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Original Research

Conservation Status and the Economic Value of Built Heritage: A Case Study on *Bahir Dar Gior'gis* and *Shimi'bit-Mikaeal,* Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study investigates the conservation concerns and economic value of two medieval structures that date back to the 17th century. These historical edifices are known as Gondarine structures and are of great cultural significance. Data were collected through primary and secondary methods, including observation, in-depth interviews, measurements, AutoCAD, and photography. The data were analyzed using a qualitative and descriptive approach, with architectural documentation playing a critical role in the analysis. The study's findings indicate that the structures are deteriorating at an alarming rate, which poses a threat to their authenticity and physical integrity. Incompatible restoration material usage, unwise and inadequate restoration, negligence, and the absence of regular maintenance are the analyzed conservation challenges. Despite their poor state of conservation, the study suggests that the monuments have the potential for economic growth and value if proper conservation measures are taken.

Keywords: Built heritage, conservation, economic value, Bahir-Dar Gior'gis, Shimi'bit-Mikaeal

1. INTRODUCTION

Heritage is recognized as a vital socioeconomic asset. However, it is subject to ongoing deterioration processes that could compromise its preservation (Baglioni *et al*., 2021). Heritage conservation is a new topic (Tillya, 2003) and promotes economic growth. Monuments hold enormous worth as they express hereditary culture and serve as verifiable information wellsprings (Amarilla and Conti, 2012; Chan, 2004; Dhonju *et al*., 2017; Nicholas *et al*., 2019). The actual records of the past serve as a central point for local memory meaning, representation and identity (Graham & Howard, 2016; Aas *et al*., 2005). Legacies provide essential components for political and scientific research by providing information (Arias *et al*., 2005; Azizi *et al*., 2016). According to Timothy (2014), heritage commercials are currently one of the most prominent aspects. The travel industry has financial and social

effects, and touring historic sites is a widely popular tourist activity across the globe (Chhabra, 2010; Hasan & Jobaid, 2014). It is one of the most important and far-reaching travel industry resources across the world. Amarilla and Conti (2012) stated that the leisure industry economy is now closely linked to understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage and economic values. Ethiopia has an astounding compositional practice. Bahir Dar is a city that boasts several significant historical sites that attract tourists. However, the importance of these sites is not well documented, which makes it difficult to establish proper measures for their preservation and protection. Monuments shall be investigated as historical records and their values. This is crucial for the city's economic and social development. The study aims to examine conservation challenges and the economic value of the heritage.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1.Geo-environmental Background of the Study Area

Bahir Dar is a renowned tourist destination situated within the Amhara regional state, characterized by a wealth of cultural and monumental heritages. The study sites are positioned along the picturesque shores of Lake Tana. The city traces its origins back to the 16th or 17th centuries, and its exact geographical coordinates are $11^0$37' Nand $37^0$16'-$37^0$16-$37^0$27' E (Figure 1). This exploration is critical for specific protection and authentic economic importance.

