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The Outstanding Heritages of Adwa, Ethiopia

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Identification and documentation of the heritage potential of Ethiopia's tourism resources is in its infant stage among which Adwa's resources are considered. Therefore this study is conducted to disclose the potentials of heritages in Adwa, Ethiopia. The objective is to disclose and describe the outstanding heritages of Adwa, Ethiopia. The methods used were fieldwork, observation and literature review. The major results are: that Adwa is home to several notable archaeological sites, historical events, religious places, as well as beautiful mountain chains and highland scenery. The heritage potential includes Yeha cultural and historical site and the Monastery of *Aba (Father) Aftse*, the archaeological site of *Siba 'at*; the Monastery of *Aba Gerima*; the battlefield of Adwa as well as the ruins of Fremona. In general, Adwa is a symbol of African pride for its victory over Italy during colonial era, it is the center of extraordinary mountain chains, a land of archeological and religious treasures. It is recommended that these extraordinary heritages need to be conserved, developed and promoted.

Key Words: Adwa, Heritage, Adwa Victory, Adwa Mountains, Endaba Gerima Monastery, Ethiopia, religious tourism

Introduction

The tourism industry has undergone unsurpassed growth over the last several decades. This has mainly been due to the advent of a 'borderless' world and increased information dissemination about the sceneries throughout the world, mobility, wealth and increased leisure time. Ethiopia is no exception to this situation.

The State of Tigray in Ethiopia has been dubbed 'the open air museum' as well as the cradle of civilisation as it houses myriads of natural, cultural, religious and archaeological tourism resources. To mention a few sites: the magnificent rock hewn churches; the chains of mountains which were the secret of victory for the black race over the white colonisers; St. Mary TSION church; the most precious tablet of mosses (the Ark of Covenant); the giant Aksum stelae (ancient obelisks); imperial burial fields and ruined imperial palaces, to name but a few elements of the Tigray tourism resources. These resources hold a priceless position for the development of the country in general and the region in particular through tourism. Furthermore, tourism is one of the principal strategic areas for realising the country's transformation.

Statement of the problem

Ethiopia has untapped potential due to the diversity of natural, cultural and historical tourist attractions distributed throughout the country. The key elements of Ethiopia's tourism potentials are its array of fauna, and flora, dramatic landscapes, abundant wildlife, varied and rich areas of archaeological wonders, historical sites and other cultural attractions. Ethiopia possess the highest number of UNESCO world heritage sites in the continent and it has a lot more to bring to such international levels of significance if identification, documentation, conservation, interpretation, promotion and management of the heritages were strengthened (Chernet, 2008). According to the World Bank (2006), much of the heritage of Ethiopia is being eroded by rapid development and urban growth. Documentation, accessibility to historical heritage sites, conservation, interpretation and presentation at historical heritage sites, visitor information and quality of guides are among the problems which need attention. Only negligible progress is being made in Ethiopia as far as uncovering and promoting the country's heritage in a sustainable manner (Worku, 2010).

As part of Ethiopia, the ‘*Woreda*’ (administrative division) of Adwa, located in the State of Tigray, is endowed with plenty heritage and such heritage is exposed to the above mentioned threats, mainly the beginning stages of heritage management i.e. identification and documentation problems. So, in this paper the research identifies and documents the major heritages of Adwa, Ethiopia.

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to identify and document the outstanding heritages of Adwa, Ethiopia.

Research Approach

There are shifts for management and tourism researchers to employ more mixed approaches rather than just quantitative or qualitative research, to take the relative strengths of both approaches and fill the gaps that may arise in studies that adopt only one approach (Currell and Towler, 2003; cited in Pansiri, 2005). The linkage between mixing methods and strategic alliances, collaboration and networking in heritage and tourism is fundamental to increase quality. So, this study focusing on the identification and documentation of Adwa’s heritages is mainly qualitative in its design as its main rationale is to identify and document the

existing heritages. What is recorded, observed and understood by the researcher is described in the study. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to answer the questions of the study mainly through interview, checklist and physical observation.

