ARCHAEOLOGY AND TOURISM: THE NEGLECTED ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF EASTERN TIGRAY, ETHIOPIA

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Abstract

This study with the prime aim of assessing the neglected archaeotourism sites is conducted in the Eastern zone of Tigray. It is investigated through assessing primary and secondary sources in line with interview, focus group discussions and observations. Archaeological sites based tourism is an important aspect of tourism destination. In the eastern Tigray zone, glorious archaeological sites and findings are found which distributed in all corners of the weredas. However, they are the least visited heritages both by the international and national tourists. Almost all the tourists visit the spectacular rock hewn churches found in the region. But, it doesn’t mean that the archaeological sites have less importance in terms of attraction and cultural value than the rock hewn churches. It is due to the emphasis given to them. All itineraries to the eastern part of Tigray are organized to the well-known Gheralta rock hewn churches. Therefore, they only visit the findings of the sites in the converted archaeological museum of Wuqro. So, it implies that there is no planned journey to the archaeo-tourism attractions. As a result, the intended benefit from the archaeological sites is virtually low. To find the expected benefits from the sites, proper management of the sites is an avoidable both by the tourists and the communities. The strong linkage among the tourism experts, local communities and the tourists is an important element in increasing the potential and sustainability of the sites.

Key words: Archaeotourism, Destination development, Neglected sites, Tourism

Introduction

Tourism is widely acknowledged as the world’s largest industry. For many countries, regions, and localities, it is a major economic mainstay or a promising source of revenue (Baram, 2008). Tourism as a smokeless industry, is the combination of many natural and cultural heritages. As Ramsey and Evert (2008) illustrated, archaeology is intertwined with tourism because archaeological excavations and historic monuments provide tourist sights and exhibits for display.

Different scholars like Baram (2008) began to mix archaeology with tourism and after they named as archaeological tourism or archaeo-tourism. Therefore, they define archaeological tourism / archaeo-tourism as part of cultural
tourism and/or as type of tourism in which archaeological resources become attractions for tourists when the main motivation of the trip is to visit the archaeological zones.

Broadly, archaeological tourism is defined by tourist visits and activities taking place at celebrated places (e.g. historic landmarks, monuments and excavation sites) and partaking in the experience they physicality stimulates (Baram, 2008). This definition underlines the archaeological site as a central piece in archaeological tourism and is sustained on the conventional classification of archaeological heritage as tangible (see UNESCO, 1972, 2003). Then after, the need of the tourists to the archaeo-tourism sites become moderately increased (Baram, 2008, UNESCO, 1972, 2003). It is common that all archaeological sites are created by the activity of humans. Therefore, if they are/were modified by humans, there is human intelligence which motivates the community of the world to visit. Archaeological tourism has expanded rapidly across the world since the 1990s. It has a major contribution to national economies and to local prosperity (UNESCO, 1972, 2003).

According to the *UNWTO World Tourism Barometer*, in 2016, around 1.2 billion international tourists traveled around the world. This makes tourism an important source of foreign currency and an activity that generates jobs whose income impacts the Gross Domestic Product of many countries. As part of this increase, archaeological tourism has also grown. The increase of visitors to archaeological sites in recent decades has been favored also by the declarations on the cultural heritage of humanity on the part of UNESCO (Ross, 2017).

Archaeological sites and historic places are major tourist attractions worldwide. Some of the most scientifically and historically important, aesthetically remarkable, and famed archaeological World Heritage Sites have seen a dramatic increase in numbers of visitors over the past recent decades (Surabhi, 2015). For instance, Malaysia had experienced an incredible pace of tourism development and heritage tourism to appeal the tourist destination and acts as important marketing tool to attract tourist especially with special interests in heritage and arts. Cultural heritage tourism has emerged as a potential form of alternative tourism among international tourists and domestic travelers (Norhasimah et al., 2014).

