further categorized into use-value (market value) and non-use value (non-market value). The first implies that a tourist is expected to pay to have access for a cultural heritage, whereas, the later implies the payment for cultural heritage as option value (when heritage is valued by someone who might use it at some time in the future), bequest value (valuing a heritage by thinking about its importance for future generations), altruistic value (when heritage is valued by some one that others may use it currently), and existence values (valuing a heritage merely for its sustaining).

Ashworth *et al.* (2007: 41-44) also defines the value and use of heritage from its intrinsic (socio-cultural values of the heritage itself) and extrinsic (the economic value) aspects. Accordingly, cultural heritage has a dualistic nature as far as its value is concerned: socio-cultural and economic capitals. However, the failure to understand the intrinsic values of cultural heritage negatively affects tourism development (du Cross and McKercher, 2015: 26). The valorization of cultural heritage is also discussed by other scholars emphasizing on the specification of the values. Hardesty and Little (2009: 6) present four aspects of cultural heritage values, including economic, symbolic, informational, and aesthetic values. Values of cultural heritage are dynamic and are shaped by the society to which they are attached. Nevertheless, valorization of cultures involves identification of forgotten and current heritage values and their attributes in the context of the process of dynamism in the values of both tangible and intangible assets (Heras *et al.*, 2013: 132).

2.1.1.2 Management and Conservation of Cultural Heritage

Management from a cultural heritage protection perspective is defined as the systematic care taken to sustain the multitude of values of cultural heritage for the interest of present and future generations. The main aim of CHM is to conserve a representative sample of cultural heritage so as to save its best value before it is gone forever (du Cros and McKercher, 2015: 49). It strives to ensure the ownership and sustain the existence of cultural heritage through different managerial activities (Cai *et al.*, 2021: 1). According to Jimura (2022: 14), the conservation and management of cultural heritage become important practices among scholars and heritage managers because it is a means for humans as a member of a certain community, representative of humans' creative genius, source of identity construction and reconstruction, source of testimony of global cultural diversity, and vital in providing educational and recreational activities for humans and its interconnection with the natural environment.

In the area of CHM, conservation and management are the primary concepts being advocated by different scholars. The importance of this advocating emanates from the irreplaceable or non-renewable nature of cultural heritage. It becomes significant because of the increasing degradation of cultural heritage and the increasing demand for these resources for tourism development, through which communities' social and economic wellbeing can be achieved.

Cultural heritage conservation and protection have contribution to enhance social cohesion and the preservation of culture and history for the future generation (Srivastava, 2019: xxii-xxiv).

Conservation is the central aspect of the concept of CHM. It is the way either to prevent threats (preventive approach) or rescue any types of cultural heritage subjected to different threats (interventive or curative approach) of which the former is the primary advised approach to sustainably protect cultural heritage (Heras *et al.*, 2013: 133). It defers from preservation in such that the former implies the wise use of cultural heritage resources, whereas, the later merely assumes the keeping of cultural heritage safe from any potential threat. It emphasizes retaining the maximum and representative significances of heritage as much as possible (du Cros and McKercher, 2015: 50). Thus, values are central to any conservation process (Nodoro & Pwiti, 2009: 2).

Management and conservation of heritage is commenced based on the thought that cultural heritage are irreplaceable resource in developing the tourism industry. Researchers agree that conserving these resources is equally important as conserving the natural resources. Cultural resources are non-renewable, and regenerating once destroyed cultural value is hardly possible. There are basic reasons that urge the need for the conservation of built cultural heritage, among others, to counter the continuous destruction of cultural heritage, to preserve collective nostalgia, to preserve artistic and aesthetic values, to enhance education and science, to sustain environmental diversity, and to generate economic activity through the tourism industry (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009: 20). However, in any conservation and management of cultural heritage, there are essential practices that are part of the management process: continuous recording or inventory and documentation. Without a recorded or documented source of information, it is unlikely to employ any kind of conservation and protection measures or to plan sustainable heritage tourism development.

2.1.1.3 Challenges of Cultural Heritage Conservation

As different research works show, destruction of cultural heritage is faster than it can be documented (Letellier, 2007: vii). The primary aspect of managing cultural heritage is identification of the causes of cultural heritage destruction. Scholars in the field of heritage management have identified the nature and types of agents that cause deterioration and

demolition of historic monuments and other movable cultural antiquities. The agents of cultural heritage conservation problems are categorized into natural and anthropogenic factors. The major natural factors responsible for the deterioration of cultural heritage are climatic causes (such as seasonal and daily temperature changes, wind, etc.); natural disasters (such as earthquakes, tectonics, landslides, floods, wildfires, etc.) and biological and botanical causes (such as animals, insects and plants). Anthropogenic destructive causes can be development projects, illicit trafficking, bad intervention, conflict and war, colonialism, pollution, and mass tourism (Cleere, 2001: 28; Boylan, 2002: 43; Feilden, 2003: 92, 157; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009: 27; Doehne & Price, 2010: 9; Onyima, 2016: 287-288).

As the degree and nature of these causes vary from country to country, their impact also varies from place to place depending upon the type and nature of heritage and the response given by the owners or stakeholders of the heritage. Studies also show that lack of political will and ignorance of cultural values, as well as inadequate cultural policies and legal, institutional, and financial frameworks, are factors contributing to challenges in managing cultural heritage for heritage tourism development (Jordan, 2013: 52-61).

2.1.2 Cultural Heritage Tourism

For the sake of this study and as tourism is a complex phenomenon with a wide range of concepts to define it, the review work here is limited to concepts and definitions related to cultural heritage tourism, a prominent type of tourism industry. Cultural heritage tourism is the subset of cultural tourism which involves movement of peoples motivated by travelling to other areas to visit performing arts, religious practices, folklore, sites and monuments and to study nature (Jordan, 2013: 49). Cultural heritage tourism embarks on the built cultural environment and other heritage aspects to ensure social and economic developments (Cai *et al.*, 2021: 1).

As different literatures show (Jordan, 2013: 49; Alvarez, Go and Yuskel, 2016: 2; Jimura, 2022: 4-6), cultural heritage tourism can be defined from the demand and supply sides of tourism as the industry sprang out of the relationship between these sides. From the demand side, cultural heritage tourism is considered from the tourists' perspective, which has an impact on the revitalization of locally neglected sites for tourism activity. Tourist motivation is revealed in terms of the tourist experience, which can be achieved through the interaction of tourists with

destination attractions. From the supplier's side, this type of tourism is treated as a complex activity involving different stakeholders such as attractions, local communities, local public sectors, conservation bodies, the accommodation and catering sector, the retail sector, local transport, and local tour operators.

2.1.3 The Mutuality of CHM and Tourism Development

In previous times, CHM and tourism development were considered to be conflicting areas, even though cultural heritage is the main common base for both of these areas. This disharmonized approach has led to raise concerns on the need to the foundation of genuine collaboration between the two areas (du Cros and McKercher, 2015: 6-19). According to these scholars, there is a misconception regarding the relationship that exists between cultural heritage conservation and cultural heritage tourism development. From heritage management perspective, the management of cultural heritage is seen by considering its intrinsic significance to local communities not its extrinsic value for tourists. Tourism experts consider cultural elements as products of tourism and work to maximize their extrinsic value. This perspective may not consider community values and conflicting interests between the two areas may arise due to such disharmonized perspectives.

However, these two areas are considered to be mutually supportive in that one supports the other. Cultural heritage tourism development is an important force in promoting the protection of cultural heritage. The tourism industry, which is developed with the welfare of cultural heritage in mind, brings quality of life to local communities. The sustainability of this largest form of the tourism industry is reliant on the sustaining the cultural heritage base through the prioritization of collaboration between the two sectors: CHM and tourism. Developing viable safeguarding activities of cultural heritage resources for the benefit of future generations is an indispensable issue within the context of tourism sustainability. On the contrary, the failure in cultural heritage protection results in the degradation of cultural heritage tourism development (Chhabra, 2010: 22; Srivastava, 2019: xiii-xviii; Cai, 2021: 1). Linking tourism with CHM has its own unique contributions, including its economic benefit. Cultural heritage tourism, therefore aims to save cultural heritage, open it to visitors, and acquire economic benefits for local developments. In its promotional activities, the tourism sector contributes to supporting cultural heritage conservation

and protection mechanisms and provides useful economic opportunities to local communities (Srivastava, 2019: xxi-xxii).

Both areas, CHM and CHT development need to understand the intrinsic and extrinsic values of heritage, so working in partnership and collaboration is the basic principle either to sustain the existence of cultural heritage through effective management activity or to make sustainable the tourism industry, which relies on cultural products (du Cros and McKercher, 2015: 18-26). A genuine collaboration effort from both areas enables the role of cultural tourism in nation building, national myth creation, national myth reinforcement, and economic development. However, the failure to create a harmonized collaboration between the two and the incapacity to control the cultural heritage and tourism planning activities may lead to adverse impacts on local communities and their cultural assets (*Ibid*: 46). The statement under Srivastava (2019: xxiv), “when culture is shared, tourism and heritage coexist so that tourism revenues can be used to sustain and conserve environments of heritage value,” vividly shows the mutuality of CHM and culture-based tourism development.

Cultural heritage tourism aims to sustain heritage and associated living traditions and practices that belong to the local communities (Srivastava, 2019: xxv). However, the mutuality of CHM and tourism development is unlikely in the absence of the involvement of local communities who live in and around tourist sites. Sustaining the safeguarding of cultural heritage and their use for tourism development usually requires communication with and full participation of the local communities who are key stakeholders as they have a close attachment to the heritage that they own, value, and use for different purposes (Litka, 2015: 10; du Cros and McKercher, 2015: 58). Local communities’ involvement, particularly in the areas where tourism is not yet being practiced, is indispensable in the exploration and documentation of cultural heritage tourism resources, and the only way to succeed in developing a site for tourism purposes (Srivastava, 2019: xxv).

As it can be understood from the above literatures, in the discourse of sustainability of cultural heritage tourism, the emphasis for the conservation and sustainable use of cultural resources is discussed from the perspective of cultural destinations which are already established in the tourism industry. In this context managing the tourism industry is viable to sustain the industry and its cultural resources. However, the sustainability of cultural heritage tourism in the areas

where tourism is not yet established is being neglected. In this case, the non-tourism related negative impacts on cultural heritage is not being researched and emphasized. Here, the importance of documentation that ensures the participation of local communities becomes in the forefront to sustain cultural heritage conservation and future CHT development in the cultural areas where cultural tourism is not well established.

2.1.4 The Role of Documentation in Sustainable Cultural Heritage Conservation and Tourism Development

Research-based documentation is a relevant practice to sustainably conserve and use cultural heritage which are mainly found in areas where tourism is little developed. From CHM perspective, in the endeavors of cultural heritage conservation and management activities, the main challenging issues that consistently face heritage conservators and managers are associated with a lack of knowledge on the following three fronts (Avrami, Mason, and de la Torre, 2000: 4):

- ✚ Physical condition, including the nature of materials and structural systems, degree and causes of cultural heritage deteriorations, etc.
- ✚ Management context relates to the availability of resources and capacities such as funds, trained manpower, and technology, as well as current political and legal conditions.
- ✚ Cultural significance and social values include the representative values of those for whom cultural heritage is being conserved, the impact of interventions, etc.

In both CHM and sustainable tourism development, the primary task is to understand the existing values and physical aspects and preservation conditions of cultural resources. The challenges related to the above points are the result of the absence of research-based documentation activities. Having comprehensive and well-documented information is the first step to move forward, and “the more one knows the more prepared one is to care for those places” is considered a principle in CHM and development endeavors (Myers, 2016: 102). To have a complete knowledge on what is going to be conserved and promoted; recording (also inventory) and documentation are significant activities which provide detailed information for heritage managers and tourism developers. The significance of these activities has been emphasized in different cultural institutions since the Hague Convention in 1954 to the ICOMOS Convention in

2011 (Letellier, 2007: 4-6; Myers, 2016: 104). Recording in the CHM context implies the process of acquiring new information about a heritage and it is part of research and investigation, conservation, use and management specifically for immovable cultural assets. As an activity, it refers to the capturing of graphic and photographic evidences which describe the physical fabrics, change, and current situation of a heritage place. Identification, locating and documentation of cultural heritage can be made in different contexts, among others, when there is change and risk in heritage values, need to undergo an intervention work, evidence of potential heritage place needed to be revealed and plan to create heritage information system (Letellier, 2007: 16-32; Myers, 2016: 103).

Heritage identification and inventory activities are vital to recognize potential cultural places and to undertake protection measures. Inventory provides detail evidence of cultural heritage related to the location, function, physical feature and status and fabrication nature which are very helpful to create public awareness and to conduct conservation planning (Shah, 2016: 166). Inventory works show us the significant values, local and current conditions, and vital information to react to cultural heritage dynamism. Inventories are continuous recording activities to identify and describe cultural sites for the purpose of future developments (Myers, 2016: 103-105). As a process, inventory and documentation of cultural heritage stand at the center of the first phase of CHM. This stage is the foundation for the next phases, including the formulation of legislation and conservation frameworks and stakeholder consultations (see du Cros and McKercher, 2015: 53-54).

Documentation of cultural heritage is the aggregate and the compiled form of heritage inventory. It can be defined as an existing stock of information. It demonstrates the technical collection and archiving of inventory works for future purposes. It is not seen as a separate activity from inventory work. The statement, “today’s recording is tomorrow’s documentation,” reveals the familiarity of recording and documentation in CHM (Letellier, 2007: 32). It is part of the heritage planning process, which involves phases of identification, classification, and documentation of features and components of heritage; assessment of the cultural significance of heritage; analysis of the opportunities and constraints for preparation of conservation and management policy; the enforcement of managerial decisions; and professional recommendations for further CHM works. In this process, documentation becomes a critical

aspect of the process (du Cros and McKercher, 2015: 70). For some scholars, the importance of recording and documenting the values and contexts of cultural heritage is defined in terms of “insurance” by which the systematic collection and archiving works serve as future reference if there is occurrence of inevitable loss or change in values of cultural heritage (Letellier 2007, 35). Evidence of inventory works can be gathered through different techniques such as surveying, excavation, and the analysis of data from remote sensing (Myers, 2016: 105).

2.2 Hypogea Churches as Typical Heritage Tourism Resources in Ethiopia

2.2.1 Concept and Typology of Hypogea Churches in Ethiopia

Hypogea churches of Ethiopia are ecclesiastical structures which are carved out of a bed rock and conceptually they are associated with historic and cultural monuments. A hypogeum (its plural form hypogea) is derived from two Greek words: *hypo* (under) and *ghé* (earth). Fleming *et al.* (1999: 276) defines the term as “an underground room or vault.” Terms such as “underground” and “underneath” are also associated with hypogeum to refer a structure which is found under the earth’s surface (Mollett, 1883: 174; Christensen, 2005: 447). To Parker (2004: 254), hypogeum is “any subterranean construction.” Di Salvo (2017: 140) also similarly defines it as a “subterranean structure.” Darvill (2003: 437) also defines hypogeum as “a kind of rock-cut chambered tomb with a series of interlinking cells or rooms...” All of the above definitions possess similar concept of the term which indicates a structure sculpted, carved or built underground of the earth’s surface. Phillipson (2009: 206) gives a precise definition of the term hypogeum which is defined as “a rock-hewn feature.”

Moreover, in the context of Ethiopia, the term hypogeum (rock-hewn) has equivalent local terminology, namely *wukr* or *wukro*, which implies a structure being sculpted out of bedrock. The Amharic term, *washa* (cave) also has similar function to express the term hypogeum. There are some rock-hewn churches that are locally named *wukr* in different areas of the country, which implies the concept is known in Ethiopia. Hypogea churches differ from conventional buildings in that the later have successive phases of construction and are built up and erected by amalgamating different materials such as wood, stone, mud, etc. Hypogea are vividly cut out of a single rock, and they cannot be defined as they are built or erected like buildings. However, the difference may not necessarily be in terms of architectural manifestations. Both conventional

buildings and hypogea structures also have similar functions, to perform liturgical services (Phillipson, 2009: 87-88). Having this overview, terms such as hypogeum (hypogea for its plural form), and rock-hewn are used interchangeably throughout this text.

Typologically, hypogea churches can be categorized into different types on the basis of the manner of their excavation or their degree of detachment from the main rock from which the churches are being carved. Mengistu (2012: 37) categorizes rock hewn churches into two types: cave and rock-hewn monolithic. Accordingly, semi-monolithic churches belong to the cave types. However, precise categorizations are given by other writers who identified three main types of rock-hewn churches. These types include monolithic, semi-monolithic, and caves (Finneran, 2007: 215). Locally, *wukr* (also *wukro*) is used to define monolithic (and sometimes semi-monolithic) rock-hewn churches. Monolithic churches are freely standing monuments “just rising from an excavated court” (Phillipson, 2009: 87). These types of monuments are completely separated from the surrounding rock, being detached in all facades, except at their bases. These structures may take a similar shape to an erected building, but they are hewn out of a single bed of rock. They are isolated from the surrounding rock through deeply carved trenches (Mengistu, 2012: 37). They mark the apogee of the architectural and engineering skills applied in the rock-hewn churches of Ethiopia (Finneran, 2007: 215).

Semi-monolithic churches are also the types of hypogea churches which are partially carved from rock faces and have various degrees of attachment with the rock (Mengistu, 2012: 37). Caves are features that are cut inward from rock faces with little modification of their exterior rock (Phillipson, 2009: 87; Mengistu, 2012: 37). Unlike the cave churches of Cappadocia in Turkey, the cave churches of Ethiopia are not karstified caves. The Ethiopian cave churches are completely representative of human workmanship. Apart these typologies, there are churches which are built under a natural cave. These are referred to as grotto churches and are not rock-hewn in nature (Mengistu, 2012: 37). From their religious symbolic perspective, monolithic and cave churches represent Christ's cave birthplace at Bethlehem and the rock-hewn tomb at Golgotha (Mengistu, 2018: 43).