Geographical area of the study

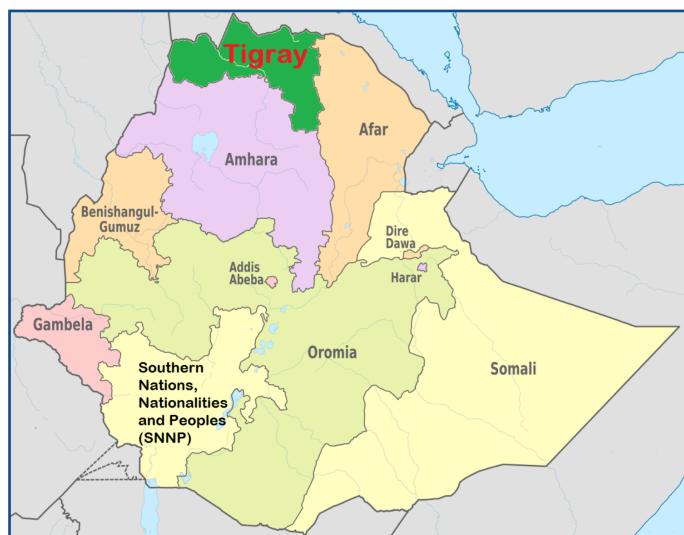
This study was conducted in the a central zone of Tigray, in the Woreda of Adwa and its environs. Figure 1 indicates the administrative map of Adwa and its kebeles in the State of Tigray. The main focus of this study is to uncover heritages in the woreda as documented below.

Results and Discussions

The Cultural, Historical, and Natural Heritages of Adwa Woreda and its vicinity

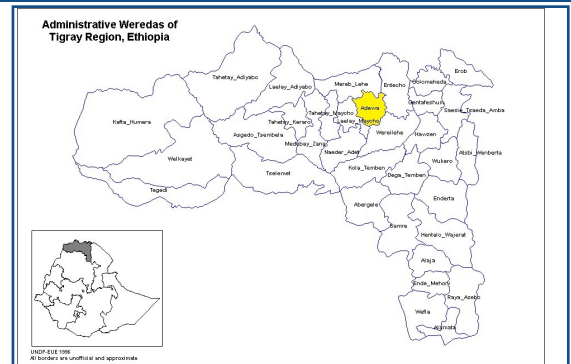
Adwa is home to several notable archaeological sites, historical events, religious places, as well as beautiful mountains chains and highland scenery. Some of the heritage potentials which are also described in detail below are: Yeha cultural and historical site and the Monastery of *Aba* (Father) *Aftse*; the archaeological site of *Siba’at*; the Monastery of *Aba Gerima*; the battlefield of Adwa as well as the ruins of Fremona.

Figure 1(a) : Map of Ethiopia showing State of Tigray



<https://www.ethiovisit.com/tigray/75/>

Figure 1(b) : Map of Tigray State showing Woreda of Adwa



http://www.arica.upenn.edu/euc_web/r1_d.gif

Figure 1(c) : Map of Adwa Woreda, showing individual Kebeles

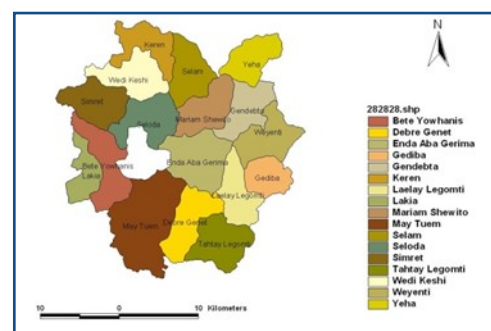


Figure 2: Yeha Small Museum, photo taken 2018.