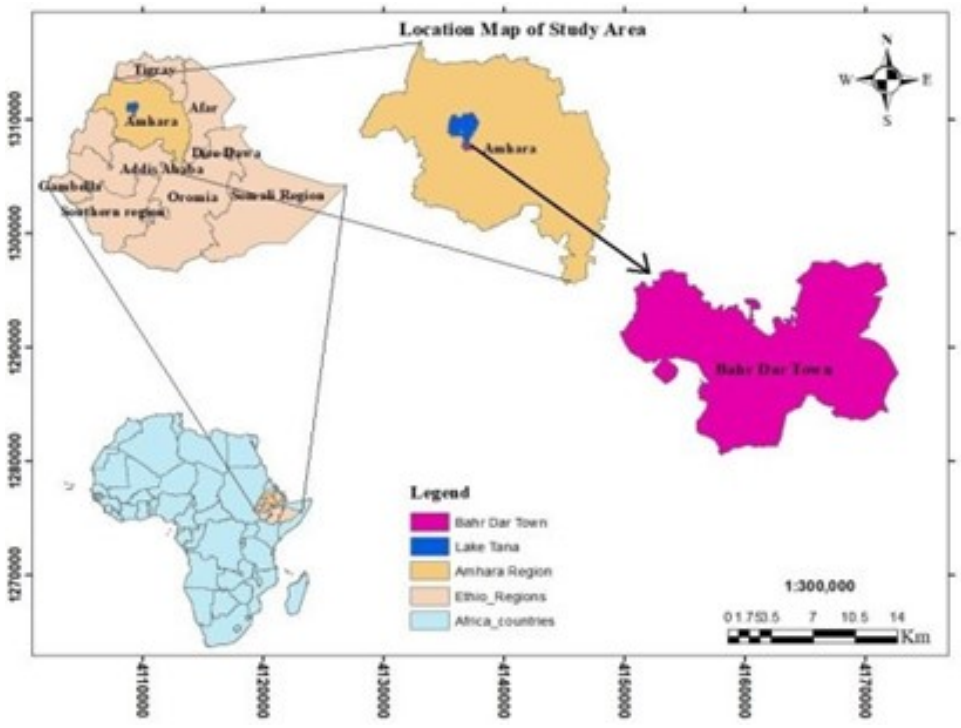


Figure 1: Location map of the study area (Wondyfraw*et al*., 2019).

2.2.Methodology

This study of a qualitative nature endeavors to elucidate current issues. To achieve this end, the researcher employs a descriptive methodology, gathering published, unpublished, and verbal sources of information to formulate the historical account, economic issues and conservation of the sites in question. Following the collection of data, the investigator employed field observation, including measurements, sketching, and utilizing an auto-computer aid design (AutoCAD), as well as primary data gathered through field observations. The researcher also examined documents and conducted verbal interviews to investigate the history of the sites. The selected sites were deliberately chosen based on their historical significance, and primary and secondary sources were collected to provide foundational data. The researcher then made estimated drawings of the structures and their components, and the structures were also intentionally photographed and recorded. Oral data was also obtained through purposively selected, semi-structured interviews with government officials, historians, tourism experts, local guides, residents, and elders, with the understanding that their names would be quoted in the research. The researcher thoroughly investigated and described the initial heritage conservation practices and economic values.

Ethical consideration:

Participants' consent and willingness to participate were obtained before data collection. Moreover, no information was altered or modified, thus ensuring the information collected was truthful and accurate. The researcher showed respect for the community's cultural norms, values, and the rights of the participants. All the literature referenced in this study has been appropriately cited. Participants were informed that their names would only be used for this research through coding mode. Lastly, the researcher assumes responsibility for presenting the findings at internal and external research conferences.

3. RESULT

3.1. History of the Sites

Bahir Dar Gior'gis: The site is a medieval building. Previously, the building was a warehouse (*eke'a-bete*). It's a three-story structure. It is the first ground- plus *(ደርብ እና ምድር)* masonry building in Bahir Dar city. The site is located within 373242320 E and 12820900 N, and it is situated at 1838 meters above sea level (Fikadu, 2013). There are several windows and two doors. It has external and internal stairs. Architecturally, the building is Gondarine style. Foreign scholars argued that the structure was constructed not by Ethiopians but by

outsiders or by a Portuguese Jesuit preacher named *Pedro Paez* as a residence (Hespeler-Boultbee, 2006). Informant 05 (2023) does not agree with the above idea that the pardon was made by the Catholics and for the Catholic *Pedro Paez's* compassion. The evidence presented by the participant was that this building built in the compound of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahido* Church (St. Giorgis Church).

