Sustaining Ethiopian heritage sites: The case of Gemate burial site in Dejen

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Sustaining Ethiopian heritage sites: The case of Gemate burial site in Dejen

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Abstract: Ethiopia is endowed with numerous heritage resources. However, the country is not in a position to utilize such resources to ensure tourism development from which local communities can generate multi-faceted benefits. Many heritage sites in the country are exposed to serious damages and their survival is questionable. This paper aimed at conducting a preliminary study on the Gemate burial site of Dejen Wereda, Ethiopia. It utilized a qualitative research method to explore the indigenous knowledge about the Gemate burial site, its research and tourism values, and its degree of deterioration. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select key informants who have good knowledge, experience, and connection with the heritage site. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focused group discussion, document analysis, and personal observation. A thematic data analysis technique was used to analyze the data. The findings of this study elucidated that the Gemate burial site has a very rich and interesting history that could inspire further archaeological, tourism, and historical researches. The potential of the Gemate burial site in bridging the dispute between oral tradition and secondary sources regarding its establishment time was discussed in this study. However, as the findings of this study uncover, the sustainability of the Gemate heritage site is questionable due to human-made and natural damages. This study calls for prompt corrective measures to sustain the heritage site and tourism product development in order to use this place as a tool for sustainable tourism development.

Subjects: History; Archaeology; Religion

Keywords: heritage site; sustainability; Gemate; burial site

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Heritage sites are priceless resources which have multifaceted values: aesthetic, historic, scientific, architectural, and related. They are the representation of local culture, history, and identity. Heritage sites could not be sustained without proper identification, documentation, preservation, destination development, and promotion for sustainable tourism development. A failure to perform these activities also results in irreparable loss of precious heritage resources. Preserving age-old heritage sites, including burial sites, cannot be materialized without creating good awareness among the local communities who live within the heritage resources. Sustaining heritage sites is maintaining one's history and identity.
1. Introduction
Heritage is a comprehensive idea which alludes to something we acquired from the past age (Nuryanti, 1996). It is a very dynamic concept that includes both tangible and intangible elements (Ahmad, 2006). As per Park (2010), heritage is a representative establishment whereupon a feeling of having a place is laid. It can be defined as a material testimony of identity. A heritage site stands for a specific spot, which can cover wider or smaller spatial scope. It is valued by people for its multifaceted significances such as natural and cultural heritage values (Boon et al., 2014; The Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and New Zealand, 2009). The importance of ecosystems, biodiversity, and geo-diversity could speak to the natural heritage significance while the cultural heritage significances inculcate aesthetic, historic, social, and cultural values both for the current and the generation to come (The Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and New Zealand, 2009).

Heritage places are more than “stones and bones” inherited from the past generation (Bradshaw, 2011:17). As expressed by Wai-yin & Shu-Yun (2004, p. 18), cultural heritage items are precious treasures not only for “their aesthetic, scientific, architectural, and other values but also because of their inherent intangible cultural values of a specific society.” Protection of cultural heritage resources led to better preservation of local culture. Although some previous studies highly recommend further study on heritage sustainability (Garrod & Fyall, 2000; Howard & Pinder, 2003; Stubbs & Stubbs, 2010), this theme remains understudied especially in the developing countries, including Ethiopia. A failure to study, preserve, and sustain cultural heritage resources or sites results in an irretrievable relapse and unsalvageable loss of extremely valuable heritage resources (Wai-Yin & Shu-Yun, 2004).

Active involvement of stakeholders in heritage conservation and management is strongly recommended in the tourism literature (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005; Chirikure, Manyanga, Ndoro, & Pwiti, 2010; Landorf, 2009). However, in developing countries like Ethiopia, there is the absence of compelling institutional structures that permit local community and other key stakeholders to take part in managing and sustaining their precious heritage resources (Chirikure et al., 2010). Although Ethiopia is endowed with numerous heritage resources, the country is not in a position to conserve, study, manage, develop, promote and use for sustainable tourism development. Dejen Woreda is not exceptional. To this end, this study aimed at exploring the extent to which the sustainability of Gemate heritage site is under risk. This study also attempted to assess the role of this heritage site in bridging the knowledge gap or the dispute between oral tradition and some secondary sources about the age of the heritage site and an identity issue buried behind this heritage place.

