

HERITAGE MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OF MEGALITHIC STONES IN GEDEO ZONE, SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA: OBSERVATIONS FROM TUTU FELA AND CHELBA TUTUTI SITES

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Abstract

Gedeo is the area where Africa's largest megalithic stone concentration is found. This research aims to assess the heritage management problems of megalithic sites in Gedeo Zone, Ethiopia, with a focus on the Tutu Fella and Chelba Tututi sites. Methodologically, the study employed primary and secondary sources, which were collected through a literature review, field work, and interviews with local informants. The study shows that the megalithic stones have historical, archaeological, symbolical, artistic and commemorative significances which enable the sites to be major source of tourism development in the area. However, these multifaceted collective past memories are subjected to mismanagement activities that have a negative impact on the preservation of the megalithic stones. These problems are associated with the lack of awareness among the local community about the values and the need for the management of the megalithic stones, the expansion of Christianity and the subsequent socio-cultural changes in the area, the mismanagement of the site's tourism activity, which is not supported by regular and legal means of collection of tourist entrance fees, the weakness of the local culture and tourism offices to employ protection activities for the sites, and the absence of continuous recording and promotion works on these features. The study also recommends the need for creating public platforms to increase the local community's awareness of the importance of the sites, continuous recording and promotion, the use of legal frameworks to support heritage management and tourism development in the sites, and recognition of the sites as national heritage.

Keywords: *Megalithic Stones, Gedeo Zone, Tutu Fela, Chelba Tututi, Heritage Management Problems*

1. Introduction

Megaliths are structures that are predominantly made of stones. These structures cover a history of thousands of years and are distributed all over the world. These features have been concerned throughout history for their cultural elements as well as sacred sites

and power. As an icon of ancient civilization and part of the history of mankind, these structures are an important source of research in different fields of study (dominantly archaeology, anthropology, and heritage management) (Krzemińska *et al.* 2018, 504-505). From an archaeological point of view, megaliths are traced from a monumentality perspective that traces the structures in terms of their materiality as figures of past memory and ceremonial spaces (Wunderlich 2019, 25–27). Erecting megaliths for different purposes was common in the pre-historic period, mainly among the early farming communities (Joussaume 2007, 911-912; Holl 2021, 364). The oldest megaliths in the world are found in the Sahara and Central African regions. These structures could be found in the form of dolmens, tumuli, or standing stones (Joussaume 2007, 912; Krzemińska *et al.* 2018, 504). Megalithic sites have made great contributions to the development of civilization, and they are playing a role in developing past imagination and mystery. Megalithic sites are not merely memories of the past, but they have an active role in the contemporary societies that live around these sites. Moreover, they are becoming sources of income for local communities by attracting tourists who have the interest to experience the different features of megaliths, which exhibit different forms, shapes, symbolical functions, and architectural and artistic values (Krzemińska *et al.* 2018, 504).

Different forms and styles of megalithic structures have been reported in different parts of Ethiopia. Different archaeological show that the structures are characterized by different features and styles, some of which are refined monuments embodying unique architectural elements celebrating kings and royal families (Joussaume 2007, 912; 2010a, 742–746; Worku 2008, 63-64; Brhan Teka 2020, 269-276; Holl 2021, 365; Tesfamichael and Ahmed 2021, 6-11). Thousands of steles are found in the southern part of the country, particularly in Ghurage (the world heritage site of Tiya Megalithic Stones is found in this area), Sidama, and Gedeo. The steles of these areas are predominantly standing structures shaped from single stone and are characterized primarily by phallic and anthropomorphic decorations (Joussaume 2007; Ashenafi 2019; 2022).