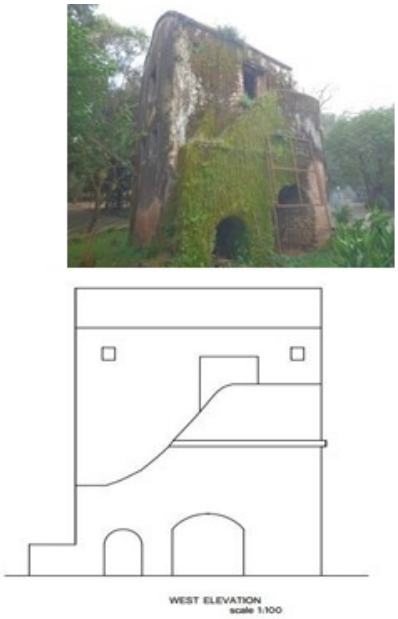


Figure 2. The built structure and Western elevation of Bahir Dar Gior'gis, Illustration (by the Author, 2018).

This is completely unthinkable due to the religious conspiracy of the Catholics and the opposition of the Orthodox Christians in the period. Informant 05 says that not only this but our ancestors have built wonderful buildings that can even be mentioned. The Jesuit Catholics were expelled by King Fasildes in 1633 (Fernández, 2016) because of their religious collusion. But the structure was built during the reign of Emperor *Ade'yam-seged* Iyasu in 1684 (Informant 05, 2018). In my opinion, this structure is similar to the warehouse found in the *Qoma* Fasiledese Church, situated in the South *Gondar* Zone. It was designed by skilled Ethiopian architects who used lime mortar and stone to construct impressive structures in various parts of the country. For example, the Qoma Fasiledese Monastery in South Gondar, built in 1618 by the wife of King Sussneyos *(r.1607-1632)*, has a much better design than the main structure (the warehouse of *Qoma*) and resembles Bahir Dar Gior'gis both in its plan and construction techniques and materials. The country's architectural and artistic achievements have been frequently scrutinized, revealing that local artists have not been responsible for the remarkable works that have been discovered. This can be attributed

to the fact that the majority of studies conducted in this area have been carried out by foreign researchers.

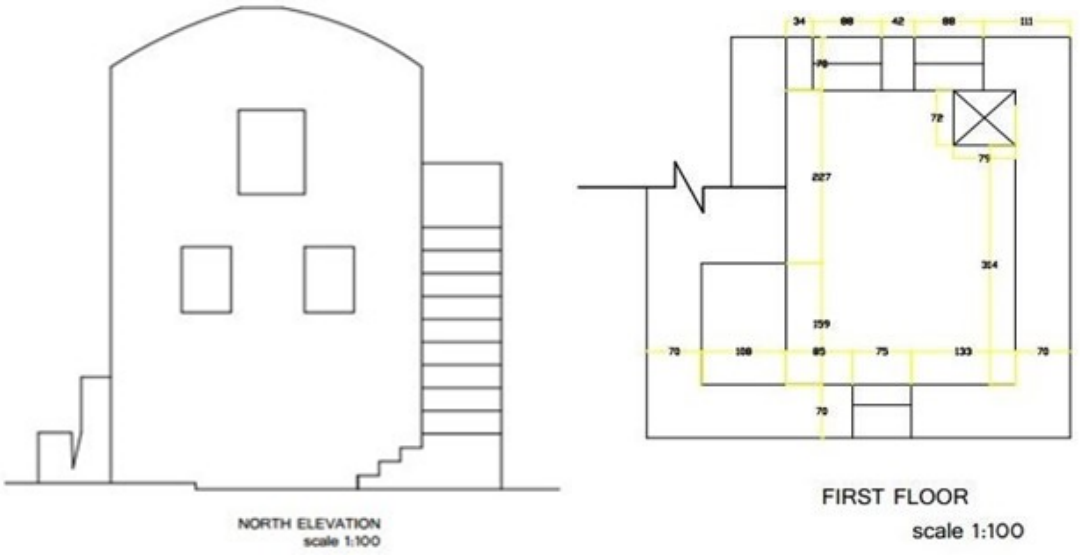


Figure 3. First-floor plan and the northern elevation of Bahir Dar Gior'gis.Illustration by the Author, 2018