The other important concept of hypogea churches is related to the architectural plan they assume and the arrangements of their internal parts. In terms of their plan, most of the Ethiopian rock-hewn churches have a quadrilateral dominantly rectangular shape or plan, and these are

commonly referred to as basilicas (Phillipson, 2009: 26; Di Salvo, 2017: xiii-xiv). The term basilica is commonly known in the Christian world. It represents a Christian worshipping space which is continued to be represented in modern church buildings, from the ancient church of Aksum Tsion Maryam to the 1950s royal churches such as Holy Trinity Cathedral of Addis Ababa (Binns, 2017: 64; Esler, 2019: 158-159). As a plan, the basilica has an extended space at the center and different partitions around it (Phillipson, 2009: 204). The basilicas hypogea churches of Ethiopia have internal quadrangular space being arranged west-east direction, being extended gradually from the main entrance to culminate at the east. The basilica is categorized into different sections by pillars, most of which are connected through arches (Di Salvo, 2017: xiv). The west-east arrangement of an Ethiopian church incorporates spaces that have their own liturgical functions. These spaces, arranged eastwardly, include *kine-mahilet* (a Geez term which means chanting place), *kiddist* (a Geez term which means holy), and *mekdes* or *kiddiste-kiddusan* (Geez terms which means sanctuary or holy of holies).

The hypogea of Ethiopia are known for their unique architectural styles, which have a common character throughout the history of Ethiopia, mainly between the 4th and 15th centuries. The basilica style is usually accompanied by different motifs of architectural and artistic expressions, which create a source of fascination for researchers and visitors. Ceilings of roof accompanied with the architrave of pillars, pillars that create division within the basilica and other exterior and interior features are usually main components of sacred architecture in rock-hewn churches of Ethiopia (for more information Phillipson, 2009; Mercier and Lepage, 2012; Mengistu, 2012; Di Salvo, 2017; Esler, 2019).

2.2.2 Development and Distribution of Hypogea Churches in Ethiopia

There are two important views regarding the origin and development of hypogea churches in the context of the ancient Christian world including Ethiopia. The first view is that the use of rock-caves for different purposes such as dwelling, cemetery and ritual activities has a long history and was common throughout the history of all human kind. From this perspective, rock caves were found to be an “impregnable form of shelter” and humans carve and use caves in their history (Rewerski, 1995: 12).

The other view is related to the influence of Christianity since its commencement. Either in Ethiopia or other parts of the ancient Christian world, the development and expansion of rock-based spiritual spaces was associated with religious references. The evolution of rock-cut worship spaces evolved through eremitic or hermitic life and was started by reclusion into wild areas, as biblical references show (Mark, 1: 2-4; Matthew, 4: 1, 16-18; Mark, 9: 2). Most importantly, the grave of Christ was carved out of a rock, as recorded by Matthew (27: 60) and this is taken as the main basis for the development of hypogea churches across the world. The beginning and end of Christ's life were associated with caves at Bethlehem and Golgotha, which respectively are represented by cave and monolithic rock-hewn churches of later times (Mengistu, 2018: 43). This life in rock-caves continued to be practiced in the later apostolic periods particularly in the ancient Christian centers such as Egypt, Syria and Palestine (Goswami, 2006: 1331; Humphries, 2006: 93).

In the context of Ethiopia, since the fourth century A.D., the adoption of Christianity as the state religion of the Aksumite Kingdom was accompanied by the establishment and construction of churches, which involved the transformation of materials into Christianized elements, as what the case that was happened in the Byzantine Christian world, which transformed the Roman basilica into a sacred Christian space. The relatively stable environment of the Aksumite kingdom enabled the expansion and development of church construction in different parts of the kingdom. The development of hypogea churches is mainly associated with the introduction and expansion of monastic life since the late fifth century A.D. The expansion of monastic life and Ethiopian monastic activity was safely accompanied by the carving of rock chapels and churches (Finneran, 2012: 249 & 257).

Following the coming into the country of the Nine Saints, monastic life assumed expansion in the inaccessible areas where chapels and churches began to have been carved from rock. This rock-cut based monasticism is evidenced with various rock-cut chapels, churches and monasteries that are still flourished in and around rocky escarpments and mountains of the country. Some of them carved rock-cut churches in northern Ethiopia. *Abba Yimata*, for instance, went to Guh (Gere'alta) and carved rock churches there. Others, such as *Abba Aregawi* and *Abba Pentelewon* went to the mountains to establish their monastic abode (Finneran, 2012: 259-264).

During the Zagwe Dynasty that succeeded the Aksumite kingdom probably since the 10th century A.D, the carving of rock-hewn churches reached its apex. The monolithic churches of Lalibela which successfully imitated the Aksumite style of architecture are the main zeniths of this period. Since the late 13th century, monasticism has begun to revive and spread to the central and southern parts of the country, and different monastic centers have emerged. These include Haik Estifanos, Debre Gol, and Debre Libanos (Finneran, 2007: 252). Until the 14th century A.D, most of the ecclesiastical worship spaces were churches carved from rock. However, after this period, the construction of churches from rock showed a decline and began to be replaced by conventional religious buildings, which mainly have round and conical shapes with a thatched roof (Phillipson, 2009: 25). However, the tradition is not totally forgotten (Mengistu, 2012: 94). Some examples of rock-hewn churches carved in the post-Zagwe period include Gennete Maryam in Lasta, Adadi Maryam in Shewa (Phillipson, 2009: 112-118, the cave churches of Betselote Mikael of Debre Gol in South Wollo and Debre Aron in North Wollo (Wright, 1957: 12-13).

The distribution of hypogea churches decreases as one comes to the southern part of the country (Phillipson, 2009: 87; Mengistu, 2012: 35-36). In relation to their history, the hypogea churches in Ethiopia are roughly ranged between the fourth and fifteenth centuries. However, dating of the hypogea churches is mainly relied on local sources. Archaeological sources are very limited to understand this context in detail. According to a few sources, the earliest of the rock-hewn churches are located in Tigray which include the Abreha *wo* Atsibiha cruciform rock-hewn church, whereas, the hypogea churches such as Adadi Mariam mainly in southern and central part of Ethiopia are suggested to be belonged to later periods in the fifteenth century (Phillipson, 2009: 184-191; Ephrem, 2018: 104).

2.2.3 Hypogea Churches as Tourist Attractions

Ethiopia is well known for its abundance of rock-hewn culture (Getahun, 2023: 5). Its ancient hypogea churches are the main tourist attraction centers ever since the earlier periods. The potential of the rock-hewn churches as tourist attractions is related to two important aspects. The first is that the rock-hewn churches are not mere monuments; they are living monuments that are still serving the original spiritual service (Gerster, 1970: 51). Their spiritual function was the power for the growth of pilgrimage in different ancient monasteries of the country.

In addition to the spiritual aspects of the churches, the architectural and artistic features of the hypogea churches are the other aspects that have had appealing power to attract tourists even since the time when Francesco Alvarez led a Portuguese mission to Ethiopia in the 1520s. The records of Alvarez were important in promoting the hypogea churches of Ethiopia for the rest of the world. Among his records, the following testimony of Alvarez regarding his visit to the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela testifies that the Ethiopian hypogea churches have unique touristic value.

It wearied me to write more of these works, because it seems to me that they will not believe me if I write more, and because as to what I have already written they may accuse me of untruth, therefore I swear by God, in whose power I am, that all that is written is the truth, and there is much more than what I have written, and I have left it that they may not tax me with its being falsehood (Alvarez, 1881: 130).

The artistic and architectural features of the hypogea churches of Ethiopia and the antique paintings form a unique setting in the Christian world. This is accompanied by religious festivals, which are unique to visitors. Since the beginning of the tourism era in the post-World War II (WWII), the rock-hewn churches of Ethiopia mainly those concentrated at Lalibela continued to attract tourists and pilgrims in a large number (Heldman, 1993: 133). It is because that in such sites, architecture forms a miraculous condition (Esler, 2019: 133). Even now, including the famous rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, there are numbers of hypogea churches that are still centers of tourism, mainly in Tigray, Lasta, and Shewa. Thus, rock-hewn churches are the main cultural heritage tourism products of Ethiopia.

Some of the major historical and religious sites in the northern, central, and eastern parts of Ethiopia are conventionally defined by writers as the “historic route.” According to Ashenafi (2016: 1-4), the route is extended from Aksum in the north to Harer in the east included different religious sites, some of which are ancient hypogea churches. Though they were not written from a tourism development perspective, dozens of publications on some of the rock-hewn churches (including the churches of Lalibela) from historical, archaeological, and architectural perspectives have contributed to the development of the tourism industry mainly in the area that is part of this route. Sites across this route have been relatively promoted as compared to others found outside of these areas.

Recently, some tourism research works related to the rock-hewn churches have emerged. However, most of these works are concentrated on the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela and other few sites in Tigray which are well documented in different previous literatures. The assessment made on the potential attractions of such tourist sites may not be necessary but should be geared towards solving problems and indicating mechanisms on how to enhance the existing tourism activity of the areas. For instance, by valuing Lalibela as one of the most important sites of religious tourism in Ethiopia, Berhanu (2013) attempted to address the local communities' participation, their benefit from, and potential challenges of the tourism activity in Lalibela town, one of the major sites of the "historic route." In the same year, more detailed research on the interplay between heritage tourism and the conservation status of the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela was also conducted by Temesgen (2013). Accordingly, the tourism activity and the heritage conservation situation of the sites were not concomitant, mainly because of the lack of support for local communities involved in the tourism activity, which directly relies on the existence of the rock-hewn churches. The absence of collaboration between different stakeholders has also affected the conservation of the churches and the progress of the tourism industry.

Ndivo and Cantoni (2016) have discussed the conventional heritage interpretation that relies on local guides' verbal communication and its negative impact on tourist satisfaction. They argued that the introduction of online-based (technology-based) interpretation systems such as visual devices and translation applications has a better contribution than the traditional way to enhance tourist satisfaction. Muluemebet (2019) also shows that despite the costs of the industry in terms of its negative impact on the conservation of the rock-hewn churches and the increasing cost of living, the local communities in Lalibela were relatively benefited by the industry in terms of employment, service delivery, and income. Other tourism research works also show the context of cultural heritage (including the rock-hewn churches), management and interpretation of tourist sites and its challenges in the tourism clustered areas of Tigray.

The discussion under Asfaw and Gebreslassie (2016) on related issue of Wukro tourism cluster described few rock-hewn churches and the gap evidences with the interpretation of the sites for tourists. Kumar (2016: 9) tried to describe the "unexplored" potential values of a few rock-hewn religious sites in a few areas of Tigray. However, most of the rock-hewn sites, including Wukro

Chirkos and Abreha *wo* Atsibiha rock-hewn churches, have been previously explored by different researchers and are better discussed under Phillipson (2009: 87-122).

In the area of historic Gondar, there are few research works documenting the available rock-hewn churches as tourist sites. Gervers, Balicka-Witakowska & Fritsch (2014: 180-200) provide a short but precise description of Zoz Amba Giorgis, a rock-hewn church in Belesa, North Gondar, Other studies made by Behailu and Haftamu (2017: 7) and Bantalem (2017: 5462-5463) tried to explore the potential attributes of tourist sites in South Gondar. The rock-hewn church of Wukro Medhane Alem, which is located near Debre Tabor was included in these publications but the descriptions given are not only shallow but also missed the major architectural features of this monolithic rock-hewn church. The potential rock-hewn churches found in Lay Gayint *Woreda*, have escaped the notice of researchers.

2.2.4 Conservation Problems of Hypogea Churches

Unlike their conventional building counterparts, the hypogea of Ethiopia have a better conservation status as they are carved from bedrock that can resist the influence of deteriorative agents. However, as time has elapsed, most of the impregnable ancient hypogea churches in the remote areas of Ethiopia are now under continuous deterioration and destruction because of different factors that can be categorized into natural and anthropogenic agents. Because of a lack of literature, most of the sites are not easily traceable for heritage managers, and the culture and tourism officers at different levels are not well connected with the sites found in their respective areas. Unlike the literatures that explore the historical, archaeological, and architectural aspects of Ethiopian hypogea, there are very few research works that are conducted to assess the conservation status of these irreplaceable tourism resources.

The available literature are concentrated on the world heritage sites of the country. Attempts have been made to show the increasing deterioration problems and associate factors with the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela. The discussions made by Delmonaco, Margottini, and Spizzichino (2010: 138-146) show the negative impact of weathering process (including biological elements) on the architectural and structural features of the rock-hewn churches. Elene (2010: 3) also showed the impact of erosion and water infiltration into the rock-hewn churches and the need for management, and she proposes a management plan integrating multi-

stakeholder involvement to bring progress in heritage protection, tourism, and community development in Lalibela.

Mengistu (2012: 114-122), on the other hand, discussed the factors contributing to the conservation problems of Lalibela rock-hewn churches as natural and man-made agents. He indicated that salt crystallization formed on the rock surface and that sunlight, rainfall, insects, tree roots, algae, mosses, and lichen are among the natural factors contributing to the deterioration of the churches. He also added that the rock-hewn churches have suffered from unwise conservation activities made at different times. Most of the interventions made previously were unwise and made at the cost of the aesthetic values of the churches. Currently, shelters constructed over the roofs of the monolithic rock-hewn churches are seen as a great risk to the churches' survival. Blen *et al.* (2018: 3-11) also conducted detailed research showing the threat of biological agents such as the growth of lichens and other microorganisms on the facades of churches.

A study by Ephrem (2018) covers samples of rock-hewn churches (such as Wukro Kirqos) in Tigray and Lalibela rock-hewn churches, assessing the conservation problems of these potential sites. He presented five detail issues of conservation problems including identification of the sources and degree of the deterioration; assessing the knowhow of local communities about the sources of deterioration of the rock-hewn churches; and the local practices in conserving deteriorated sites. Despite the lack of specifically categorized discussions, Ephrem stated poor management, rain fall, bad conservation, and biological elements such as algae, lichen, and mold as factors in the conservation problems of the rock hewn churches in Tigray. He also adds that the neglect to take immediate and appropriate management activities and the unwise local interventions are worsening the conservation status of the churches. Recently, the researcher tried to conduct a preliminary study on the conservation problems of some rock-hewn churches found in South Gondar, North Wollo and Shewa (Tsegaye 2019a). In general, the management and conservation problems of rock-hewn churches have a direct impact on tourism development, which relies on cultural legacies of the past.

2.3. Conceptual Framework of the Study

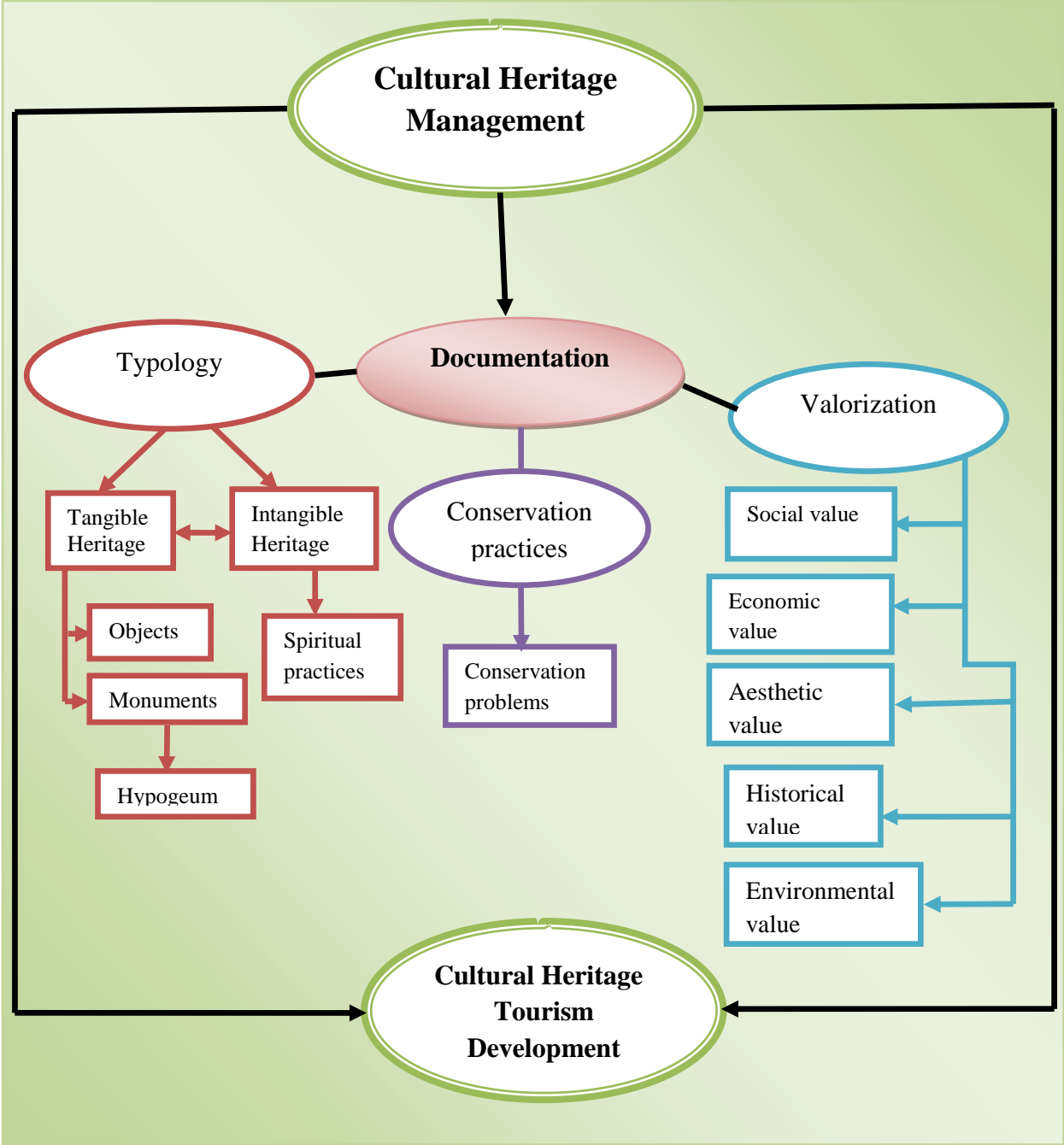


Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework of the study, the role of CHM for sustainable CHT development (Source: adapted from the literature review)

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.1 The Study Area

Geographically, the study area, Lay Gayint, is one of the twelve administrative *woredas* in the South Gondar Zone, Amhara Region. It is bordered by North Wollo Zone in the east, Farta and Simada *Woredas* in the west, Tach Gayint District in the south, and Ibinat *Woreda* in the north. The *woreda*'s capital is Nefas Mewcha, which is located across the Dessie-Bahr Dar highway, just 739 kilometers from Addis Ababa, 175 kilometers from Bahr Dar, the capital of the region, and 75 kilometers from Debre Tabor, the capital of the zone. The area is categorized into *dega* (*highland*), *weina dega* (*temperate*), and *qolla* (*tropical*), which range from 1300 to 3500 meters above sea level (Walle, 2011: 1-2).