The Archaeological and Historical Site of Yeha

Adwa's historic fabric begins with a glance at the enticing remains of Yeha—the centre of the earliest civilization in northern Ethiopia. The material culture discovered and investigated from Yeha, which lies to the northeast of Aksum, suggest that it was a central place for political and religious leaders and their families; administrators who organised and managed trade operations; craft specialists who planned and undertook construction of monumental residential and religious buildings; artisans who produced sculptural art and metalwork and; home to settlers who undertook irrigational activities (Michaels 2005). Hence, Yeha is home to the famous Temple of the Moon (Ethiopia's oldest standing structure), *Grat Beal Gebri Palace* (a ruined complex distinguished by a portico 50m x 50m wide and two sets of square pillars), a graveyard containing several rock-hewn shaft tombs, the location of an Ethiopian Orthodox monastery founded by *Aba Aftse* (one of the Ethiopian 'Nine Saints') and large ancient settlement area with visible material culture clearly in evidence beneath the current residential area.

Moreover, Yeha has many other archaeological sites which include *Enda Gully*, *Grat Abune Afsea*, *Grat Merahi*, *Aba Meta'e* cave church, *Enda-Agali'e*, *Debre-Zeiti*, the Monastery of *Abune Mezra'eti*, *Da'ero Che'al* rock cut chambers and *Abyi-Adi* graveyards, *Adi brur* archaeological site, a church museum and a series of interconnecting basins surrounded by hills which served as a watershed and have the potential for archaeological investigation and tourism attraction.

The Great Temple

The Great Temple located in Yeha (Temple of the Moon) is the oldest standing structure in Ethiopia. It is a well-preserved ancient structure, located on a small knoll rising above the surrounding valley. According to different investigations, this Great Temple was built during the time of the D'MT Kingdom in the 1st millennium BC (Iris, 2013; Michaels, 2005; Philipson, 1998). One observes the remains of dressed-stone masonry architecture believed to represent the remains of religious structures of monumental aspect. Moreover, the presence of objects of a special religious

Figure 3 Yeha Temple (right), archaeological objects (left), 2018



Figure 4: Grat Beal Gebri archaeological site and the findings

nature such as small, circular, shallow basin, stone altars and a mortuary stele about two meters high in the immediate surroundings of the two structures promotes the idea that this place had been a sacred precinct over much of its history.

The masonry techniques and architectural style of this temple is unique and remarkable, as dry wall construction was employed (Philipson, 1998). It is constructed without the use of mortar, from regular rectangular blocks of silicified limestone up to 3m in length; the outer faces, edges and corners are superbly dressed with great precision. The Great Temple's second storey is evidenced by: the presence of wall masonry which supplied - at the appropriate elevation - for the installation of floor beams; signs of four centrally-positioned vertical support columns on the ground floor; the presence of two upper-storey windows above the front entrance, and; the presence of an interior water drain protruding from the north wall

face at just the right elevation to have drained water collecting on the second floor. Its entrance is facing west and appears to have been approached by a formal masonry staircase.

According to Michaels (2005), the temple's original roof was a flat structure. This rectangular-shaped temple has dimensions of 18.66 x 15.02m in the external part. The walls of the modern church incorporate two finely carved stones depicting a frieze of stylized ibex figures. These carvings were once part of the temple structure, as may have been three stone slabs, now kept in the church treasury which bear South Arabian texts.

Grat Be'al Gebri

Some 200m to the north-west of the church enclosure, on another low hill, stand the remains of a monumental structure known as *Grat Beal Gebri*. Its most noticeable feature is a series of bulky square-sectioned monolithic pillars (Figure 4). Several archaeological excavations have taken place at Yeha since 1906 initiated by the Deutche Aksum Expedition, 1952 by Institute of Ethiopian Archaeology, and 1970s by a French scholar Francisco Anfray.

According to those results, the structure was broadly contemporary with the temple described above. The studies also noted that the site had at least two phases of construction. The initial phase has been assigned to the Early Pre-Aksumite period. The massive pillars of the portico which attributed to a Middle Pre-Aksumite structure might have originally served as the key elements of the earlier structure. The discovery of many finely dressed stones that would have been out of

Figure 5: Rock-cut tombs

place in the Middle Pre-Aksumite structure probably represent the disturbed remains of an earlier structure now obliterated by later construction.

