

Preliminary Report:

Conservation Concerns for the Lalibela

Rock Hewn Churches



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Executive Summary

This report details preliminary findings on the damaging nature of conservation work being conducted on the rock hewn churches of Lalibela, Ethiopia. The report examines two works, namely the EU funded shelters over five churches and the American Embassy funded conservation works on the Gabriel-Rafael church.

Firstly, this report found that the heavy weight of the shelters has been imposed on delicate structures for more than a decade without any form of prior study or follow up. Due to its heavy weight, lower capacity to resist the maximum wind pressure in the area, lack of scientific monitoring, and alarming signs such as the falling of screws, the local community and church administration are extremely worried that the shelters may collapse and destroy the churches. The original shelter design that was approved through an international bidding competition was abandoned and replaced with a new design without the consultation of local people or the clergy. During the construction of the shelters, physical damage occurred to parts of the Bete Amanuel and Bete Medhanealem churches. The purpose of the temporary shelters was to allow restoration to happen. However, no restoration work has taken place in the sheltered churches. The petition of the Lalibela church administration to various Ethiopian authorities and UNESCO has been ignored.

Secondly, this report found that while the American Embassy funded restoration project at the Gabriel-Rafael church may have produced the positive outcome of preventing water from dripping inside the church, project implementation failed to meet best practice. The local committee reports that restorers replaced materials specified in the project plan with low quality items (such as changing fluid Xb with fluid Xa), they failed to provide planned conservation items such as cleaning materials to remove past conservation efforts and stainless steel to strengthen pillars, and occasionally used unapproved chiselling and nailing to clean the walls. The main consultant of the project failed to monitor the implementation process and the scientific committee (which is headed by a representative from the Ethiopian Government Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH)), failed to conduct regular meetings as provided in the project document. Despite these and other issues, the project is labelled a success and is being replicated in the Golgotha-Selassie churches. This report does not cover the conservation project being carried out at the Golgotha-Selassie Church, which requires additional study given ongoing controversies.

The report also found that there are serious concerns about what is being prioritised for conservation. Experts report that Bete Amanuel and the roof joining the Selassie Chapel and the Mariam courtyard have a significant risk of collapse and are a “disaster in waiting”. Moreover, Bete Libanos requires emergency intervention as it is facing land sliding risks. Emergency measures should be undertaken to strengthen these structures, and local people are concerned as to why these issues have not been urgently addressed.

Overall, local people have been sidelined at every level, their concerns consistently ignored and information about conservation works withheld. The report found that there is an unprecedented lack of accountability and transparency in what is being carried out at this precious world heritage site. The responsible ARCCH is active only at the stage of project signing. Once projects are signed, implementation is left to lower level employees who rarely follow project planning. There is a significant lack of transparency about all works, and damages done to the churches have not been addressed.

Introduction

The rock hewn churches of Lalibela serve as the spiritual centre and the sole means of livelihood for many of the town's residents. Carved out of a single rock some 900 years ago, the churches embody the ingenuity of Africans and are together regarded by UNESCO as a world heritage site. This document is a short report outlining preliminary findings into the problematic nature of two conservation projects, namely the large shelters over the churches and conservation work on the Bete Gabriel-Rafael church (currently being extended to the Bete Golgotha and Selassie churches). In both cases, the conservation works did not follow best practice, and many locals, clergy members, academics and conservation experts have expressed considerable concerns about the future preservation of the churches.

The first version of this report was written in a time of urgency to address impending conservation projects and community meetings, with the aim of offering important context and previously undisclosed information about conservation work to all stakeholders. The information in the first report has been gathered from official documents and letters, conservation reports, academic reports, informal discussions with conservation experts, and consultation with the local community and church. The second and third versions incorporate major events that occurred since the first report was written on 10 February 2018. The second version incorporated additional information that was gathered since the drafting of the first report on 10 February, and included an additional executive summary and a recommendations section. This third version contains additional information on recent protests carried out by residents of Lalibela and information regarding ARCCCH's plan to raise money from the public to lift the shelters. Further versions may be forthcoming as more information becomes available. The report is designed predominantly to express the concerns of local stakeholders (community and church members) whose legitimate concerns have previously been ignored.

Firstly, it is worth mentioning that despite the churches' local and international significance, the town of Lalibela is seriously handicapped when it comes to infrastructure such as roads, internet and water. A few years ago, the World Bank opened a branch in the town with a promise of greening and developing Lalibela. It supported the displacement of local residents around the churches to create a tourist park that has not been realised, it constructed dozens of toilets that have never been operational, and constructed poorly-built roads that are still

dilapidated shortly after construction. The depopulation of the people near the churches was carried out without any consideration to the historical and cultural ties between the people and their heritage. It also increased the vulnerability of the churches to risks of vandalism and other security threats. While I was in Lalibela in January and February 2018, I could not find enough information on the Bank's project as the branch office has been closed with the "completion" of its mission. I saw not only the lack of any genuine development in the area, but I also witnessed the animosity and disappointment many locals feel towards the unfulfilled promises they received from the World Bank. For instance, local youth set one of the non-operational World Bank toilets on fire (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Burnt remnants of non-operation World Bank toilet, set on fire in January 2018.

Locals reported that there has been a systemic attempt to curtail critical voices from reaching wider international and national audiences. Shortly after my arrival in the town in early 2018, Lalibela became totally isolated from the digital world for more than 6 weeks. Internet access was terminated by the government. I witnessed local people, business-owners and foreign visitors complaining to local authorities to no avail. Access to the internet was available in other parts of the country such as Axum, Gondar, Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa. The government provided no explanation as to why the internet was unavailable in the town. Locals believed that this was done to prevent critical voices from reaching the ears of international funding bodies and interests, including the American Ambassador who came to Lalibela during this time to launch a new conservation project. This is by no means a one-off occurrence, and local people feel ignored and disappointed by the lack of any explanation or action.

This feeling of disappointment extends to the way many local people feel about the conservation works on the churches themselves. The conservation works were undertaken by the European Union (EU) and the American Embassy as funding bodies with the Ethiopian government as a beneficiary. I have no doubt about the good intention of the funding bodies to conserve the churches. However, there are serious questions in relation to the actual commitment of the government body and other persons who took part in the implementation of the projects, especially in relation to the EU funded shelters, which has drawn nationwide public concern in Ethiopia. On 7 October 2018, thousands of people in Lalibela held a protest to demand that the government (namely the ARCCH), UNESCO and the EU act to prevent the damage the projects they supported pose to the Lalibela churches. Given the national significance of these churches, there is ongoing community outcry on social media demanding prompt action be taken by concerned bodies.



Figure 2: Photos of the 7 Oct 2018 Protest. Thousands of people gathered, carrying signs such as "Shame on UNESCO". In the photo of the young woman holding a placard in Amharic, her sign reads "The Lalibela Churches are exposed to danger because of the ARCCH". Photos taken from social media or provided to me by local people.

I travelled and visited the EU funded project and the American Embassy funded projects repeatedly in early 2018 after being alerted to serious local concerns. I spoke to the local

government and church administration bodies, the priests who serve at the churches, and local residents who witnessed what has been happening as a result of the intervention of several actors into the natural life of the rock out of which the churches were carved. Since returning to Australia, I have been continually contacted by local people about their ongoing concerns. The Lalibela churches are 900 years old, but almost everyone I met agree that the churches have been devastated in the last 60 years due to arbitrary and careless restoration measures. They believe that more damage has been done to the churches in the last 60 years than anything that has happened to them in their almost millennia long existence before then. It is ironic that these churches have become vulnerable and devastated by careless interventionist projects since inscribed as a world heritage site by UNESCO in 1978.

Before modern restoration methods started in mid-20th century, local people participated in conserving their churches using traditional means. Elders would mix plant and animal remains with clay to plaster leaking roofs. They applied animal urine to kill algae and the roots of invasive vegetation that grew on the rocks. Local masons rebuilt damaged parts by mixing clay soil and straw over a period of several months. Local residents would flush out water accumulated on the surface to prevent it from reaching the rock bed. The churches were maintained with minimal intervention and the avoidance of materials foreign to the nature of the rock (Ayalew, 2016).

