

Nyssen, J., Meheretu Yonas, Tesfaalem Ghebreyohannes, Smidt, W., Lenaerts, L., Seifu Gebreslassie, Annys, S., Hailemariam Meaza, Williams, F., Dessen, J., Miruts Hagos, Mitiku Haile, 2020. Geotourism interactions with Christian Orthodox religion in Tembien (Tigray, Ethiopia). Presentation at EGU2020: Sharing Geoscience Online, Geophysical Research Abstracts 22: EGU2020-5704.

# Geotourism interactions with Christian Orthodox religion in Tembien (Tigray, Ethiopia)

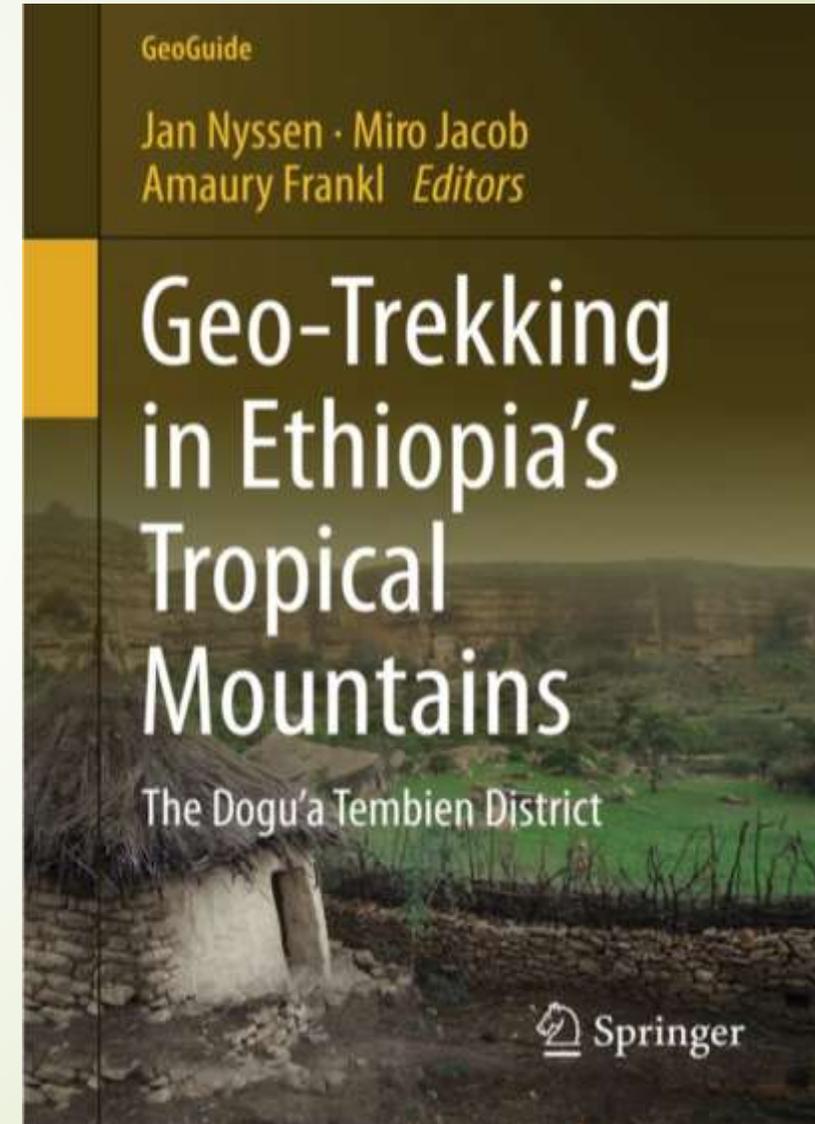
Jan Nyssen, Meheretu Yonas, Tesfaalem Ghebreyohannes, Wolbert Smidt, Lutgart Lenaerts, Seifu Gebreslassie, Sofie Annys, Hailemariam Meaza, Frances Williams, Joost Dessen, Miruts Hagos, Mitiku Haile