Abiyi Adi Rock-Cut Chambers

These shaft tomb chambers which are carved from a single rock (Figure 5) are found to the south east of a river locally named as *kewhi Aleto* which means 'it is rocky'. The site is found at N 0501952 and E 1578652, at an elevation of 2114m.

Continuous archaeological excavations at the site indicate that it was used as a burial spot for elite people of the time. Many grave materials made up of wood, beads, and pottery sherds have been discovered by archaeologists, and such materials indicate that the rock cut is part of the palace of *Girat Be'al Gibri* and the temple of Yeha. There are 7 chambers, some of them are oriented north-south whereas others are east-west .

Ancient residential area of Yeha

Though Yeha is famous for the remarkable monument known as the Temple of the Moon, there are other remains of archaeological importance located in proximity to the site of the temple and ruins of *Great Be'al Gibri*. The whole region exhibits one of the densest concentrations of pottery fragments. In addition there are visible architectural structures and debris of stones in various locations and in each compound of the present day farmers in the area.

If one excavates any spot in any corner of the modern town of Yeha, they will come across debris of pottery sherds, and concentrations of dense building rubble which evidence that the area that the modern village is built upon the ancient residential town. Some of the archaeological evidences which are collected by the farmers from different spots of the town, especially, during ploughing their farmland; digging for house construction or for water-wells, are found in the mini church museum inside the church compound. This means the density of archaeological data combined with site area suggests that the place was a large town accommodating large number of people. Equally, the basins of the Valley of Yeha reveal a patchwork of rectangular field plots, many of which even today are linked by a network of earthen ditches to the nearest principal stream.

The Monastery of Aba Gerima

Ethiopian monastic institutions are always very prestigious educational, artistic, literature and hymnological centres. *St. Aba Gerima* was one among the Nine Saints who founded his own Monastery and monastic community in the fifth century AD, in *Medera* near Adwa town. The monastic community has managed to preserve a number of ancient books from the Aksumite times, including the gospels having 600 pages written by *Aba Gerima* in 6th c AD within one day. This means, they are the world's earliest illuminated Christian manuscripts and are properly displayed, conserved, protected, and used by the monastic community. The cover of one book is made of gold whereas the other is from silver. They are found only in this Monastery. Illustrations of the saints Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are all included in the books along with what may be the first ever Christian illustration of a building. They were written on parchment in the early Ethiopian language of Ge'ez and are thought to be the earliest example of book binding still attached to the original pages.

The earlier date given to the manuscripts coincides with *Aba Garima's* arrival in Ethiopia from Constantinople in 494 AD, adding weight to the legend that he was responsible, at least in part, for writing the texts. The monks believe that the book has the holy powers of a sacred text. If someone is ill, they read passages from the book and it is believed to give them strength. Although the monks have always believed in the legend of *Abba Garima*, new scientific dating means it could actually be true. The *Garima* Gospels, which are believed to have holy powers, have never left the monastery. A personal metal hand-cross/*betre meskell*, a pestle and mortar made up of stone which were used by *St. Aba Gerima*, and many other objects of the saint are still found in the museum.

Figure 6: Ancient Gold-covered book



Figure7: Generals during Etio-Italy war, 1896.



In addition, there are many other heritage items including - *Negarit* (local drum), different religious books, hand crosses, crowns and *Metshafe Duga* (manuscripts) which are donated by many kings and Queens such as King G/meskel, Hatsey Eyasu Adyam seged, *Ras Alula Aba Nega*, *Ras Michael Suhul*, king Minilik, Etege Taytu and queen Zewditu and others are found in the monastery. The site is also an important historical site for *Emperor Menilik II* who was able to see Italian troops from this mountain before the battle of Adwa, and *Ras Alula Aba Nega*, who defeated Mahdist troops at the battle of *Dogali* and whose grave is in the compound of the Monastery.