Modern restoration methods introduced foreign objects to the churches. The most intrusive method was applied in 1954 when some of the walls of the churches were nailed to accept cement and red paint. On Bete Amanuel and Bete Medhanialew churches, the restorers applied a bituminous layer and red ochre ink. The paint smelt profusely and the bituminous layer started to swell and fall off the wall, so a new technique was called for. Under a massive restoration project led by the Italian architect Angelini, the paint and cement were scrapped and the nails forcefully pulled out. This process left massive fractures and cracks especially on the Bete Amanuel and Bete Medhanialew churches (Ayalew, 2016). Some people call Bete Amanuel the most tortured of all the churches, with the insertion and removal of the nails leaving the church severely pockmarked and cracked (see Figure 3 and 4).



Figure 3: Bete Amanuel, the tortured church. The holes in the surface were caused by the insertion and removal of nails.



Figure 4: Close up of pockmarks on Bete Amanuel caused by nails.

Angelini's restoration project was extremely intrusive and damaging. Alongside the significant damage to Bete Amanuel and Bete Medhanialem, the two crosses that stood on top of the roof of the Bete Mariam church were completely destroyed (Ayalew, 2016) (See

Figure 5). I have been informed by local residents that no one has been held accountable for these damages.



Figure 5: Bete Mariam church with the original crosses on the top. The church today, with the crosses missing, can be seen on the front cover of this report.

Later, several European countries supported various restoration projects that left scars on the body of the churches. The most common feature of all conservation processes is the complete disregard of the relevance of the experience of local people. Restorers simply walled off the churches from the faithful and did their work once they got approval from the government, offering little information about what was being done. When they finished, they left the churches in a state of vulnerability that required further intervention and conservation work. They also left little information, project documents or plans to explain what had been done to the churches, making it difficult to check if conservation projects had been followed according to best practice or if there had been any damage in the process (and how such damage had been addressed).

The EU funded shelters have become part of this legacy, where promises were made but not fulfilled. The American Embassy funded restoration project is still underway and is marred with various signs of inefficiency, lack of transparency and inconsistency. The funding bodies, as well as the Ethiopian government, are responsible in ensuring that public resources are used effectively to preserve these churches, and that dangerous and untested restoration

measures are avoided at all cost. While the matter deserves a deeper study in the future, this report details some of the points that are concerning to the local people.

The EU Funded Shelters

Shelters were erected over five of the Lalibela churches in 2008. Funded by the EU, the shelters were justified by the need to create “temporary protection of the churches from weathering, while conservation studies are undertaken and conservation activities implemented” (UNESCO, 2007b, p. 3). While preparing this report, I could not find detailed information on the European Commission websites about the outcome of their funding of the Lalibela shelters. A link posted on 27 August 2010 titled “Preservation-Conservation of Lalibela Churches” provides no detailed information about the project (European Commission, 2010). Other sources indicate that the original architectural design of the shelters were open for competition in 1999 and a selection panel chose a suitable design in 2000 (Ayalew, 2016). UNESCO claims that in 2007, “the World Heritage Centre, in collaboration with the Ethiopian Government and the European Commission, had succeeded in changing the design of the shelters, making them both smaller and reversible” (UNESCO, 2007a).

The original project design required that the shelters’ foundations should be moved away from the tuff bedrock and from locations that were close to the cliff or that presented land sliding risks. It also dictated that construction materials should be light, and heavy machinery that produce vibrations should be reduced (UNESCO, 2007b, p.3) (see Figure 6 and 7).

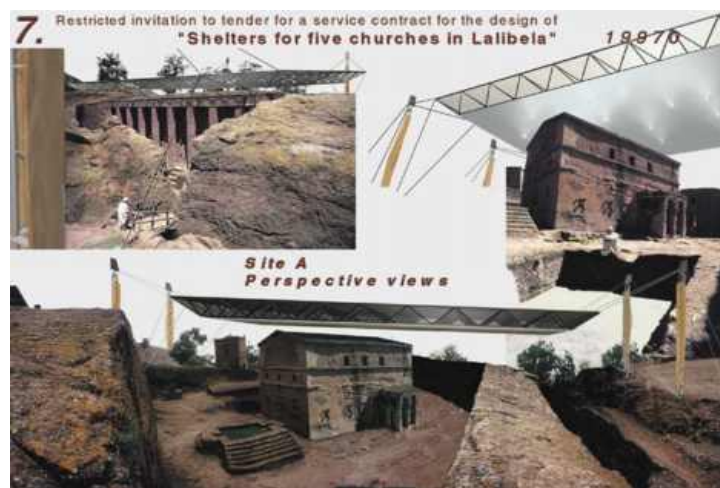


Figure 6: The original shelter design over Bete Mariam, Bete Meskel and Bete Medhanialem (UNESCO, 2007b, p. 49).

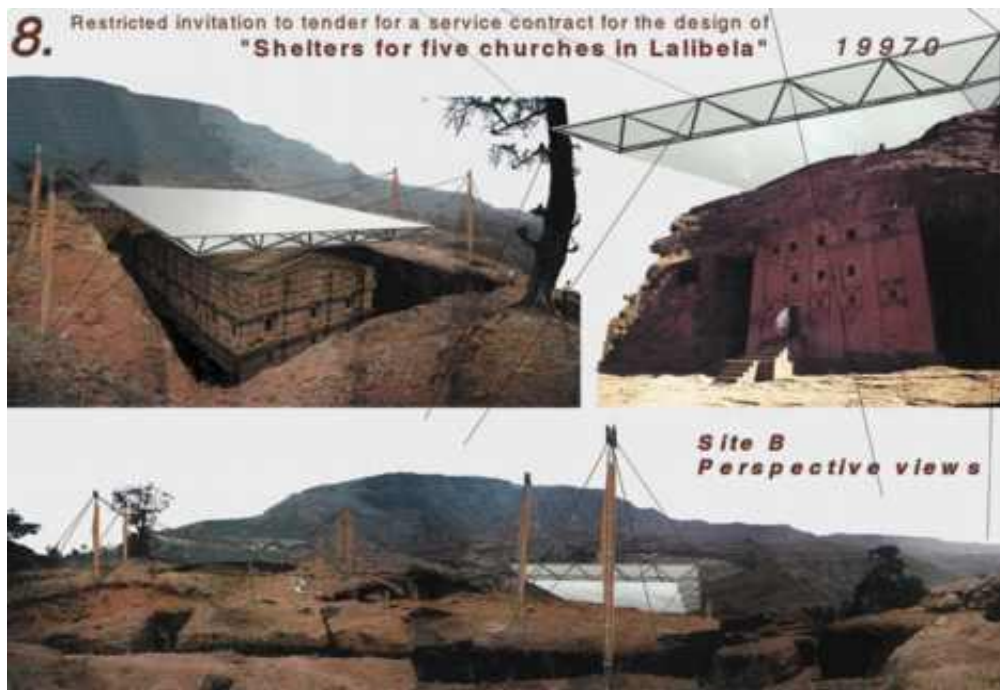


Figure 7: Original shelter design over Bete Amanuel and Bete Aba Libanos (UNESCO, 2007b, p. 49).

Later, for reasons that are unknown to the local people, the design was replaced with a heavy shelter that stands on the body of the rock from where the churches were carved. The following are some of the dangers the EU funded shelters pose to the churches:

1. The weight of the shelter on the rock structure. One of the dangers posed by the shelter has to do with the impact of its heavy weight on the foundations and roofs of the churches. The heavy weight of the metal structure has been imposed on top of the roofs of very old churches. For instance:
 - At least one of the feet of the heavy metal foundations that carry the shelter over Bete Mariam church stands directly on top of the roof of the Selassie chapel (see Figure 8). One conservation expert I spoke to argued that the foundation was one metre to the side of the roof, though others have stated that it is directly on top of the roof. Neither can be confirmed without access to the shelter plans, which have not been provided to the church administration or local community. However, its close proximity to the roof of the Selassie chapel is clear from its placement within the Mariam courtyard. This is extremely concerning given a scientific report by Associate Professor Esayas G. Yohannes (Executive Director AAU-AAiT, V/President for AAU) that states that the thin layer between the Selassie

Chapel and the Bete Mariam Church is a “disaster in waiting”. The community fears that the heavy foot of the shelter may make its way down to the Selassie chapel, causing the destruction of both the Selassie and the Mariam churches.