Further, since current frameworks of archaeological tourism are focused largely on tangible dimensions of archaeological heritage, they tend to bypass monuments and sites which have lost their materiality. Yet, these sites continue to attract tourist interest due to compelling story-telling and creative ingenuity of tourism providers (Ross et al., 2017).

According to Ross et al., (2017) the life blood of much of the tourism industry is heritages especially the cultural heritages. Therefore, archaeological heritages are worth mentioned from them. Archaeological heritages or sites are the most significant and can deliver much information of the past while visiting by international and national tourists.

Despite the presence of many archaeological sites in the in the eastern zone of Tigray, they are neglected from the view of the international and national tourists. It is common that the study area is rich in heritages especially in rock
hewn churches. Almost more than 80% of the rock hewn churches of Tigray (out of the 134) are found in the Eastern zone of Tigray. Therefore, the tourists are more familiar with the rock hewn churches than the archaeological sites. It is not the number matters rather the perception of the tourists and the itinerary of the tour operators. But comparable to the rock hewn churches, the archaeological sites can entertain and educate the tourists. Besides, they can be used as source of income for the mass community and the country in general. In the study area the tourists visit only the major discoveries of the sites (in their way not deliberately) in the recently converted archaeological museum of wuqro. And the rest (which are not displayed in the museum) are neglected form the tourists. However, the combination of the archaeological sites and the other heritages are valuable to increase stay of tourists and the tourism industry in the study area. Although the area is profusely with the archaeological sites, it is not systematically investigated. Thus, this study is undertaken to foster the archaeotourism visitation in the Eastern zone of Tigray.

Objectives of the study

The overall objective of this study is to assess the neglected archaeotourism sites of Eastern Tigray with the following specific objectives.

- To identify the potential archaeological sites of the study area
- To assess the status of heritage based tourism destination development in the study area
- To evaluate the protection of the archaeological sites

Geographical Description of Eastern Tigray

Eastern zone is among the zones found in Tigray. It is bordered by Afar region on east, south eastern zone on south eastern, on the west by central zone and on the north by Eritrea. It is has nine districts (Weredas) with a total of 13,268.99km² area coverage with an average of 2581 masl elevation.
Research Methodology

To collect significant data, the researcher used both primary and secondary methods of data collections. In line with these, the most important research methods that the researcher employed to collect the intended data were filed work, interview and focus group discussions. In the fieldwork, the researcher had identified, located, described and documented the current preservation conditions of the archaeological sites. In the interview part, since local communities are familiar with the archaeological sites and the immediate surroundings, oral history will receive worthy of consideration to consolidate or triangulate the field survey data. To come up with the expected results, repeated interviews and discussions were conducted with the local residents who are living in the area under discussion. The researcher was able to administer face to face interview to collect valid and reliable data from the key informants. The interviewees were selected based on purposive sampling technique to know the sites historical and economic functions.

From the purposefully selected key informants the researcher has selected four groups of individuals for focus group discussion. The researcher had prepared some basic questions which need more clarification, and distributed the questions and ask them politely at a glance. At that time the researcher was a moderator to guide and keep the flow of the discussion and to collect the intended information. From this roundtable discussion the researcher took summary of ideas. Beyond this, the researcher created awareness about the future sustainability of the heritages.

In order to catch up the predetermined objectives, the researcher used pre-dominantly the qualitative method of data analysis with a descriptive research approach.
Results and Discussions

The archaeological sites of Eastern Tigray

Eastern Tigray is the home of different archaeological heritages distributed in various areas of the zone. It is recognized to comprise significant Aksumite and Pre-Aksumite sites. Some archaeological assessments (see Tekle, 2011 and D’Andrea, 2008) revealed that the area is with immense of archaeological findings which helps to promote and reconstruct the culture history of the region. However these studies, the region is still with plenty of archaeological heritages which need to assess archaeologically. The area is not systematically assessed and surveyed in the archaeological point of view (D’Andrea, 2008). Thus, (D’Andrea, 2008) suggested that the focus of the archaeological researchers were not in the eastern zone of Tigray rather they were concentrated to the central part of Tigray.