Archaeological work at Gedeo's megalithic sites was carried out in the 1930s by German-led archaeologists led by Adolf E. Jensen. Other archaeological works were also conducted in the 1990s by a French archaeological team led by Joussaume (2010b, 1007-1008) and most recently by Ashenafi (2019, 2022) and Ashenafi *et al.* (2022). More than 10, 000 steles are found in Gedeo which is an area with the largest concentration and number of steles in Africa (Ashenafi 2022, 57). From this context, Gedeo are identified as one of the peoples of megalithic cultures in southern Ethiopia. Tutu Fella and Chalba Tututi are the two major sites where large numbers of steles have survived to this day (Joussaume 2007, 2010a, 2010b, Ashenafi 2019). These texts indicate that the sites have historical, archaeological, artistical, and spiritual values which are in one or another way connected to the local traditional religious activities and the physical natural environment of the area. Currently, an effort is being made to register the Gedeo Cultural Landscape on the World Heritage List. The registration process considers the megalithic sites as an integral part of the protected natural landscape of the area which has been preserved for a long period (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6448>).

However, in terms of the heritage management context of the sites, these collective memories of the past are overlooked, and the necessary protection action against manmade and natural destructive agents is not being made. Mismanagement activities in and around the two major megalithic sites, Tutu Fella and Chelba Tututi, have been shown to have a negative impact on the multifaceted values, sustainability of the megalithic stones, and future heritage management of the sites. The issue may also have a negative impact on the start of the project to register the sites as part of the Geo Cultural Landscape on the World Heritage List. Assessing the management situation of the megalithic stones and ensuring their preservation condition is just part of the preservation of the physical natural environment as the megalithic stones are part of and have significance for its rich biodiversity. This study aims to assess the heritage management problems of the megalithic stones in Gedeo Zone with particular emphasis on Tutu Fela and Chelba Tututi megalithic sites. The result of the study will have contribution for local heritage management initiation and for the undergoing inscription process of the Gedeo Cultural Landscape by informing local culture and tourism offices and other stakeholders who have the concern in the protection, promotion and heritagization of the sites both at national and international levels.

2. Method

Methodologically, this study employed review of literatures, interview and field work data collection techniques to gather the primary and secondary sources of the study. Different published and unpublished literatures were rigorously reviewed to have better insight about the issue under study and to identify the research's problem which was supposed to be addressed here. This activity was made since the sketch of the study and continued in the post field work to have access for latest research outputs. The Data for the study included both secondary and primary sources. Most of the literature based sources of the study were accessed online from reliable internet sources. Literatures available in different libraries of Addis Ababa and Dilla Universities have been consulted.

A field work was also conducted to collect primary sources for the study. During the field work, sources related to the physical environment, living cultural activities and physical features of the megalithic stones have been collected. The field work was conducted between 2016 and 2017 and additional information about the heritage management situation of the megalithic sites was also collected in 2022. The location (UTM Coordinates) of the sites under study was also recorded using Global Positioning System (GPS). Photography was also employed to record the megalithic stones and their vicinity using digital camera. In addition to the observation, an in-depth interview was made with informants including local elders who had better knowhow about the cultural activities and the megalithic stones of the Gedeo. Officers of the culture and tourism bureaus of the district and zone were also interviewed to collect information related to the management aspect of the megalithic stones in the area. Four interviewees were

purposefully selected both from the local elders and culture and tourism officers of the area.

They were selected based on their better knowledge as per to the intimation I got from different persons. The information gathered from these interviewees is convinced to provide the necessary data for the study. Through this method, additional secondary sources related to the historical background and heritage management situation of the megalithic stones have been collected. The sources of the study are explained and analyzed qualitatively, an approach which is dominantly used in social sciences and humanities research work.