The Battle of Adwa

Ethiopia was brought to the world's attention in 1896 when an African country with no industry of weaponry and with mostly bare-footed soldiers, defeated Italy, a modern European country, at the battle of Adwa. This is celebrated throughout the world; Adwa stands for human dignity, freedom, and independence. As such its significance is universal and its story should be told repeatedly. The battle of Adwa was a global historic event for it was a battle heroically and victoriously fought against colonialism and for freedom. Moreover, it was a battle that halted the colonial aggressions of Europeans in Africa. Furthermore, it was a battle that taught an unforgettable lesson to Europeans - domination gives rise to resistance and the battle of Adwa made it clear that domination or aggression can be decisively defeated.

The battlefields of Adwa, where the Italians were defeated are located at the mountain ranges of Adwa, mainly in three specific sites. These are: *Emba Ra'eyo* located about 10km south of the *Adwa-Adigrat Highway*, where there is a burial of an Italian general (Figure 7); *Mariyam shewito* and *Mindibdeb* where the last tough fighting took place and the Ethiopians gained victory over the Italian army. Therefore, the mountain areas of Adwa ought to be marked as natural historic sites and, hence, together with the battlefield, they should be protected, conserved, and promoted in the context of their historic importance and ecological tourism potential.

Adwa: 'Mountains in Conference'

The typical conical shape of the geological features known as the Adwa Mountains, which are located not far from the town of Adwa, are believed to be the home of Black African pride. If one observes this landscape feature (Figure 8) one witnesses a spectacular terrain and an amazing topography. In addition, the strategic position and the commanding views that the mountain provide, made it possible in the past for the locals to spot and prevent the advance of any potential security encroachment. Therefore, the mountains of Adwa contributed a significant role in the victory of Adwa, by Ethiopians over the Italians.

Figure 8: Adwa Mountain Chain

<http://aksumcultureandtourism.org/en/content/monument>

Anthropological Notes on Adwa Woreda

Yeha, a kebele in Adwa, served as the capital of the ancient kingdom of Da'amat (980 - 400 BC) that existed before the Aksumite Kingdom (100 AD - 940 AD) in the northern part of Ethiopia. The inhabitants of this area are this, an ancient people who have developed their own culture, expressed via their religion, writing, painting, huge monumental buildings, burial systems and many other forms. The following are some highlights of the expressive cultures of Yeha and the Adwa people.

Economy

Society of this Woreda depends on ploughing based agriculture and trade. They primarily practice cultivation of cereal crops like wheat, barley, *teff*, and sorghum. Trade is also part of the economic activities that forms the livelihood of this society. Farmers trade by selling cattle, goats and sheep, and merchants exchange commodities. In addition, individuals earn money by selling weaving and pottery products. Additionally, tourism creates job opportunity for local food and beverage establishments, souvenir shops and guides.

Pottery products in Ethiopia and particularly in this community are numerous in type and also play copious functions as part of the traditional values of the society

in addition to their economic importance (Figure 10). To mention are *fermelo* (used for boiling water and cooking stew) *midja*, *wancha* (used to drink local beer), *laga* (container for milk) *jebena* (coffee pot) and *wchihiti* (holder of jewellery and cosmetics). *Midja* are particularly unique to the rural people of Adwa and are easily portable and facilitate the use of firewood for breadmaking. It is also easy to take the ash being used for baking. Besides that, it can serve for baking and boiling water, using charcoal, animal dung and firewood. It is also easy for bakers since it has holes or spaces for the smoke to go out.

All the pottery products are made from a unique type of clay soil locally named *lema* with sand. These pottery types are made after sand and *lema* is grained

Figure 9 : Local Market

Figure 10 : Clay work (left), local food (right)



together until it becomes smooth for making. Once it is made, it is covered with cattle dung and will be burned for twelve hours. The pottery makers employ it for home use and for sale. Most pottery products are used largely for storing and serving liquids and foods albeit some are also made for ritual purposes. Pottery making is both women's and men's task though who makes what generally depends on the pottery's purpose.