The topography of the *woreda* is part of the central plateau of Ethiopia, and it is characterized by a rugged landscape including mountains (such as Guna, the third highest mountain in the country), hills, gorges, and escarpments that make it one of the most inaccessible areas of the country (Walle, 2011: 1-2; Gebre Kidan, 2019: 1-2). It connects Gondar and Wollo through its natural bridge (also known as *Yegzer Dildiy*, which means God's Bridge among the local residents), which is part of the Checheho chain that separates the tributaries of the Beshilo River that flow towards the Abay River in the south and the tributaries of the Zoga River that flow towards the Tekezze River in the north (Gebre Kidan, 2019: 9). In terms of its population, the district has 206,458 residents, of whom almost 90% live in rural areas (CSA, 2007). Most of the population adheres to Orthodox Christianity. The people have different socio-cultural practices that are common in the region. These practices include living traditions such as communal harvesting, marriage, mourning, arbitration, and social gatherings in and around parish churches (Walle, 2011: 1-2).

Economically, the people of Lay Gayint are dependent on a traditional subsistence farming system by which some crops such as wheat, *teff*, and potatoes are being produced. However, the *woreda* is one of agriculturally the unproductive areas of the country mainly because of drought, land degradation, the incidence of crop pests, ground and surface water depletion, and landslides,

and the people suffer from food shortages, particularly since the 1970s (Walle, 2011: 6; Arega, 2013, 56; Addisu and Menberu, 2015: 31).

Historically, Gayint, which is recently divided into Lay Gayint and Tach-Gayint administrative *woredas*, was part of Begemdir province and a center of religious and political activities mainly in the medieval period. According to some sources, Christianity was introduced to the area since the 6th century A.D., and different monasteries and churches are found as evidence. Some examples include Zur Amba Aregawi, Setla Maryam, Mesenna Medhane Alem, Lida Giorgis, Akale Kristos, and Checheho Medhane Alem. The monastery of Zur Amba is said to have been established probably during the reign of King Gebre Meskel in the 6th century A.D. There are also different religious sites that attest to the expansion of Christianity before and during the medieval period in Ethiopia (Omer, 2005: 716; Gebre Kidan, 2019: 9). In addition to its religious history, the *woreda* is known for the famous *Fetawrary* Gebrye, the military commander of Emperor Tewodros. To venerate him, the emperor named Gayint *Ras*, an Amharic term which means head or chief. Since that time, Gayint has been recalled by the local communities as *Ras Gayint* (Walle, 2011: 3).

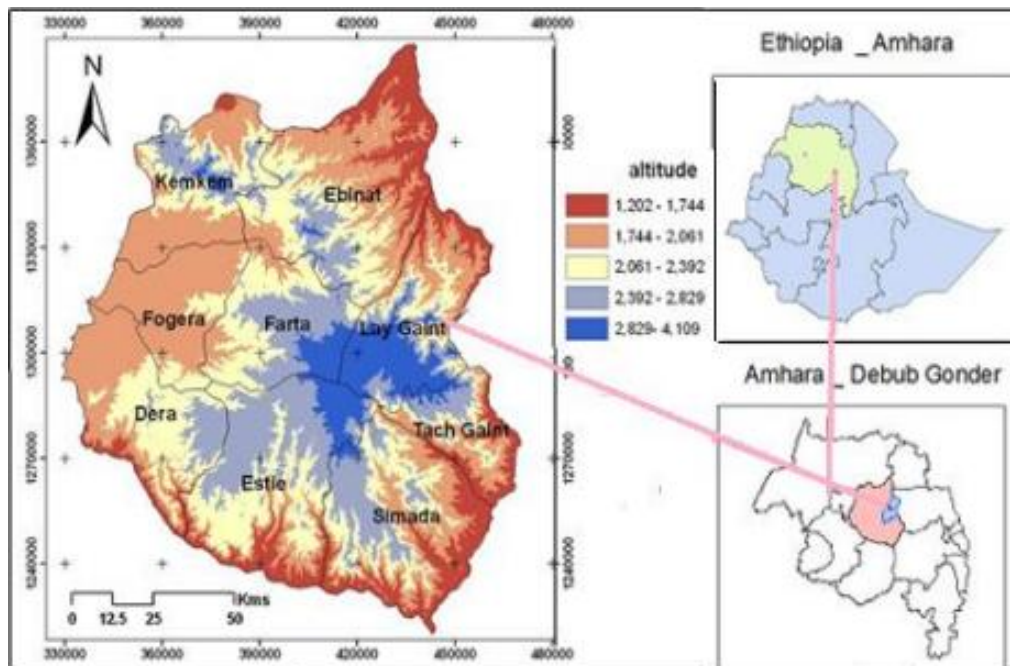


Figure 3.1: Map of Lay Gayint Woreda¹ (Source: Arega 2013: 46)

¹Except they are cited, all the figures inserted in the study are own collections.

3.2 Research Approach and Design

In the process of research, research design and approach are basic elements to facilitate the smooth sailing of research operations in order to make research findings efficient and relevant in producing important knowledge with minimal expenditure of effort, time, and money. There are two main approaches to research. These are qualitative and quantitative. In terms of its design, the research process includes the types of sources to be collected, the types of data gathering techniques or tools, the sampling techniques, and the approaches to data analysis (Kothari, 2004: 32–33).

This study has employed methods that are commonly used in the areas of cultural tourism development and CHM. The study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive research design, supplemented by a quantitative research approach. The qualitative research approach was employed to deeply understand the characters and behaviors under study. This approach was used to analyze data collected using interview, observation, and archive analysis, whereas, the quantitative approach was employed to analyze data from questionnaires collected from the local communities.

3.3 Types of Data Sources of the Study

In the area of social science research, there are commonly two types of sources. These include primary and secondary sources. This study used both of these types of sources. Primary sources included sources which gave first-hand information about the study issue. These sources include data related to the physical and architectural elements of the hypogea churches collected during the fieldwork (observation) using different mechanisms. Secondary sources also included data related to the historical narrations and heritage management issues of each churches collected using different data gathering techniques.

3.4 Data Collection Techniques

In the area of tourism research, there are different techniques used to collect substantial research data. Among these techniques, which are explained by different scholars either from the broader social science perspective or from the context of tourism research in specific, are ethnographic survey, focus group discussion, interview, questionnaire survey, and observation and archive

analysis (Berg, 2001; Kothari, 2004; Ritchie, Burns and Palmer, 2005; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Tracy, 2013; Brunt, Semley and Horner, 2017). Being acquainted with the concepts, approaches, processes, and applications of these techniques into consideration, this study has employed the following data gathering techniques.

3.4.1 Observations

Observations in the context of this study included activities such as surveying, which is an important fieldwork activity in the exploration of cultural and tourist resources. The surveying of the study sites was made between May 10 and 19, 2023.² The field work involved traveling and physically observing the sites in order to gather data related to the physical and architectural elements of the rock-hewn churches. All the sites were not accessible by car and were reached on foot walk. Features observed during the field visit were thoroughly recorded in handbooks. In addition to this, other supportive instruments were used to collect the necessary data for the study. By using a digital camera, pictures of essential features of the sites were taken. The data collected through these instruments was an integral part of the data presentation, analysis and discussion. The Global Positioning System (GPS) was also used to record the coordination points (north degree, easing degree and altitude) of the sites, which are mapped accordingly. A meter was also used to measure the area of the hypogea churches. In the field work, getting primary information on treasures of the churches was impossible because of political instabilities in the region.

3.4.2 Questionnaires

A questionnaire as a data collection technique implies the distribution of different types of questions to identified individuals in order to collect deep information about a certain issue. In this technique, two activities were undertaken to realize the data collection process. These included the preparation of questionnaires and the selection of respondents. A combination of structured and unstructured questionnaires were prepared and distributed to respondents. For the sake of the respondents, the questionnaires were prepared both in English and Amharic. The preparation of the questions was done with coherency and clarity about the issue under inquiry while keeping the necessary format of the questionnaire. The prepared questionnaires were

² The observation made at this period was not the first time to the researcher. The sites were visited in June 2021 with guests who were interested to visit rock-hewn churches across the Checheho escarpment.

distributed and collected between May 13 and 14, 2023. The respondents filled out the questionnaires with the help of the researcher and local guides, who supported respondents who had no basic knowledge of reading and writing. The researcher met the respondents for this purpose while they were gathered for spiritual and social activities around their parish church. The distribution of the questionnaire in each church was made separately, and the analysis was also made accordingly to clearly understand the issue in the context of each church. The intention of the questionnaires was to gather data about the historical and heritage management aspects of the rock-hewn churches.

3.4.3 Interviews

An interview was conducted through verbal communication with the key interviewees selected using the sampling procedure. Both open-ended and closed-ended questions were prepared in English and translated into Amharic to be verbally asked of the key informants. The verbal responses of the informants were recorded using handwritten notes and mobile sound recording. Because it was inconvenient to have a meeting physically, some of the informants were interviewed by phone. The interview questions were intended to gather further information about the historical and heritage management issues of the rock-hewn churches.

3.4.4 Archive Analysis

In cultural studies related to tourism development, assessing the available previous archival records is helpful to supplement the sources collected through the techniques described above. It is also helpful to understanding the historical narrations and trends of heritage management and tourism activities (if available). In relation to this, unpublished sources showing the history of the sites were assessed. These sources primarily included *Gedle Abune* Muse (a Geez term which means the hagiography of Our Father Moses) of the founders of the hypogea churches. *Gedle Abune* Muse which has some copies found at Addis Amba Medhane Alem and Nazugn Mariam Churches in Meket *Woreda*, North Wollo was consulted. Important information related to the study sites was extracted from these parchment copies which are written in Geez. The records from these offices were accessed some years ago. However, accessing available records from CTB at zonal and *woreda* level was difficult during the field work. Moreover, some of the records might be lost during the war before a year. Luckily, the archival sources used in the study were accessed from the bureaus before the incident.

3.5 Sampling Technique and Size

The study has employed both purposeful and random sampling techniques in order to identify participants and study sites. The research sites were selected purposefully based on the type (fabric) of the churches. Geographically, each locality of the *woreda* is divided into different administrative *kebeles* (localities, the lowest administrative level), which have their respective parish churches. The *kebeles* with hypogea churches were purposefully selected as the sites of this study. The key informants and respondents of the study were selected among the local communities who were members of the respected parish church (of rock-hewn types) and the culture and tourism offices of the *woreda*.

In the interview, five informants (four males and one female) who had better information on the issue participated. The technique that was used to select participants for an in-depth interview schedule was purposeful sampling, in which key informants were selected based on their knowledge regarding the issues related to the study. The informants with better knowledge were traced through the snowball method, in which a person was asked to recommend another person who has better knowledge on the issue. The respondents were selected from the residents of the two *kebeles*. Within each parish church (*kebele*), respondents over the age of 18 were selected. By taking the total population of the *woreda*, which is 206,458, according to the CSA (2007), 400 respondents were selected randomly. This number of respondents was calculated using Taro Yamane's sampling formula, which is mentioned under Adam (2020: 92), assuming a 95% confidence level and $e = \pm 5\%$:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N * (e)^2}$$

Where, n= sample size, N= target population, and e= error term.

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{206,458}{1 + 206,458 * (0.05)^2} = 400$$

Though it was difficult to get the total population of each *kebele*, the sampling of the respondents was proportionally taken from the two *kebeles*, Mesenna and Aydefer, where the study sites are located. Accordingly, 200 respondents from Mesenna Medhane Alem and the rest of 200 respondents from Wukro Giorgis were randomly selected. This selection was made when most of the communities were gathering around their churches for social and religious purposes, and only voluntary respondents were included. The selection was accompanied by the distribution of the

questionnaires with the support of local students who were capable of Amharic reading and writing. This was helpful to be timely and effective in the distribution, filling, and collection process of the questionnaires. It was also important to effectively fill out all the questionnaires (though most of the respondents did not give answers to open ended questions). As most of the respondents were illiterate, some 20 local students participated in reading the questions to the respondents and writing their answers.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data, which was collected through different techniques, was analyzed through a qualitative and quantitative analysis approach. Data collected by interview, observation, and archival review techniques was analyzed through a qualitative descriptive approach, which is important to analyze symbolic and expressive human activities (Berg, 2001: 239). The data collected through the questionnaire technique was analyzed descriptive quantitative analysis technique. The closed ended types of questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics by considering the percentage of the frequencies of the responses. The questions related to the opinions and feelings of the respondents were also analyzed using statistical descriptive analysis. The analysis is made by harmonizing the data collected through the four data collection methods mentioned above.

3.7 A Matrix for Objectives, Data Collection Methods, and Data Analysis Approaches

S. No.	Specific Objectives	Method of Data Collection	Approach of Analysis
1.	Describe the type and historical narrations of ancient hypogea churches in Lay Gayint.	✓ Observations	✓ Qualitative approach
		✓ Archival Analysis	✓ Qualitative approach
		✓ Interviews	✓ Qualitative approach
2.	Describe the potential tourist attraction elements of the hypogea churches.	✓ Observation	✓ Qualitative approach
		✓ Interviews	✓ Qualitative approach
		✓ Questionnaires	✓ Quantitative approach
3.	Explain cultural heritage conservation practices on the hypogea churches.	✓ Questionnaires	✓ Quantitative approach
		✓ Observations	✓ Qualitative approach
		✓ Interviews	✓ Qualitative approach

Table 3.1 A matrix for objectives, methods of data collection and approaches of data analysis³

³ Except they are cited, all the tables inserted in the study were own preparations.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

Research ethics is considered important by research scholars for its significant role in avoiding misconducts during research activities and positively affecting the effectiveness of the results of a research work. Research ethics implies the professional conduct of researchers in the processes of data collection, analysis, and dissemination. The main aspect of research ethics is the professional codes of ethics, which are “social contracts between members of a professional group that aim to instigate and encourage ethical behavior and prevent misconduct, including research and publication” (Gallegos-Erazo, 2021: 11).

There were some elements to be considered by the researcher in the course of this study. Firstly, an ethical clearance certificate issued on April 20, 2023, by the college’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) was received from the College of Development Studies. Secondly, data collection was made by keeping the traditions of the religious sites. This included recognizing and respecting religious values that have meaning and significance to the local communities. Thirdly, as the treasures of churches are vulnerable to theft and robbery activities, a discussion was held with church administrators and tourism and culture officers of the *woreda* on how to gather data in a secure way. However, there was no way to observe and get detailed information about the treasures found in each church because of the lack of willingness from the concerned bodies. Finally, before conducting an interview and disseminating a questionnaire to informants and respondents, respectively, the researcher assured their voluntariness to provide the necessary information for the purpose of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter explores the untapped potential tourism values of the hypogea churches in Lay Gayint *Woreda*. It deeply describes two major issues related to these churches: the potential values possessed by the hypogea churches and the heritage management status of the rock-hewn churches. The first issue thoroughly discusses the typology and potential values of tourist attractions, whereas the second topic illustrates heritage conservation practices and associated problems. The data presentation and analysis are accompanied by a brief discussion. In relation to the analysis of questionnaires and interviews, the demographic information of respondents and informants is briefed under Appendices III and IV, respectively. Before proceeding to the above topics of the study, scanning the tourism practices in the *woreda* is supportive of the rationale that the topic of this study is pressing and indicative of the need for documentation of the untapped cultural values of the *woreda* for a future heritage tourism development plan.

4.1 Potential Tourist Attractions and Tourism Activities in Lay Gayint: Opportunities and Challenges

4.1.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

This discussion on this topic is based on the data collected from written records found in the CTB of Lay Gayint and South Gondar Zone and literature, field observation, questionnaires, and interviews. The overview made on the general tourist attractions and tourism activities of Lay Gayint *Woreda* intimates the need to deeply scrutinize the area's opportunities and anticipate and foster tourism development by fulfilling the challenges that thwarted the industry.

As has been highlighted in the introductory part of this study, the *woreda* has two main opportunities that enable it to be one of the country's future tourism destinations. One of these opportunities, though it may not be taken as the major one as the *woreda*'s opportunity in its possession of potential sites, is the location of the district between Lalibela and Bahr Dar-Gondar tourist way. The other and more viable opportunity, as described a bit below, is the *woreda*'s endowment with different potential tourism resources, both natural and cultural, which are not yet explored and used for tourism development.

Naturally, the *woreda* is rich with varied attractive features, including mountains, such as Guna Mountain, and other varied landforms and protected forests, some of which are associated with the ancient churches. One of these attractive landforms is the Checheho escarpment, which is characterized by extended cliffs, gorges, and terrains and is partly occupied by small cottages. Typically, the corridor, which is called by the local community as God's Bridge between Gondar and Wollo and the protected forest around Checheho Medhane Alem are of great importance. The remnants of protected forests, with some old trees, are almost concentrated in the realm of each church. This implies the importance of the religious sites from an environmental perspective. The protected sacred forest of Setla Mariam and its different natural caves are other examples of natural attractions associated with the ancient churches (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2).



Figure 4.1 A protected sacred forest at Setla Mariam Figure 4.2 A natural cave at Setla Mariam

Culturally, there are a number of ancient churches that have significant tourist attractions. At the *woreda* level, about 19 ancient churches, which are locally believed to have been established between the 4th and 18th centuries A.D., were listed (see Table 4.1). At the zonal level, the CTB of South Gondar has recorded and mapped twenty cultural and natural sites as potential tourist sites in the area (see Figure 4.3). In this record, except for Checheho Medhane Alem and Zuramba (Zur Abba) Tsiraariam Mariam (also Zuramba Abune Aregaw), many other significant sites found in Lay Gayint were overlooked.