3. Result and Discussion

Historical and Cultural Setting of the Study Area

The Gedeo are one of the peoples in southern Ethiopia belonging to the *enset* (*enset ventricosum*) and megalithic cultures. They are settled in what is now known as the Gedeo Zone in the Nation, Nationalities, and Peoples of the Southern Region (SNNPRS). The zonal main town is Dilla, which is located 359km away from Addis Ababa, across the Hawassa-Moyale main road. The Gedeo speak *Gedeuffa*, which is part of a Cushitic language and it shares some similarities with Burji, Hadiya, Sidama, Kembata and Guji who have social and economic interactions (McClellan 1988, 28). They also speak Amharic as their second language. There are two views about the ancestors that the Gedeo claim to have been descended. The first claim state that the Gedeo are descended from their ancestor, Deraso, whose children were organized into two houses: Sholle Batte (the senior) and Sase Batte (the junior), both of them had their own sub-tribes or clans. Deraso is locally believed to be the senior brother of Guji who are Gedeo's neighboring Oromo people. The other claim is related with the communities' belief that traces their origin from *Murga Gossalo*, which is assumed to be an aboriginal tribe (Tadesse 2002, 22, 24–25; Asebe 2007, 43). However, except local traditions, there is no sufficient and clear historical research work that shows the origin or the claimed descendants of the Gedeo.

In the course of time, the Gedeo have developed a form of traditional administration system, *Balle*, which is said to have possessed features similar to the *Geda* system of the Guji Oromo community (Tadesse 2002, 24–25). The tradition continues to this day, and its role is highly significant in making reconciliation in order to settle personal, local, or ethnic-based conflicts through its *songo*, which is a *kebele*-based or village-based arbitration court system of the Gedeo. The local *songo* at *kebele* or village level is still actively used in settling conflicts which have different causes and in restoring lasting peace within the community (see Figure 1). The *Balle* system assumes hierarchy and it is usually headed by the *Abba Gada* which is also commonly known among the Guji Oromo (Asebe 2007; Tsegaye 2019).



*Figure 1. The elders at Songo reconciliation process
(Photo: the author, 2017)*

The Gedeo had a form of traditional religion, which is now practiced only by a few members of the people (not more than 8% of the local population). Their god, *Mageno*, which means the sky god, is believed to be the creator and destroyer of this world. Some adherents of the religion claim the traditional religion to have a monotheistic character (Informant: Gobena Litu, personal communication, 2016). However, unlike other monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, it has no known founder, sacred book, and missionary. These characters connote the Gedeo's traditional religion to be part of the African traditional religion in its wider context. In addition to this, its ritual activities are strongly linked with the natural environment such as rivers, trees and mountains. Due to this, the belief is more characterized by the practices of traditional religions (Ayalew, Abeje and Amaha 1996, 21; Tsegaye 2019, 7640). The *Woyyu*, Gedeo's distinguished spiritual leaders are story tellers who retold the values and practices of the tradition to the local communities. These story tellers are also traditional healers and practitioners of medicine used to cure different diseases. They believe that they received such knowledge through the blessing of their predecessors. Moreover, there are also saint elders among the Gedeo called *Wabeko* who are believed to be capable of predicting future happenings (Informant: Tesfaye Herbaye, personal communication, 19 January 2016).

The two significant living ritual ceremonies of the Gedeo are *Fachie* and *Deraro*, which entertain the process of confession and thanksgiving ritual activities, respectively. These living traditions are being promoted as a means of cultural development and cooperation by the Gedeo people (Tsegaye 2019, 7640-7644). Following the coffee harvest, *Deraro*, which is also the traditional new year of the Gedeo, started to be colorfully celebrated in Dilla town since recent times. Such traditional activities have contribution for the preservation of the biodiversity of Gedeo. The physical landscape where the Gedeo live is green, which the local elders believe to be associated with their

indigenous environmental preservation knowledge system that emanated from their religion (Informants: Alemayehu Boku and Gobena Litu, personal communication, 2016).