- At Bete Amanuel church, one of the feet of the shelters rests directly on the roof of an underground tunnel and this poses a similar threat.
- The shelter over Bete Libanos poses a similar challenge. The two heavy feet that carry the shelter stand very close to the top of the church itself (see Figure 9). Even before the shelters were made, Bete Libanos was identified by UNESCO as having a high land sliding risk and requiring emergency conservation measures (UNESCO, 2007b, p. 22). Given the churches are made from a single rock structure, there are fears that any pressure to any part of the rock would have a serious impact on the entire structure.



Figure 8: Shelter foundation in Mariam courtyard standing on top of Selassie church below.



Figure 9: The two metal foundations standing near the top of Bete Libanos.

2. The shelters have been left for too long without any kind of follow up. Although experts promised to pay regularly visits to inspect the shelters, local priests and officials say that no such visit has been carried out. No scientific study has been conducted to understand the short and long term impacts of the imposition of these structures over the churches.
3. The local community was not consulted at any phase of the planning, implementation or evaluation of the shelter project. The design competition “only allowed European companies to submit designs for consideration”, of the jury of 11 who voted on the design only 5 were Ethiopian (and none were from Lalibela), and the contractor who built the shelters only employed labourers from outside Lalibela who, according to locals, were so careless with their work that they caused damage to the churches (McClure, 2007, pp. 16-17).
4. The local community also was not consulted about the revised shelter project. It is not clear why the original design that was approved by the parties was later changed. At the local government and church administrative levels, there is not a single document that explains the design, process and outcome of the EU funded project. Priests who attempted to interfere with the construction of the shelters told me they were

intimidated with warnings that they would have to pay for the wages of workers that became idle as a result of their protest.

5. During the construction of the shelters, damages occurred to the churches. Local residents report that damages occurred when the previous shelters were removed in order to install the EU shelters. Others have told me that further damage occurred during construction. For example, during the construction of the shelter at Bete Amanuel, an accidental falling of construction materials cut two monkey-head style protruding beams from two windows on the north facing side of the church (see Figure 10). Another falling of construction material caused a crack on the Bete Medhanialem church. Moreover, there are local reports of hidden or unreported damages caused during the construction process. No attempt was made to assess known or unknown damages or hold the actors accountable for the damages they caused to the churches.



Figure 10: Monkey-head style protruding beams on Bete Amanuel. Severed beams (circled) were broken during the shelter construction.

6. There are serious concerns regarding the quality and strength of the shelters to resist wind. Locals complain that the gap among the metal bars that carry the roofs of the shelters has widened significantly over the years and screws have fallen from the joints in the supporting structures. The upper joints of the pylons are showing signs of opening between individual tube parts. Others complain that the shelters were wrongly made to resist wind pressure much lower than the maximum wind pressure value in the area. I confirmed this in a meeting on 17 February 2018 with Associate Professor Esayas G. Yohannes, who stated that the current shelters do not have the capacity to resist local wind pressure. One of the church deacons and a member of the local committee also believe that the shelters were made from a flammable material, making fire a new threat to the churches.

7. In the words of the Chief Architect Claudio Baldisserri, the shelters were originally built to “protect the churches from sun and rain and permit restoration that could absolutely not be postponed” (Teprin Associati, 2010 [2003 et.c], p. 5). He further stressed that “immediate restoration work must be given paramount priority and should no longer be postponed” (Teprin Associati, 2010 [2003 et.c], p.5). Once restoration was complete, the shelters would have been removed, leaving the churches with renewed strength and beauty. However, a decade has passed and not a single restoration work has been conducted on the five churches that are covered.

8. The construction of the shelters has altered the natural exposure of the rocks to rain and sunlight. There is a marked difference in appearance between the part of the rock that is protected by the shelters and the rest that is not. Despite its stated intentions, this has significantly increased the fragility of the churches to resist rain and sunlight in the future. In a visit to the churches on 3 February 2018, Simon Warrack (Cultural Heritage Conservator) said to Deacon Abey Chanie and Dr Rebecca Higgie that he did not believe the shelters should have been put up in the first place. He stated that the rock that makes up the churches is rich in clay, which expands when wet and retracts when dry. According to Mr Warrack, the shelters have kept rain off the churches which could cause the rock to become overly dry, making the clay in the rock shrink and potentially crack.

9. The EU funded shelters have introduced a vicious cycle of dependency on foreign experts. Clearly, it is beyond the capacity of the local people to sustain or remove such protection measures. According to Ethiopian Minister of Culture and Tourism Dr Hirut Woldemariam, the removal of the shelters will cost about 20 Million USD (Amhara Mass Media Agency, 2017). This is a significantly higher amount of money than the cost of constructing them, which was 5.52 Million Euros (archilovers, 2008).

Given these concerns, there is a strong anxiety among many people in Lalibela that the EU funded shelters have endangered the very existence of the churches themselves. It was promised that the shelters, under regular monitoring, would provide temporary protection while other conservation measures were taking place. Minister Hirut Woldemariam has stated that the shelters were originally made to serve for five years. However, as stated, ten years have passed since the shelters were constructed and no additional conservation measures have been undertaken (except on Bete Gabriel-Rafael, which is not under a shelter), no monitoring of the shelters has occurred, and it is feared that the shelters may have caused structural damage or increased the churches' vulnerability to deterioration and damage in the near future. The local church administration office has written to several authorities including the Ethiopian Prime Minister, UNESCO, the World Monument Fund, the Ethiopian Authority for the Protection of Heritage, the Amhara Region Chairperson and many other bodies, notifying them of the looming danger. I have attached some of these complaint letters with this short report for reference (see Appendix 2).

Although there now seems to be local consensus on the importance of removing the shelters, in my meeting with Associate Professor Esayas G. Yohannes, he stated that he believed they should remain, and indeed, that their weight should be increased in order to withstand the local wind pressure. This is deeply concerning to local people, who have witnessed screws falling from the shelters and metal beams widen over the years. It is also deeply troubling given that one of the feet of the shelters stands directly on top of or near an area that he himself has stated is in danger of collapse. It is important to consider the potential damage the current shelters (and heavier shelters) could cause if the Selassie roof was to collapse.

In my research and consultation on the shelters, it has become clear that there is little awareness of what impact the shelters have had on the churches themselves and what will happen if they remain or if they are removed. It is extremely important to understand the full

impact of the shelters on the future wellbeing of the churches before further interventions are carried out. As has occurred in the past, restoration interventions without independent scientific investigation may cause further damage to the churches. Answers should be provided as to why restoration works have not been forthcoming, given the shelters were only built in order to facilitate restoration, and assurances must be given that such work will now take place. Community concerns about the shelters change in design, damage that occurred to the churches during their construction, and many subsequent issues (including the falling of screws) must sincerely be addressed. Decision makers who failed in their previous responsibilities of monitoring the shelters and other conservation works should be identified so that they do not make further decisions in relation to the churches. There should also be an independent investigation into the pressure the shelters exert on the rock (especially sensitive areas) and the potential for cracking due to the drying of the clay-rich rock. Before the shelters are removed, the process of exposing the clay-rich rock after a decade of not having any rain on them needs to be investigated immediately. Any protection that may be installed over the churches should fulfil the international standard of ensuring that it is of low weight, sustainable and reversible, and all decision making must be transparent and in consultation for local people. It is extremely important that a serious investigation take place and a clear plan developed with input from the local community.

Many local residents believe that the ARCCCH is responsible for the damage caused to the churches due to dangerous conservation methods. No archival documentation is available regarding conservation history and management of Lalibela at the site. The failure of the ARCCCH to monitor the shelters after installation is regarded as a major contributing factor for the lack of further conservation efforts to take place, which was the main purpose of the temporary shelters. It is therefore important to have a new joint initiative that allows local people, community groups and regional administrative bodies to have an integrated and organised involvement in future conservation efforts.