S. No.	Name of the site	Distance from Nefas Mewcha	S. No.	Name of the site	Distance from Nefas Mewcha
1.	Mesenna Medhane Alem	12 km	11.	Debre Mariam	29km
2.	Tefu Meskele Eyesus	12 km	12.	Tana Eyesus	36km
3.	Wof Washa Kidane Mihret	27km	13	Shitan Abbo	28km
4.	Wukro Giorgis	18km	14	Meskel Aza Mariam	38km
5.	Checheho Medhane Alem	15km	15	Abish Gedam Abbo	54km
6	Setla Mariam	30km	16	Yedero Gabriel	1km
7.	Debre Sina Mariam	85km	17	Zuramba Aregawi	35km
8.	Guna Michael	28km	18	Aseta Michael	0.5km
9.	Akale Kristos	30km	19	Key Gedel	1km
10.	Dera Meskel	32km			

Table 4.1 List of ancient cultural sites in Lay Gayint Woreda (Source: CTB of Lay Gayint Woreda, 2004 E. C)

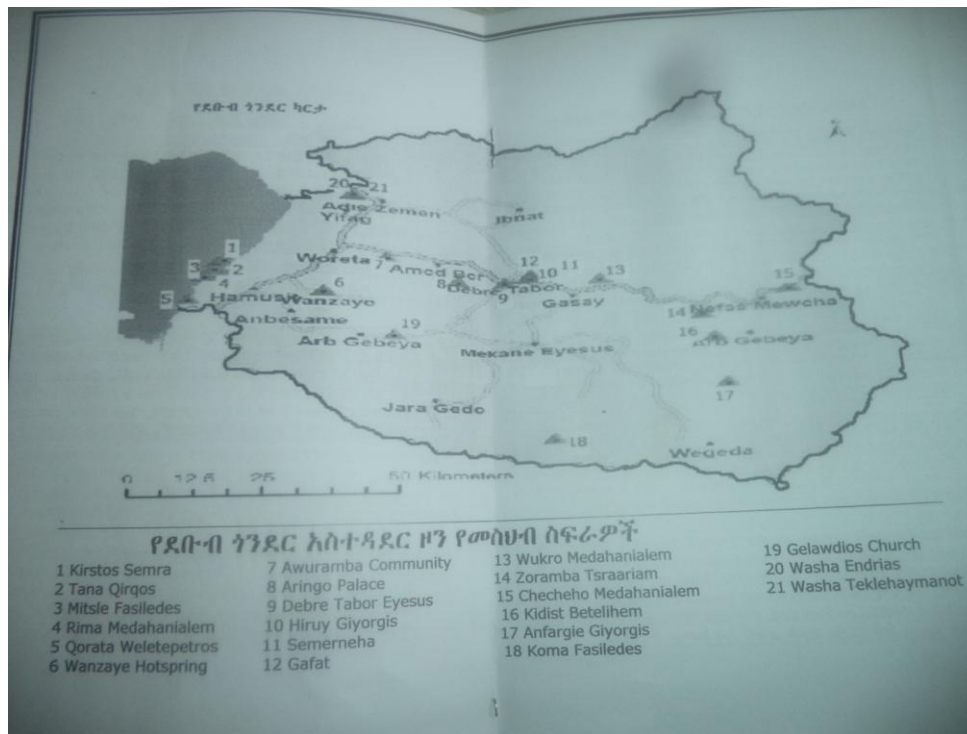


Figure 4.3 A map showing potential tourist sites in South Gondar (Source: CTB of South Gondar Zone, 2006 E.C)

Even though they are neglected, the churches listed at *woreda* level have ancient history, art, and movable treasures that are preserved by the local communities. According to the local tradition, which is compiled by the CTB of the *woreda*, the history of the establishment of the churches

ranges between the 4th and 18th centuries. Accordingly, some of the churches, such as Wukro Giorgis, Mesenna Medhane Alem, and Zuramba Aregawi, are considered the earliest in the area. Most of the other churches were established during the medieval and Gondarine periods. In their type, some of the ancient churches are hypogea, which are discussed in this study.

More specifically, the hypogea churches of the area have better potential than other churches, mainly in terms of their architectural attractions, as discussed in the later sections of this chapter. In addition to the above overview of the potential opportunities of the *woreda* for tourism development, the opinions, observations, and feelings of the local communities were surveyed through questionnaires and interviews to better understand the status of tourism practices in the *woreda*, which is identified with the opportunities shown above.

The results of the survey tools regarding tourism activities and the local communities experiences are presented, analyzed in the following paragraphs. With regard to the tourism potential of the hypogea churches as potential tourist attractions, the respondents' opinions are summarized in the table below.

Local communities opinion on the potential of the hypogea churches for tourism development	Frequency	Percent	
Do you think that the rock-hewn churches have potential elements to attract tourists?	Yes	328	82.0
	No	72	18.0
	Total	400	100

Table 4.2 Respondents' opinion on the potential of the rock-hewn churches for tourism development

As indicated above (Table 4.2), regarding the potential tourist attraction elements of the hypogea churches of the *woreda*, 82% of the respondents opined that the hypogea churches have potential tourist attraction features. This result is concomitant with the discussions made later on the different attraction features of the hypogea churches. Regardless of this, there is no defined tourism activity, as indicated in Table 4.3 below, which summarizes the local communities' opinion on whether the practice of tourism existed in the *woreda* or not.

Respondents' opinion on the practice of tourism in Lay Gayint		Frequency	Percent
Is there any form of tourism practice in your area?	Yes	75	18.8
	No	325	81.2
	Total	400	100

Table 4.3 Respondents' opinion on the practice of tourism in Lay Gayint

As indicated above (Table 4.3), in relation to the form of tourism, if it was already in practice, 18.8% of the respondents stated that there was tourism activity in the *woreda*. 81.2% of the respondents' answers showed that there was no type of tourism activity in the area. This implies that there is no known tourism practice noticed by the local communities. In other words, they did not observe the flow of tourists to the ancient churches or other potential sites that they knew about. In relation to this, some of the respondents' suggested that tourism activity that relies on cultural and historical tourist attractions would have better importance for the *woreda*. This demands the exploration, identification, and documentation of existing cultural sites to enable the development of culture-history-based tourism practices.

The absence of defined tourism activity in the *woreda* implies that the hypogea churches and other potential cultural sites are not well known to tourists, as is confirmed from the responses of the respondents indicated in Table 4.4 below.

Respondents' opinion on how far the hypogea churches are known to tourists		Frequency	Percent
Do you think that the rock-hewn churches in your area are well known tourist sites?	Yes	52	13.0
	No	348	87.0
	Total	400	100

Table 4.4 Respondents' opinion on how far the hypogea churches are known to visitors

As indicated in the table above, 13% of the respondents indicated that the hypogea churches in the *woreda* are well-known tourist sites; whereas 87% of the respondents' stated that these sites were not well known tourist attractions.

Despite the benefits lost in previous times, the local communities have shown their interest in the development of the industry using the potential religious sites, particularly the rock-hewn churches, as indicated in Table 4.5 below.

The local communities' interest for the development of tourism using the potential resources particularly the rock-hewn churches		Frequency	Percent
Are you interested if these rock-hewn churches can be developed as tourist destination?	Yes	300	75.0
	No	100	25.0
	Total	400	100

Table 4.5: Respondents' interest for the development of tourism in Lay Gayint Woreda

As shown in Table 4.5 above, 75% of the respondents expressed their interest in developing the rock-hewn churches as tourist sites, whereas 25% of them expressed their absence of interest in developing tourism activity in and around the rock-hewn churches. For some of the respondents, the reasons behind their interest in the development of tourism in their locality include job opportunities for the local communities in particular and the economic contribution of the sector in general. This result is important as tourism relies on resources owned and used by local communities. In the absence of interest and involvement from the locals, it is unlikely that tourism development will be planned by external stakeholders such as tour operators, or even the government. This is the first step in exploring, documenting, conserving, and promoting the potential tourism resources.

The underdeveloped status of the tourism activity in the area is due to different factors that hinder the development of the industry. The observation of the local communities regarding the availability of tourism infrastructure (transportation, accommodation, etc.), one of the factors that affect the industry, is summarized in Table 4.6 below.

Local communities opinion on the availability of basic tourist infrastructures (such as road) and services providing centers (such as hotel)		Frequency	Percent
Is there any service center and facility (accommodation and infrastructure) established to serve tourists in the area?	Yes	71	17.75
	No	329	82.25
	Total	400	100

Table 4.6 Respondents' observation on the availability of basic tourism infrastructures in the woreda

As indicated in Table 4.6, most of the respondents (82.25%) indicate the absence of these infrastructures in and around the potential sites found in the *woreda*, whereas 17.75% of the respondents observed the availability of basic tourism infrastructure in the area.

On the other hand, the perception (feeling) of the local communities towards the development of tourism relied on the potential hypogea churches is analyzed and summarized in the table below.

Feelings of respondents in supporting tourism development	Mean	Std. Deviation
Appreciating oral narrations about the tourist site for tourism development.	3.83	0.84
Encouraging domestic visitors to pay a visit to the site.	3.96	0.87

Table 4.7 Respondents' feelings in supporting tourism development

Based on the result indicated in Table 4.7 above, when looking at the mean and standard deviation of the respondents' responses about the local communities' appreciation of the oral narrations of the tourist site and encouragement of domestic visitors to pay a visit to the site, the mean values are about 3.83 and 3.96, respectively. This indicates that most of the respondents agreed to appreciate the historical narrations about the tourist site for tourism development as well as encourage domestic visitors to visit the ancient churches. Furthermore, the standard deviation was close to 1.0, implying that there was no huge deviation between respondents' opinions on both questions.

Data related to the tourism practices in the *woreda* and the collaboration between the *woreda* and other stakeholders was also gathered from key informants. The responses of the informants are presented as follows: In relation to the status of the tourism activities and the collaboration of the *woreda* with tourism stakeholders, the head of the CTB of the *woreda* stated the following:

In our woreda, there is no known tourism activity as compared to other areas such as Lalibela, Gondar, and Bahr Dar. The bureau may have a plan to make the woreda a tourist destination, but it has not yet been implemented for different reasons. The promotion attempted at the woreda level through the Facebook page of our office has made little contribution. There is also no collaboration created between our bureau and tourism stakeholders, who are found far from the woreda. We did not see any tour operators who brought guests to the woreda. And, therefore, we still have no collaboration with any stakeholder (informant: Tsega Kihnet, interviewed on 16/05/2023).

Another officer of the bureau also forwarded the factors that hinder the development of tourism activity in the *woreda* as follows:

The bureau's engagement in activities to enhance tourism is insignificant. There are different factors responsible for the underdeveloped status of the industry. There is an absence of skilled manpower, and the bureau is led by non-professional cadres. This is the main problem. There is also a frequent shift of officers from one bureau to another, which hinders the proper understanding of the duties of the bureau. There is also a lack of emphasis on the bureau's activities, lack of support from zone,

region, and federal offices. Tour operators are also not available, even at the zonal level. Plus, the absence of basic infrastructure such as roads and clean hotels is hindering the development of tourism in our woreda (Informant: Tewodros Melak, interviewed on 15/05/2023).

4.1.2 Discussion

As has been highlighted above, in terms of the environment for tourism development in Lay Gayint, two major opportunities have been identified: These were its locations along the way between the three main tourist destinations: Lalibela in the east and Bahir Dar and Gondar in the west. This opportunity may be important for tourism planners to extend the flow of tourists towards rural areas, such as Lay Gayint. The other opportunity, which is described above, is the *woreda*'s endowment with potential cultural and natural tourist attractions. As far as the cultural tourism resources of the area are concerned, the capacity of the religious sites (particularly the hypogea churches) to be endowed with significant tourist attraction elements is confirmed by the local community's opinion, as indicated under Table 4.2. These potential attraction elements are not yet known, so exploring what actually existed in each hypogeum is required.

As the survey results show (in Tables 4.3 and 4.4), there was no tourism activity noticed by the local community. In other words, the respondents had not seen the flow of tourists to the potential sites (either the natural or cultural sites, such as the hypogea churches) of the *woreda*. This implies the potential tourism resources of the *woreda* are idle or underutilized and, at the same time, poorly managed and conserved, as confirmed in the result of the study placed in the next sections of this chapter. Both local communities and the *woreda* officers underlined the absence of the practice of the industry and the poorly known status of the potential religious and historical sites of the *woreda*, mainly because of different reasons such as the absence of infrastructure (basically car transportation) and negligence either at the *woreda* level or above.

Overall, the results of the data presented above indicated the tourism development practice in Lay Gayint is insignificant, which implies the absence of tourist flow towards the *woreda*'s potential cultural sites, which are little known to decision-makers, tourists, and tour operators. Neither the local communities' interest in tourism development nor the potential tourism attractions in the *woreda* are factors in the underdeveloped condition of the practice in the area. It is rather due to the number of factors, mainly related to decision-makers and other tourism stakeholders. The factors that made the industry underdeveloped, mentioned by the respondents'

and the informants are evidenced in different literatures (Mulugeta, 2012; Tesfaye, 2015; Yimer, 2016; Robinson, 2016; Ephrem, 2018; Getahun, 2023).

Moreover, the absence of detailed information (documented evidence) about the sites is an additional challenge for the industry. In relation to these problems, Lay Gayint's potential historical, religious, and natural sites are found to be idle in the tourism activity of the country. The idleness of the potential tourism resources reflects the absence of documentation and management of the values of such resources. Here, identification of what potential resources the area has is a primary issue. Establishing an enabling environment for the development of the industry comes in second.

As different experts in the field show (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009: 20–33; Keitumetse, 2016: 181 & 203), the potential tourism resources of most developing countries, including Ethiopia, are not only untraceable but also vulnerable to different destructive agents. The case of Lay Gayint is no exception. Therefore, it is unlikely to think about the management and promotion of these unnoticed cultural resources. Moreover, as Srivastava (2019) indicates, tourism helps to share cultural values so that these values can be conserved through the revenue collected from tourists. To ensure this, the first step is establishing the tourist information base through documentation and promotion.

Here, the challenge of tourism activity in Lay Gayint and other well-known tourist areas in different parts of the country is different. For relatively well developed tourist sites such as Lalibela and Gondar, the industry's main problem is not the absence of documented tourist information, rather the absence of collaboration between different stakeholders who have benefits from the tourist sites; the sites' conservation problems occurred because of tourism activities, the rise of living costs for the local communities, and etc. (see Temesgen, 2013; Muluemebet, 2019). While looking at the case of Lay Gayint, the situation is different as this is an area where tourism is not yet known. In this case, the primary challenge for the tourism industry is the absence of documented tourist information about the untapped cultural resources. Such areas with no or underdeveloped tourism development possessed little explored and poorly managed cultural resources. Nevertheless, in the areas where tourism is not well developed, the exploration and documentation of some of the potential cultural sites becomes a primary and pioneering activity to deeply understand the existing opportunity and anticipate future tourism

development planning in the *woreda*. Therefore, the following sections of the chapter provide a detailed description of some of the major tourism sites, exclusively the hypogea churches that have potential tourist attraction features for future tourism development activity.

4.2 Potential Tourism Attraction Features of the Hypogea Churches of Lay Gayint

4.2.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

4.2.1.1 Typology and Attraction Features of the Hypogea Churches

This section explores the different features (which can also be considered here as potential future tourism values), including the landscapes, architectural features, historical narrations, and treasures that aligned with the three rock-hewn churches, Mesenna Medhane Alem, Tefu Meskele Eyesus, and Wukro Giorgis. Before proceeding to these topics, preliminary issues on these churches are described below.

The exploration of the least known cultural heritage in this study is shaped by the view that cultural heritage has both use and non-use value, which implies the economic (extrinsic) and socio-cultural (intrinsic) benefits that these resources possess for the benefit of current and future generations. In relation to this, the unexplored and little utilized hypogea heritage tourism resources in Lay Gayint *Woreda* are documented here as irreplaceable resources for heritage tourism development in the future. This chapter provides a detailed description of the potential tourism values of the hypogea, which were identified during the field work. These churches were of course introduced in the previous section of this chapter, but to name them again: Mesenna Medhane Alem, Wukro Giorgis, and Tefu Meskele Eyesus.

Currently, except for the rock-hewn church of Tefu Meskele Eyesus, the local communities are using the other two churches for regular spiritual purposes. This chapter explores the types and main tourist attraction elements of the churches in the subtopics that follow this section. The full information regarding names and the location of the churches is summarized in Table 4.8 below, and their distribution is also indicated in the map (see Figure 4.4) that follows the table.

S. No.	Name of the Church	UTM Coordinations		
		Easting degree	Northing degree	Altitude
1.	Mesenna Medhane Alem	0438049	1302668	2799
2.	Tefu Bete Kristian	0437039	1303526	2828
3.	Wukro Giorgis	0433045	1305428	2871

Table 4.8 Basic information of the Hypogea churches in Lay Gayint

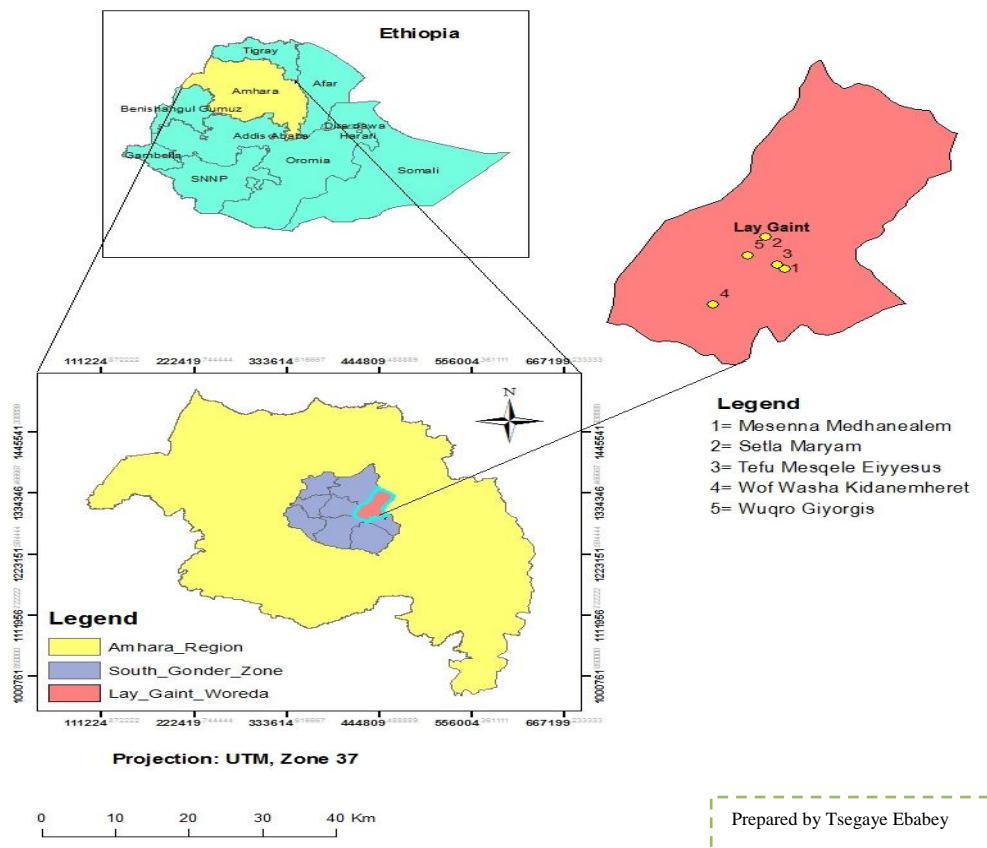


Figure 4.4 Map of the distribution of hypogea and some other built-up churches in Lay Gayint

The following sections give detailed descriptions of the values or features possessed by the hypogea churches, which are expected to be potential future tourist sites in the *woreda*. The discussion is made in line with the values of the churches, including their physical landscape, architectural and aesthetic features, historical narrations, and movable treasures, which have different values. For the sake of easily capturing the general context of each church, descriptions are made separately, with some descriptive comparisons.