Research works on indigenous agroforestry of the area attest that the environmental conservation in Gedeo is the result of the cumulative traditional knowledge which is associated with their local religious activities (Abiyot, Bogale & Baudouin 2014, 14). As the local elders adhere, the life of a Gedeo man is associated with three elements which are coffee, *enset* and tree. Accordingly, the preservation of the green environment of the area is emanated from this positive relationship of man and plants, from which the principles of environmental protection are developed. The Gedeo have also tradition of preserving the forest which is a burial place of their relatives. This is an important thought that enabled the preservation of the forests in different parts of the area. The protection of trees is believed to increase the harvest of their crops (Tsegaye 2019, 7640). In this context the ancient burial sites on which megalithic stones erected have link with the preservation of the green natural landscape of the Gedeo.

The Gedeo's economy is dominantly relied on coffee production. There are also other cultivable plants such as *enset*, a perennial crop which has multiple purposes. The communities use its trunk to prepare different types of foods and its bark to during house construction. According to Tadesse (2002, 24-25), the Gedeo typically prepares *bula*, a locally proceed product of *enset* and they supplies it to their neighbors such as the Guji Oromo. In the return, the Guji pastoralist communities supplies the Gedeo *enset* cultivators with cattle Their agricultural system is recognized to have been developed in a way protecting the natural physical environment which is still one of the green areas in southern Ethiopia.

Traces of Orthodox Christianity in Gedeo can be found since the 19th century, when the area was reincorporated under the rule of the central government under Emperor Menelik II. The earliest Orthodox Church was Bule Slasie, which is located in the highland of Gedeo in Bule area, north of Dilla town. Protestant Christianity was introduced into the area through the leading activity of European missionaries since the 1950s. It has been expanded throughout the area mainly because of the expansion of modern education, healthcare centers and spiritual activities lead by the missionaries. Currently, this form of Christianity is the area's dominant religion that potentially has brought about socio-cultural change among the Gedeo (Tadesse 2002, 27-28; Tsegaye 2019, 7640-7644; Sintayehu, Buruk and Tsegaye 2020, 669). Despite the influence of the current socio-cultural transformation as a result of the expansion of Christianization in the area, the Gedeo did have a tradition of burying their dead in a common cemetery, as is evidenced in some archaeological sites mentioned above. These sites remarkably constitute the most important tangible cultural legacies of the Gedeo's past, and the first two sites are highly significant in terms of their larger concentration of megalithic stones and their unique artistic and symbolical features. This study is concentrated on the assessment of the management aspect of Tutu Fela and Chelba Tututi megalithic sites, and the result is expected to have its own contribution to improving the heritage management of the sites and to supporting the process of the inscription of the Gedeo Cultural Landscape on the World Heritage List.

The Megalithic Stones of Gedeo: Some Reflections

This assessment concentrates on Tutu Fela (UTM coordinates: 2000m above sea level with 0415727 N and 0695983 E) and Chelba Tututi (UTM coordinates: 2054m above sea level with 04111110 N and 0692150 E) megalithic stones, the most widely known sites that can represent the heritage management situation of different megalithic sites in Gedeo Zone. The Africa's largest concentration of megalithic stones in this area has worldwide implication and significance in the area of archaeological activities in order to understand the ancient communities with megalithic culture. This potential concentration the unique features of the steles have contribution in attracting different research teams mainly from Europe even since 1930s. The megalithic stones (particularly Tutu Fela) in Gedeo were first brought to the attention of scholars by a German team in the 1930s and by a French team in the 1990s (Joussaume 2010b, 1007-1008). Other research efforts have also been made to reveal the megalithic stones from an archaeological point of view. The most comprehensive study that covers six megalithic sites in the area was conducted by Ashenafi (2019) and specific archaeological work that brought a new dating for Sakaro Sodo megalithic site by Ashenafi *et al.* (2022).