Conservation Work on the Bete Gabriel-Rafael, Bete Golgotha and Selassie Churches

The American Embassy funded a restoration project on the Bete Gabriel-Rafael church, which is currently being extended to the Bete Golgotha and Selassie churches (often known as the Mikael churches). The implementation of the project on Bete Gabriel-Rafael had significant flaws to which the church administration complained several times to no avail.

During the restoration project, a local committee was created to monitor the project. Although the full project document was not provided to them, members of the committee actively followed up the implementation process based on the weekly plan of action that was given to them. In carrying out their duties, they identified several flaws in the implementation process.

In discussion with local committee members and the head of the church, I helped draft a letter to the Ethiopian Government Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH) to detail the community and church administration's concerns. Some of the concerns are were as followed:

1. The implementation process of the project lacked consistency with the project plan. Some of these problems include:
 - The use of inappropriate, unplanned or unapproved materials in conservation work. Though the local committee was not supplied with the full project plan, they were given weekly work plans that detailed which materials should have been used. For instance, in the Bete Gabriel-Rafael church, Fluid Xa was used when the plan indicated that Fluid Xb should be used. Conservation work started without having required materials. For instance, cleaning materials to remove past conservation efforts and stainless steel to strengthen pillars, as specified in the plans, were not provided at all. The local committee informed me that restorers occasionally used chiselling and nailing to clean the churches, which was not approved or outlined in the weekly plans.
 - Introducing new, unplanned conservation methodologies without the approval of the scientific committee. Although the project dictated the use of certified chemicals only, and other materials to be imported from overseas, sometimes the workers used local materials without proper verification.
 - The main contractor subcontracted the implementation of the project to an Ethiopian company called MH Engineering and members of the local committee were unable to verify the qualification or expertise of the workers that took part in the implementation process.
 - The failure of the project's main consultant to attend the site of conservation work for the entire life span of the project. As specified in the work plans provided, the

main consultant should have attended the site approximately 14 times. He only visited the site once.

- Lack of commitment from the scientific committee, who did not perform their stated duties to monitor work at the site and resolve issues between the local community and the contractor. The scientific committee did not meet or conduct its duties as specified in the scheduled plans, and attempts to deal with problems were only ever made at a distance and with little effort. Local members (the Lalibela Mayor and the Head of the Church) on the scientific committee were not given the opportunity to participate in the meetings. The local committee also believes that the scientific committee should be an independent body constituting conservation experts and members of the local community. A government official from ARCCH should not chair the scientific committee.
2. As stated, the full project plan of the conservation work on Bete Gabriel-Rafael was never provided to the local committee. The local committee has stressed a need to have a copy of the full project document for the Bete Golgotha and Selassie churches in order to follow and monitor the project. Ideally, these should be provided in both Amharic and English.
 3. There is a strong need to ensure that the local committee is given the chance to fully participate and provide input into the conservation process. All changes to the project should be made in sincere consultation with the local committee and church administration. It should be supported by an independent scientific committee.
 4. The project plan must feature a provision for accountability, should any damage be done to the churches during conservation work. No one has ever been made accountable for the significant damage that has been done to the churches in past restoration projects. Provisions must be made to ensure that any damage caused is addressed.
 5. Finally, conservation efforts must urgently address the concerns regarding the thin roof joining the Selassie Chapel and the Mariam courtyard, which Associate Professor Esayas G. Yohannes specified as in “great danger of collapse” and a “disaster in waiting” in his report to ARCCH (Ref A1714_SAR). He also recommended that this

issue “should be addressed before any intervention starts in the Gologotha-Mikael churches”.

Without fully addressing the flaws identified by the local committee, the Bete Gabriel-Rafael project is celebrated as a “development success” and a ceremony was organised to launch the replication of this project in the Bete Golgotha and Selassie churches through more funding from the American Embassy.

On 3 February 2018, the Ethiopian Minister of Culture and Tourism Dr Hirut Woldemariam, the USA Ambassador to Ethiopia Mr Michael Raynor, Director of the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Ato Yonas Desta, World Monument Fund Program Director (Sub-Saharan Africa) Stephen Battle, among others, arrived in Lalibela to inaugurate the launch of the Bete Golgotha and Selassie Project. Members of the public, priests, the Head of the Lalibela churches Aba Yared Misganaw and the Mayor Mr Melkamu Mamo also attended the ceremony.

It was hoped that some of the issues encountered during the Gabriel-Rafael restoration project would be discussed. My wife, Dr Rebecca Higginson, and I worked with the church administration and members of the local committee to translate their grievances from Amharic to English so that the American Ambassador could listen to them. We translated the speech of the Head of the Lalibela churches and a letter to be given to the attendants, especially the US Ambassador. The letter and the speech stated conditions that are necessary to build trust and transparency. Parts of the letter are stated above, but the letter in full can also be seen in Appendix 4.

A day before the event, individuals from Addis Ababa arrived to help organise the event and we learned that the Head of the Church was to make only a 3 minute welcome note and no discussions was allowed to happen. I sensed the disappointment of the Head of the Church when he started his welcome without first offering the usual *besme'ab wowold womenfes kidus* blessing. His and the Mayor's speeches were shorter than the guests' speeches. At the end of the ceremony, I raised my voice and asked if the Minister and the Ambassador would be willing to listen to the concerns of the local people. The request was denied and the ceremony concluded without giving the local residents a chance to express their views. This is another example of how local concerns are sidelined. Nevertheless, I still spoke briefly to

the Ambassador and the conservation expert Simon Warrack who was in attendance and happened to discuss his concerns about the shelters with Deacon Abey Chanie and Dr Rebecca Higgin (as highlighted above in the section regarding the shelters). None of the concerns expressed by myself, the church, the community or the local committee have yet to be addressed.

Alongside this lack of transparency, there is a significant concern that emergency conservation work in other parts of the church complex is being ignored. According to the World Heritage Committee Mission Report 2007, the following are classed as “emergency conservation activities”:

- “The structural consolidation of Biet Amanuel church (that present a risk of collapse) and the installation of an appropriate monitoring system
- The evaluation of land sliding risks in Biet Aba Libanos and the appropriate monitoring and consolidation measures
- The evaluation of structural failure at Biet Mercurios and the appropriate monitoring and consolidation measures
- The repair of existing cracks that expose the churches to water infiltration and/or the mural paintings to direct damage
- Emergency consolidation of mural paintings and sculpted elements
- Repair of the existing modern or traditional drainage system” (UNESCO, 2007b, pp. 22-23).

To date, only one of these emergency concerns has been partially addressed, namely the repairing of existing cracks that expose the churches to water, and only in the Bete Gabriel-Rafael church. Given that conservation experts have stressed that Bete Amanuel and the roof joining the Selassie Chapel and the Mariam courtyard are at a significant risk of collapse, it is unclear to the local community and church members why these issues are not being addressed immediately.

Unanswered Questions on Funding Discrepancies

In addition to the lack of answers as to why projects were not implemented properly, there has been no transparency regarding financial matters. As discussed, none of the conservation

projects were carried out as per the original project plans. In the EU funded project, the design for the construction of the shelters was changed without any explanation to local people. No subsequent monitoring or maintenance were carried out to check if the shelters were still in proper working order. In a 2001 Annual Report on its development policy, the EU stated a commitment of 9.10 million Euro for “Preservation and conservation of the Lalibela churches” (European Commission, 2002, p. 113). It is not clear if this amount was spent on Lalibela or not. As stated previously, other sources indicate that the cost of constructing the shelters was 5.52 million Euros (archilovers, 2008). On 27 August 2010, the EU announced on its website that it “supports cultural heritage preservation and tourism development in Ehtiopia [sic]”, and in Lalibela, “the EU-funded project aims to prevent the site from erosion and to develop touristic infrastructures surrounding the sites” (European Commission, 2010). Given, the primary shelters have nothing to do with preventing erosion, the EU’s information adds to the lack of transparency regarding its role in addressing issues related to the shelter project. Clearly, Lalibela churches are in a worst state now than they were before the EU funding started.