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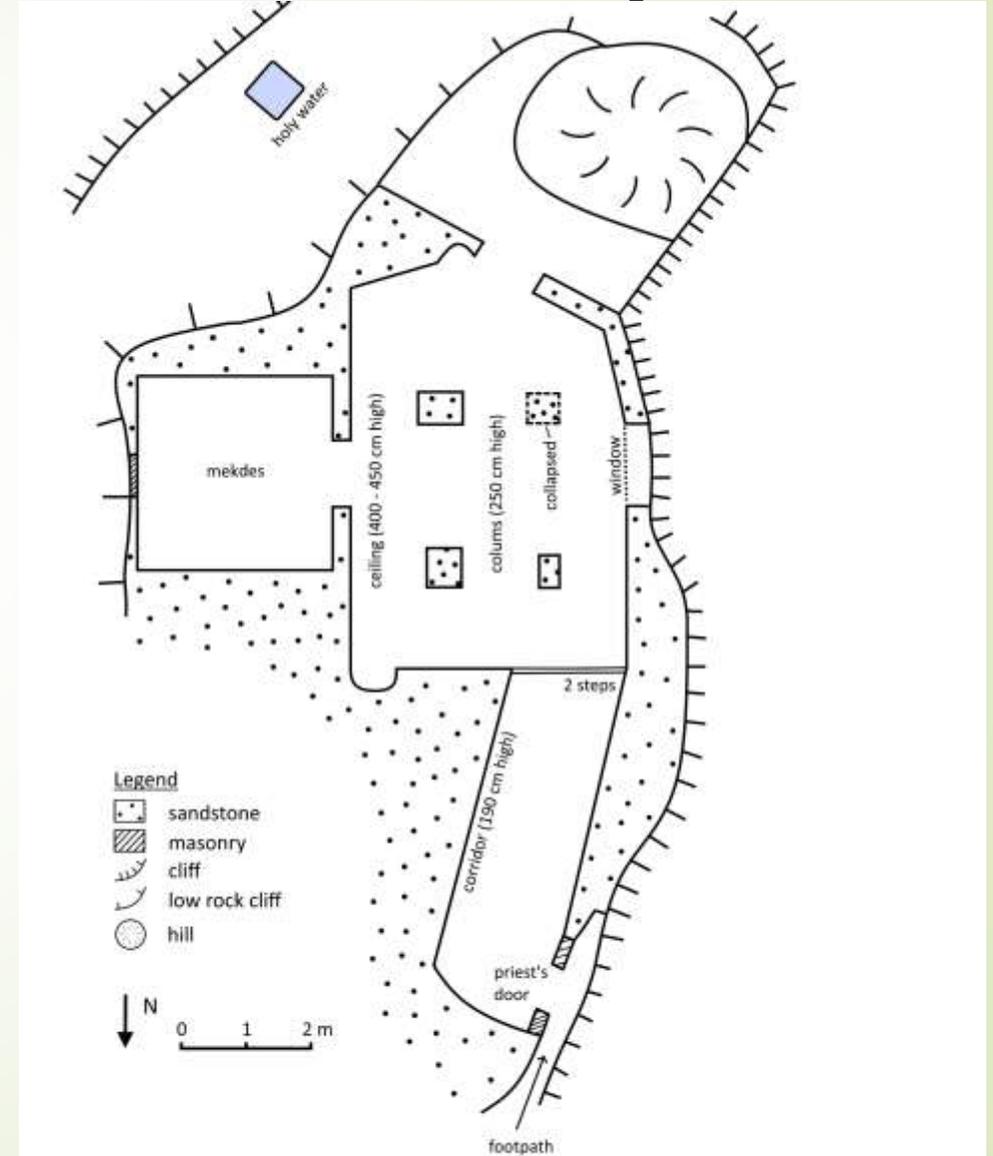
# Geotourism