2. Methods and materials

2.1. Description of Dejen Wereda
Dejen Wereda is one of the weredas (districts) found in East Gojjam Administrative Zone. It is bounded by Enemay Wereda in the north, Shebel Berenta Wereda in the east, Awabel Wereda in the west, and Horojareso Wereda of Oromia National Regional State in the south (Kassie, 2012). Dejen Wereda covers a total area of 62,743 hectares or 627.43 km². Topographically, the Wereda is characterized by 49.5% mountainous, 38.8% plain and 11.8% gorge. Ecologically, it is characterized by 95.02% waynadega or moderate weather and 4.98% qola or hot weather. The soil type of the district consists of black soil (65%), clay or red soil (12%), ashalema (18%) and gray soil (5%). The annual average temperature of the Wereda ranges from 24°C to 27 °C. The annual average rainfall of the Wereda varies between 800 and 1200 mm. The elevation of the Wereda is between 1002 and 2586 meters above sea level, in which the bank of Abay River is the lowest and Tirich Jeba is the highest elevation of the Wereda (Dejen Wereda Culture and Tourism Office, 2016).

According to the 2011 statistical data of the Wereda, the total number of population is 108,626 of which 10,683 lives in the urban area and the remaining 97, 943 in the rural areas. 86% of the population in the district engaged in agricultural activities while the economy of the remaining
population depended on trade and other activities. Dejen Wereda consists of 22 qebeles of which 21 are rural and the remaining one is urban i.e Dejen Town. Dejen Town, which is the capital of the Wereda, located at 228 km away from Addis Ababa or 308 km from Bahir Dar (the regional capital) or 50 km from Debre Marqos, the zonal capital (Dejen Wereda Culture and Tourism Office, 2016; Kassie, 2012). Dejen Wereda has rich natural and cultural tourism resources. These include Yeegir Tina, Dil Areg Cave, Agaw Kab (Agaw Wall), Yetnora Market, Abay Rufael, Jerie Washa Shemelamo and Gemate burial site (Asmelash, 2015; Dejen Wereda Culture and Tourism Office, 2016). Gemate burial site was the major focus of this study (see Figure 1).

2.2. Research design
An exploratory research design is recommended for researchers who deal with issues about which no adequate information was made available so far (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Kothari, 2004). According to Cohen et al (2007, p. 119), exploratory study is suggested when no adequate information or knowledge is available about a given issue. In this case, “extensive preliminary work needs to be done to gain familiarity with the phenomena in the situation, and understand what is occurring before we develop a model and set up a rigorous design for a comprehensive investigation.” In other words, there was no scientific research work carried out about this heritage site. This would be partially associated with its inaccessible location and the local residents’ poor understanding of its heritage values. To this end, this study used an exploratory research design to carry out the preliminary study on the Gemate burial site located at Dejen Wereda.

2.3. Research approach
The selection of research approaches depend on the nature of the investigation and the objectives intended to be achieved. Keeping this in mind, this study deployed qualitative research method in order to explore the attitudes, behaviors, and experiences (Cohen et al., 2007; Dawson, 2002;
Kothari, 2004) of local people about the Gemate burial site. This research method was selected for the sake of getting in-depth information from participants of the study (Cohen et al., 2007).

2.4. Study population
Population refers to the entire group of people, events, or things of interest that researchers plan to study (Sekeran, 2003). By its very nature, qualitative research needs careful selection of study population from whom researcher plan to obtain information. For this reason, the researchers first decided who they should consult to gather reliable and valid information. A careful discussion, among the researchers, was followed by selecting a local governor, elders, religious fathers, and employees of the Culture and Tourism Office of Dejen. The Culture and Tourism Office of Dejen Wereda facilitated the selection of knowledgeable participants.

2.5. Sample size and sampling technique
It was not feasible to collect data from the whole population living in the wereda and selection of the sample was inevitable. A non-probable sampling technique was applied to choose participants from the target population for its appropriateness for qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2007; Sekeran, 2003). Particularly, both purposive and snowball sampling technique were used to select the participants of the study. There were some criteria applied while using these sampling techniques. These include knowledge, long-time religious service and experience, strong connection with the heritage site, and the willingness to participate in the study. A total of eleven individuals actively participated in the current study. Eight persons were involved in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and three more persons were interviewed for additional information. The reason the participants were limited to eleven was due to the information saturation at that level (Dawson, 2002; Kumar, 2011). Going for more participants was deemed to be time wasting and not relevant due to the fact that no new insights were obtained after the eleventh participant.