Housing

Houses in this Woreda are usually built from stone in rectangular or circular shape and have flat roofs of wood covered with soil and stone. The name of this traditional house is called *hidmo*. The houses also have wide overhanging eaves to protect the walls from rain. The abundance of stone in comparison with other materials such as wood compelled the community to build their houses with rocks. The walls are painted with cattle and dung mud and accordingly, the houses are typically of villa or one storey. The windows and doors are purely made from wood.

Writing System

There is a lively experience of preparing reading materials related to Orthodox Christian Holy Books or *kitab* that were prepared by hand to serve as a means of protecting from illness. To do so *Yekum stahafiwoch* (manuscript writers) prepared more than ten types of colourful writing materials made from mixtures of leaves, crops, roots and seeds. These people also produce very figurative paintings that depict the images of saints of orthodox religion.

Food

There are numerous food menus that are served by the community. However *hanza* and *sirana* are particular to rural Adwa and also the central zone. *Hanza* is a unique food that continues to be the favourite food and is particularly customised on festival days and is also eaten on other normal days. It can be served at breakfast, lunch and during coffee ceremonies. It is very healthy, easy to make, and is also a delicious food to be tested by anyone from outside the area. It is made

Figure 11 : Examples of housing in the Woreda



from a combination of barley, *teff* and sorghum flour. It is made of two independently baked *enjera* that stick together to form this tasty food. This food is particularly important in its composition in addition to being very appetising.

Sirana is the other peculiar food type found in Adwa and its surrounding community. Although the name is common to other areas of Tigray, its content is quite different. It is a type of *kita* (local bread) made of bean and chickpea flour. It is also very tasty and can be served at any feeding time, independent of stew or with it, as one desires.

Dressing and ornaments

In Adwa women prettify themselves with jewellery that includes armlets, rings, pendants, bracelets earrings and necklaces. The jewelleries are made of gold, brass and leather which are embellished with beads. Women dress in their best traditional dresses called *tilfi* which is a cotton made dress bejewelled with a range of embroidery, particularly on the front of the dress from the top to bottom of the cloth. The girls also adorn themselves with an array of beautiful jewellery on their neck, ears and above forehead. A girl who is a fiancée to someone also has a unique usage of jewellery - she adds a necklace with a cross made of silver at her neck.

Women also wear a variety of hairstyles based on their age and marital status. Young girls shave their hair exempting some hair at the back part of the head. However through time the bald part of the head closes and by the time a young lady is on the track of marriage it is expected of her to wear the fully braided hair style. There are many styles of braiding, particularly for girls entering to the adult stage that includes the hair style of *game mis kunchieti* (for unmarried women) and *game mis tsirura* (for married

women). In general, hair style and jewellery usage show variation depending on age and marital status.

Kinship and Marriage

The *Adwa* people have a patrilineal descent system in which descent is traced from males to their offspring. As far as inheritance is concerned there is no predisposition attributed to gender or being the first born and any other factors. However, inheritance rules distinguish between land and household property. As has been said above, regardless of gender and marital status every son and daughter inherits an equal share of land from his or her dead parent. The remaining possessions, not consumed in the funeral commemoration, a year after death, will be divided among offspring.

The communities of Adwa practice monogamous marriage of one man and one woman in accordance with the holy scriptures of Christianity. This is because all of the population in this area follow Orthodox Christianity. Marriage in this community is a socially acknowledged union between spouses who are committed to one another, with the expectation of a life lasting intimate relationship. Marriage begins with a ceremony known as a wedding that officially recognises the marriage partners. For the wedding ceremony both parents prepare food and drink and invite guests. The groom goes to the bride's house to take his wife. The wedding ceremony starts with traditional dances and music accompanied by people playing *masinko* and *embilta* drums. Dowry is given by the bride's parents to the groom in the form of cash or n kind but this pays for what the groom gives to the bride in the form of dress and jewellery. Both the groom and the bride's families provide equal resources to serve for their offspring's future life although it is not the case always. At the times of divorce, the wife and the husband share resources according to their provision made at the time of their marriage.

