

Tourism Development Potentials of St. Yared Heritages in Aksum: Assessment to Intervention 2018

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Abstract

Title: 'Tourism Development Potentials of St. Yared Heritages: the case of Aksum town Tigray is the cradle of Ethiopia's civilization resulted from plenty of contributions among which St. Yared is an exemplary. The contribution of St. Yared for Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church in one hand and for Ethiopian tourism industry on the other hand can be said tremendous. This study is entitled 'Tourism Development Potentials of St. Yared Heritages: the case of Aksum town. Aksum is the most historic place of Ethiopia endowed with incredible world heritages. The main objective of this study is to assess the tourism development potentials of St. Yared heritages in Aksum town. To achieve this objective the study has employed qualitative research method, and employed both primary and secondary sources as data instruments. In the study interview, field observation and photos used as primary sources while document analysis as secondary sources. The main findings of the study show that the tangible and intangible heritages associated with Saint Yared are the music compositions, together with the precise distinctness of chants and hymns performances of St. Yared, the music instruments he was used like kebero (drum), begena, masinko, kirar washint (flute) and Tisnasil (sistrum) etc, the main books, his history in church education and contribution to the present in general, the way of life of his colleagues in church education and other treasures are among the main tourism resources of St. Yared works. Though Saint Yared and his works have enormous tourism potentials still not yet used much for tourism development. The saint resources in Aksum should developed into tourism products and it is an opportunity for product diversification in the town, increases length of tourist stay in the town.

Keywords: St. Yared; Tourism product; Tourism resources

Introduction

Tigray is considered as the open air museum as well as cradle of civilization as it houses myriads of natural, cultural, religious and archaeological tourism resources. Just to mention few sites, the magnificent rock hewn churches, the chains of mountains which kept the secret for the victory of the black race on white colonizers, St. Mary Tsion church, the most precious tablet of mosses (the Ark of Covenant), the giant Aksum steles, imperial burial fields and ruined imperial palaces are only to give a glance over the Tigray tourism resources [1,2]. These resources hold 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 realizing the country's transformation. In addition, the contributions of handicraft producing, variety of food and drinks, painting science, alphabets, writings and music (secular and religious) of Ethiopia are originated from Tigray during the Axumite kingdom (ibid) [3,4].

Objective of the Article

General objective

The main objective of this article is to assess the tourism development potentials of St. Yared heritage resources in Aksum.

Specific objectives

- To identify tourism resources of St. Yared works
- To indicate the potential tourism product developments from St. Yared works

Methodology

- Document analysis
- Field observation
- Key informants

St. Yared: history and tourism potentials

Maikera (Maikerwah) where student Yared rest and take lessons from a worm is found about four kilometers north of Aksum at geographic coordinates of 14°N 38° 33'E. It is found on the way of going to Medebay Welel. Maikera is found west of the twin tombs of Kaleb and Gebremeskel and north east of bête Giorgis hill simply on a pedestrian way going to Medebay Welel. Medebay Welel is a place located about fifteen kilometers north of Aksum town. Still now, Maikera is considered as holy water (Mai of St. Yared) and everyone drinks there while passing through or purposefully going there. Mai refers to water and Kera or Kerwah refers to the tree in Tigrigna language [5,6].

Yared, guided by the Holy Spirit, he saw the angels using drums, horns, sistrum, masinko and tau-cross staff instruments to accompany the songs of praise to God. He decided to adopt these instruments to all the church music and chants [7].

The chants of St. Yared are usually chanted in conjunction with aquaqua or sacred dance. St. Yared pioneered an enduring tradition of Zema, Aquaqua and Qine [8]. These are musical, dance and literary traditions that continue to inform the spiritual and material well being of a significant segment of the Ethiopian population [9]. Yared's Zema

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chants have also established a classic Zema Mahliet tradition, which is usually performed in the outer section of the Church's interior [10].

St. Yared's contribution to tourism and culture

The contribution of St. Yared for Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church in one hand and Ethiopian tourism industry on the other hand can be said tremendous. The tangible as well as the intangible treasures left to us by St. Yared can be good sources of attraction. In fact, the impact of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church for Ethiopian tourism is visible and tremendous. In this regard, the contribution of St. Yared will come to the front. In the following paragraphs, attempts will be made to highlight the works of St. Yared for Ethiopian tourism. In this regard, Mezmur [2] has conducted MA thesis entitled "Traditional Education of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Its Potential for Tourism Development (1975-present)". The author highlights the contributions of spiritual heritages for Ethiopian tourism development and is discussed as follows. In other words, these are some of the contributions of St. Yared in one way or the other for Ethiopian tourism [11].