Regrettably, the country's scholars have not given sufficient attention to the preservation and investigation of the cultural heritage and resources that serve as the foundation of civilization, history, wisdom, and knowledge. The northern elevation of the building is approximately 8 meters tall and 5.2 meters wide, with a typical wall thickness of 37 centimeters. Its exterior (Bahir Dar Gior'gis) staircase is located just west of the north part and has fourteen steps, each measuring 33cm in length and 9cm in width.

The building has two windows on the main floor, one measuring 70 cm by 88cm on the west side and the other measuring 70 cm by 42 cm on the east side. Figure 4 depicts the rectangular layout of the first floor as well. It is 2.59 m in level. There are five windows; the eastern window is 52 x 58 cm, and the northern and southern windows measure, respectively, 1.10 x 1.11 m and 1.30 x 1.5 m. Their shades are frail and have endured openness. The wooden ceiling is typically 20 centimeters thick. Lime and sand-sized plaster are applied to the roof vault. In any case, it is in an exceptionally terrible condition. The subsequent level is lit by a solitary, halfway-found window that traverses 110 cm × 111 cm.

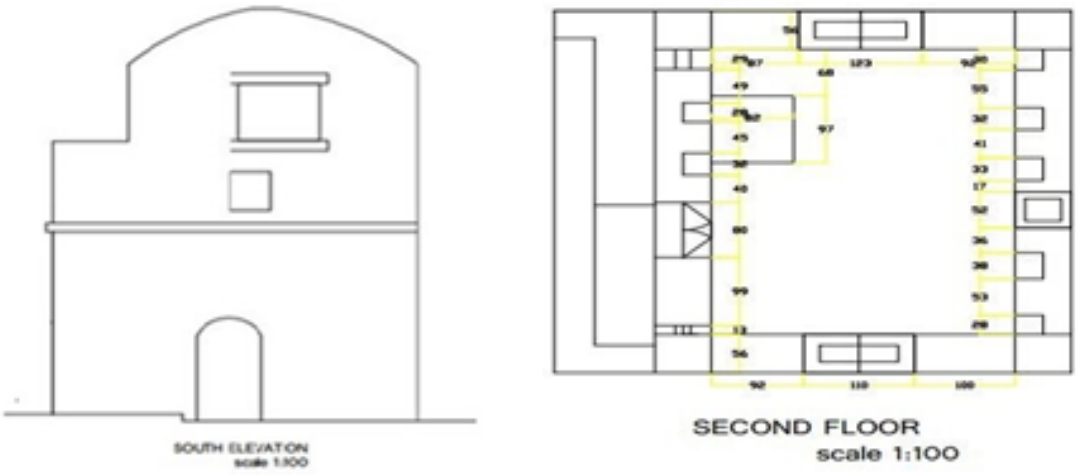


Figure 4. Sothern elevation and Second-floor plan of Bahir-Dar Gior'gis,(by Author, 2018).

A large crack, about 2.90 meters tall, extends from the bottom of the wall and goes around the outside edge of the east window. Plant growth is causing damage to the wall as roots are creating cracks. The wooden window frames are in poor condition, with visible shards of wood. A portion of the casing has vanished. Three wood-outlined windows can be tracked down on the main floor of the design. The window in the southern height is around 70 x 75 cm, while the window in the northern rise is roughly 70 x 42 cm.