Figure11: Local Dress



After the completion of the wedding service the couple determines their place of residence. Although there is no formal rule of post marital residence, it is usually patrilocal in nature as other ways are treated negatively by the community.

Customary law and social control

The elders of the community are respected based on age and maturity and are selected to act as mediator for conflict occurring between individuals or groups before it is submitted to modern judiciary systems; (it can sometimes be seen after the case had been treated in the modern legal system). *Astarakiwoch* (mediators) can be elected for their trustworthiness, persuasion skill and their acceptance by both the plaintiff and the defendant. Conflicts often arise over divergence of interest in inheritance, water, land and divorce.

Conclusions

Adwa is home to several notable archaeological sites, historical events, religious places, as well as beautiful mountain chains and highland scenery. Some of the heritage potential which is described in detail are Yeha cultural and historical site and the Monastery of *Aba* (Father) *Aftse*; the archaeological site of *Siba'at*; the Monastery of *Aba Gerima*; the battlefield of Adwa, as well as the ruins of Fremona in Adwa. The major sites identified in the project are:

The Archaeological and Historical site of Yeha: Ethiopia's historic route begins with a glance at the enticing remains of Yeha - the centre of the earliest civilization in northern Ethiopia. Hence, Yeha is home for the famous Temple of the Moon (Ethiopia's oldest standing structure), *Grat Beal Gebri* palace (a ruined complex distinguished by a portico 50m x 50m wide and two sets of square pillars), a graveyard containing several rock-hewn shaft tombs, the location of an Ethiopian Orthodox monastery founded by *Aba Aftse* (one of the Nine Saints) and a large ancient settlement area with visible material culture evidenced beneath the current residential place.

The Great Temple: This temple is located in Yeha and is the oldest standing structure in Ethiopia. It is a well-preserved ancient structure located on a small knoll rising above the surrounding valley.

Grat Be'al Gebri: Some 200m to the north-west of the church enclosure, on another low hill, stand the remains of a monumental structure known as *Grat Beal Gebri*.

Abiyi Adi Rock-Cut Chambers: These shaft tomb chambers which are carved from rock are found to the south east of a river locally named as *kewhi Aletto* which means 'it is rocky'.

Ancient residential area of Yeha: Though Yeha is famous for the remarkable monument known as the Temple of the Moon, there are other remains of archaeological importance located in proximity to the site of the temple and ruins of *Great Be'al Gibri*. The whole area exhibits one of the densest concentrations of pottery fragments.

The Monastery of Aba Gerima: Ethiopian monastic institutions are very prestigious educational, artistic, literature and hymnological centers. *St. Aba Gerima* was one of the Nine Saints who founded his own Monastery and monastic community in the fifth century AD, in *Medera* near Adwa town.

The Battle of Adwa: Ethiopia was brought to the world's attention in 1896 when an African country with no tradition of weaponry and with mostly bare-footed soldiers, defeated Italy, a modern European country, at the battle of Adwa. This is celebrated throughout the world, and Adwa stands for human dignity, freedom, and independence. As such, its significance is universal and its story should be told repeatedly.

Adwa: 'Mountains in Conference': The conical shaped Adwa Mountains, are not too far from the town of Adwa. These are known as the home of Black of African Pride.

Anthropological Notes on Adwa Woreda: Yeha, a Kebele in Adwa, had served as capital of the ancient kingdom of Da'amat that existed before the Aksumite kingdom in the northern part of Ethiopia. The inhabitants of this area are an ancient people who have developed their own culture, expressed via their religion, writing, painting, huge monumental buildings, burial system and many other forms.

Recommendations

Adwa, Ethiopia is endowed with unique, novel, inspiring and outstanding heritages that need further works, building on the introduction outlined in this study. Based on this study the following are the major recommendations:

- Further heritage documentation is needed to provide insight on these heritages.
- The government must devise heritage management practices in Adwa.
- Tourism Destination professionalisation is needed so as to promote and use the heritages in ways that are appropriate for all stakeholders.

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