In August 2018, the ARCCH Director announced that the shelters pose an imminent threat to the churches and it needs 300 million Ethiopian Birr to remove the shelters (Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, 2018). No detailed project plan has been submitted and it is not clear what is planned once the shelters are removed. It is not clear how ARCCH reached at this figure, given its proposed budget to remove the shelters last year was 20 Million US dollars (over 560 million Birr), as explained earlier. Many Ethiopians, concerned for the churches and unaware of the ARCCH’s lack of transparency with previous conservation projects, wish to donate their own money to help raise the 300 million Birr, but there has been no transparency about the figure or how such money would be managed. Others continue to be concerned with the ARCCH’s approach to heritage preservation and demand that the Ethiopian government and UNESCO take responsibility to address the threats. As stated in Article 6 of the World Heritage Convention, while it is a state responsibility to care for heritage sites, such heritage “constitutes a world heritage for whose protection it is the duty of the international community as a whole to co-operate” (UNESCO, 1972). UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee may also consider inviting local organisations or individuals from Lalibela to participate in consultative meetings as per Article 10 (2) of the Convention. This would allow sidelined communities to have a sense of agency on decisions relating to their heritage.

In the American Embassy funded project, itemised materials to be imported from overseas were replaced with cheaper local materials. The main contractor and the scientific committee did not attend the project site as per the plan. Moreover, the project was sub-contracted to a local company called MH Engineering that employed persons who could not prove their experience or qualifications. These discrepancies may have been done to cut corners with respect to funding. The funding bodies and the government should disclose financial statements and show how funds to the restoration project have been spent. All project documents need to be translated in local languages and explained to local stakeholders.

Recommendations

This report makes the following recommendations:

1. An in-depth, independent investigation is conducted to address local concerns about the shelters, consulting multiple experts and local people.
2. The EU, UNESCO, and the Ethiopian Government provide local people with answers as to why the shelter design changed, why no restoration projects have occurred on the sheltered churches, and address all other concerns about the shelters as detailed in this report and the letters in Appendix 1 and 2. They should hold persons who exposed the churches to harmful restoration measures accountable so that such persons do not continue to make further decisions in relation to the churches.
3. An independent body representing the voices and concerns of local people affected by the EU-funded shelters should be created and consulted in future decisions involving the removal of the shelters and future conservation efforts. This will pressure the ARCCCH to respond to the requests of the standards set by the World Heritage Committee and local religious community.
4. As detailed in this report, the rock-hewn churches must be relieved from the heavy weight of the shelters as quickly as possible. Based on independent scientific investigation, measures should be taken to address the impact of the covering of the five churches by the shelters and the possible effect of exposing them after a decade-long covering from rain and sunlight.
5. Current conservation works on the Bete Golgotha and Selassie churches should not continue until a full investigation of the problems with the Bete Gabriel-Rafael work is conducted, with the aim of ensuring that similar problems are not replicated.
6. The scientific committee overseeing conservation works should be an independent body consisting of experts and local community members. It should not be chaired by a government official from ARCCCH as was the case in the Gabriel-Rafael church.

7. Bete Amanuel, the roof joining the Selassie Chapel and the Mariam courtyard, and all other areas of the church complex identified as needing emergency restoration should be addressed before future conservation works take place.
8. Accountability mechanisms must be put in place in all current and future conservation plans to ensure that any damage done to the churches during conservation projects is rectified.
9. All conservation plans, current and future, are provided in full to the Lalibela local committee, the Lalibela church administration and other local stakeholders, in both English and Amharic.

Conclusion

This short report details some of the concerns with the EU funded shelters and the American Embassy funded conservation work on Bete Gabriel-Rafael (and current work on to the Bete Golgotha and Selassie churches). It has shown that at various stages, conservation work has caused damage to the churches or has not been implemented according to best practice. It has also detailed many concerns from the local community, and shown how these important concerns have been ignored.

There is a clear discrepancy between project planning and implementation. It is important that funding bodies put in place strong monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that involve the free and open participation of local people. Political and financial motivations may hasten the destruction of the churches rather than saving them. The impact of the EU funded shelters is still unknown and there has been little study or consideration about the impact of past restoration projects before moving onto the next. Except in the American funded conservation work, where a local committee was created to participate in monitoring the project, local people are always denied the opportunity to decide and participate in the conservation of their churches and heritage. Even in this case, the local committee was given little agency to impact what was happening with the project. European companies who won restoration projects often subcontracted their work to local ones who did not follow best practice. As observed in the Gabriel-Rafael project, the scientific committee failed to perform their duties.

In relation to the shelters, local residents and the clergy in Lalibela demand answers from the European Union, the Ethiopian government and UNESCO as to why the original shelter design was changed, why local residents were not consulted with the change of the design, and why the shelters were constructed in the first place if further restoration measures were not going to take place. They want to know why experts failed to monitor and follow-up the shelters since their construction in 2008 and who is responsible for the damage caused to the churches.

In relation to the Gabriel-Rafael conservation work, it was extremely important that the local committee and members of the public in Lalibela evaluate the administration of the project before the Golgotha-Selassie restoration project was undertaken. This has not occurred, and

work on the Golgotha-Selassie is currently underway. The quality of the work in the Gabriel-Selassie church needs to be verified by independent experts before it is replicated in the other churches, and local people are concerned that this current project will suffer the same inadequacies as the last. Furthermore, they believe that the scientific committee should not be chaired by the ARCCH.

There are also serious concerns about what is being prioritised for conservation. Since Bete Amanuel and the roof joining the Selassie Chapel and the Mariam courtyard are at a significant risk of collapse, an emergency measure should be undertaken to strengthen these structures. Moreover, Bete Libanos requires emergency intervention as it is facing land sliding risks.

Finally, it is extremely disturbing to realise that the ARCCH, which is entrusted to oversee the welfare of the churches, failed to carry out its important tasks. For example, in an official report sent to UNESCO on 28 January 2014, the ARCCH reported that experts were carrying out regular monitoring of the shelters despite the fact that they had received several letters from the church administration (some are attached in this report) that show the absence of any kind of monitoring for more than 8 years (ARCCH, 2014, pp. 7-8). The Ethiopian government, in collaboration with funding bodies, should create transparent and accountable mechanisms for the implementation of any project that may occur at this world heritage site.

The Ethiopian “Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Proclamation No. 209 /2000” does not provide detailed procedures for the role of local communities in the conservation and restoration of their heritage. The proclamation establishes ARCCH with wide-ranging powers such as registering, supervising, protecting, studying and discovering cultural heritage and ensuring that heritage provides socio-economic benefits. The Authority is “established as a government institution with a juridical personality” (Art 1) and its duties and responsibilities rest in the sole power of a General Manager who is appointed by the government upon the recommendation of the Minister for Information and Culture, currently Culture and Tourism (Negarit Gazeta, 2000). Given the gross failure of the ARCCH in relation to conservation projects in Lalibela, it is worth considering the creation of a mechanism by which the broad power of the ARCCH is checked through shared responsibilities with local and regional bodies, and the participation of local people.

As stated in the introduction, this is a preliminary report to address impending conservation projects and community meetings. It was written in consultation with local people, to give them a voice they have previously been denied. Future reports will be forthcoming and of a more detailed nature. This report is, nevertheless, the result of rigorous research and consultation, and should be used to encourage further investigation into the conservation work being conducted on the churches of Lalibela.