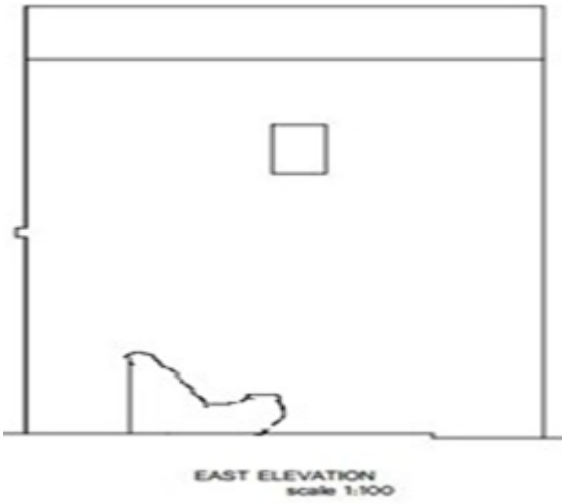


Figure 5. The Eastern elevation of Bahir-Dar Gior'gis edifice, (prepared by the Author, 2018).

The right-hand window is 70cm by 88cm in size, and the room's level is around 2.02 meters. On the ground and first floor, there is an open passage estimating 80cm by 71cm roughly. Root infiltration has seriously hurt within, strikingly on the third floor.

Shimi'bit-Michael: There are ruins outside the compound of Shimi'bit-Michael's Church that constitute additional structural heritage. These ruins are built in the Gondarine style and are situated on the shore of Lake *Tana* in the southern region, outside the compound of

Shimi'bit- Michael Church (*Bete-Christian*). The presence of large trees and road congestion has caused the decay of the ruins. There are two theories regarding the history of the ruins. According to local historians, the structure was constructed during the reign of Emperor *Adyamseged Iyasu* I in 1684. However, some historians claim that it was built during the reign of Emperor Fasiledese (1632–1667). The structure was originally huge, but the trees and their roots have almost destroyed it. Today, only a portion of its foundations and small sections of walls (Figure 6) remain. Unfortunately, *Shimi'bit*-Michael is now an obliterated heritage site, as a large part of the old landmark foundation was destroyed to build a new road.



Figure 6.The ruined structure of *Shimi'sbit-Michael* by author *2020.*

4. DISCUSSION

4.1.Conservation and Deterioration Challenges

Preserving heritage is crucial for the preservation of all acquired cultural values and the continuity of architectural traditions. Heritage is recognized as a vital socioeconomic asset. However, it is subject to ongoing deterioration processes that could compromise its preservation. Therefore, it is necessary to transition from haphazard restoration methods to a more methodical approach that addresses conservation concerns. This can be achieved by creating innovative materials that facilitate the preservation of artifacts (Baglioni, 2021). Nevertheless, the current state of built heritage protection is characterized by poor organizational methods, a lack of coordination between stakeholders, and an urgent need for skilled professionals (informant 04, 2022). Weak protection efforts have led to corruption and damage to the design. Plant growth can cause physical and chemical changes in the underlying structure, particularly in tropical regions where these monuments are located (Mishra *et al*., 1995). Plant root growth, in particular, disintegrated wall brickwork,

foundations, roof edges, and underlying wooden structures (Figure 7A-D?).



Figure 7. The ruined structures of *Shimi'bit-Michael* (B, C, and D) and *Bahir-Dar Gior'gis (A)*, Author, 2020

4.2.The Absence of Regular Maintenance and Negligence

Unfortunately, heritage is often subject to degradation, which poses a significant threat to its preservation, as noted by Baglioni (2021). It is essential to transition from ad hoc restoration approaches to a more systematic and comprehensive approach that incorporates the development of cutting-edge materials for the protection and preservation of cultural artifacts (Ibid) The shortfall of intermittent investigation can harm verifiable structures (Rashid and Ahmad, 2011). Regular inspection, documentation, and maintenance are essential for preserving built heritage. The regular inspection varies based on need and can occur every six months to five years. The historic structures of *Bahir Dar Gior'gis* and *Shimi'bit-Michael* are deteriorating due to a lack of a preservation plan. This led to the underlying disintegration of the inside and outside pieces of designs. Various building materials and components are broken and damaged.