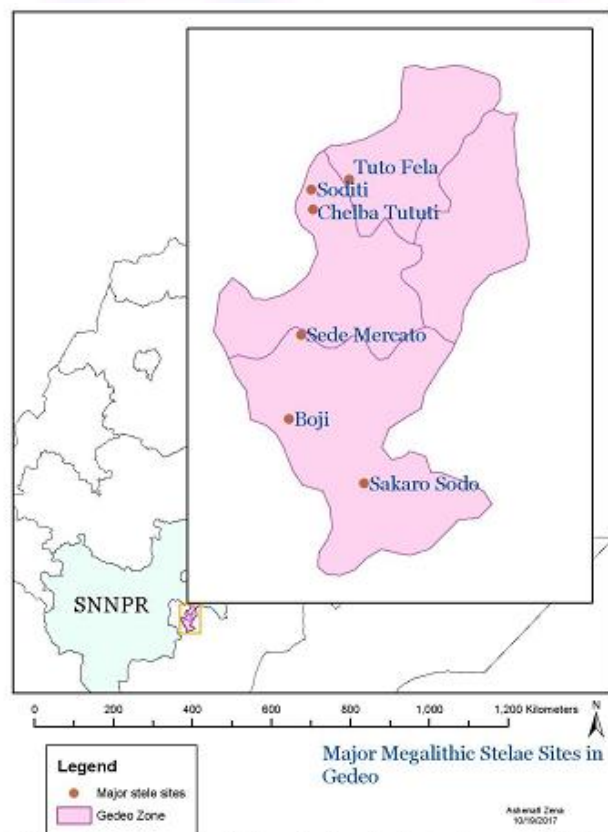


Figure 2. Map of Megalithic Sites in Gedeo Zone
(Source: Ashenafi 2019, 70)

The megalithic sties which are included under the study of Ashenafi (2019) were Chelba Tututi, Tutu Fela, Soditi, Sede Mercato, Boji and Sakaro Sodo (see Figure 2). The megalithic site of Chelba Tututi hosts the largest concentration of megalithic stones,

probably more than 1300 stones, which imply the peak of megalithic construction in Gedeo. Tutu Fela also possesses more than 250 megalithic stones and tumuli, which include well-decorated stones (Ashenafi 2019, 43). However, according to the information gained from the Culture and Tourism Bureau of Gedeo Zone, there are more than 1500 megalithic stones at Chelba Tututi and more than 500 megalithic stones and tumuli at Tutu Fela (Informant: Daniel Ketema, personal communication, 2022). The megalithic sites generally represent collective cemeteries, indicating the tradition of common burial places used by the area's then residents, as well as fertility sanctuaries (Joussaume 2010b, 1008). However, the tradition of having a common burial site is currently an abandoned tradition that is replaced by burial activity simply performed in each individual farmland (Tsegaye 2019, 7644).

Historically, the tradition of erecting symbolical megalithic stones in Gedeo can be dated between the first and the fifteenth centuries A.D (Joussaume 2010b, 1007; Ashenafi 2019, 94; Ashenafi *et al.* 2022, 57). This implies the sites possess historical significance. Artistically, the megalithic stones both at Tutu Fela, which is typically a collective burial site and Chelba Tututi, which is mainly a commemorative and sanctuary site, or at any other sites in the area represent symbolical elements that are engraved on the megalithic stones some of which are well decorated (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). These symbolical features indicate the social and cultural construction of the community in the past. The very common feature of the megalithic stones of Gedeo is their phallic character (see Figure 4 and Figure 5), which is manifested by an anthropomorphic feature that is evidenced only in Gedeo megalithic sites (Joussaume 2010b, 1007). Other varied features are also available on some of the megalithic stones. Of course, all the tumuli are not decorated with engraved features, and some of the decorated megalithic stones may refer to the local social hierarchy of the time and ritual practices performed by the communities resided in the vicinity.