- Churches and monasteries obtain some of their income from tourists. When tourists visit churches and monasteries, they are invited to see the architecture of the church; tourists are also briefed about history of the churches and monasteries which they are visiting. The process of education, way of life of the students, the types of education, the content of the education (for educational tourists), how clergymen deliver their service to church, colorful clergymen services in Qine mahlet are some potential attractions of tourist.
- Yared's composition by itself is one of the biggest tourist attractions. St. Yared's mind is the prism, through which the different patterns pass. Music and dance (Mashebsheb) are combined, to constitute the highlight of the celebration.
- It is universality that belongs uniquely to music, together with the precise distinctness, that gives it that high value as the panacea of all sorrows. The combination of sorrow, pain and joy is one of the recurring themes, both in the music and in the life story of St. Yared.
- In Ethiopia there are different religious festivals celebrated throughout the year including Meskel, Lidet, Timket, Fasika and others. Many tourists are coming to Ethiopia to participate and celebrate these festivals. Most of the programs of these religious festivals are occupied by the chants and hymns of St. Yared. So, St. Yared and his works are main potential heritages of Ethiopian tourism.
- His books and Festivals: The emperor who ruled Ethiopia during zenith of St. Yared was Gebremeskel (525-539 A.D) the son of the renowned Emperor Kaleb. The fact that during his reign Ethiopia produced her greatest musician and poet, Saint Yared, who as the creator of Zema (music) and poetry, surpassed all, pleased the Emperor so much that he was content to conduct the matters of state and leave to Yared the affairs of the Church.
- Although traditional church schools are not well promoted to both foreigners and domestic tourists, there are many attractions, treasures, performances to be visited. The process of traditional education, way of life of the students, the types of education, the content of education (for educational tourists),

how clergymen deliver their service to church are some important potential attractions of tourists.

Attractions Resulted from st. Yared works

Maikerah is located in the northwest of Aksum, at about four kilometers distance from the town. The site can be integrated with adjacent heritage sites so as to develop appropriate travel route. Attempts are made to discuss the heritage sites located around Maikerah which can be integrated together as a tourism product and adds the existing tourism offer of the town to the tourism industry [12].

Visit to sites of Maikerah and Murade Kale

The place of Maikerah (where St. Yared learned from the caterpillar) and Murade Kal (where he was praying) are the two major tourism sites in Aksum though not yet developed well. His spirit of being patient and enduring education experienced from the small creature is also immersed to the society of that time as a culture. At present being patient and tolerant is considered to be a sign of strength and wisdom [13].

Walking tour with scenic view

Aksum Maikerah Monastery of St. Yared is geographically situated in an interesting landscape which is an ideal place for soft trekking, walking and enjoying the scenic view of the area. It can be accessed easily from the twin tombs of Kaleb and Gebremeskel through a soft walk or from the Ezana inscription following the road to the village town of Medebay Welel by vehicles.

Agricultural and rural tourism

The site of Aksum Maikerah Monastery of St. Yared is located on the outskirts north of Aksum town which is a perfect place to explore the indigenous life of the rural Ethiopia in general and Tigray in particular. Tourists will be exposed to practice the day to day life of the people (gastronomy, farming, social gatherings and others).

Health spas

The holy water of St. Yared at Maikerah is still honored as merciful water and many individuals go to Maikerah to drink, wash and take holy water. It has never been reduced in its content nor increased whatever the amount of usage to humans and animals is. The nearby holy water of St. Gebremeskel and its interconnected landscape is also worth visiting.

The tomb of Kaleb and Gebremeskel

King Kaleb is one of the celebrated Christian kings of Aksum who reigned from about 500 to 534 AD. Before his death, he prepared his own tomb and retired to a monastic life at the monastery of Abune Penteleon north east of Aksum.

Bête Giorgis hill

On the top of Bete-Giorgis there is another stele park with more than 300 stele. The hill by itself is believed to be as the first settlement of the Aksumite society before they come down to the present location. It is an early Aksumite period. Tourists can enjoy visiting the steles, the archeological sites, villages' life, and the view. Its geographical location is 469490E, 1562448N, 2204 m above sea level. The visit will take two to three hours including visiting the life of the village and the view.

Adi-Tsehafi archaeological sites

Adi-Tsehafi located north of Aksum Maikerah Monastery of St.

Yared is very ideal for different archaeological excavation. In and around Adi-Tsehafi one can find pictures that resemble with hyena and fox, obelisks up to 15 m height, different containers made of stone, lion style stones and other unfinished nearby excavations. Visit to other nearby sites like the legendary and spectacular hill of Temen-Zewgeo' and others also add value to the Aksum Maikerah Monastery of St. Yared to compete as a tourist destination.