2.6. Data collection tools
Depending on the nature of the investigation, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, FGD, personal observation, photography, and document analysis. As discussed before, the then head of the Culture and Tourism Office of Dejen Wereda, Ato Getinet Alene, helped us a lot during the selection of the participants of the FGD and semi-structured interviews. All informants were asked several questions dealing with the state of Gemate heritage site as a cultural and natural attraction. They were also asked the degree of deterioration in the site. Our data collection method was supported by cautious voice recording and capturing impressive photographs of the study area. We conducted personal observation in order to gather additional information that helped us to strengthen and triangulate the primary sources.

2.7. Data analysis method
Following the data collection, an attempt was made to transcribe the field notes and audio records of the participants. In addition to this, secondary sources were reviewed and used to check and counter-check the primary data sources. Next, thematic data analysis was utilized (Dawson, 2002) to analyze the data. Themes were created and data were organized to fit each theme. Finally, results were interpreted and a conclusion was inferred from the data.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Gemate cave site as a religious and burial site
As noted prior, Minji Mariam Church had been a cave church which was constructed from stone, wood, and straw utilizing lime-stone. It was located at the escarpment of the hilly mountain, which is found 18 km from the Dejen Town in the southwestern direction. It was a semi-cave church, which had three parts: Qene Mahelet (the place of the cantors), Qedest (The Holy) and Qedeste Qedest (The Holy of Holies). This is a common architectural design of the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia. It took a rectangular shape that indicates the basilica style and influence of the Byzantine architecture in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church construction (See Figure 2).
The first section, named qene mahalet, has an approximately 4.5 meters length, 1.70-meter width, and 1.8-meter height. The second section, called qedest (holy), has about 3.45–3.65 meters width, 7.30-meters length, and 1.55–1.64-meters height. In any case, it was very hard to put the exact measurement of the third room, qedeste qedest, since it was profoundly destroyed. Due to this reason, we preferred to leave its size measurement. The church has three doors having various sizes. The first door, the entrance, had 70-centimeters length, 1.4-meters height, and 45-centimeter width. The second door, which interfaces the first and the second rooms, had 55-centimeters width, 1.25 meters length, and 1.60-meters height. The third gateway, which connects the second and the third rooms, had 75-cm length, 1-meter height, and 50-cm width. It could be easy to expect that the size of the height of the buildings and its doors might undoubtedly exceed the above-mentioned measurements.

According to the informants, the Gemate burial site was believed to have been constructed by Agaw people, who were the earlier settlers of the area. The establishment of this church was traced back to the reign of Abrha-We-Atsbha, the two brother kings who ruled the Aksumite Empire from about 316 to 340 AD. Since then, the church continued to give religious service to the people until the 10th Century AD. Informants claim that there were religious persecutions and destruction of churches at a certain time in the past in the region. The time obscure, but we expected that it could be in the time of Yodit Gudit, a pagan woman who destroyed the Aksumite Empire churches in the late 10th century AD. According to the local tradition, Agaw people heard rumors about the destruction of many churches by Yodit Gudit. Following this, informants further noted, a person named Beratie concealed the Ark of St. Marry at a nearby gorge called Yechira Gedel, where it was reported to have been stayed for several years. They further noted restoration of peace and stability to the area took a long time after which the Ark of the Church was brought back to its original place, Gemate Cave Church.

At a certain time, the church was relocated to an adjacent plain territory which is one kilometer westbound of Gemate burial site. However, as the information obtained from the participants of this study showed, when and why the church was moved from its original location to the current place remains obscure. Nevertheless, we could imagine that there might be some factors that urged the displacement. First, the former location of the church was located at the escarpment, which makes access to the heritage place very difficult. In other words, the local people and clergy movement to and from the church would be too difficult. Secondly, it might also be due to the shortage of burial areas in the former place since it is a hilly area. One important thing that confirms this idea is the existence of burials layered one over the other in a shelved manner in the study area.