Figure 8. The absence of maintenance, by the Author, 2018

The wall structures have crumbled. The disturbed state of these designs is likewise exacerbated by disregard, absence of upkeep, and deficient administration arrangements or organization draws. The enormous *Shimi'bit-Michael* (the Gondarine) structure covered the encircled portion of the space in the image above (Figure 8, B). When the building was first constructed, it covered a large area. However, most of its primary components have been destroyed. My 2018 field survey on *Shimi'bit-Michael* revealed that the ruined structure was more visible because it was not completely obscured by the tree that grew over it. The area,

which is not protected as a core area or heritage, is dominated by the growth tree structure. I observed this during my visit in November 2022 (Figure 9A B and C). They fabricated another cobblestone street (Figure 9A) by destroying the design without considering or safeguarding the significant legacy. This shows the area's cultural heritage, the tourism office's assessment of local resources, management plans, and challenges. As a result, *Shimi'bit-Michael* is the primary legacy that is rapidly disappearing.



Figure: 9. Plant growth threat (Figure C) and destruction of the building due to the result of negligence and road construction on *Shimi'bitMichael (*Figure*, A, B)*, Author, 2023.

It has been observed that a lack of preservation information among partners leads to the deterioration of historical landmarks. Public awareness of legacy preservation is fundamental, as a lack of public participation is the primary cause of destruction. In addition, legacy protection is only possible with the contribution of all partners. Investment and participation from the local community are at the core of any successful conservation effort. Local heritage preservation depends heavily on the efforts of local area associations, which have direct communication with historical landmarks and their surrounding communities.

The preservation of heritage depends on the community's recognition of its worth, as without it, they are the primary culprits in its destruction. Unfortunately, the data gathered indicates that communities often fail to recognize the value of legacy, resulting in its damage or destruction. For example, there are man-made problem and spray paintings scratched by an on the inside and outside primary walls of the Shimi'bitMichael site, which is now being nearly destroyed, and the impoverished have resorted to using low-quality materials for their temporary shelter. Therefore, it is crucial to raise awareness on a local level to directly impact the preservation of historical landmarks and ensure sustainable partnerships. Anthropogenic causes contribute to threatening the heritage and its transmission to future generations, as stated by Baglioni (2021). It is also important to consider the primary materials for every support intervention to prevent further damage.

According to the tourism official in Bahir Dar, the Gior'gis' edifice underwent suboptimal restoration during the 1980s, conducted by the local tourism offices (Informant 01, 2017).



Figure 9. Scratched through amendment, and unauthentic engraving on the historic site of *Bahir Dar Giorgis*, author, 2019.

4.3.Unwise and Falsified Restoration of the Buildings

Any unethical and unprincipled treatment, restoration, or conservation efforts are considered heritage destruction. It is necessary to transition from haphazard restoration methods to a more methodical approach that addresses conservation concerns (Baglioni, 2021). This can be achieved by using well-suited materials that can facilitate the preservation of artifacts (Ibid.). The intervention was carried out with a lack of understanding of value and without enough consideration of experts' technical knowledge, and value-based approach and this exposed the historical momentous to further degradation and decay. As mentioned, these artifacts lack proper maintenance and monitoring. However, *Bahr Dar Gior'gis*, a seventeenth-century architectural site on the coast of *St. Giorgis* Church, has undergone two different restorations. The first was done in the 1980s and the other was done recently in the 2020s. The maintenance did not follow the basic principles and ethics of heritage maintenance and was not carried out by qualified professionals, so the heritage has lost its message, history, and value. Not only this, but the message conveyed through the legacy has been misconstrued. If this issue happens to a heritage, it is considered as a great loss and

damage.