Today, the area becomes a focus of many archaeological investigations in line with the participation of the local community. As a result, plenty of archaeological sites and rock hewn churches are investigated. Consequently, recently archaeologists began to survey and excavate after the region is known to have significant archaeological and historical sites. Therefore, in the past two decades many potential archaeological sites are discovered. Still, the archaeological investigations are going on with both international and national professionals.

The archaeological sites that were discovered through archaeological investigations in Eastern zone of Tigray (figure 2) are mostly discovered and investigated by the international researchers.
Figure 2: Map shows distribution of the archaeological sites

Menebeyti /Ouna-Adi archaeological site

This archaeological site is found in Wereda Gulo-Makda at the village called Menebeyti near the rock art site of Amba fakeda. The site is investigated by the Eastern Tigray Project, ETAP, directed by Catherine D’Andrea, professor of Archaeology from Simon Fraser University. The project stands to examine the cultural development of northeastern Tigray from prehistoric through Aksumite times, with the central focus on the origin and development of the pre-Aksumite state, concentrating on the pre-Aksumite or DMT Kingdom (D’Andrea, 2012, D’Andrea et al., 2008).

It is a well-organized and integrated program of archaeological and ethno-archaeological research with the aim to examine the nature and role of rural economics in the development of ancient Ethiopian complex societies, to distribute and expand on previous archaeological investigations and to provide a basis from which to explore new interpretations of past cultures (D’Andrea, 2012, D’Andrea et al., 2008). D’Andrea and her teams (2008) mentioned that the Gulo-Makda area was part of the territories of the Pre-Aksumite and Aksumite kingdoms. They thought that even if the area is rich in archaeological sites, it has been known only for some times. Alongside, D’Andrea et al., (2008) added that the sites in the area were described by many scholars like Anfray in 1960s.
This is an important archaeological site with remains of large-scale architecture, complete vessels and ancient cereals, probably the location of an important town or city during the Aksumite period. Therefore, one portion of the site is now open for tourists which is protected by the shelter (figure 3). However its historical, cultural, and scientific value, the site under discussion is not visited by the international tourists.

Adi-Akawuh archaeological site

This magnificent site is located in the southwestern part of the town of Wukro. Adi Akaweh, a recently discovered archaeological site, has created much pleasure and attention among archaeologists. German and Ethiopian archaeologists have discovered a number of objects including a statue of a seated woman and an altar with a Sabaean inscription on it as well as a partially inscribed podium. To the surprise of archaeologists, the inscription mentions the pre Aksumite Da’amat kingdom and the temple of Yeha. From the evidence assembled, the site is tentatively dated to the 8th or 7th century BC (Tigray Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2015).
Mariam Anza archaeological site

This archaeological site is found in the district of Hawzen about 3 km north east of the town. It is investigated by Jack Philips and she discovered plenty of valuable findings. Within this site geez inscriptions, stelae and different fragmented and complete potteries were discovered. Free standing pillars, probably brought from the Mariam Anza area, are also found in the town of Hawzen inside the Menafesha Park (figure 5). Although many important features in the site, it is not visited by tourists. Therefore, if we properly manage the site it could be an important archaeological attraction.

Figure 4: findings of adiakawh site (photo taken from wuqro museum)

Figure 5: standing pillars found in hawzen
Wakarida archaeological site

The archaeological site of Wakarida (formerly known as Aribara) is situated in the eastern region, about 70 km north of Wukro, 2 hours’ drive from Edaga Hamus to Mengela. It is investigated by the team of French scholars under the project of French-Ethiopian project of archaeological and epigraphic investigations in Tigray region, Ethiopia (Gajda and Dugast, 2013). Thanks to Dr Iwona and Dugast for the discovery and investigation of this wonderful archaeological site. Within this archaeological site different complete vessels and complex structures are found. And major findings of the site are now displayed in the Wuqro museum. Unlike to its potential, it is not known and visited by the national and domestic tourists.