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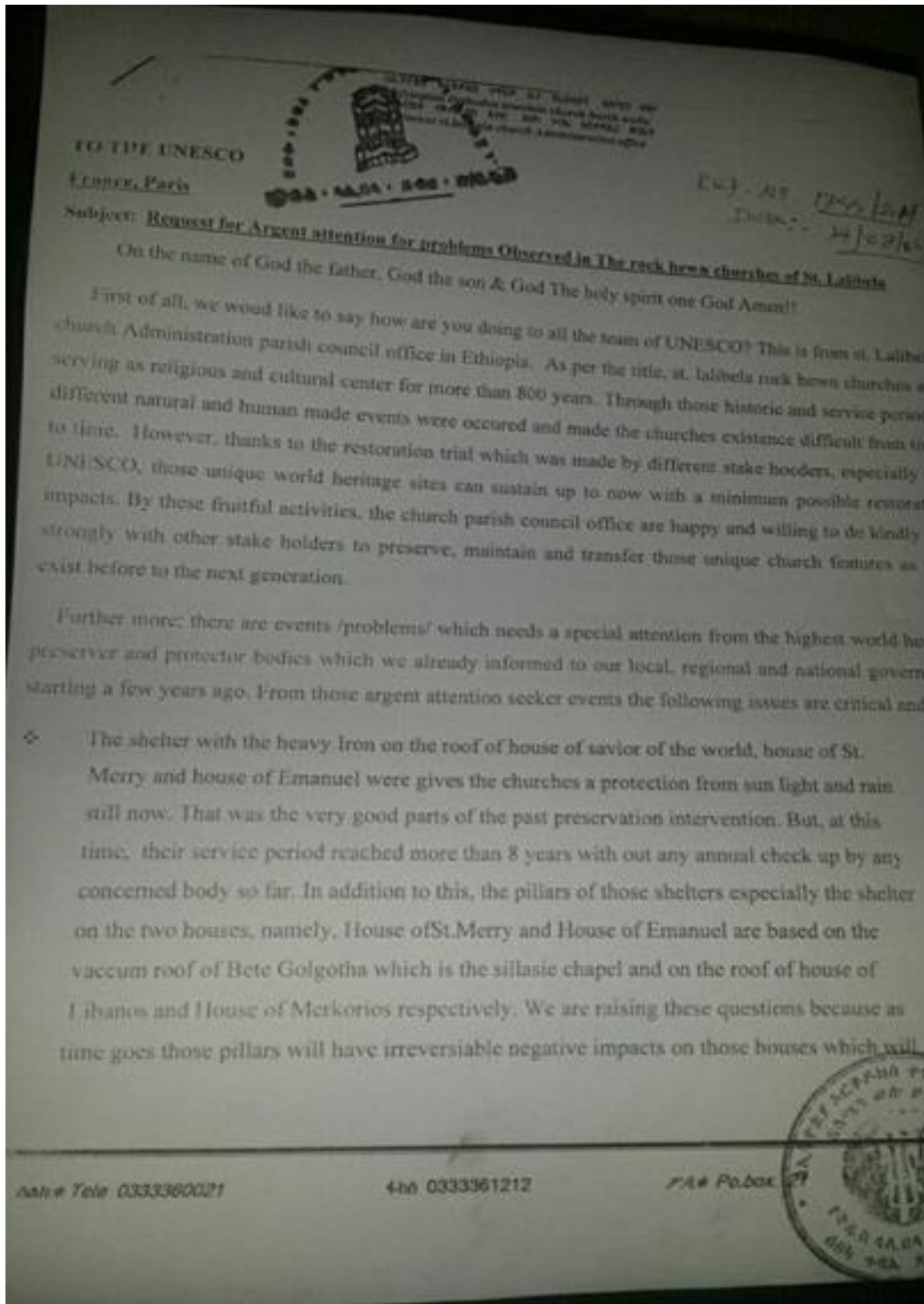
Note: This reference list is limited, and does not include interviews and consultations with conservation experts, priests, church administrators, town administrators and local residents. For more information, please contact the author.

Appendices

1. Letter from the Lalibela church to UNESCO stating several issues with the EU funded shelters, including the absence of regular check-ups in the past eight years. The letter states the dangerous impact of the weight of the Bete Mariam shelter's foundations on the roof of Selassie chapel, and the impact of the Bete Amanuel shelter's foundations on the underground tunnel, and on Bete Libanos and Bete Merkorious.
2. Compilation letters from the Lalibela church to various authorities. Includes:
 - Letter from the Lalibela Church to the Ethiopian Authority for Heritage Research and Protection stating the grave danger the EU funded shelters have posed to the churches due to the revised design that allowed the foundations of the shelters to be imposed inside the compound. The letter states that for the last seven years the shelters were not checked by experts, the areas where the foundations stand are breaking, the plastic roof of the shelters are breaking and leaking when it rains, and the foundations of the shelters on Bete Amanuel and Bete Mariam stand on delicate places that could submerge and destroy the churches if a strong wind or earthquake occurs. It also quotes previous letters that stated similar concerns. The letter has been copied to the Amhara Region and North Wollo Zone administrative offices.
 - Letter written to the President of the Amhara Region, Bahir Dar, states issues with the Gabriel-Rafael church project and the grave concern posed by the shelters due to the falling of screws from the roofs and the imposition of the shelters' foundations on the roofs of other churches.
 - Other letters, some difficult to read, details similar concerns.
3. Two minutes of the local committee expressing several concerns in relation to the American Embassy funded project on the Gabriel Rafael church. Concerns are listed in English in the report.
4. Draft letter in English from the Lalibela Church to the Ethiopian Authority of Research for Culture and Heritage Conservation. This was a translation and edit my wife and I prepared on behalf of the church. It was hoped that discussions would take place and the concerns stated in the letter would be submitted to the Minister of

Culture and Tourism, the American Ambassador and other bodies before the launch of the Golgota-Selassie project. However, the discussion did not happen and the letter was not used.

Appendix 1: Letter from the Lalibela Church to UNESCO



አዲስ አበባ ጥቅም ላይ የዋለው የሥነ ምግባር ምርምር ማዕከል
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...der derive unnecessary impacts on the beneficiary churches from the shelters.
Because of long years service and existence of the churches, the magnitude of demolition of church
parts are sever on house of Emanuel, house of St. George and house of savior of the world. But, past
restoration intervention did not consider the magnitude of the problem in each church to give priority
for the acute problems. For example, the up coming restoration trial for the house of Golgotha by the
embassy of the United states of America in Ethiopia is not that much proper in prioritizing when we
consider the critical problems which are exist on house of Emanuel and house of St. George.

- ◆ The core and the Buffer area, which was taken away from the dwellers, are still vacant and none
developed infrastructurally as the the heritage site needed. Rather, it becomes a waste dumping site
for people nearer to the vacant area. We are still struggling to protect the area by giving education
when there was preaching in the church as well as through hiring guards but still it is not sufficient as
it should become clean and net as the heritage site part. The people who were evacuated and relocate
from their predecessor area are disappointed and asked us for what they resettle and relocate from
their eriminal place. So, it shall be developed infrastructurally to make it better and attractive for
tourists as well as to give answer for the people who asked us.
- ◆ Most of the church treasury is in our small Museum but it is under the expected standard since we do
not have any capacity to make it as the expected standard. So, to make it standardized and better, we
need your rentless assistance more than previous time.

Therefore, as a nearest keeper of those wonderful heritage sites, we strongly and kindly asking
your esteemed organization to remove those problem posing shelters, give timely and proper
conservation intervention for the house of churches which are nearly on the verge of demolition
before history accuse us and to make the vacant area to be developed as the heritage site needed.

CC:

◆ To world Monument Fund
Washington DC, USA.