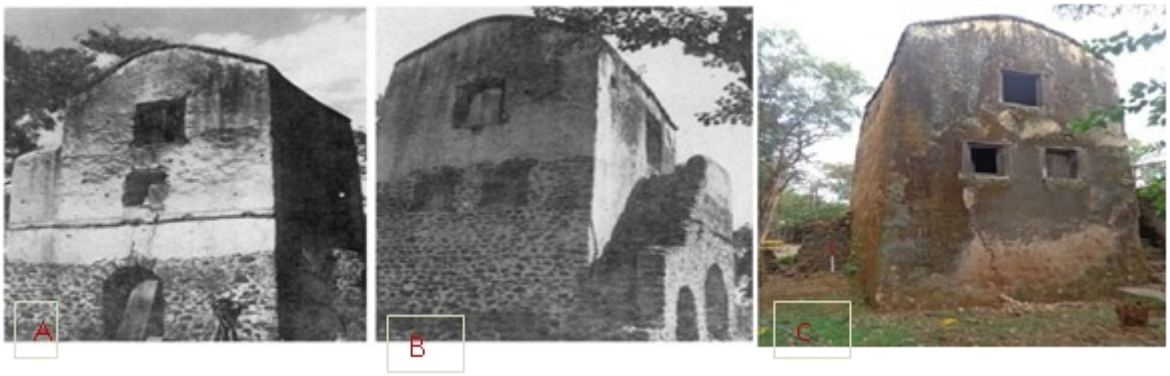


Figure: 10. The original status of *Bahr Dar Gior'gis*, (Figure A & B, Anfray, 1980) and after its restoration in the 1980s (C), by Author, 2018.

The repair was not done with the right material or the same and compatible with the original materials and it did not preserve the existing features and shapes, causing serious damage to this irreplaceable resource. For instance, cement and new and irreconcilable materials was used as maintenance materials, which caused issues as it was incompatible with the original materials (Figure, 11). This resulted in further problems by distorting and altering the original features.



Figure 11. The Current Status and Structural amendment or modifications of Bahir Dar Gior'gis (Author, 2024)

As shown in Figure 11) and compared with the original status of the structure (Figures 10: A, B), the intervention did not respect its original material, authenticity, historical environment, and values. Instead of having a historical setting and figure, it appears to be a contemporary and typical structure. The use of incongruous materials for reconstruction has caused the fragmentation of primary structures. It can be seen from the image (Figure 11) that the restoration has distorted the architectural history and resources. This unwise and wrong maintenance of heritage has happened to this heritage because of the disinterested

and surprisingly indifferent nature of our heritage stakeholders. And for this, the mentioned corner and our heritage being destroyed at this time are just a few examples.

4.4.The Sites and Their Economic Values

Heritage is a vital socioeconomic asset (Baglioni, 2021) that is unfortunately subject to ongoing degradation, which poses a threat to its preservation. It is crucial to shift from ad hoc restoration methods to a more systematic and comprehensive approach that includes the development of state-of-the-art materials for protecting and preserving cultural artifacts (Ibid.) According to Ismail *et al*. (2014), heritage is a vital engine of economic growth that boosts the local economy, expands business opportunities, and generates revenue. They provide substantial economic value and benefits. The development of heritage for the economy is particularly noteworthy, as it helps to preserve the country's rich cultural heritage (Ismail *et al*., 2014). According to Johar *et al*. (2011) and Hegazy (2015), social media serves as a vital tool for sustainable heritage economic values. However, it's important to consider responsible for the environment and heritage with quality economic development in the communities.

Heritage and tourism are closely linked. Tourist sites with rich cultural heritage are essential to the long-term development of and have the potential to become tourist destinations if properly managed (Ashley & Roe, 1998). Many places prioritize heritage preservation for economic development through tourism. Unfortunately, treasures like *Bahir Dar Gior'gis* and *Shimi'bit*-Michael's historic structures are often overlooked. These sites have significant economic benefits for the community, including job creation and wealth generation for various sectors, including youth (informant 08, 2023). Regrettably, these heritage sites are seldom visited by tourists, and even locals need to realize their existence (informant 03, 2020). The people of *Bahir Dar* should be encouraged to see these treasures, conveniently located in the city and on the lakeshore. The sites possess the potential to facilitate the economic growth and development of the city.