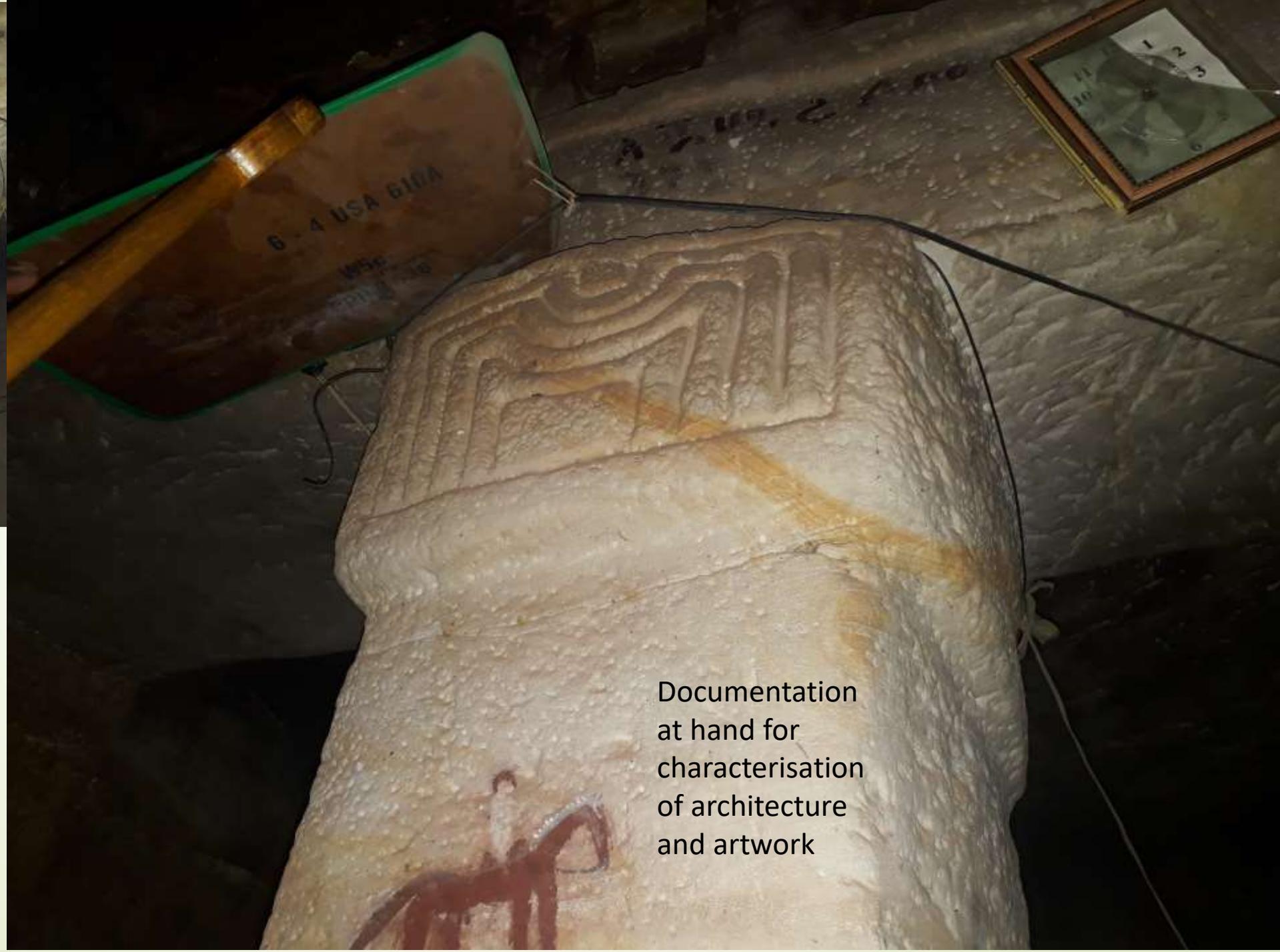
- **Geotourism** is a form of natural area tourism that specifically focuses on landscape and geology.
- Geoguide has been prepared for Tembien
- In the frame of preparation of a Geopark and application to UNESCO
- Tembien culture largely inspired by Orthodox religion
- **Synergies and challenges of the overlapping spaces of geotourism and religious expression**



# Synergies: Rock churches as a major touristic attraction

- ▶ Hundreds of rock churches – illustration by the (yet undescribed) Yohannis church of Debre Sema'it (Tembien)