Figure 6: features of wakarida site (after gajda and dugast, 2013)

Archaeometallurgical sites

Archaeometallurgical sites are among the sites which can be used as archaeotourism potentials of the region. In eastern Tigray, the Archaeometallurgical sites are distributed almost in all weredas of the zone. The sites found in Hawzen, Wuqro, Atsbiwenberta and SasietsadaEmba are the most magnificent sites in the study area which can be used as heritage attractions. These sites can tell us about the technological civilization and power of the past societies. However, the archaeometallurgical sites found in the study area are completely outside the visitation of the international and national tourists. But, if these heritages can be included in the itinerary of the tourists and the concerned body give them due emphasis, they can be used among the best tourism destinations of the region. Most of the archaeometallurgical sites in the eastern Tigray zone are found in the Gheralta Mountains, where the spectacular rock hewn churches are found (figure 7).
Tigray has more than 53 rock art sites and most of them are found in Eastern zone of Tigray particularly in the districts of Gulomakda, Saesietsada Emba, Hawzen, Ganta Afeshum, Irob and Atsbi wenberta (Guesh, 2019). These rock art sites can be used as tourism attraction sites.

Many scholars are in agreement that rock arts are primary source of information about the pre-historic and historic periods. They argued that rock art is the first manifestation to society’s realization of its own idea (Tekle, 2011). They can be used as a source of information while manipulating the prehistoric and historic societies. With the absence of archaeological findings in one area, rock arts can tell us what has happened in the past through carefully analyzing their styles, forms and techniques.

From the least promoted and recognized kind of heritage attractions in the eastern zone of Tigray, rock arts are worthy mentioned. Although the concerned bodies give a little attention to them, they have comparative advantage like the rock hewn churches. Thus, the rock art sites of the region can be among the best tourist destinations. Some of the rock art sites of the study area are: Anza rock art, Beati wuqro, shemele, Endarawyan, Beati Nequal, Enda Gihe, Beati afhot etc.
Figure 8: some of the rock arts sites of the area

It doesn’t mean that the eastern zone of Tigray has only the aforementioned archaeological heritages. It is with profusely archaeological sites and needs further archaeological investigations.

The current archaeotourism potential of the sites

The eastern part of Tigray owns numerous archaeological sites that can be easily twisted to tourist destinations. Hereafter, following proper management plans, utilization of the archaeological sites as tourism destinations is a new arena. Because, nowadays, archaeo-tourism activities are potentially considered as extraordinary gears in enriching economy of the region. Though the presence of profusely sites and can predict their future functions, the current potential of the archaeological sites is in a minimum level. It is sad to say that the archaeological sites in the Eastern Tigray are infrequently visited by the international and national tourists. According to the statistics of the culture and tourism offices of the weredas, there are no tourists who intentionally come to visit the archaeological sites. Despite the importance of archaeology to tourism, it is difficult to find tourists who travel only for archaeological reasons. But, there are international tourists who deliberately come to visit other attractions like rock hewn churches. Visits to archaeological sites and museums are usually integrated into the trip as an important component in many tourist destinations, but they are not the only reason for traveling. Other frequent components in tourist trips include, landscape, the attractions of contemporary culture, and a more generalized historical interest.

This problem emanates not only from the absence of promotion but also from lack of awareness of the tourist guides, the concerned bodies and lack of published books of the sites. Here, the mass community and the guides have not the real history of the sites because they were/are investigated by the foreigners. Those professionals/foreigners simply excavate the sites and take the evidence they want rather than teaching the mass community at a glance. Thus, because of these problems and the visualization problem of the sites (most of them are backfilled after excavation) their expected function for the region and the community is underestimated. The prime function of these sites would be “to serve the society” but now they have simply the name of archaeological sites. Having the name only could not be enough. Therefore, the current archaeotourism potential of the sites is low.
As shown in the graph the archaeological museum of Wuqro is the most visited attraction of the area next to the rock hewn churches. But, the archaeological sites are least visited (figure 9). Thus, this leads to the short stay of the tourists because they only visited the rock hewn churches. However the opportunity we have, the tour guides and others are not willing to show them. It is not ingratitude of the local guides but the promotion and plan of the itinerary.