4.2.1.1.1 Mesenna Medhane Alem

I. Physical Landscape (Environmental Value)

The church of Mesenna Medhane Alem is located in the locality of Mesenna, northwest of Nefas Mewcha town. It is established on a hill that is situated overlooking the western face of the Checheho chain, the upper course of the Zoga River. The hill is one of the few areas covered with protected natural forest that has been preserved to this day. As it is vividly known in the northern part of the country, most of the protected natural forests are found in and around ancient churches and monasteries that maintained the tradition of preserving forest areas as sacred landscapes, which can be considered an example of a protected sacred forest. It is very common that areas such as Lay Gayint, with isolated protected forests, have a church beside them.



Figure 4.5 Vicinity of Mesenna Medhane Alem Church

The preservation of this small-scale forest in the compound of the church is an important aspect of the practice of environmental conservation in the area. It is an example of the mainstay of ancient forest remnants in areas where the environment is deteriorating because of overexploitation and deforestation through continuous human settlement. The hill of the church is covered with old trees, including *woira* (*Oliea africana*) and *tsid* (*Juniperus procera*), which constitute the appeal of the compound of the church as a sacred landscape (see Figure 4.5). The

area around the church, however, is dominated by unwittingly prepared burial sites, which have deteriorated the beauty of the church's landscape.

II. Historical Value

Mesenna Medhane Alem and other hypogea churches in the area have important historical significance that can be narrated here. Regarding its history, the head of the church stated the following:

The church has a long history, as we heard from our forefathers. It was built by Abune Muse during the reign of Abriha wo Atsibiha in the fourth century A.D. Abune Muse was a bishop who came to Ethiopia from Egypt after the death of Abba Selama Kesate Berihan. There are also many other churches built by Abune Muse (informant: Kinde Bereded, interviewed on 9/623).

This oral narration is a reflection of Abune Muse's life, which is recorded in *Gedle Abune Muse*, which mentions the evangelization and church carving activities of the bishop in Begemdir (South Gondar). The arrival and activity of the bishop in Begemidr, as mentioned in the *Gedle Abune Muse* (taken from the copy available at Addis Amba Medhane Alem), are quoted from *Gedle Abune Muse* (p. 151) as follows:

ወካዕበ ኣንሶሳወ ወበጽሐ ንበ ሀገረ በጌምድር ወረክበሙ ለብዙኃን ድውዶን ወፈወሶሙ በህየ። ወኣጥመቆሙ ጥምቀተ ክርስትና ወመጠወሙ ምሥጢራተ ቅድሳት በእደዊሁ ቅዱሳት። [And again, he moved and arrived in the country of Begemdir. There, he got many patients and cured them. He baptized and gave Holy Communion with his holy hand. And there, he carved 16 churches].

Though local written sources that mention it are not available, the local oral tradition shows that it was one of the rock-hewn churches in South Gondar to have been carved by Abune Muse. After its foundation, the church was lost and rehabilitated at different times because of war and other problems. With regard to this, the head of the church states the following:

The church of Mesenna Medhane Alem was lost for several years, probably since the war of Imam Ahmad Gragn. It was reestablished during the Gondarine period following its discovery by the local rulers who settled in the area. The church's name, Mesenna, means misennite, which means how beautiful it is. It has been given since its discovery by our forefathers (informant: Kinde Bereded, interviewed on 09/06/2023).

The interview results show that the name Mesenna is derived from *misennite*, a Geez term that means how beautiful it is and indicates the discovery of a beautiful rock-hewn church obscured by a forest. The term reflects the aesthetic values of the hypogeum, which was found after several years of abandonment. This local history of the church is associated with a war that took

place between the Christian Highland Kingdom and Muslim Sultanates in the 16th century. The local tradition regarding the impact of the war of Ahmad *ibn* Ibrahim al-Ghazi (in short, Ahmad *Gragn*, the left-handed) who was the ruler of the Adal Sultanates is widely spoken in this area.

III. Architectural Values

Mesenna Medhane Alem hypogeum is a monolithic church in its type. It is carved all around, being free from its parent rock in all its facades. It is carved from a reddish rock. Its shape seems tends to be round. Due to different factors, its southern facade was destroyed and replaced by another conventional building. It seems like the monument might have been a rock enclosure on its western side, as inferred from the broken parts observed on the south-eastern side of the hypogeum. Currently, the hypogeum is sheltered with iron sheets (see Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6 Mesenna Medhane Alem, sheltered with iron sheets

The northern side of the church is deeply carved. This formed a deep trench that was opened to the western and eastern sides of the hypogeum (see Figures 4.7 and 4.8). The bones of saints are laid down on the surface of the trench. There are also some small caves along the trench that contain the bones of saints. The trench carved is used to move around the church and to drain rainwater. The church has three entrances with a similar average measurement of 2.2m height and 1.5m width. Except for the entrance in the west that has a rectangular base and an arch shape at the top; the other two entrances on the southern side are totally with the frontal facade. Along

the male's get, a small room is found that leads into the *kine-mahilet* and *kiddist*. Its entrance into the *kine-mahilet* measures 2 meters in height and 1 meter in width. There are also eleven opened windows with different shapes and sizes, but lacking Aksumite frames.



Figure 4.7 (left) Northern side of the trench of Mesenna Medhane Alem
Figure 4.8 (right) Eastern end of the trench of Mesenna Medhane Alem

The monument is relatively complex in its plan. It has two major divisions, separated by the rock wall. The first division constitutes the *kine-mahilet* and the nave is the second division. The *kine-mahilet* is the space where chanting is made by chanters. Its western and southern parts have a podium, a storey-like space, which can be easily accessed from the western and southern entrances. It is a reserved part of the *kine-mahilet* that is not deeply carved; it has risen 2 meters in height above the *kine-mahilet*. It can congregate some attendants for chanting and other spiritual activities of the church. The lower part of the podium is the *kine-mahilet*. It serves for chanting movements and praying services. Its floor is somehow more deeply carved than the nave. Five false windows are carved on the south-western wall of the *kine-mahilet*, right below the podium. In front of the *kine-mahilet*, on the external rock wall of the nave, ancient cloth paintings (which are not easily datable here) are plastered. They are poorly preserved. The *kine-mahilet* measures 7 meters in length, 4.30 meters in width, and 4.75 meters in height. The four pillars in this room are sculpted at different magnitudes, and some of them are not deeply carved into their bases. They have less workmanship than the pillars found in the nave. Most of their capitals and arches are damaged.

There are three rectangular doorways that lead into the nave, which constitutes the *kiddist* and the *mekdes*. Corner posts (protruding features), typical of Aksumite art traditions, are sculpted on each entrance. Internally, the bottom corner posts are not clearly visible due to dust deposited over time. The doorways have similar measurements of 2 m in height and 1.05 m in width. There is one false window with Aksumite style that can be seen as being from the *kine-mahilet*. The other part is the nave, which is further divided into different parts, screened by four pillars. The nave is partitioned by pillars carved from the main rock. They are well decorated, with arches supported by horizontal beams (capitals). The arches mark a good ceiling for the vault. Their entablatures are also well designed. The pillars are connected with pilasters resembling similar characters (see Figure 4.9).



Figure 4.9 (left) A rock-hewn pillar in the *kiddist* of Mesenna Medhnae Alem
Figure 4.10 (right) A rock hewn *member* at Mesenna Medhane Alem

The other division is the nave, which includes the holy, *g'ebate mentola'et*, and *mekdes*. These divisions are made with pillars carved from the rock. The nave measures 10.50 meters in length, 8 meters in width, and 4.8 meters in height. It shows good workmanship than the *kine-mahilet*. The *mekdes* has a quadrilateral plan, and some sections which are curtained. There are two immovable monolithic and rectangular *members* (a Geez term which means altars) carved from the bedrock. One of them, obscured by the curtain on the right side, is the *member* of Medhane Alem. It has different sub-divisions. The other *member*, on the left side, is not functional (see Figure 4.10). Its roof is domed with a circular feature.

IV Treasures

The rock-hewn church of Mesenna Medhane Alem has preserved numbers of ancient sacred treasures. Some of these treasures to name include crosses, books written in parchments, processional instruments such as staff, cestrum, and etc. (informant: Melake Mihret Awoke, interviewed on 17/05/2023).

4.2.1.1.2 The Abandoned Church of *Meskele Eyesus*

I. Physical Landscape

The site of this church is located near Mesenna Medhane Alem Church in the same *kebele*. It is founded on a rocky plain that overlooks the Checheho chain and the rugged lowland area in which the Zoga River flows towards the Tekezze River. Small farming villages surround the site, which is covered with bushes, grasses, and a few olive trees that have escaped the local exploitation of old-age trees grown over the site (see Figure 4.11).



Figure 4.11 The vicinity of Tefu Bete Kristian at Mesenna

II. Historical Value

The abandoned hypogeum, which is found in Lay Gayint *Woreda*, has a significant history that requires more attention because it is a lost monument. In its current state, the rock-hewn church structure is abandoned and not functional in terms of its spiritual purpose. The local term, *tef*, is employed to indicate an ancient hypogeum that is abandoned and not a regular or former religious service. To provide a preliminary historical narration of this abandoned rock-hewn church, some sources have been collected from local oral tradition. In relation to its history, three important issues arise here. These include its foundation period, its original purpose, and the

causes of its abandonment. Regarding these issues, the local myth is stated by the head of Mesenna Medhane Alem Church as follows:

This church is currently unused. But it has a long history, as we heard from our fathers. The church was founded by King Lalibela. Before the war of Gragn Ahmed, it was the church of Meskele Eyesus. However, it has been abandoned since the war and is still forgotten (informant: Kinde Bereded, interviewed on 09/06/2023).

The above statement summarizes the three issues raised above. Accordingly, the foundation of the church is traditionally attributed to King Lalibela. This implies that the abandoned hypogeum was one of the rock-hewn churches carved in medieval Ethiopia. The local tradition shows that it was a church dedicated to the Ark of the Holy Cross of Jesus. According to this account, the rock-hewn church is still a lost church since the war of Ahmad *Gragn*, though the monument is physically preserved.

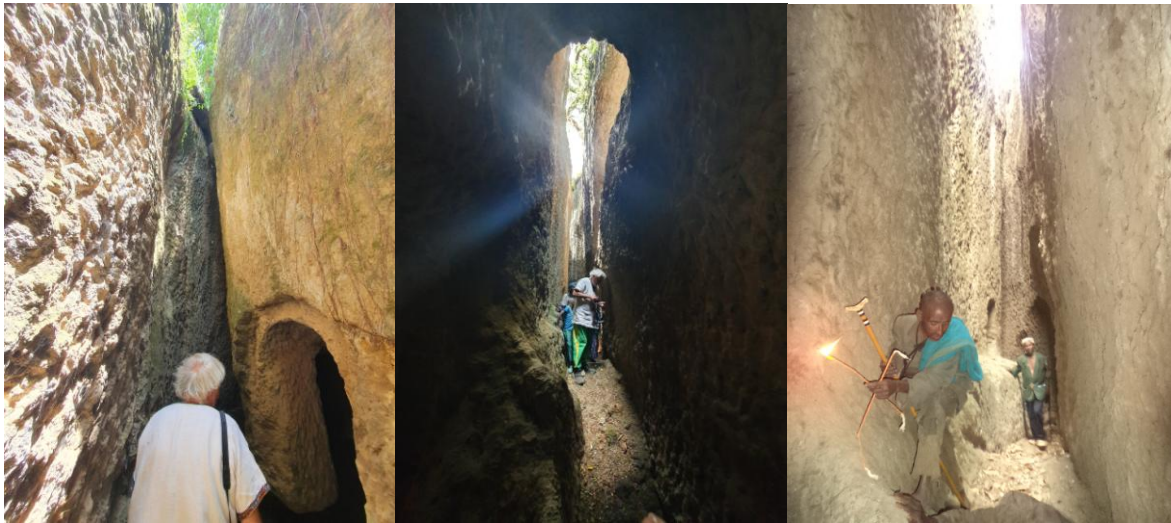
III. Architectural and Artistic Values

The abandoned Meskele Eyesus church is a monolithic rock-hewn structure in its plan. It is carved out of single bedrock, a white volcanic tuff situated on a stable plain. This monolithic hypogeum is independently raised by detaching all of its facades from the main rock through the carving of deep trenches. The trench that runs to the southern part of the structure indicates the plan to carve another monolithic structure, which is not yet completed. The position of this portion of the bedrock in the northern direction is more convenient than its southern counterpart to carve a monolithic hypogeum (see Figure 4.12).



Figure 4.12 (left) The southern division of the bed rock of Tefu Bete Kristian
Figure 4.13 (right) The northern visible hypogeum of Tefu Meskele Eyesus

However, there is no hint as to whether this was attempted by the hewers or not, except for the trench that passes over it. The longest trench that separates the carved hypogeum measures 50 by 1.5 meters, with a maximum height of 12.8 meters. The southernmost part of this trench is filled with dust deposited over time. It is quite difficult to give a further description of the end of this trench in the absence of archaeological excavation; it may lead to another hidden or incomplete rock-hewn structure (see Figure 4.17). This postulation is due to the fact that the rock plain in the southern part is more stable than the northern rocky plain, where the visible hypogeum is carved.



Figures 4.14, 4.15 and 4.16 Partial view of the internal side of the longest trench, Meskele Eyesus



Figure 4.17 The southernmost part of the longest trench

The hypogeum described here is carved in the northern part of the rocky-plain. It roughly takes a round shape. Including the longest trench, which is described above, it has other two trenches that give the hypogeum a monolithic appearance. A third trench was also properly carved along the northern side of the monument. It is connected with another short trench that separates the southern complex from its parent rock. It also leads to an entrance opening towards the southern division of the rock. The purposes of these trenches include separating the hypogeum from the main bedrock, draining water from floods, and serving as entrance and exit ways.

The entrance into this hypogeum is placed along the northern side of the hypogeum (see Figure 4.13), which has two major parts. These are the exterior (the first) and the nave (the second) sections. The plan for the first section is somewhat different. It partly lacks an exterior rock wall that protects and gives a complete picture of the hypogeum. Instead, its eastern and northern sides are surrounded by colonnades, which are sculpted from the rock. Some of the colonnades that form a row replace the exterior rock wall (façade) on these sides, as usual for other rock-hewn churches in the country (see Figure 4.18). However, this might be because of the hewer's intention to make the exterior hall of the monument open to light. Instead of a rock wall, crudely shaped colonnades are sculpted; forming two rows that characterize the exterior room of the hypogeum (see Figures 4.19 and 4.20).



Figure 4.18: Tefu Meskele Eyesus, eastern view of the rock-hewn church, pillars are partially seen

Overall, there are about 22 colonnades in the first section of the hypogeum. Because of the absence of any kind of artistic elements, unlike the rock-hewn pillars in the nave of the hypogeum (the second interior section), it is possible to say that the colonnades in the exterior section of the hypogeum are sculpted merely for supporting this section's roof, which is also uneven and, little decorated. The roof of this section dominantly exhibits the marks of tools used during carving. This feature is common elsewhere, mainly in Meket.



Figures 4.19 and 4.20 Partial view of rows of colonnades in the first section of Meskele Eyesus

However, on the western side of this section, there is a separate room situated along the northern main entrance immediately in the right direction (see Figure 4.21). A rock wall has protected it, and it is better decorated with wall beams and a domed roof feature than the other part of this section. It has a doorway that measures 1.5 meters in height and 0.75 meters in width. Three interconnected domed features garnish its roof. On the rock wall of this part, which is also part of the nave, features of rectangular false windows are evident. It also constitutes graffiti (recently modified features) that were possibly made by the local herders. To the north of this room appears a narrow passage connected with the longest trench described above. This part overall has 7.5 meters of length, 18 meters of width, and 2.25 meters of maximum height. The height measurement did not include the part of the floor that is filled with dust deposited over time. Here, all height measurements of the hypogeum, either interior or exterior sections, are already

taken above the deposit that filled the floor of the church. The exterior part of the hypogeum might serve as a *kine-mahlet* where many people could congregate.

The nave, the second section of the hypogeum, is completely protected by a rock wall. On the western and northern facades of this section, there are two rectangular doorways that measure equivalently 0.75 meters in width and 1.5 meters in height (see Figures 4.22 and 4.23). Above the second doorway, a false window is sculpted, imitating a cruciform feature above it. Another third doorway along the southern side of the nave exists, but it is completely clogged by dust. There are also five windows that have different shapes, but no corner posts are imitated.