There are some interesting features of the Gemate burial site. First and foremost, the burial system is unique in its nature and uncommon in other areas as far as we know. Because corpses in the Gemate
burial site are buried one over the other having isolated by a kind of wood and thick layers of mud. What makes it very amazing is that in most cases, no less than eight corpses are buried one over the other and attach to the living rock. Unless we closely and consciously observe it, it is hard to recognize the burials from the regular rock setting. This can be observed from the pictures that are included below (see Figures 3 and 4). Notwithstanding the intrusion of animals and human beings, some burials survived for a long time. These burial sites are very close to the cave church. Even though we lacked information regarding the burial culture of the early settlers of the area, we expect that this might occur due to the shortage of burial places. Because the topography of the area where the church was initially located and the burial activities took place is a very sloppy and cliff too, even to stand.5

The presence of several corpses buried in the Holy of Holies of the church is another wonderful feature of the Gemate burial site. This is unique to this church for the fact that there is no such tradition in the region to the knowledge of the researchers. The Holy of Holies has many corpses and a few of them are in a good condition though there is no guarantee to their survival in the future (See Figure 5). Despite our effort to obtain information regarding why the earlier people used the Holy of Holies for a burial purpose, our informants failed to give adequate information about it. We, however, envisage that the earlier people might utilize this room for a burial purpose immediately after the Ark of Covenant of St. Marry was moved to the current place.

The durability of the burials in spite of human and nature-related damages is another astonishing attribute of the heritage site. As we tried to converse before, despite human and natural related pressures in the area, some burials still remain untouched and a few corpses did not decompose so far. This might be partially associated with its physical inaccessibility. Some of the
corpses, which are damaged by human interferences, are exposed to the outer surface but they are less decomposed.6

3.2. The bridging role of the Gemate burial site

There is a very clear knowledge gap as far as the introduction of Christianity and the establishment of Orthodox Churches in Gojjam is concerned. Written sources and the local oral tradition contradict to each other. Therefore, the Gemate burial site could be taken as an important tool to bridge this knowledge gap or to address the contest between both sources. Written sources associated the introduction of Christianity to East Gojjam Region with the reign of Amde Tseyon (r. 1314–1344) and his successors. The end of the Zagwe Dynasty (1150–1270) and its replacement by the “Solomonic Dynasty” was followed by the shift of political center from Lasta to Amhara (South Wollo) and subsequently to Shewa. This historical event highly influenced the political and religious history of Gojjam Province in general and East Gojjam region in particular (Ayalew, 2002; Tamrat, 1973, 1988). Ayalew clearly stated this development in his M.A. thesis as follows:

East Gojjam, which had been in the periphery of Ethiopian state in the Aksumite times, became more exposed to the overall influence of the new power group [Solomonic dynasty]. It was in the reign of Amde Tsion that the political authority of the Solomonic state was established in Gojjam. This opened the way for subsequent evangelical activity by the church at first against a strong pagan [Agew] resistance and later followed by a large scale Christian Amhara settlement from the neighboring provinces of Shewa and Amhara. These Christian settlers brought with them their Semitic culture and their forms of Christianity to east Gojjam. The evangelical activity of the monastic and secular clergy together with the settlement of a considerable large number of Christian Amharas in the region brought about the gradual transformation of Gojjam from a non-Christian Agaw province to Christian Amhara province (Ayalew, 2002:4-5).

According to Tamrat (1973), the main endeavor to evangelize the people of Agaw instantly to the south of Lake Tana was made during the reign of Amde Tsion. The pagan people south of the lake were said to have been under the Agaw ruler called Jan-Chuhay. Zeyohonnes, who initially originated from Shewa and established the island Monastery of Kebran in Lake Tana, started to preach them. This brought him into conflict with the Jan-Chuhay after which the former was captured and detained at the Mountain Amedanit, in central Gojjam (Tamrat, 1988).

The forces of Amde Tsion freed Zeyohonnis from prison and even killed Jan-Chuhay. However, the efforts made by several monks from Tana Qirqos to expand Christianity to the area south of the lake were not successful. The most fruitful process of evangelization of the people of Gojjam in general and East Gojjam, in particular, came from the direction of Shewa and Amhara. The monks of Debre Asebo (the later Debre Libanos) played a crucial role in the christianization of East Gojjam (Ayalew, 2002). Until the advent of Christian clerics in East Gojjam across the Abay, the evangelical activities of the island monastery could not infiltrate the Agaw barrier (Tamrat, 1973). Following the incorporation of...
Gojjam to the Christian kingdom by the forces of Amde Tsion, Christianization of East Gojjam was escalated fundamentally by Abba Bekimos, who was later named Tekeste Birhan. He was reported to have been triumphant in converting large people in the region. Amde Tsion’s conquest and incorporation of East Gojjam was followed by the construction of many churches in the area. The churches of Debre Worq, Dimu Giorgis, Mertule Mariam and others are good cases in point. The first three churches, which were developed into important monasteries and educational centers, played a pivotal role in spreading Christianity further into the western parts of the province (Ayalew, 2002).