"May God bless the entire world!"
[Signature]
[Title]
Heritage Administration of Oromia
P.O. Box 4, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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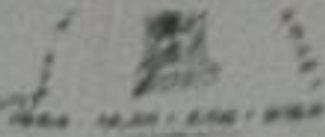
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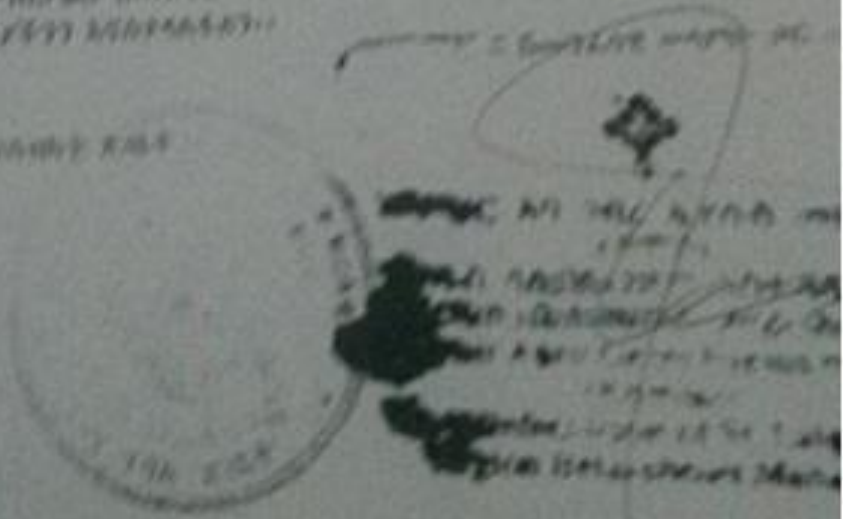
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Appendix 3: Minutes of Local Committee for the Gabriel-Rafael (USA funded) project

የሰብሰባ ቀን፡- 20/09/07 ዓ.ም

የሰብሰባ ቦታ፡- ቤተ ገብርኤል-ፋፋኤል ቤተ መቅደስ

የሰብሰባ ሰዓት፡- 8:00

ተሰብሳቢዎች ፡-

- 1 አቶ ታደሰ በየነ -----ከላሊ/ባ/ቱ/ጽ/ቤት ሰብሳቢ
- 2 ዲ/ን መኩንን ገ/መስቀል አማኝ -----ከቅ/ላሊ/ደ/ጽ/ቤት ፀሐፊ
- 3 አቶ ስለሺ ዳርጌ -----ከከተማ አገልግሎት አባል
- 4 አቶ ሞገስ ተፈራ -----ከላሊበላ ባ/ቱ/ሪዝም ጽ/ቤት አባል
- 5 ኢንሰፐክተር አወቀ ፈንታው -----ከላሊበላ ከተማ አስ/ፖ/ጽ/ቤት »
- 6 ቀኝ ጌታ በላይ አናወጥ -----ከቅ/ላሊበላ ደብር ጽ/ቤት »
- 7 መ/ታ የማኅበር ግንባታ ወ-በት ----- » » » »

ሆነን ተሰብስበናል፡፡

የሰብሰባው አጀንዳ፡- የቤተ ገብርኤል-ፋፋኤል ቤተ ክርስቲያን የጥገና አጀማመር ሂደትን በተመለከተ-

እንደሚታወቀው የቤተ ገብርኤል-ፋፋኤል ቤተ መቅደስ ጉዳቱ እየሰፋ መጥቶ ለአደጋ በመጋለጡ ምክንያት ጥገና ለማድረግ ሰፊ ጥናት ሲካሄድለት ቆይቶ ምንም እንኳን በተባለለት ጊዜ መጀመር ባይችልም አሁን ላይ የሳይት ርክክብ ተፈጽሞ ስራ ተጀምሯል፡፡ ከዚህ በተጨማሪ ለፕሮጀክቱ ስኬት ያመች ዘንድ አንድ የከፍተኛ ባለስልጣናት ያሉበት የፌደራል ቴክኒክ ኮሚቴና አንድ የአካባቢ /የቅርብ/ ቴክኒክ ኮሚቴ ተዋቅሮአታል፡፡ በመሆኑም ሥራውን ተቋራጩ ለመጀመር እንዲችል አማካሪ ድርጅቱ እንዲመጣ ተደርጎ ርክክቡ የተፈጸመ ሲሆን ሆኖም አካባቢያዊ ቴክኒክ ኮሚቴው የሥራው መጀመርን ለመገምገም ለማየት በተደጋጋሚ ቀናት ሳይቱ ላይ በተገኘበት ጊዜ ያረጋገጠው፡-

- 1ኛ. የአማካሪ ድርጅቱ በፕሮጀክቱ ለአንድ ጊዜ እንኳን በቦታው ለመገኘት አለመቻሉ፤
- 2ኛ. ተቋራጭ ድርጅቱም ቢሆን በፕሮጀክት ቴክኒክ ደክመንት ላይ የተገለፁትን የስራ ማቴሪያዎች አቅርቦና ይዞ ወደ ስራ ያልገባ መሆኑ፤
- 3ኛ. አሁን ላይ በፊት የነበረውን ስሜንቶ ለማንሳት እየተጠቀሟቸው ያሏቸው የብረት መሮዎችና ብረት ቡሩሾች ተገቢ ካለመሆናቸውም በላይ በቤተ መቅደሱ ላይ አደጋ እያደረሰና ሌላኛውን የሀንፃ ክፍል እየገዱም በመሆኑ ጉዳዩን ከቅርብ ቴክኒክ ኮሚቴው ጋር በመሆን በመካከላችን ተገኝቶ ሊፈታልን ወይም ሊያነጋግረን የሚችል የአማካሪ ድርጅት ወኪል አጥተናል፡፡

ሥለሆነም ምንም እንኳን የሥራው ሂደት 1. አግባባዊ

እና 2. ወቅታዊ መሆን ቢኖርበትም በቅርቡ ላይ እየመጣ ያለውን ጉዳት በማሰብ አማካሪው በሌለበት ሁኔታ ስራውን ለማስቀጠል የተቸገርን በመሆኑ ለጊዜው አማካሪው መሀንዲሱ ተገኝቶ ችግሮችን እያስተካከልን መሄድ እስኪቻል ድረስ በብረት መሮዎችና ብሩሾች የሚሰሩ ሥራዎችን እንዲቆሙ በአንድ ድምጽ ወስነናል፡፡

ጉባኤው፡-

- 1 አቶ ታደሰ በየነ ----- ፊርማ -----
- 2 ዲ/ን መኩንን ገ/መስቀል አማኝ ----- ፊርማ -----
- 3 አቶ ስለሺ ዳርጌ ----- ፊርማ -----
- 4 አቶ ሞገስ ተፈራ ----- ፊርማ -----

የሰብሰባ ቀን:- 01/10/07 ዓ.ም
 የሰብሰባ ቦታ:- ቤተ ገብርኤል- ፍፋኤል
 የሰብሰባ ሰዓት:- 3:30
 ተሰብሳቢዎች :-

1. አቶ ታደሰ በየነ -----ሰብሳቢ
2. ቀኝጌታ በላይ አናውጥ -----አባል
3. መ/ታ የማኅበርሃን ውበት -----አባል
4. ዋ/አ/ር አወቀ ፈንታው -----አባል
5. አቶ ልዑል ተካ -----አባል
6. አቶ ስለሺ ዳርጌ -----አባል
7. ዲ/ን መኩነን ገ/መስቀል -----ፀሐፊ
8. አቶ ማሞ ጌታሁን -----አባል
9. አቶ ዳዊት ይሄይሰ -----አባል

የሰብሰባው አጀንዳ:- በቤተ ገብርኤል-ፍፋኤል ቤተ መቅደስ ጥገና የታዩ ችግሮችንና አስቸኳይ መፍትሄ
 እንዲሰጥ ስለማሳወቅ ፡-

ከላይ በርዕስ ለመግለፅ እንደተሞከረው የቤተ ገብርኤል-ፍፋኤል ቤተ መቅደስ ርክክብ ተፈፅሞ ሥራዎች መጀመራቸው ይታወቃል፡፡ ነገር ግን በስራው ሂደት የተከሰቱ ችግሮች ማለትም፡-