Figure 4.21: One of the rooms outside of the nave, Tefu Meskele Eyesu

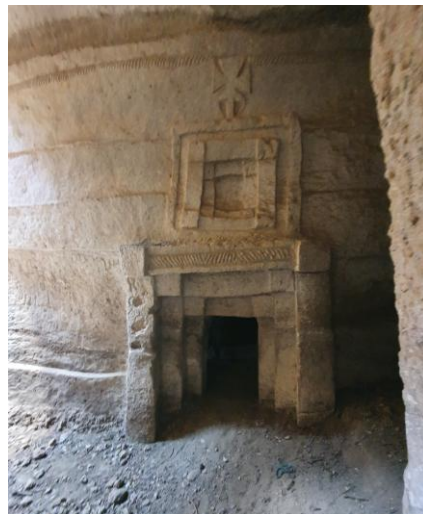
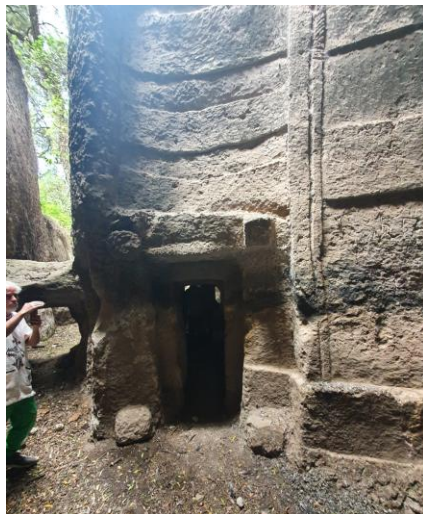


Figure 4.22 & 4.23 Doorways into the nave of the hypogeum at Tefu Meskele Eyesu

The nave has a quadrilateral plan, which becomes narrower to the eastern side. It overall measures 10 meters in length, 7.5 meters wide, and 2.30 meters in maximum height. It is divided into different parts: *kiddist* and *kiddiste-kiddusan*. There are four pillars carved from the bedrock, forming the aisles of the nave. The main purpose of cutting up these pillars is to have a compartment for the nave and to support the rocky roof as well. Unlike the colonnades situated outside of the nave, these pillars are wisely carved and decorated, being interconnected with each other on their four sides through their architraves. They also have collimated capitals and protruding bosses at the center of their arches. The thick entablatures, together with the architraves, form some part of the ceiling of the nave's roof. The columns' architraves create a portico view towards the *mekdes* (Figures 4.24 and 4.25).



Figure 4.24 (left) A portico view of connected pillars towards the *mekdes* at Tefu Meskele Eyesus

Figure 4.25(right) One of the pillars in the nave of Tefu Meskele Eyesus

The roof of the nave is better decorated than its exterior counterpart. Different decorative motifs, predominantly symbolic Christian and geometric engraved features, including crosses, arches, entablatures, domes, and engraved beams, are used to adorn it. These are the major elements that generally characterize the ceiling of the roof. These architectural manifestations have varied shapes and stylistic features, signaling the creativity of the hewers. Triangular and rectangular geometric designs are mostly applied to embellish the roof (Figure 4.26). Engravings with cross shapes are also evidenced, accompanied by different geometrical elements. A cruciform figure

decorated by a circular geometric sign is apparently sculpted in many places. A cross surrounded by a triangular geometrical design is the other decorative feature of the roof. A domed feature with a central protruding boss being encircled by lines that are connected with the boss is also evidenced on the roof (Figure 4.27). The engraved lines are also accompanied by triangular features.



Figure 4.26 (left) Geometrical features on the nave's roof, Tefu Meskele Eyesus

Figure 4.27 (right) An engraved embellishment in the nave's roof of Tefu Meskele Eyesus



Figure 4.28 (left) One of the rock-hewn *members* in Tefu Bete Kristian

Figure 4.29 (right) Feature of a domed roof in the *mekdes* of Tefu Bete Kristian

The inner part of the nave is *kiddiste-kiddusan*. It is a tripartite *mekdes* that is aisled by pillars. Two of the sub-sanctuaries have monolithic *members* carved from bedrock. They have a

rectangular shape, and one of the *members* has small parts hollowed out, probably to put incense, which might be used during liturgical and ritual services given before its abandonment (see Figures 4.28 and 4.29).

4.2.1.1.3 Wukro Giorgis

I. Physical Landscape (Environmental Value)

The rock-hewn church of Wukro Giorgis is located in the area called Aydefer, some 15 kilometers north-west of Nefas Mewcha town. It can be best reached on foot from Gobgob, a small town located along the Woldia-Bahir Dar main road, to the west of Nefas Mewcha. The locality where this church is found is called by the local community as Wukro or Aydefer, which are used here interchangeably to name a same *kebele*. The church is established on the southern side of a hill, which is scarcely covered by old enough indigenous trees that have environmental significance for the area, which is exploited due to long-term human habitation. The remnant of the sacred forest is dominated by indigenous local *tsid* trees (Figure 4.30), which are studded around the hill.



Figure 4.30 The hill of Wukro Giorgis (viewed from north)

Below the hill, to the south of the church, there is a holy spring that is usually used by believers to treat themselves of different diseases. The patients seeking cure with the holy water

temporarily stayed within natural caves formed along the cliff, below the church. A tributary of the Zoga River forms a gorge that passes along the southern side of the hill.

II. Historical Value

The historical narration for the rock-hewn church of Wukro Giorgis is similar to that of Mesenna Medhane Alem. It is one of the rock-hewn churches locally narrated as having been carved by Abune Muse, whose short history is described under Mesenna Medhane Alem. Regarding the establishment of the church, the local oral tradition is stated by the head of the church as follows:

Aydefer Wukro Giorgis has a longer history than others, such as Mesenna Medhane Alem and Nazugn Mariam. It was the earliest church in Gayint. It was built by Abune Muse. He was the second bishop during the reign of Abriha wo Atsibiha in the fourth century A.D. Wukro was one of the churches built by Abune Muse. Because of this, the church has a long history (informant: Alamrew Tesfe, interviewed on 17/05/2023).

The history of the establishment of the church is similar to other narrations, which are described under Mesenna Medhane Alem and reflected in the discussion part later on. In the copy of *Gedle Abune Muse* found at Nazugn Mariam, Wukro Giorgis is mentioned as one of the rock-hewn churches established by Abune Muse in Begemidr. Its name, Wukro, indicates the feature of the church, which is carved from the bedrock.

III. Architectural Value

Wukro Giorgis is a semi-monolithic hypogeum sculpted on the top of the south-eastern side of a hill. Before reaching the church, an carved tunnel is found in the west that leads to an anteroom not connected with the church (Figure 4.31). The anteroom has one entrance to the west and two exits to the east, on the side of the courtyard of the church. To the west of the church, unfinished carved rooms are located. These parts are filled with dust and the bones of saints. They were chapels for monks. They have two divisions opened towards the western facade of the church.

The church is carved from soft bedrock. It is freed from the main rock along all its facades except on its northern side (see Figure 4.32), which seems to have been deliberately attached to the rocky hill to maintain the safety of the monument. The rock is exposed to weathering activities. Grasses grown on the rock also contributed to its deterioration.



Figure 4.31 (left) The tunnel that lead into the courtyard of Wukro Giorgis

Figure 4.32 (right) View of the Wukro Giorgis church from the west

The church is rectangular in its external view, with average measurements of 15.75 meters in length, 14 meters in width, and 6 meters in height (its height varies from 5 meters to 7 meters in its eastern and western facades, respectively). It has three entrances along its western, southern, and eastern facades. But its western entrance is temporarily closed. The entrances are approximately 2.4 meters high and 1.5 meters wide. They are modified and repaired, and it is difficult to identify the original features they had. Internally, all of them have a quadriangle shape. There is also another doorway along the southeastern face, opened to connect the church with Bethlehem, a small cave carved into the main rock.

The church has various internal divisions planned for the purpose of different spiritual activities. The three major divisions, *kine-mahlet*, *kiddist*, and *mekdes*, are planned by keeping the west-east arrangement of EOTC tradition. Within these subdivisions, there are different rooms partitioned by columns and rock-wall. The first section of the church, accessed from the east, measures 3.25 meters in length, 1 meter in width, and 2.4 meters in height. To the west of it, another part is found, accessed through an arch-shaped entrance decorated by capitals. It is quadrilateral and has average measurements of 2.4 meters in length, 2.55 meters in width, and 3.5 meters in height. Its roof is projected by cross-cut features. In this room, part of the *kiddist* and the *mekdes* can be accessed.

The *kine-mahlet* has an irregular shape. It seems no services are given there; its floor is full of dust. Some of its spaces are occupied by the bones of saints (Figure 3.34). Its roof is also undulating. In this room, two columns are poorly carved. They have no arches or capitals. Two false window-like-structures are carved inside its western wall. It generally measures 2.6 meters in length, 10.5 meters in width, and 3.3 meters in height.

The *kiddist* also measures 9.25 meters in length, 2.3 meters in width, and 3.5 meters in height. This part has two exits on its western and northern sides. Their external situations are explained above. Internally, one of the entrances has corner posts on its head alone. In fact, these features poorly imitate the Aksumite styles. There are two pillars that have arches and capitals. The roof of the *kiddist* only is relatively decorated with engraved cross-cut features (Figure 4.33). In three dimensions, with carved rectangular space, simple designed crosses are carved. No ornamental characters are added.



Figure 4.33 (left) An engraved cross in the roof of the *kiddist*

Figure 4.34 (right) Fossils of saints in the *kine-mahilet*

North of the *kiddist*, a shallow room measuring 6.6 meters in length, 1.75 meters in width, and 1.75 meters in height is found. It is connected with Bethlehem through a short entrance measuring 1.25 m in width and 1.5 m in height. The *mekdes*, which has an average measurement

of 5.8 meters in length, 9.35 meters in width, and 3.35 meters in height, also has two subdivisions separated by arching pillars. Its roof is little decorated. The *mekdes* has several sub-subdivisions separated by columns and the rock wall. Some of these divisions, occupying the southern side of the *mekdes*, are connected with the *kiddist* through arched entrances.

IV. Treasures

According to the information gathered through interview, the rock-hewn church of Wukro Giorgis has preserved numbers of different ancient sacred treasures. According to the head of the church, these treasures include crosses with different shapes, sizes and decorative embellishments; parchments, and other processional instruments such as drums, all of which have significant value as tourist attractions (informant: Alamrew Tesfe, interviewed on 17/05/2023).

4.2.2 Discussions

4.2.2.1 History of the Churches

The hypogea churches explored in this study have an ancient history, according to the local sources mentioned above. Among these churches, Mesenna Medhane Alem and Wukro Giorgis have similar historical narrations in relation to their founder. As the local oral traditions show, these churches are believed to have been carved by Abune Muse, whose life is described in *Gedle Abune Muse*. Abune Muse (see Figure 4.35) is better known in South Gondar and North Wollo, where a number of hypogea churches are attributed to him. *Gedle Abune Muse* states that he carved many churches from rock in Tigray, Begemdir, and Wollo, though it is difficult to trace here all the rock-hewn churches found in these areas.

Some copies from Addis Amba Medhane Alem and Nazugn Mariam in Meket have been consulted. The copy available at Nazugn Maryam mentions Wukro Giorgis in Lay Gayint, but it is not mentioned in the copy available at Addis Amba Medhane Alem. Both copies indicate the evangelization and church carved activities of the bishop in this area. As mentioned above, the local oral tradition adhere that Mesenna Medhane Alem and Wukro Giorgis are the earliest churches. According to *Gedle Abune Muse*, the last church carved by Abune Muse was Yediba

Mariam, which is found in Dawnt *Woreda*, North Wollo. One of the sanctuaries of this church is dedicated to Abune Muse as Bete Minas, probably his anointing name.

The history of Abune Muse is not well known among scholars. However, at this level, it is possible to pass with some description based on the available sources. The only detailed written source that gives a full account of his life is the *Gedle Abune Muse*, which is difficult to know when and by whom it was written. It mentioned Muse with two names, Muse and Selama II. Accordingly, Muse was born from a family whose weeding was blessed by the presence of Christ. He was Israeli in his origin and was a devoted monk in the monastery of Macariu in Egypt before he came as bishop of Ethiopia (see *Gedle Abune Muse*, 148). Muse became the second bishop of Ethiopia after he got the anointment of Athanasius, the then patriarch of the Coptic Church, following the death of Frumentius (Abba Selama I) in the fourth century A.D. The following is quoted from *Gedle Abune Muse* to further illustrate this statement:

*ወሰበ ሰምዐ ሊቀ ጳጳሳት ዕረፍቶ ለአቡነ ሰላማ ንዘነ ዐቢያ ንዘነ። --- ወእምዝ ንሠሠ መንገል አስቁጥሶ ብእሴ መንፈሳዊ ዘይከውን ለሢመት ወኅረያ እምነ መነኩሳት ዘገዳመ አስቁጥሶ ወበህያ ረከቦ ለዝንቱ ብፁዓዊ ሙሴ ጻድቅ። ወመነኩሳትሂ ሠምሩ በሢመተ አቡሁ ወበዘዘአሁ። [When the patriarch (Athanasius) heard the death of our Father Selama, he felt much melancholy. ...after this, he inquired whether a strong spiritual man among the monks of the monastery of Scetis sufficed for the appointment. He found his grace Muse the truthful. The monks also acknowledged his appointment] (*Gedle Abune Muse*, 148).*



Figure 4.35: A mural painting of Abune Muse at Yediba Maryam, Dawnt *Woreda*

The history of bishops after the Frumenties and the fifth century of Ethiopian history are rarely known in literature (Sergew, 1972: 109–110). The history of Muse is considered within this

context. There are few scholarly sources that mention Muse. According to Sergew, the fifth century of Ethiopia is little known, and this may be associated with the period when Muse was heading the church. A certain Egyptian bishop with the name Minas is mentioned as the successor of Abba Selama in the bishopric order of Ethiopia (*Ibid.* 110). This bishop is the one who is locally associated with Abune Muse, as it is described in his life.

Notwithstanding the absence of research, there are more than 35 rock-hewn churches across the Checheho escarpment which is extended from Gayint to Dawnt as far as Yeju. Most of these are traditionally attributed to Abune Muse. The problem here is related to the fact that, unlike the first bishop, Abba Selama, who is most known for his translation of religious books, Abune Muse is little known to scholars. However, the tradition about this bishop is widely known in the aforementioned areas. In relation to this, the histories of Mesenna Medhane Alem and Wukro Giorgis are associated with him. This narration shows that these two churches were built during the Aksumite period.

The abandoned rock-hewn church, Tefu Meskele Eyesus, has a different history. In relation to this, three important issues confront here. These include its foundation period, its original purpose and dedication, and the causes of its abandonment. As described above, the hypogeum is locally attributed to King Lalibela, the most famous ruler of the Zagwe Dynasty. Similar historical narrations of other rock-hewn churches are found in different areas. For instance, Zoz Amba Giorgis in North Gondar (Gervers *et al.*, 2014: 199) and Adadi Mariam, south of Addis Ababa (Phillipson, 2009: 145) can be mentioned. Rough architectural similarities can be raised but it may be difficult to conclude that this church was carved by the king himself. The other problem is related to the original purpose of the hypogeum. Its architectural features, symbolical elements, and eastward liturgical arrangements of the hypogeum show its original spiritual purpose. The local tradition claimed that it was dedicated to Meskele Eyesus. This dedication is not new in the tradition of EOTC. The rock-hewn church of Meskele Kirstos near Sekota town is a good example in this regard (Phillipson 2009, 107–109).

With regard to its abandonment, the local narration is found to be important as far as the Imam's war covered all areas of the territory of the Christian Highland Kingdom. As it is stated under Taddesse (1972: 301), the Imam's war was disastrous mainly for the cultural legacies of the

Ethiopian Orthodox Church across the country. However, there is little research showing the cultural sites lost during the war. As the local traditions show, the abandonment of this church could be because of the war of Ahmad *Gragn*, who made his campaign as far as Lake Tana. Recently, a rock-hewn church (now Tembekot Medhane Alem), lost for several centuries because of the war, was discovered in Meket. However, this requires an archaeological excavation to have detailed knowledge about the situation and whether there might be remnants of evidence buried in and around the church.

4.2.2.2 Architectural Reflections

The hypogea churches explored in this study have some architectural features to be discussed here. Regardless of the degree of refinement made, the churches have some common architectural and artistic features that are similar to other Aksumite or post Aksumite rock-hewn churches. Here a slight comparison is made between these churches and others found in Meket, Lalibela, and around Debre Tabor, which were visited at different times. All over, the architectural manifestation of these churches has more similarities with the rock-hewn churches located across the Checheho escarpment that reaches as far as Dawnt. The architectural similarities are manifested mainly in their type and shape; styles of facades, doors, windows, and pillars; roof ceilings, and partitions.

Typologically, the churches explored in this study fall under the monolithic and semi-monolithic types of Ethiopian hypogea churches. They are hypogea in the sense that they are carved under the ground downwardly through humans' workmanship, which means they are not natural caves. As indicated in the previous descriptions of each church, the rock-hewn churches of Mesenna Medhane Alem and Tefu Meskele Eyesus are monolithic in their type, which means they are freely standing structures. Wukro Giorgis, on the other hand, is a semi-monolithic hypogea that is partially detached from the main rock, hence a semi-excavated church.

It is significant to put the typology of these churches into the general context of the country's rock-hewn church tradition. As discussed under the literature review, the hypogea churches in Ethiopia are categorized into monolithic, semi-monolithic, and cave structures based on the magnitude of their attachment to the main rock in which they are carved. In this case, their planning, whether quadrilateral, round, or irregular in shape, is determined by the degree of

detachment of their facades from the main bedrock. The detachment of their facades is mainly determined by the nature and position of the bedrock, which can be part of any kind of rocky landscape such as an escarpment, hill, or mountain.

Excavating monolithic rock-hewn churches was not merely the hewers' interest. Rather, it was guided by religious meaning and historical associations with early Christianity. According to the local tradition, monolithic churches represent Christianity that is directly descended from the faith of the Apostles (informant: Melake Mihret Awoke, interviewed on 17/05/2023). On the other hand, carving of churches from rock has biblical reference, as Christ is symbolized with rock, as St. Paul the apostle stated it: "That rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10: 4). Researchers also indicate the historical genesis and trace of monolithic rock-hewn churches to the burial place of Christ, who was buried in a newly carved rock-hewn tomb (Mengistu, 2018). It was from this deep religious and historical foundation that the peculiarity of the tradition of monolithic rock-hewn churches (such as Lalibela rock-hewn churches) reached its apogee in Ethiopia (Finneran, 2007). The monolithic and semi-monolithic orientation of the rock-hewn churches considered in this study is part of this development.