Until the 14th century AD, Agaw people were the predominant settlers of East Gojjam and its vicinity. They were later evicted by newcomers who came from Shewa and Amhara Saint. This fact can be confirmed by what happened to the names of most areas of East Gojjam, where a considerable number of places were given names in Agaw language. Agaw Badma (Agaw ruin), Agaw Meriet (Agaw land), Agaw Beret (Agaw barn), Agaw Kab (Agaw wall), Agaw Minch (Agaw spring) and Agaw Amba (Agaw mountain) are good cases in point (Ayalew, 2002). The participants of this study confirmed this idea that the people of Agaw were the earlier settlers of East Gojjam. The replacement of the Agaw people by the newcomer, Amhara, involved both violent confrontations between the former and the latter and peaceful settlement (Informants, Ayalew, 2002).

During the east-west Amhara expansion and settlement, Enesi, Enebsi Sarmidir, Goncha, Enarji Enawga, Shebel Berenta, and Enemay were reported to have been the first districts, which were influenced by the process. The number of Amhara settlers in East Gojjam increased gradually but steadily. The expansion further continued to the western districts of the region including Awabel, Dibay Tilatgen, Anebed, Gozamin, Machakel, Sinan, and Motta. The way in which the Agaw people were replaced by the Amhara could be easily understood from the then popular sayings. Of them, one reads “አገው ሲነቀል ሲተከል” which literally means “when the Agaw were replaced by the Amhara”. Another very similar saying reads “አገው ሲሰደድ አማራ ሲለምድ” (Ayalew, 2002:6–7) which literally means “when the Agaw migrated and the Amhara settled down.” The above-stated forceful eviction of the Agaw people from the region and their replacement by the Amhara people was supported by oral information obtained from the participants of the study. They expressed the process as “አገው ሲነቀል አማራ ሲተከል በአፈምሳሩ በዘግር требования” which literally means “The Amhara people settled having evicted the people of Agew using spears and axes.”

Informants claim that the Agaw people were forcefully expelled from their earlier settlement by the Amhara. By that time, however, in Dejen, particularly Minji locality, a certain Agaw named Dil Areg escaped from the forceful eviction. As time went by, he was believed to have married a certain woman named Wegit, who came from Shewa; and they gave birth to some children including Kurar, Minji, and Jirie who settled in the localities that are, to date, named after them. The term Minji in Agaw language means “refusal to leave out from a given area, and Kurar in the same language means “intermarriage” or “developing linkage.” It is very interesting that the current inhabitants of Minji and Kurar localities of Dejen Woreda strongly believed that they are the descendants of the early Agaw peoples of the area. Both written sources and oral traditions unanimously confirmed that the Agaw people were the early settlers of East Gojjam, including Dejen Woreda.

Here we can infer that neither the 4th Century nor 14th Century can be taken for guarantee as the heritage site’s time of foundation. If that is the case, when was the Gemate burial site established? How could this heritage site bridge the paradox between both sources? The Gemate burial site is a very important heritage resource as far as these two basic questions are concerned. It could help to carry out a further and comprehensive historical and archaeological study to address the above-mentioned questions. This preliminary study could also serve as a foundation for such investigations and some advanced techniques could be applied to examine the age of the human corpses. In other words, this heritage place has immense scholarship role. However, there is one more serious issue that needs due attention: the sustainability of the heritage site. Some of the major challenges affecting its sustainability are discussed below.
3.3. The Gemate burial site: Its sustainability problem

The Gemate burial site is vulnerable to various changes, which could result in decay (Welsh Assembly Government, 2011). Both human-made and natural factors could cause serious damages to priceless heritage sites and make their sustainability questionable (Cassar, 2009). Sustaining heritage sites refers to the process that guarantees long-term conservation of heritage values. Particularly, it indicates that the heritage management mechanism keeps a balance between the economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and institutional dimensions. To be sustainable, heritage sites must be protected, enhanced, enjoyed, and understood by the present and future generation (Welsh Assembly Government, 2011). Sustainable management of the heritage site in Africa is found in its infant age (Mboya, 2009).