As mentioned above, the archaeological sites are not delivering their expected function comparing to their potential. Here, the big question is how these sites could be important for tourism destination development. Thus, in my experience, community empowerment in the destination area for both the experts and the general community is inevitable. With regard to heritage preservation and protection the whole communities should be aware about the meaning of heritage, the importance of heritage for the community in particular and the country in general. Besides, during the community empowerment the general community should know the hospitality of the tourists and how to change the heritages to products.

The availability of potential sites by itself is not enough. Hospitable, passionately take care of their guests in line with secure environment is another means of tourism destination development. It is common that sustainable tourism destination development is always initiated by the community. Thus, to have this development the community is aware about the relationship of agriculture and tourism. Then after, tourism can be as alternative for their survival and means of economy.

Finally, preparing summary of the attractions, planned itineraries, access maps to sites; and list of available facilities and services are among the mechanisms for the archaeotourism destination development.

**Figure 9:** graph shows the visitation level of tourists in eastern tigray (source: gheralta tour guide association)
Protection and tourism destination development of the sites

If tourism is not carefully and effectively managed at areas that contain archaeological materials, the scientific and historic values that can be realized only through the careful study of those materials will be lost permanently with the material itself. This is not speculation; there is ample evidence that the archaeological record has become increasingly compromised in recent decades as numbers of visitors to archaeological sites have grown (ICOMOS, 2011).

At many archaeological sites (especially World Heritage Sites), global media have reported significant deterioration of site fabric or social interruptions that have been linked to over-visitation (ICOMOS, 2011). And this results forever destruction.

Tourism at archaeological sites has been shown to drive destruction of archaeological materials at those sites. Repair of those materials does not undo the destruction. Inscriptions, frescoes, carvings, and other informative details of standing structures that are part of the archaeological record once gone are gone forever. Example, the information that a coin could provide about the chronology of an archaeological site is lost for all time when the coin is excavated from its stratigraphic context by a looter.

Thus, Visitors must made aware of the fragile nature of the antiquities/archaeological sites there and provided opportunities to learn more and enjoy related experiences outside the area of archaeological importance. A visit to the site is the benchmark for interpretation; interpretation itself should occur for the most part at places that do not contain fragile resources, and where local communities have been or will be established. This will be essential for the preservation of the site, but will also yield substantial economic benefit to the communities within which interpretation and services are provided. Visits to archaeologically sensitive areas should be relatively short and the flow of visitors should be regulated so as to eliminate heavy flows that force individuals against findings, encourages people to mount on ruins, and generates frustration and confusion that can make people to other thoughtless, destructive acts.

Archaeological resources are not necessarily compatible with all types of tourism. They are somehow unique in their physical parameter for they are sensitive to external damage and decay. However, the attention of heritage development is low compare to other developments. Afterwards all archaeological sites are sources of pride and identity for the people who own them. So, maintaining quality and authenticity of archaeological sites is an important aspect of archaeological tourism (Surabh, 2015). Therefore, when they visit the archaeological sites of the region they should care of the sites while visiting. The community and the tourists have their own contribution in protecting the archaeological sites.
A. The archaeological sites and community

Archaeology-based tourism economy is considered as the most celebrated means of foreign currency generator via tourist expenses. The economic benefits are in the form of direct income that are, site admission fees, hotel, restaurant, and tour agency income. These kinds of tourism benefits are advantageous in boosting the country’s economic income. Although heritage protection and preservation are a costly affair, it can in the long run produce economic and social benefits. Beneficiaries of the archaeological tourism can be classified in to the general public and specifically the local people near the archaeological sites.