Figure 3. Partial view of Tutu Fela megalithic site, a well decorated stele in the center (Photo: the author, 2017)



Figure 4. Partial View of Tutu Fela Megalithic Site, a decorated phallic stele in the center (Photo: the author, 2017)



Figure 5. Partial view of Chelba Tututi Megalithic site (Photo: the author, 2017)

Archaeologically, the sites become significant mainly for their implication of ancient forms of burial and commemorative traditions, which is the primary mark of the megalithic stones of Gedeo. The sites could also represent Gedeo cult traditions. The megalithic sites are significant not only for the concentration of thousands of erected stones and tumuli, but also for the archaeological evidence tracing the use of ceramics, polished axes, and obsidian microlithic tools (Joussaume 2010b; Ashenafi 2019). From the present perspective, the megalithic sites of Gedeo are connected with the local society, which performs ritual activities in and around the sites (Ashenafi 2019, 116). This tradition is showing growth inspired by the development of tourism, and this can be an important alternative in developing megalithic site-based tourism in Gedeo. Moreover,

these megalithic sites are integral to the green natural and cultural landscape of the Gedeo and hence need protection.

Heritage Management Problems of the Megalithic Stones of Gedeo: Observations from Tutu Fela and Chelba Tututi Sites

The megalithic cultural heritage of Gedeo is not merely collections of standing stones erected above the graves of the dead but has multifaceted values including historical, archaeological, symbolical, artistic, and ritual significance. In the context of the area, where there is rare historic monumental (tangible) heritage, the megalithic sites are the sole potential resources for heritage tourism in the area and the main source of collective monumental memory of the past. Despite this, there are different management problems that degrade the values of this cultural heritage, thwart the potential of the sites to be the sole heritage tourism destination of the area, and hinder the internationalization process of the megalithic sites as an integral part of the Gedeo cultural and natural protected landscapes. Because of different agents, some of the megalithic sites are subjected to destabilization, some others to cracking and some others to be broken and totally eliminated from their original place (see Figure 7, Figure 8, Figure 9).

The first management problem of the megalithic sites is associated with the lack of awareness among the local community about the values and the need for the management of the megalithic stones. This problem is partly related to the incapacity of the local culture and tourism offices (mainly at district and zonal levels which are the immediate responsible bodies for the protection of the sites) to create public awareness platforms on the multifaceted values of the megalithic stones and the benefit those communities can generate if these sites get protection. As the fieldwork data collection indicates, the sites are open for grazing land to be accessed by domestic animals, which have negative impacts on the megalithic stones because of the contact they have with the erected stones (see Figure 6). The leaning of animals undoubtedly subjects the standing stones to being destabilized. Detriments, cracking, and breaking of different parts of the megalithic stones are also evidenced, which can be partly because of the contact of animals and people with the megalithic stones. Despite the fact that the location is already designated as a major tourist site in the Geo Zone, such a negligent situation exists. Because of the misuse and mismanagement of the sites, most of the steles are subjected to fracturing, destabilization, and total elimination of some of the stones from their original place.



Figure 6. Sheep (under the tree shadow) grazing in the megalithic site of Chelba Tututi (Photo: the author, 2017)

In the second place, the expansion of Christianity and the subsequent socio-cultural changes among the community have contributed to the mismanagement situation at the megalithic sites. The expansion of Protestant Christianity since the 1950s has brought socio-cultural changes among the local community (Tadesse 2002, 27-28). There has been a growth in negative attitudes towards the importance of the megalithic stones. This has resulted in the neglect of the megalithic sites by the local community in terms of safeguarding the sites from different destructive agents. The socio-cultural change that is witnessed in the community has its own negative impact by developing negative values for the megalithic stones, and this perception is not limited to the prohibition of ritual practices in the megalithic sites. Some Christian adherents also forbid communities from participating in ritual activities which are performed at megalithic sites. It not only impedes locally based megalithic site protection, but it also degrades the community's collective memory perception of megalithic stones (Tadesse 2002; Ashenafi 2019). The long-standing megalithic steles are perceived as satanic symbols among some Protestant Christians, as has been closely observed by Tadesse (2002, 30) as follows:

Unfortunately, these cultural heritages [megalithic stones]... are fast disappearing with the elderly. This is one area where the Kale-Hiywot church, wrongly considering all that is traditional as satanic, has inflicted heavy damage.