4.5.The Economic Activities and Challenges of the Sites

Heritage entails the development of businesses that focus on the cultural heritage of specific locations (Surugiu and Surugiu, 2015; Pennington and Thomsen, 2010). The increasing economic value of heritage has resulted in stakeholders prioritizing its economic benefits over its historical and cultural significance (Fetene, & Weldesamuel, 2020; (Wang *et al*., 2019; Donohoe, 2012). For a developing economy, community involvement in tourism is critical (Chili and Ngxongo, 2017; Ashley and Roe, 1998). Per information obtained through

interviews with residents in *Bahir Dar* city, it is evident that they lack knowledge regarding the historical significance of the built heritage (Informants: 02 *and 06, 2017; 08, 2023).* Hence, community participation in heritage protection and tourism development is a critical component (Chili & Ngxongo, 2017); Nagarjuna, 2015). It will be able to capture the sense of the location and its inhabitants (Ismail *et al*., 2014). Asserting participation partners is inadequate. The government or private sector partners are required to ensure the long-term viability of historical tourist commercialization (Hasan & Jobaid, 2005). Community participation in the studied sites is underprivileged. Small-scale enterprises in the surroundings are the main paraphernalia for the community's involvement in heritage tourism. According to the findings, the local community lacks sufficient knowledge about how to participate in tourism marketing and benefit those who live near heritage sites. The government is supposed to encourage entrepreneurs and the private sector. Accordingly, providing entrepreneurship and other instruction is a key strategy to scale up the community's knowledge and participation in tourism dealings. As higher education, universities must work together to raise public awareness about heritage preservation and marketing. The full visitor's happiness should be ensured, corresponding to the site and its social and tasteful setting (Surugiuand Surugiu, 2015; Amarilla and Conti, 2012). The administrative and confidential sectors have not made the travel industry showcase speculation. There is no advertising and integrated works. One of the obstacles is the absence of a billboard to show where the destinations are found and negligence. Indeed, even there is a gap on how to speed up the travel industry organizations and how to engage business people around vacationer locations and the solace of legacy sightseers. Also, research-based problem-solving efforts in the industry are a major obstacle. According to the informants, there is no cooperation and reconciliation to take advantage of the economic benefits for industry advancement (Informant: 04, 2022 and 09, 2017).

5. CONCLUSION

The study investigates the conservation concerns and economic value of two medieval structures that date back to the 17th century. The degradation of heritage is cause for concern, as it is occurring at an accelerating pace for several reasons. The structural components and elements deteriorate due to inadequate conservation measures. The main reasons include poor conservation, the absence of maintenance, and preservation initiatives, a deficit of experienced professionals, skills, and experts, and negligence in the approach of value-based treatment on the sites through research-based examination and documentation. There is also

misinterpretation and history distortion. It is crucial to preserve our identity and history within heritage. The other major issue identified in the study is the lack of economic value utilization from historic sites, which presents a significant gap with the absence of signboards. Therefore, scientific maintenance is a major hindrance to rescuing the studied heritage sites. Proper examination and methodical maintenance are crucial for preserving historical structures and maximizing their economic value. Finally, the sites need proper management approaches and technical conservation efforts. Experts are encouraged to collaborate in the preservation of heritage and the development of tourism. Communities need to be involved in the protection of cultural resources and tourism development. Interventions should be based on the principles of cultural heritage conservation to minimize unwise and unnecessary amendments in intervention practices while preserving authenticity. It is crucial to raise awareness about the importance of protecting invaluable heritage. Universities must collaborate with skilled experts to institute short-term and long-term training. Regular assessments and documentation are crucial to protecting the integrity of heritage's economic value. Finally, the sites should be investigated from multiple disciplinary perspectives by the researchers.

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