The prime beneficiaries of the archaeo-tourism are the people who live near the archaeological heritages who may get more technological and economic advantages from the facilities which are prepared for tourists. The basic advantages could be access to modern transportation facilities, creating job opportunities and elevating employment rate and other social linkages. Nevertheless, with regard to our archaeological resources there need to develop heritage management, interpretation, and perhaps story keeping and responsibility in order to exploit them in a scientific manner.

More than any one the community (the local community) are the best actors of protecting the archaeological sites. There is no one who know the sites more than them both in terms of their cultural significance and how they can generate income. If so, there is also no one who can protect the archaeological sites safe than them.

B. The archaeological sites and the tourists

It is common that tourists flow is either for the cultural or natural attractions. And cultural heritage resources are often exposed to several damages (illicit traffic, vandalism, looting, trampling … etc.) happening both by overseas and domestic tourists. They can damage them unknowingly or intentionally. Therefore, tourism cannot be the enemy of cultural heritages at any cost. Tourism and cultural heritages are the two close friends. Tourism should guarantee the safeguarding and management of heritage resources. Beyond anything, tourism has the lion share to participate in safeguarding heritages above its financial profit. Archaeological sites as a finite resource which can never be replaced if once destroyed needs serious management. So, in order to become the beneficiaries of our sites the principles of heritage management could not be contradicted with any other economic profits.

Tourists have the responsibility to protect the archaeological heritages. When they come to visit the sites they should know and respect the rule and ethical consideration of the sites entrance. They should not be eager to take some findings from the sites and should not step on the fragile resources. Apart this, they can even have the responsibility to create awareness on the future sustainability of the sites.
Conclusion and recommendation

To sum up, this study conducted to assess the neglected archaeotourism sites of Eastern zone of Tigray is mainly operated through assessing primary and secondary sources. People from all over the world are fascinated by archaeological ruins and artifacts. They are attracted by the prospect of seeing and possibly touching an object that has survived hundreds or even thousands of years of history. It is good to say that archaeological sites and historic places are major tourist attractions worldwide even in Tigray. The number of people that visit archaeological sites increases every year and the growth results benefiting the local communities and sometimes the increase in traffic can result in damage to sites.

The admiration of archaeological sites as tourist attractions means that they are valuable sources of revenue, but unfortunately this is often not matched by reinvestment in proper management to ensure both protection of the site and continued enjoyment of it by tourists. Archaeological sites are fragile resources and inadequate site management will result in deterioration or even destruction of the site.

Therefore, the archaeological sites which are found in the study area have great social, cultural, and economic value. These archaeological sites can be used as an integral parts of regional histories, heritages, and identities. They can be also often major tourist attractions if we promote them properly. In the advanced countries, the economic potential has increased the pressure on archaeological sites to accommodate greater entries of tourists and on the authorities in charge to open up more sites to tourism. But in our country, especially eastern part of Tigray, the economic benefit gain from them is extremely low. It is not the potential of the sites rather it is the awareness of the community. They know only their names, but they don’t know exactly how these potential archaeological sites are sources of income through tourism.

Tourism expands local opportunities and brings revenue but it can also have serious impacts on sites. It has both negative and positive impacts. Therefore, when we act tourism it is expected to have challenges especially to the archaeological sites. Archaeotourism must be considered carefully and entered sensibly. Steps must be taken to maintain the integrity of the sites as both a cultural resource and as a subject for research.

Since, the archaeological sites of Eastern Tigray are not visited by the national and international tourists cooperative work is demanded. The cooperation between heritage managers and tourism experts, tourists and communities should be very strong. Public awareness is also an inevitable about the importance of the archaeological sites for tourism development and cultural development. Besides, series community empowerment and promotion is required.

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