The attitude of some specific religious groups or members has, in one way or another, a wider impact among the community when it ignores societal responsibility in safeguarding the sites from destructive anthropogenic and natural agents. This negative attitude toward megalithic stones led to the misuse of megalithic stele for personal gain and the complete removal of long-term-erected stones. These mismanagement activities not only destroy the collective historical memory of the people but also disturb the

archaeological context of the megalithic sites. The lack of protection and the removal of these icons imply a dismissal of the Gedeo's common past. In its wider context, the absence of the local community's protection of the sites has a negative impact on the preservation of the natural physical landscape of the area. Even at this time when cultural heritage is being promoted for the purpose of tourism development, there is not sufficient understanding of the need to safeguard the megalithic sites.



*Figure 7. Broken megalithic stones at Chelba Tututi
(Photo: the author, 2017)*



*Figure 8. Destabilized megalithic stones at Chelba Tututi
(Photo: the author, 2017)*

Thirdly, even though tourists are not regularly flown into the area, the available revenue collected from the tourist entrance fee is not legally and regularly collected. During the field visit of this study, entrance fees were simply collected without receipt, and this

trend creates the misuse of the revenue of the sites for personal purposes, which indicates the lack of continuity of legal frameworks to administer the profit of the sites. This problem creates a negative perception among the local community members who do not have any benefit from the sites, which may encourage the communities to misuse the sites for their own purposes. Until recently, the profit collected from tourism activity was not sufficient to support the livelihood of the local communities and to enable heritage management activities at the sites that needed conservation. According to the information collected from the Culture and Tourism Bureau of Gedeo Zone, it is still a challenging issue to rehabilitate destabilized megalithic stones because of a lack of financial support (Informant: Daniel Ketema, personal communication, 2022).



*Figure 9. Deteriorated megalithic stones at Tutu Fela
(Photo: the author, 2017)*

Fourthly, the negligence of the megalithic sites is obviously associated with the local culture and tourism offices, which have immediate responsibility for creating and installing mechanisms of protection for the megalithic sites. There were possible activities (such as fencing, preparing accessibility, providing information about the sites, creating awareness platforms among the local community, and the like) that could possibly be made by the local offices, probably in collaboration with other stakeholders. At a minimum, there are no clear informational billboards around the sites to provide information for tourists (see Figure 10). Replacing damaged tourist information billboards is not done, which may be a very easy task for the local offices.



Figure 10. Damaged information billboard of Tutu Fela, erected on the main highway near to the site (Photo: the author, 2017)

Finally, the absence of continuous recording and promotion of these features as significant common past legacies has its own impact on the heritage management of the sites. Recording is important not only as *insurance* against the inevitable loss of cultural values but also to understand the degree of damages to such cultural heritage, and the output is important to take measures against deteriorative causes. Promotion can also help to increase the flow of tourists, so that profits can be used not only for the development of local communities, but also for site management. These activities are not well considered, and this gap is related to the local culture and tourism offices' lack of trained experts in the area of archaeology, heritage management, and tourism development. As of now, the offices lack comprehensive documentation of the sites.

4. Conclusion

Megalithic structures date back thousands of years and are distributed across the world. These structures have multifaceted significance, including historical, archaeological, symbolical, and artistic values. They are connected with contemporary society and are sources of tourism development. Ethiopia has varied types of megalithic structures, which are distributed in different parts of the country. Gedeo Zone is one of the areas where thousands of megalithic stones are found at more than six sites. This assessment concentrates on the heritage management condition of Tutu Fela and Chelba Tututi megalithic sites, which are the most widely known and represent the heritage management situation of different megalithic sites in the above-mentioned zone.