In addition to its religious reference, the monolithic orientation of rock-hewn churches is also determined by the position of the bedrock from which the churches are carved. It is convincing to say that most of the churches with this orientation are carved from a rock that is attached to a more stable landscape, which can be a rocky hill (such as Mesenna Medhane Alem and Wukro Giorgis) or a rocky plain (such as Tefu Meskele Eyesus, Wukro Medhane Alem, and the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela). On the contrary, most of the churches with cave orientations are carved from rocky escarpments. In this case, the Gere'alta cave churches in Tigray and different cave churches across the Checheho escarpment as far as Dawnt can be mentioned.

The monolithic orientation of the churches is locally defined by *wukr* or *wukro*, a term that is used to identify a hypogeum church. This Geez term is designated to identify rock-hewn churches that have a monolithic or semi-monolithic orientation. Some areas with this type of hypogeum church are locally named *Wukro*. In South Gondar, Wukro Giorgis at Aydefer Kebele and Wukro Medhane Alem around Debre Tabor are good examples. Such examples are also available in Tigray (Phillipson 2009). Hence, in this view, the three rock-hewn churches are *wukr*,

or monolithic, and semi-monolithic in their types. Lay Gayint, thus, can be mentioned as one of the areas with the highest concentration of the monolithic and semi-monolithic hypogea of Ethiopia.

In relation to their typology, the shape or planning of the monolithic churches is also important. Unlike the monolithic churches at Lalibela such as Bete Medhane Alem or Wukro Medhane Alem, the exterior face of the hypogea of Mesenna Medhane Alem and Tefu Meskele Eyesus churches tends to be round, whereas Wukro Giorgis roughly takes a rectangular shape. However, internally, they have a quadrilateral basilica style, which was very common in Ethiopian, Roman, and Byzantine Christianity.

While coming to the specific features, the churches have common features to be reflected here. In terms of their facades, unlike the monolithic rock-hewn churches of Lalibela and Nazugn Mariam in Meket, all of the hypogea in Lay Gayint lack decorative motifs such as horizontal and vertical wall embellishments. However, the doorways of the churches have similar decorative motifs, which are manifested in terms of corner posts (protruding signs) on the top and bottom sides of doorways and windows. These architectural features are common elements of the Aksumite and post-Aksumite periods (predominantly the Zagwe period). A false window at Tefu Meskele Eyesus also magnifies the attempt to imitate the Aksumite architectural traditions, which are also well adapted at Lalibela rock-hewn churches. A false window here refers to a feature that imitates the shape of a window but cannot be opened as usual.

The pillars in the nave of Tefu Meskele Eyesus and Mesenna Medhane Alem are relatively more refined than those found in the church of Wukro Giorgis. They are decorated with capitals, arches, and entablatures, which are common embellishments on pillars elsewhere in the country. The features of the pillars at Mesenna are well designed, and they have better similarities with Wukro Medhane Alem and Lalibela rock-hewn churches (see Figures 4.36-4.38). In terms of their arrangement, style, and appearance, the plan of the colonnades along the exterior part of Tefu Meskele Eyesus is unusual because they lack decorative motifs and replace the rock wall.

In terms of the ceiling of their roof, the churches are decorated with engraved cruciform and geometric features, as well as entablatures and dooms. The roof of Tefu Meskele Eyesus is better decorated than others in Lay Gayint. Some of these features are similar to Wukro Medhane

Alem, though this one is more refined. Doomed features are also found both at Mesenna Medhane Alem and Tefu Meskele Eyesus. This feature of sanctuaries is closely familiar with many rock churches in Meket, Wadla, and Dawnt. Overall, Tefu Meskele Eyesus is better decorated than Mesenna Medhane Alem and Wukro Giorgis.



Figures 4.36, 4.37 & 4.38 Different features of pillars at Tefu Meskele Eyesus (left), Mesenna Medhane Alem (middle) and Wukro Medhane Alem (right)

The other important aspect is their liturgical internal division, which followed the eastward liturgical arrangement of *kine-mahilet*, *kiddist*, and *medkes*, keeping the EOTC church construction tradition. Most of the time, the internal divisions of rock-hewn churches are made by rows of pillars, which form aisles in the above arrangements. The *mekdes* is usually placed in the innermost part of the church, on its eastern side. It is the holiest room of any church in the tradition of EOTC. It hosts the *menber* on which the Ark of the Covenant can be placed. Mesenna Medhane Alem and Tefu Meskele Eyesus have two rock-hewn *menbers* carved out of the bedrock. This immovable feature of a *menber* is mainly known in different churches found in South Gondar and North Wollo.

The tunneling networks are also common features in all monolithic and semi-monolithic rock-hewn churches in general. These features are well developed in the case of Lalibela's rock-hewn churches. They are carved deeply into the bedrock primarily to distinguish the hypogea as having its own independently raised structure. Moreover, the features have two important purposes: networking different rock-hewn churches (for people to easily access the churches) and draining rainfall waters from the courtyards (Mengistu, 2012).

4.3 Heritage Conservation Practices and Problems of the Hypogea Churches

4.3.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

As heritage management scholars advocate, cultural heritage once destroyed has little probability of recovery. Here, the challenge facing the management of cultural heritage has a direct negative

connotation for tourism development, which relies on past cultural legacies. Lay Gayint *Woreda* is one of the areas where incredible ancient cultural heritage is being poorly traced, managed, and documented. As has been described in the previous sections of this chapter, the rock-hewn and built-up cave churches found in the *woreda* have varied tourist values, particularly in terms of their architectural features and ancient treasures. The next two subsections discuss conservation practices, problems, and causes, concentrating on their hypogeum and treasures.

4.3.1.1 Conservation Practices and Problems of the Hypoega of the Churches

In order to foster tourism development in the area, recording the values possessed by the sites is not quite enough. Identifying the heritage management problems and the associated factors is also important, as it helps sustain the use of the sites for tourism development. Data collected through questionnaires, interviews, and observation showed the profound heritage management problems of the three sites. The result of the questionnaire in relation to the heritage management status of the rock-hewn churches and the local communities' opinion about the situation is summarized and described in Table 4.9 below.

Local communities' opinion & feeling on the heritage management status of the rock-hewn features at Mesenna, Tefu Bete Kristian and Aydefer	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel the current conservation status of the rock-hewn churches is at a serious level of deterioration.	3.85	0.72375
I witnessed that natural agents such as rain and sun light are causes for the deterioration of the rock-hewn churches.	3.92	0.65166
I witnessed that professionally advised repairing activity has been made to maintain deteriorated parts of the church.	2.60	0.87915
I involved in repairing activities of the church that helped to maintain deteriorated parts.	2.53	0.93073
Previous repairing activities have little contribution in maintaining the aesthetic and structural features of the churches.	3.72	0.66158

Table 4.9 Local communities' opinion about the heritage management problems of the hypogea churches

As is indicated in Table 4.9 above, the mean values for the current conservation status of the rock-hewn churches and the associated agents of the problem are 3.85 and 3.92, respectively. These values imply that the majority of the respondents agreed that the conservation status of the churches is at a serious level and that the major deteriorative agents are rainfall and sunlight. The respondents' opinions on the practice of previous skill-based repair work and the local

communities' participation in any preservation activities have mean values of 2.60 and 2.53, respectively. These values imply that a majority of the respondents disagree with the professionally advised repair work made in the past and with their active involvement in any previous repair activities. The last mean value of the involvement of local communities in previous repair works of the churches is 3.72, which implies that the majority of the respondents disagreed that the local communities have active participation in the heritage management activities of the churches. Furthermore, almost all of the standard deviations are close to 1.0, implying that most of the respondents have a similar understanding of the heritage management aspects of the churches.

Data related to conservation practices, problems, and previous repairing works and their impact on tourism development were also gathered from key informants. In relation to the status of conservation practices at the *woreda* and previous conservation activities, the response of an informant from the CTB of the *woreda* is stated below:

The CTB of Lay Gayint could not conduct conservation activities because of different reasons. In relation to this, A few repairs and preservation works were made only with the initiation and participation of the local residents. But it is difficult the conservation works were supported by professionals in the field. At the district level, we do not have conservation experts or support from the above offices. There is also no financial support to document and conserve cultural heritages that are deteriorating due to different factors. The absence of conservation work negatively affects tourism development. This problem affects not only the present capacity but also the future generation, which may need these valuable resources for tourism development (informant: Tewodros Melak, interviewed on 16/05/2023).

As has been described above, the rock-hewn churches and other historical and religious sites of the *woreda* are suffering from a lack of conservation practices. As the observation showed, all of the rock-hewn churches are subjected to serious conservation problems, which are evidenced in terms of cracking, deterioration, and destruction of architectural features. The local communities are well aware of this problem, which is mainly associated with natural agents such as rainfall and sunlight that continuously affect the architectural values of the rock-hewn churches. In relation to this, the field observation result confirms that the rock-hewn churches are deteriorating because of their exposure to high rainfall during the rainy season and sunlight during the dry season. The field observation result also confirms that these factors have a

negative impact on the sustainability of the ancient hypogea churches in all sites (Mesenna, Tefu, and Aydefer).

According to the field observation, all of the rock-hewn churches face deterioration, though the degree varies from place to place. Different features of the rock-hewn churches are cracking, broken, or totally destroyed. As different studies show, natural factors such as rainfall and sunlight and man-made factors such as unwise use and unadvised conservation practices have negatively affected the conservation of rock-hewn churches. As has been confirmed in different studies (see the discussion under Chapter 2), the factors for the deterioration and destruction of the different features of the rock-hewn churches are both natural (such as rainfall and sunlight) and anthropogenic (such as unwise use and bad (non-professional) conservation practices).

The negative impact of rainfall and sunlight is visible in all of the rock-hewn churches. In the case of Mesenna Medhane Alem, cracking and total destruction of some features of the hypogeum are evidenced. One of its facades on the southern side has been destroyed and replaced by a new conventional built-up feature. This destruction mainly appeared because of rain falling in the summer and sunlight at other times. Cracking occurs mainly on the roof of the church because of the infiltration of water through the rock face.



Figure 4.39 (left) A person showing the court yard endangering by flood at Mesenna Medhane Alem

Figure 4.40 (right) Part of the court yard slid at Mesenna Medhane Alem

The church's courtyard is also endangered because of the penetration of water into the ground. Part of the compound is removed as a result of this cause, approaching to endanger it. The

flooding collected during the rainy season led to part of the court yard being hollowed out and partly slid (see Figures 4.39 and 4.40). In addition to this, wild animals such as the wood squirrel dwell around the rock of the church. These animals also have an impact on smudging the aesthetic values of the rock-hewn church.

The other problem for the conservation of the hypogeum is unwise conservation practices, which were made at different times. The destroyed frontal façade of the church has already been replaced by new building constructed using cement without maintaining lost architectural features (Figure 4.41). Unfortunately, the church has lost its exterior architectural features, which were expected to be expressed across the frontal façade. These features might have had an Aksumite style of doorways and windows, which are not completely restored because of a lack of expert-advised intervention.



Figure 4.41 The repaired part of the frontal façade of Mesenna Medhane Alem

However, recently, an intervention has been made to shelter the hypogeum with iron sheets to protect it from sunlight and rainfall. The process of construction of this shelter is stated by the head of the church as follows:

The church was endangered because of rainfall, and the local communities took the initiative to cover it with shelter to protect it from rain. The construction was made possible only by the financial and labor efforts of the local communities. There was no stakeholder who supported the construction (informant: Kinde Bereded, interviewed on 09/06/2023).

As it was confirmed through field observation, the erected shelter was made without the support of conservation experts. For the time being, the shelter is protecting the hypogeum from rain and sunlight. However, the construction was made unwisely, in which a building was added over the roof of the rock-hewn feature to support the shelter. This may bring additional deterioration to the church.



Figure 4.42 (left) An entrance into the nave being clogged by a dust, Tefu Meskele Eyesus

Figure 4.43(right) Some of the broken colonnades at Tefu Meskele Eyesus.

On the other hand, flooding that occurred due to high rainfall profoundly affected Tefu Meskele Eyesus hypogeum. The floor of the hypogeum is filled with dust from the outside. One of the entrances of the nave on the southern side is closed because of the disposal of the dust over time (see Figure 4.42). Apart from this, the local communities were using the hypogeum as an enclosure to confine their livestock. This practice caused deterioration in different parts of the hypogeum. Because of combined factors (both natural and anthropogenic), some of the rock-hewn pillars are broken, and some others are hollowed out or deteriorated (see Figures 4.43). Moreover, because of improper contact with humans, some graffiti is probably left by the local herders.

The rock-hewn church of Wukro Giorgis also did not escape the impact of natural factors, particularly rain and sunlight, due to the absence of temporary shelter. Its facades and roof are overrun by grasses, which are grown mainly due to the previously added cement and other materials for repair purposes. Water droplets also infiltrate the roof, causing it to crack. Grasses grown over the roof have also contributed to the deterioration of the rock through biological

activities. Moreover, local work to repair the roof using cement has contributed to the deterioration of the rock (see Figure 4.44).



Figure 4.44 Grasses grown over Wukro Giorgis rock-hewn church

4.3.1.2 Conservation Status of Sacred Treasures of the Churches’

The hypogea churches of Lay Gayint *Woreda* are not mere monuments; they are sites preserving different ancient movable treasures, though this study is limited to the information gathered through the questionnaire and interview. The result of the questionnaire and interview in relation to the CHM status of the sacred treasures is analyzed and described in Table 4.10 below.

Feelings of respondents on the management of movable treasures	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel that the sacred treasures of the churches are poorly preserved.	3.63	0.81
I feel that the current treasurer of the church is not conducive for preservation of the sacred objects of the churches.	3.90	0.63
I witnessed that man-made activities such as theft threaten the safeguarding of the ancient treasures of the church.	3.41	0.90

Table 4.10: Respondents’ opinion and feeling on movable treasures management

As shown in Table 4.10 above, the mean values for the poor management condition of the movable treasures and the inconvenience of the current treasury are 3.63 and 3.9, respectively. These values imply that the majority of the respondents agreed on the poor preservation status of the treasures and the inconveniency of the treasurer's placement of the sacred properties. On the other hand, the mean value for illegal man-made activities that threaten the treasures is 3.41, which implies that around half of the respondents agreed on the problem of theft of ancient antiquities in the *woreda*.

Despite the important value they have, ancient sacred treasures are untraceable and poorly managed. As it is commonly known, most of the ancient sacred antiquities of the country are found in the monasteries and rural churches, which have no own standardized storage of properties. Treasures in rural areas are stored in a room that is locally called *eka bet* (treasury). This *eka bet* is mainly made of local materials such as mud, stone, and wood and is thatched with grass. Very few of them are carved from rock. *Eka bets* constructed from mud, stone, and wood are mainly inconvenient for safely storing sacred properties. The properties face destruction due to the growth of insects and other harmful animals, such as mice, found in and around the treasury. The treasures are therefore not only exposed to biological practices, but also the storing place is unsafe to protect them from theft, which is considered by the local communities as a potential threat. As one of my informants stated, theft of ancient treasures is a serious problem for the safety of the treasures, particularly parchment books and processional crosses. The following statement of the head of Wukro Giorgis magnifies how serious the problem is:

Until this day, we are not safe and confident regarding the treasures of the church. In collaboration with the local communities, we try to safeguard these precious treasures of the church. However, this activity does not have a guarantee for the safeguarding of the treasures, as we have no well-built eka bet. We always dread theft, as it is widely practiced in our woreda. Most of the time, parchments and processional crosses are targeted by this practice. There were different attempts to steal the property of the church. For instance, in 2012, some of the parchments were stolen from the eka bet. But with the help of the local communities and militias, we were able to capture the stolen parchments at Gobgob town (informant: Alamrew Tesfe, interviewed on 16/05/2023).

Theft of ancient treasures in this area is part of illicit trafficking, which is the main problem of movable cultural antiquities in the country. Despite the absence of data collected through observation, it is likely to be stated that the treasures found in both churches are not safely stored. The protection activities taken by the local communities are temporary and are not

effective in safeguarding the treasures. This requires the involvement of stakeholders such as the zonal diocese and the culture and tourism offices at different levels.

4.3.2 Discussions

4.3.2.1 Conservation Practices of the Hypogea

According to the description given above, the conservation practices and status of the hypogea churches of Lay Gayint are not in good condition. The result of the observation supports the response of the respondents, who felt that the rock-hewn churches' conservation status was at a serious level. With varying degrees, the churches are deteriorating because of natural (mainly rain and sunlight) and anthropogenic (unwise conservation practices, improper use, and illicit trafficking) deteriorative agents. These causes are evident in various literatures, posing challenges for the management of ancient monuments across the world (see Feilden, 2003: 92, 157; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009: 27). Unless the proper preventive and remedial practices are done, these factors are indicated to be uncompromising to destroy the non-renewable cultural legacy of humanity. The main responsible causes of deterioration of the hypogea churches of Ethiopia are weathering activities, particularly rainfall and sunlight, and botanical factors such as grasses are well evidenced in the rock-hewn churches of Lay Gayint. Moreover, unwise conservation practices also caused additional deterioration in rock-hewn churches.

Previous studies conducted on a few other rock-hewn churches in the country also similarly show the impacts of these factors. The deterioration caused by weathering activities and biological factors in the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela is indicated in previous research works (see Delmonaco, Margottini, and Spizzichino (2010: 138–146); Mengistu, 2012, 114–117). The negative impacts of bad conservation practices at Lalibela are also clearly shown under Mengistu (2012: 119–123). The impacts of these combined factors are also evident in the rock-hewn churches found in Tigray (see Ephrem 2018). Another good example that vividly shows the negative impact of weathering activity (rainfall and sunlight) and unwise conservation practices is the rock-hewn church of Nazugn Mariam in Meket.