Challenges of St. Yared and his Works

St. Yared and his works are currently facing different challenges for their survivability. Some of the prevailing challenges are:

- Different church and secular scholars and singers give different responses about the history and works of St. Yared in different times. But this allegation is not shown with detailed justification and archaeological findings.
- The consideration of St. Yared's hymn as the base for the expansion of secular music and St. Yared as the father of secular music. In the current mass Medias, St. Yared is coined as the father of secular music. But the church defends, this is not true, as the church have never advocated secular song.
- Current expansion of spiritual songs in audio and audio visual forms without following the necessary steps and original hymn of St. Yared is still another challenge. Many individuals are preparing religious songs without having detailed knowledge on St. Yared's hymns and the church may be simply to get money. Some singers are taking hymns simply from secular music [3]. Most of the church treasures that are used as icons during St. Yared's chants like drum, sistrum, church clothes and praying stick are currently also used by Protestantism followers. So, this may lead to loss of ownership [3].
- Some of the types of Yared's sacred songs like Yekome Wereb, Yetegulet Digua, Yeankober Wereb Yewashera Qine, Yeachabr Wereb, Yeselelkula Kidasie Ye Aba Giorgis Ze Gasicha Seatat are almost vanishing or very few scholars who know them are available in the country without students. The future status of church education, if the situation continues as it is, will be in a critical situation [3].
- There is no organized traditional church school. The monasteries and churches of Ethiopia has been one of the most well-known centers of traditional church education of higher level in ancient and medieval periods of Ethiopia. But we are on the way of losing all this wealth.
- Currently different developmental activities are going on nearby to Mai-Kerah. Some of them include stone grinding business, hotel/lodge and others. These are leading to erosion and destructions of the heritage full area of Mai-Kerah and its environs.
- Sites which have specific linkage with St. Yared and his works are not considered as main parts of touring itinerary in Aksum. Example, Murade-Kal

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The contribution of St. Yared for Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church in one hand and Ethiopian tourism industry on the other hand can be said tremendous. The tangible as well as the intangible treasures

left to us by St. Yared can be good sources of attraction. In fact, the impact of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church for Ethiopian tourism is visible and numerous. The following are the major tourism resource potentials:

- Churches and monasteries
- St. Yared's composition
- The universality that belongs uniquely to music, together with the precise distinctness, chants and hymns of St. Yared
- His books and Festivals
- The treasures and performances of St. Yared.
- The process of traditional education, way of life of the students, the types of education, the content of education (for educational tourists), how clergymen deliver their service to church from the tourism potentials and the sites nearby the following are the potential tourism products
 - ▶ Visit to Sites of Maikerah and Murade Kale
 - ▶ Walking Tour with Scenic View
 - ▶ Agricultural and Rural Tourism
 - ▶ Health Spas
 - ▶ The Tomb of Kaleb and Gebremeskel
 - ▶ Bête Giorgis Hill
 - ▶ Tsehafi Archaeological Sites

Major Challenges for the Heritages St. Yared works

- Currently different developmental activities are going on nearby to Mai-Kerah. Some of them include stone grinding business, hotel/lodge and others. These are leading to erosion and destructions of the heritage full area of Mai-Kerah and its environs.
- Sites which have specific linkage with St. Yared and his works are not considered as main parts of touring itinerary in Aksum. Example, Murade-Kal
- Historical Contestation

Recommendations

- Insight research of the destination to identify tourism resources comprehensively, devise tourism business, accommodation and activities, tourism products, promotion tools, land use planning, development needs, types of tours, accessibility, and related which will be used as Tourism Master Plan for this destination is needed. This will also help to prepare each sites description including facts, figures and anecdotes in data base manner
- Construct Museum for collecting and conserving St. Yared and Geez Heritages
- Development of historic route and tour of the St. Yared sites (Walking tour)
- Development of cultural tour to sites like Medebay, Mikerah, murade kal, bête ketin and Betegiorgis
- Development of special tour activities like City tour, pilgrims, festive and local markets

- Geez Festival and St. Yared Commemoration week event organization by having tourism exhibition, international conference, competitions and tours
 - Development of religious school and enactment center
 - Development and consolidation of the health spa for special tourism activities
 - Development of view points, walk ways, spectacular landscape viewing, and bird watching sites
 - Produce standard tourist maps of this destination
 - Device tools of promotion like by website
 - Developing appropriate mechanism to benefit the community and boost community based tourism like by training, upgrading their house to lodge...
 - Apple production and agri-tourism in Mikerah area.
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