The megalithic sites are generally collective cemeteries, indicating the tradition of common burial places used by the area's residents at the time, as well as a sanctuary,

indicating the fertility cult. Historically, the tradition of erecting symbolical megaliths in Gedeo can be dated to the 1st century A.D. This implies the sites' historical significance. Artistically, the megalithic stones either at Tutu Fela and Chelba Tututi or at other sites represent symbolical elements that are engraved on some of the megalithic stones. The most common symbolic feature of the megalithic stones is the anthropomorphic form, which is evidenced only in Gedeo megalithic sites. Other varied features are also available on some of the megalithic stones. The decoration and style of the megalithic stones show the social hierarchy of the community at the time.

Archaeologically, the sites are found to be important for their possession of figurative materials and spaces as well as other archaeological traces such as ceramics, polished axes, and obsidian tools. The sites are major past monumental legacies of the Gedeo and now they are the main heritage tourism resources of the area. Despite this, there are different management problems that degrade the values of this cultural heritage, thwart its potentiality to be the sole heritage tourism resource of the area, and hinder the internationalization process of the megalithic sites. The first management problem of the megalithic stones is associated with a lack of awareness among the local community about the values and the need for the management of the megalithic stones. The second problem is associated with the expansion of Christianity, and the subsequent socio-cultural change among the community has contributed to the mismanagement situation at the megalithic sites.

The third problem is related to the mismanagement of the tourism revenue, which is not supported by regular and legal means of collecting tourist entrance fees. Fourth, the failure to manage megalithic sites is linked to the weakness of local culture and tourism offices, which bear direct responsibility for developing mechanisms to protect megalithic sites. According to the informants, despite the culture and tourism office's efforts to monitor this issue, the effort is not carried out on a regular basis, and the individuals assigned to lead the tourism activity of the sites fail to follow legal systems, particularly when collecting revenue from tourist entrance fees (Informant: Tesfaye Herbaye, personal communication, January 2016). Finally, the absence of continuous recording and promotion of these features as significant common past legacies has its own impact on the heritage management of the sites. All these gaps are reflected in the actual problems on the megalithic sites, which are often overlooked and subjected to deterioration because of different agents. This study recommends the following points have been considered by different stakeholders, such as the local communities, the local culture and tourism offices, and researchers in the area.

- ✓ Firstly, awareness creation among the local community is an urgent issue. It is because the local communities are the nearest custodians of the sites and can protect these precious cultural heritages from further anthropogenic factors. This can be initiated by the local culture and tourism offices (either at district or zonal levels) and by requesting support from regionally or nationally based culture and tourism stakeholders, university research institutions (such as Dilla University), and other interested groups.

- ✓ Secondly, culture and tourism offices (either at zonal or regional and national levels) have to take on the activity of continuous recording as their usual task. This may help the offices or other researchers to have well-documented information about the long-term status of the megalithic sites.
- ✓ Thirdly, promotion of these sites has to be made either through public, social, or print media. In such ways, the sites can be reached by tourists who have an interest in visiting megalithic sites. A facebook page, for instance can be created by any interested group to exclusively promote such cultures of the area.
- ✓ Fourth, legal frameworks (such as well-organized culture and tourism ticket and information offices) have to be established in the sites to sustain the management and tourism development in and around the megalithic sites.
- ✓ Finally, the megalithic sites need to be recognized as national heritage so that better management can be gained from higher culture and tourism offices at regional level (Culture and Tourism Bureau of Southern Region) and national level (Ministry of Culture and Tourism)

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6. Biography

Tsegaye Ebabey has received his bachelor's degree in history from Debre Markos University and his MA degree in archaeology from Addis Ababa University. He taught in the Department of History and Heritage Management at Dilla University between 2010 and 2018, and he is currently working as an Assistant Professor of Archaeology in the Department of Anthropology at Hawassa University. He has published more than nine articles in both domestic and foreign journals in the areas related to historical archaeology and cultural heritage.