- 1ኛ. በጥናት ደክመንቱ መሰረት የቅድመ ዝግጅት ሥራ ተሟልቶ ወደ ሥራ አለመገባቱ፡-
 - ✦ በቀድሞ ትክክለኛ የሆኑ የጽዳት መሳሪያዎች ሳይሟሉ የጽዳት ሥራ ለመስራት መሞከሩ / በሀይላንድ ውሃ መርጨት ፣ በሚስማር ቀጥቅጦ መጠቀም፣ መርና መደሻ ከአካባቢው ተውሶ መሰራት)፤
 - 2ኛ. ሥራው በቂ፣ ግልፅና ጥርት ያለ መረጃ በሚፈለገው ደረጃ በአማካሪው ፣ በተቋራጩና በአሰሪው/World Monument Fund/የልተያዘ በመሆኑና ለኮሚቴው ማስረጃት ባለመቻሉ፡-
 - ✦ በቅርብ ላይ ያሉ ሀረጎችና ምልክቶች /Foot print/ ሳይጠፋ እንዴት ማጽዳት የሚቻል መሆኑን መግለፅ አለመቻሉ፤
 - ✦ አሰሪዎች በጥናት ሰነዱ ላይ ያለውን ዝርዝር የሥራ ሂደት ተከትሎ እንዴት እንደሚፈፀም ማስረጃት አለመቻሉ/የዱሮው ጥገና እንዴት እንደሚነሳ ግለጽ የሆነ ነገር አለመቀመጡ/፤
 - 3ኛ. ቁርቋሮው በመርና በመደሻ በመሆኑና የዱሮውን ጥገና / ሰሚንቶ / እስከመጨረሻው ሰርሰረን እናወጣለን ሲባል ሌላኛው የህንፃ ክፍል ላይ ጉዳት እየደረሰ መሆኑ፤
 - 4ኛ. በቂ የሥራ መርሃ ግብር ተቀርጾ ወደ ሥራ ለመግባት ዝግጁ መሆን አለመቻሉ / የሰው ኃይል መርሃ ግብር ፣ የሰራ መርሃ ግብር፣ የቱሳቱስ አቅርቦት መርሃ ግብር አለመገለፁ/፤
 - 5ኛ. በጥገና ሥራው ላይ እየተሳተፉ ያሉ ሰዎች በቀና ተመጣጣኝ የሆነ የሥራ ልምድ ፣ እውቀትና ክህሎት እንዳላቸው ማረጋገጥ አለመቻሉ፤
 - 6ኛ. በጥናት ሰነዱ ላይ እንደተቀመጠው በሳይት መሀንዲሰንትና በአማካሪነት የተቀጠሩ ባለሞያዎች ልምድ፣ ተሞክሮና የትምህርት ዝግጅት ያላቸው መሆኑን ለማረጋገጥና ለማወቅ አለመቻሉ፤
 - 7ኛ. ሥራውን ለማስኪድ የሚያስችሉ ማቴሪያሎች ወደብ ላይ ናቸው በሚል እስከ አሁን ወደ ተቋራጩ ንብረት ክፍል መግባት አለመቻላቸውና ለሥራው እንቅፋት መፍጠራቸው፤
 - 8ኛ. በጥናት ሰነዱ ላይ በተቀመጠው መሰረት ሥራዎች ዲዛይናቸው እየታየና ሌላ ቦታና ላቦላቸሪ ላይ እየተፈተኑ ብሎም ወጢታማነታቸው በማረጋገጥ መተግበር ከመሆኑ ይልቅ ዝም ብሎ የሚሰራና ይህንን ለማድረግ ብዙ ወጭ የሚይጠቅ መሆኑ በአሰሪው በኩል መገለፁ፤
 - 9ኛ. የቅርስ ባለሰልጣን ወኪል እስከ አሁን በቦታው አለመገኘታቸውና ለሚፈጠሩ ችግሮች በቅርብ ሆነው መፍትሄ ማፈለግ አለመቻላቸው፤
- በአጠቃላይ የቅርስ ጥገናውን ለማካሄድ በቂ ማቴሪያል ሳይቀርብና በአሰሪው ላይ ሙሉ ግልፅኝነት ሳይኖር ስራው እንዲቀጥል መደረጉ በቅርብ ደህንነትና በጥገና ሥራው ጥራት ላይ ከፍተኛ ችግር የሚፈጥር መሆኑን የኮሚቴው አባላት አምኖን የቅርስ ጥናትና ጥበቃ ባለሰልጣንና ሳይንሳዊ ኮሚቴው ወደ ቅርስ መገኛ ላሊባ መጥቶ ለችግሮቹ የመጨረሻ እልባትና አቅጣጫ እንዲሰጥ በማለት ልዩነት በሌለው ድምጽ ወሰነናል፡፡

- ተቋ ስም ፊርማ
1. አቶ ታደሰ በየነ -----
 2. ቀኝጌታ በላይ አናውጥ -----
 3. መ/ታ የማኅበርሃን ውበት -----
 4. ዋ/አ/ር አወቀ ፈንታው -----
 5. አቶ ልዑል ተካ -----
 6. አቶ ስለሺ ዳርጌ -----
 7. ዲ/ን መኩነን ገ/መስቀል -----
 8. አቶ ማሞ ጌታሁን -----

Appendix 4: Draft letter prepared for the launch of the Golgota-Selassie (USA funded) project

Reference No: _____

Date: _____

To the Authority of Research for Culture and Heritage Conservation, Addis Ababa

Subject: Request for transparency re: Lalibela Church Conservation

Firstly, we would like to appreciate your great concern for the preservation and restoration of our world heritage site, the ancient rock churches of Lalibela, which constitute one of the holiest places in Ethiopia. We would like to thank all of the stakeholders in this conservation project, especially the people and government of the United States of America.

However, the St. Lalibela Church Administration and the surrounding community would like to express considerable concerns with the nature of the upcoming work on the Bête-Golgotha and Michael churches, especially given that conservation work on Bête Gabriel-Rafael did not follow best practice. We are therefore writing to request a written response to our concerns below and that we are fully informed of and given the opportunity to fully participate in the decision-making processes around the conservation of our churches. We hope that such a dialogue will allow all stakeholders to come to a common consensus and create trust between the project contractors and the local community and church, who are the custodians and owners of the site.

Our concerns are as followed:

6. We need an assurance from the Authority that all the problems which we encountered in the conservation work on the Bête Gabriel-Rafael church will not happen in the Bête-Golgotha and Michael churches. These problems include:
 - The use of inappropriate, unplanned or unapproved materials in conservation work. Though we were not supplied with the full project plan, we were given weekly work plans that detailed which materials should have been used. For instance, in the Bête Gabriel-Rafael church, Fluid Xa was used when the plan indicated that Fluid Xb should be used.
 - Conservation work started without having required materials. For instance, cleaning materials to remove past conservation efforts and stainless steel to strengthen pillars, as specified in the plans, were not provided at all.
 - Introducing new, unplanned conservation methodologies without the approval of the scientific committee.
 - The failure of the project's main consultant to attend the site of conservation work for the entire life span of the project. As specified in the work plans provided, the main consultant should have attended the site approximately 14 times. He only visited the site once.

- Lack of commitment from the scientific committee, who did not perform their stated duties to monitor work at the site and resolve issues between the local community and the contractor. The scientific committee did not meet or conduct its duties as specified in the scheduled plans, and attempts to deal with problems were only ever made at a distance and with little effort. Local members on the scientific committee were not given the opportunity to participate in the meetings. We also believe the scientific committee should be an independent body constituting conservation experts and members of the local community.
7. The full project plan of the conservation work on Bête Gabriel-Rafael was never provided to us. We need to have a copy of the full project document for the Bête-Golgotha and Michael churches in order to follow and monitor the project. Ideally, these should be provided in both Amharic and English.
 8. We need to ensure that the local committee is given the chance to fully participate and provide input into the conservation process. All changes to the project should be made in sincere consultation with the local committee and church administration.
 9. The project plan must feature a provision for accountability, should any damage be done to the churches during conservation work. No one has ever been made accountable for the significant damage that has been done to the churches in past restoration projects. Provisions must be made to ensure that any damage caused is addressed.
 10. Finally, conservation efforts must urgently address the concerns regarding the thin roof joining the Selassie Chapel and the Mariam courtyard, which Associate Professor Esayas G. Yohannes (Executive Director AAU-AAiT, V/President for AAU) specified as in “great danger of collapse” and a “disaster in waiting” in his report to ARCCCH (Ref A1714_SAR). He also recommended that this issue “should be addressed before any intervention starts in the Gologotha-Mikael churches”.

As you can see, we have considerable concerns for our churches. We kindly ask for your genuine response in written form and insist that no further conservation work continue until the local community and church is properly consulted. This is vital to ensure the project is successful and that we may preserve our holy, ancient churches for future generations.

Kind regards,

CC:

The Embassy of the United States of America in Ethiopia
The Minister of Tourism and Culture, Addis Ababa
The Amhara Regional State
The Office of Tourism, Culture and Parks, Bahir Dar