All of the hypogea churches in Lay Gayint are affected by these factors to varying degrees. The deterioration that occurred on all of the rock was mainly caused by rainfall. Grasses grown over the hypogea of Tefu Meskele Eyesus and Wukro Giorgis also create additional deterioration. The

problem at Meskele Eyesus is profound, may not be comparable with other hypogea that are in use. Further discussion is made below to clearly understand how the problem escalated due to the impact of weathering activities and bad conservation and to canvass how the conservation practices in the *woreda* and other areas are in a critical situation.

In order to put it in actual context, the negative impact of weathering activity and bad conservation (remedial interventions) is discussed here by taking the case of the rock-hewn churches in Lay Gayint and Nazugn Mariam, a good example of an endangered hypogeum in Ethiopia.



Figure 4.45 (left) A Degraded part of Mesenna Medhane Alem

Figure 4.46 (right) A Degraded facade of Nazugn Mariam

In the course of time, rainfall droplets in one time and sunlight in another time have gradually created cracking and profound deterioration on the aesthetic and structural features of the hypogea churches in Lay Gayint. This problem gradually brought about the total collapse of some parts of the facades of the churches, as is evidenced at Mesenna Medhane Alem and Nazugn Mariam. Both churches have lost most of their aesthetic features, which were well manifested along the exterior facades. The southern façade of Meseena Medhane Alem is totally destroyed, whereas the western façade of Nazugn Mariam is deeply degraded, which implies that the impact is not limited to eradicating the aesthetic values of their facades but also the degradation of the facades, weakening the thickness and substance of the rock (see Figures 4.45 and 4.46).

The unwise repairs made by the local communities aggravated the problem of sustaining the existence of these rock-hewn churches. The interventions were aimed at repairing the lost facades of the churches. However, the repairs are not effective in bringing back the architectural and structural features of the destroyed facades of the churches. In this context, the repairs made are non-professional in the sense that the practices were not made with an understanding of the physical fabric and multitude of values of the repaired sites.



Figure 4.47: Bad repairing work made at Nazugn Mariam rock-hewn church

Figure 4.48 A stub of a pillar engulfed by a new building, left for evidence on the exterior part of the rebuilt façade of Mesenna Medhane Alem

The repairs both at Mesenna and Nazugn were made using cement and hard stones, which do not match the nature of the rock from which the churches are carved. As has been shown in literature, the problem of local repairing works is associated with three problems, which include a lack of knowledge about the fabric of the rock of the churches, an understanding of the architectural and aesthetic values of hypogea, and a lack of financial and legal support at the country level. The repairs made at both churches are simply the replacement of the old with a modern kind of conventional building (for more clarity, see Figures 4.47 and 4.48).

In addition to the impacts as a result of weathering activity and bad conservation practices, unwise uses at Tefu Meskele Eyesus have additional effect on the conservation of the hypogea. For long time, this hypogea was used by the local community for personal purposes such as confining animals and storing stalks in its internal parts. Because of this, some of the columns in the external part of the hypogea are either broken down or hollowed out due to contacts of humans and animals. A similar problem is also evidenced at Gibtsawit Abbo and Tembekot Medhane Alem in Meket.

Generally, the conservation status and practices at Lay Gayint *Woreda* in particular and other areas in general are at a serious stage. Unless the necessary measures are taken, the problem aggravates the conservation problem in the churches. The deterioration of the main features of the churches means the loss of potential tourist attractions. This situation challenges future tourism development at the local, regional, and national levels. The assessment made at this level is the first step for future measures to protect the cultural resource base of the area. Until recently, activities to identify the detailed problems of the ancient sites and conserve endangered sites have not yet been done, with the exception of unwise repair activities at Wukro and Mesenna, as explained above. With regard to Tefu Meskele Eyesus, its abandoning condition recalls urgent conservation practices to rescue it from deterioration. As heritage management scholars advocate, cultural heritage is non-renewable, which requires close monitoring of the conservation status of such incredible past human legacies. It should be noted that knowing more about the existing conservation problems is the basis for future interventions to rescue endangered potential tourism resources. In the absence of documentation and conservation practices, achieving sustainable tourism development is hard.

4.3.2.2 Conservation Practices and Problems of the Treasures

Though there is no data collected through observation, the results of the questionnaires and interviews show that there are important ancient treasures at Mesenna Medhane Alem and Wukro Giorgis. The conservation problem of the churches is not limited to the hypogea structures. As it is indicated in Table 4.10, though the cause is different, the ancient treasures of these churches are also subjected to conservation problems, which occur mainly because of two factors: a lack of standardized *eka-bet* and theft.

In Lay Gayint or anywhere in Ethiopia, sacred treasures are stored in traditionally built *eka-bets*, which have played an important role in the preservation history of sacred antiquities in EOTC. As the term indicated, *eka-bet* implies treasury, a house that is purposefully constructed to store the treasures of churches. Each church has its own *eka-bet*. Some hypogea churches may have *eka-bet* carved from rock, but most of these and other conventional churches have *eka-bet*, which is mainly built from wood, stone, mud, with a thatched roof, or, since recently, covered by iron sheets. However, as the local communities felt, whatever the materials used to construct it, the

eka-bet of the parish churches in Lay Gayint is not convenient for the safety of the treasures stored within it. The destruction of these precious treasures occurred because of their exposure to termites, mice, and other destructive agents.

The other problem, which is stated both by the respondents and the informants as a potential conservation challenge for the sacred treasures of the churches, is theft. As Getahun (2023) stated, theft and illegal trading of ancient movable antiquities are the main threats in Ethiopia. According to Tilahun (2010: 28–54), who discussed the problem from its criminality aspect, theft and illegal trading on antiquities are still the main threats in Ethiopia, either in peacetime or wartime. Ancient churches and monasteries are the targets of antiquities theft practices. The antiquities found in the two churches of Lay Gayint are not exceptions to this threat. The efforts made by the local communities are not quite adequate to protect the treasures of these ancient churches against theft, which is conducted by the collaboration created by a local collaborator and different individuals and groups outside of the area.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Heritage management and tourism development are two collaborative practices at the global level. Heritage management practices such as documentation and conservation are basic practices to sustain the resource base of heritage-based tourism. In developing countries, cultural heritage tourism resources are underutilized, mainly due to the absence of practices to trace, document, and conserve potential tourism resources. The lack of those practices challenges the development of tourism and the existence and continuity of incredible cultural resources for future generations. Tourism development in Ethiopia mainly relies on past cultural legacies, which dominantly include religious sites and landscapes in and around them. However, most of its ancient cultural heritage tourism resources are untraceable because of a lack of research-based documentation. Lay Gayint *Woreda*, which is located across the northern historic route, has several opportunities mainly its religious sites, particularly the hypogea churches. However, as this study overviewed, the *woreda* did not use its opportunities to foster tourism development.

This study attempted to explore and document the potential tourist attraction values and the causes and existing problems of the conservation of the ancient hypogea churches of the *woreda*. Typologically, the hypogea churches of the *woreda* are monolithic and semi-monolithic in appearance. The rock-hewn features of Tefu Meskele Eyesus and Mesenna Medhane Alem are monolithic in type, which means they are freely standing monuments. Whereas Aydefer Wukro Giorgis is semi-monolithic, in which only three facades are detached from the main rock.

The study discussed the environmental, historical and architectural values, and ancient treasures of the churches, which can be transformed into viable tourism resources that have a significant economic contribution through the planning and development of tourist infrastructure. Environmentally, as is common in many parts of northern Ethiopia, churches have a great role in maintaining and preserving the ecological environment through their protected sacred forests. Similarly, the churches discussed here have contributed to preserving some old and indigenous trees within a highly exploited area. Historically, three of the churches have narrations that show

their historical foundation. The rock-hewn churches of Mesenna Medhane Alem and Aydefer Wukro Giorgis have an ancient history that is traditionally attributed to Abune Muse, the second bishop of Ethiopia. The abandoned rock-hewn church, which is believed to be dedicated to Meskele Eyesus, was founded during the Zagwe Dynasty, and its abandonment is associated with the war of Ahmad Gragn.

Architecturally, the rock-hewn churches possessed different decorative and aesthetic features that marked their relationship with the Aksumite and post Aksumite architectural traditions. The hypogeum of Mesenna Medhane Alem resembles architectural and decorative motifs, such as the corner posts of its entrances and frames of the pillars, among others, which are similar to other rock-hewn churches such as Lalibela. Tefu Meskele Eyesus, on the other hand, is characterized by rude and refined pillars, domes, and different geometric and cruciform motifs, which are dominantly expressed on the roof of the nave. Though it was difficult to have access to data for movable treasures, the questionnaire and interview results show that these hypogea have preserved significant sacred treasures.

The conservation aspect of churches is at a critical stage, particularly in the cases of Mesenna Medhane Alem and Tefu Meskele Eyesus, which are threatened by anthropogenic and natural factors that deteriorate their rock-hewn structure. Rainfall and sunlight have affected the aesthetic and structural features of the church of Mesenna Medhane Alem, whereas Tefu Meskele Eyesus is profoundly affected by the flood that enters the internal part of the hypogeum. The place where the movable treasures are stored is also not convenient for safely preserving the sacred antiquities of the churches. Generally, the result of this exploration is an attempt of tracing, documenting and promoting potential cultural resources for future tourism development. It may be seen as a case show in bringing sustainable cultural heritage tourism through the documentation of the multitude values of religious sites in the areas where tourism is not yet developed.

5.2 Recommendations

Finally, as a study that attempts to bring little-known tourism resources to the attention of scholars and decision-makers, the followings are recommended for future actions

- Firstly, further research work is needed to completely document the treasures of the churches and trace all available archaeological traces of the churches. Particularly, archaeological research is recommended to deeply understand the abandoned rock-hewn church, which is described in this study as Tefu Meskele Eyesus.
- Secondly, attention is needed to safeguard the ancient treasures of the churches. This requires strong security activity and standardized *eka-bet*. Construction of small scale museums at local parish level may solve the problem of storage. This may be initiated by the local communities in collaboration with volunteer religious groups or other interested stakeholders.
- Thirdly, urgent archaeological and rescue work is needed, particularly for the abandoned Tefu Meskele Eyesus rock-hewn church. Currently, there is a movement among the local communities to rehabilitate and prepare the hypogeum for religious purposes. However, the process requires the support of professional experts to properly identify, record, and collect necessary archaeological evidences if they are available in and around the hypogeum.
- Fourthly, it would be of great importance if the sites included in this study get the recognition of the regional and federal culture and tourism offices. This may enable the sites to get better attention, promotion and preservation practices as potential resources for future generations. This activity may be initiated and conducted in collaboration between different CTB at government level and other stakeholders who are engaged in the tourism industry.
- Fifthly, developing service providing tourism infrastructure (for instance a road to make the sites accessible) has to be initiated in the *woreda* in order to mobilize the untapped cultural resources for tourism development.
- Finally, endorsing promotion projects is needed by stakeholders such as government offices at different levels, tour operators, and other interested groups so that these sites may come to the attention of potential tourists.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix I: Questionnaires

Addis Ababa University
College of Development Studies
Center for Environment and Development Studies
Tourism Management and Development Programs

This survey tool questionnaire is prepared for the purpose of collecting essential data for the MA Thesis entitled: “**Hypogea Heritage Tourism Resources and Conservation Problems in Amhara Region, Ethiopia: Explorations from Lay Gayint Woreda, South Gondar**” to be submitted to the College of Development Studies, Tourism Development and Management Program. The result of this study will solve the gap in the absence of research-based documentation regarding the cultural sites of this area. To this end, your information which will be collected in this tool will have valuable significance to produce a tangible research result about the potential sites found in the *woreda*. Dear respondents, your answers will make an immense contribution to the successful completion of the study.

If you have any query and comment, feel free to get me through my addresses: Email- tsegayeeb@hu.edu.et, or phone: 0919803084.

Tsegaye Ebabey

General Instruction

This questionnaire survey tool consists three sections. The first section intends to cover general information about the respondent. The second section has consisted questionnaires about the heritage management status of movable treasures of the churches. The last section presents questions on the cultural conservation issues of the rock-hewn churches. The respondents are expected to write their answers for all questions either by circling or underlining the appropriate answer for the alternative questions or by writing their answers for the short answer questions on the space provided immediately after the questions.

Section 1. General Information about the Respondent (Please put “√” in front of your choice.

Sex	1	Male	
	2	Female	
Age	1	18-30	
	2	31-40	
	3	41-50	
	4	51-60	
	5	>61	
Education	1	No education	
	2	Church education	
	3	Primary and Secondary School	
	4	College Diploma	
	5	Degree and above	
Occupation		Job Seeker	
		Farmer	
		Church Servant	
		Civil servant	

Section 2. Questions related to the tourism activity and local communities perception on the hypogea churches

Indicate your answer by putting “√” sign in front of the alternatives you chose. For questions which need your explanation, please write your answers on the space provided.

1	Is there any form of tourism practice in your area?	1	Yes
		2	No
2	If your answer for the above question is “No” which type of tourism is best to develop tourism activity in your area?.....		
3	Do you think that the rock-hewn churches in your area are well known tourist sites?	1	Yes
		2	No
4	If your answer for the above question is “No,” what are the problems you encountered to make the rock-hewn churches tourist site?		
5	Do you think that the rock-hewn churches have potential elements to attract tourists?	1	Yes
		2	No
6	Are you interested if these rock-hewn churches can be developed as tourist destination?	1	Yes
		2	No
7	If your answer for the above question is “Yes”, what benefits do you expect from the development of the rock-hewn churches as tourist destination?.....		
8	Do you have any experience or involvement in promoting the churches as tourist destination?	1	Yes
		2	No
9	Is there any service center and facility (accommodation and infrastructure) established to serve tourists in the area?	1	Yes
		2	No
10	What activities can you do to make the ancient churches as tourist sites?.....		

Section 3. Questions related to the conservation issues of the rock-hewn churches and their treasures. For the questions which are listed for your rating are denoted as follow:

- 5= strongly agree,
- 4= agree,
- 3= have no idea,
- 2= disagree, and
- 1= strongly agree

No.	To what extent you are agreeing or disagreeing with the following statements related to the conservation status of the movable treasures of the rock hewn churches and tourism development in the area?	5	4	3	2	1
11	I feel the current conservation status of the rock-hewn churches is at a serious level.					
12	I witnessed that natural agents such as rain and sun light are causes for the deterioration of the rock-hewn churches.					
13	I witnessed that repairing activity has been made to maintain deteriorated parts of the church.					
14	I involved in repairing activities of the church that helped to maintain deteriorated parts.					
15	Previous repairing activities have little contribution in maintaining the aesthetic and structural features of the churches.					
16	I feel that the sacred treasures of the churches are poorly preserved.					
17	I feel that the current treasurer of the church is not conducive for preservation of the sacred objects of the churches.					
18	I witnessed that man-made activities such as theft threaten the safeguarding of the ancient treasures of the church.					
19	I would lend hand in fencing the site to protect from any intrusion.					
20	I observed that all the local communities are aware and committed to participate in activities to safeguard the church.					
21	I would appreciate oral narrations about the site for its tourism development.					
22	I would encourage domestic visitors to pay a visit to the site.					

23. If you have any additional view, please state here on the space provided.....
.....
.....
.....

Appendix II Interview Questions

**Addis Ababa University
College of Development Studies
Center for Environment and Development Studies
Tourism Management and Development Programs
Interview Questions**

These interview questions are prepared for the purpose of collecting essential data for the MA Thesis entitled: “**Hypogea Heritage Tourism Resources and Conservation Problems in Amhara Region, Ethiopia: Explorations from Lay Gayint Woreda, South Gondar**” to be submitted to the College of Development Studies, Tourism Development and Management Program. The result of this study will solve the gap in the absence of research-based documentation. Having this in to consideration, your information will have valuable significance to produce a tangible research result about the potential sites found in the *woreda*. Dear informants, your answers will make an immense contribution to the successful completion of the study.

If you have any query and comment, feel free to get me through my addresses: Email-tsegayeeb@hu.edu.et, or phone: 0919803084.

Tsegaye Ebabey

Questions for Church Servants

1. What seems like the history of the church from its foundation to the present?
2. What is the symbolical meaning of architectural and artistic manifestations of the churches?
3. Do you tell me the most important sacred and ancient treasures of the church?
4. Did the church have faced theft of treasury in its history? If so, what were the treasures lost because of theft?
5. Is there any activity made either by the local communities or the government to protect the church from illegal treasure hunters?
6. If there was a repairing activity on the church, would you please tell me the participants, period and source of the repairing fund?
7. What activities do you suggest to make sustain the preservation of the church and its treasures?

Questions for Tourism and Culture Office Experts

1. How do you define the practice of cultural heritage management of Lay Gayint District in the context of the ancient hypogea churches?
2. How the cultural heritage management problems affect the tourism activity of the district?
3. Was there any conservation practice conducted by the government to protect the churches from deteriorative agents? If so, would you please explain the trend and its effectiveness?
4. What seems like the activity of the culture and tourism offices (at district level or above) in making the district tourist destination by using its ancient cultural sites such as the rock-hewn churches?
5. What seems like the collaboration that the district’s office has with different stakeholders in the area of tourism and cultural heritage management?

Appendix III Demographic information of respondents (Statistical Analysis)

		Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	291	72.8
	Female	109	27.3
	Total	400	100
Age	18-30	27	6.8
	31-40	81	20.3
	41-50	164	41.0
	51-60	83	20.8
	>60	45	11.3
	Total	400	100
Education	No education	231	57.8
	Church education	48	12.0
	Primary and secondary school	95	23.8
	College diploma	9	2.3
	Degree and above	17	4.3
	Total	400	100.00
Job	Job seeker	32	8.0
	Farmer	332	83.0
	Church servant	17	4.3
	Civil servant	18	4.5
	Total	400	100.0

Appendix V Informants' information

No.	Name of Informants	Age	Job	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
1.	Tsega Kihnet	29	Head of Lay Gayint CTB	Nefas Mewcha	16/05/2023
2.	Tewodros Melak	28	Tourism and Heritage Management Officer at Lay Gayint CTB	Nefas Mewcha	16/05/2023
3.	Kinde Bereded (Priest)	46	Head of Mesenna Medhane Alem Church	Wukro Giorgis	09/06/2023
4.	Alamrew Tesfe (Priest)	45	Head of Wukro Giorgis Church	Nefas Mewcha	17/05/2023
5	Melake Mihret Awoke	48	Head of Lay Gayint Parish Office	Nefas Mewucha	17/05/2023