The circumstance at the Gemate burial site, which is a deep-rooted cultural and natural attraction site, is worse in its nature. Unless serious attention is paid to it, the sustainability of this important heritage place is unthinkable. At present, it is under serious danger of annihilation. Participants of this study were asked the extent to which the heritage site is exposed to crumbling. They noted the nonappearance of a responsible body to protect the site from human and animal-related damages. They evinced that crowds of cattle are constantly released towards the heritage sites and its vicinity for grazing. Hence, they further uncovered, many corpses buried in the site are damaged by animals due to which some human bones found above the surface of the earth (See Figure 6). The researchers observed a similar problem during field work. Past studies dealing with sustainability of heritage places strongly recommend that stakeholders’ (including local community) active participation in heritage management plays a pivotal role in reducing the degree of heritage damages (Aas et al., 2005; Landorf, 2009). This is a missing element in the study area and ensuring the sustainability of Gemate heritage site would be hardly possible without raising the awareness and ensuring the involvement of the local residents (Chirikure et al., 2010).

Some cattle herders decimated the heritage site while searching for woods that were utilized to construct the church (see Figure 7). The absence of proper identification, documentation, conservation, and promotion of this important heritage site affects its sustainability. Poor level of awareness among the local people influences their understanding of the multifaceted values of their heritage. Informants were asked why some individuals were taking wood from the site. They replied that some cattle herders destroyed the wall structure of the heritage site and took wood for fuel purpose. They put two reasons for this to happen: (1) the local communities do not know the values of the heritage site and (2) the absence of official protection and sustainable site management. Such problems were suggested in previous studies (Chirikure et al., 2010), indicating that poor institutional concern and low community awareness of heritage sites result in the loss of many heritage resources.

Figure 6. Human bones found above the surface of the Earth.

(Source: Photo by the corresponding author, 2016)
In addition to this, some elementary and secondary schools have extracurricular activities among which “አንወት ከም ከእርህ እወቅ ክለብ” meaning “Know Your Country Club” is notable. Members of this club from different schools arrange academic visit or field trip to the Gemate burial site. In the meantime, the absence of proper visitor management exposes the heritage site to serious damages. Some students stand on the graves and they were even reported to have been taking some artifacts and human bones from the site. These irresponsible actions intensified the deterioration of the cultural, archeological and historical values of the heritage site. Some artifacts that were found in and around the heritage site were not properly collected and preserved for future use. Instead, they were taken by some individuals. Figure 8 shows pottery that was discovered in the Gemate heritage site and currently put in the Culture and Tourism Office of Dejen Wereda, around 18 km away from its location. This indicates that there should even a small museum where some artifacts from the site could be preserved, conserved, and displayed for visitors.

As discussed before, Gemate burial site is a very intriguing heritage having multi-faceted significances. It could be an ideal place for future archaeological and historical studies to address the above mentions disputes. In addition to this, it could be a good place for tourism development in Dejen Wereda. Its peculiar burial system, topography and the presence of non-decayed many corpses are attractive enough to visitors. This, in turn, could encourage tourism development in the area. Preserving the site and sustaining it to the coming generation, therefore, is the uncompromising task. It needs serious attention to save the site from persistent damages. Without careful protection and sustainable management of the site, it would be hardly
possible to conduct further studies either to confirm or disprove the claims of oral and written sources and to use the site for a new tourism destination development. Employees of Dejen Wereda Culture and Tourism Office and the local people should work hard to preserve the site. The regional and national governments and other concerned bodies are also responsible to protect the site and to transform it into the next generation.

4. Conclusion
The Gemate burial site is located at about 18kms away southwest of Dejen Town. It served as a religious and burial site for several years. According to various sources, the locality was inhabited by Agew people who were believed to have been used this site as the center of religion and burial. Informants assert that the site was used as a church since its foundation in the 4th century AD. Conversely, written historical sources rejected this idea and argued that it was after emperor Amde Tsion (r.1314–44) came to power in the 14th century that Christianity was introduced into Gojjam in general and East Gojjam in particular. It seems easy to assert that this contradiction between the oral and written sources regarding the introduction of Christianity to Gojjam and subsequent establishment of churches needs further archaeological study and dating system in order to know the exact age of the Gemate burial site. It is important to note here that this site is very impressive for various reasons: corpses are buried on the other separated by using wood and stick mud and some human corpses are not decomposed. However, the sustainability of the heritage sites is unthinkable unless prompt actions are undertaken to save it from distinction. Besides, this heritage site would be one of the best attraction sites in the wereda if its sustainability is ensured.

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Cover Image
Source: Taken by the researchers, 2014.

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Notes
1. Observation in the field.

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