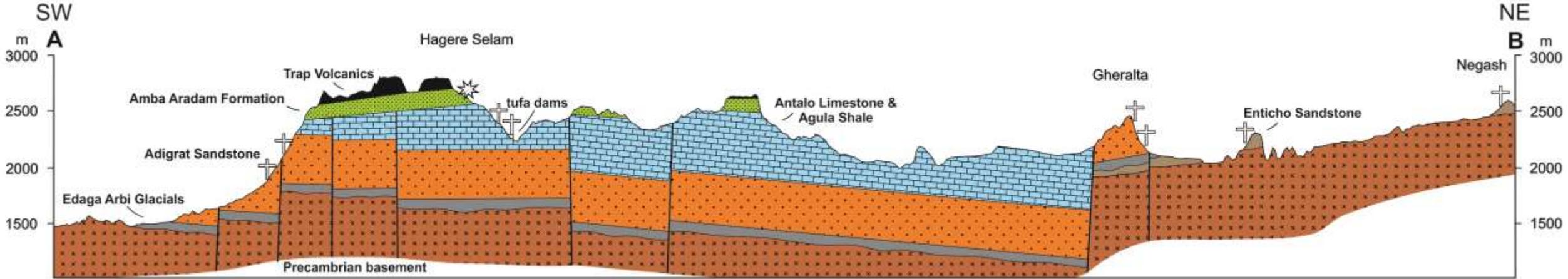


Documentation  
at hand for  
characterisation  
of architecture  
and artwork





# Lithology determines location of rock churches



(Bussert & Nyssen, 2019)

# Sacred forests around all churches

Ch'ege

Adenna Kidane Mihret



# “Holy water” springs and domestic tourism

May Lomin

Dabba Hadera



# Pilgrim ways – scope for trekking

Pilgrim way to Dabba Hadera



# Environmental protection ("God created it")

Itay Sara



Zerfenti



# First geosites: caves and tunnels as Christianised sacred spots



Zeyi cave



Gobo Dogu' at tunnel ©explorergenes



Dembela, new Medhanie  
Alem rock church

# Popular geological myths inspired by religion

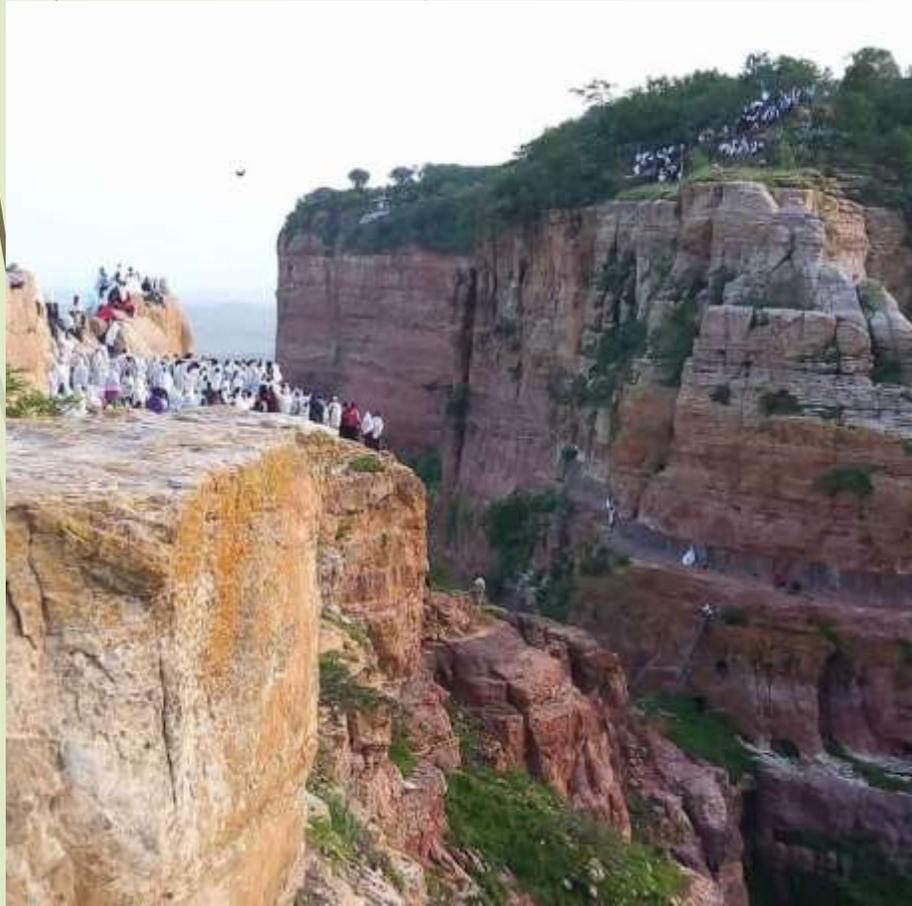


Imni Ilias



Megesta © Google Earth

# Domestic tourism to sacred places --> popularisation of geography and geology



Dabba Selama (©abcdshi on Twitter)



Dabba Hadera

# Challenges

- Common drawbacks of international tourism in developing countries



Begging in Simien Mts. (©agreatjourney.com)



alamy stock photo

M7YMF6  
www.alamy.com

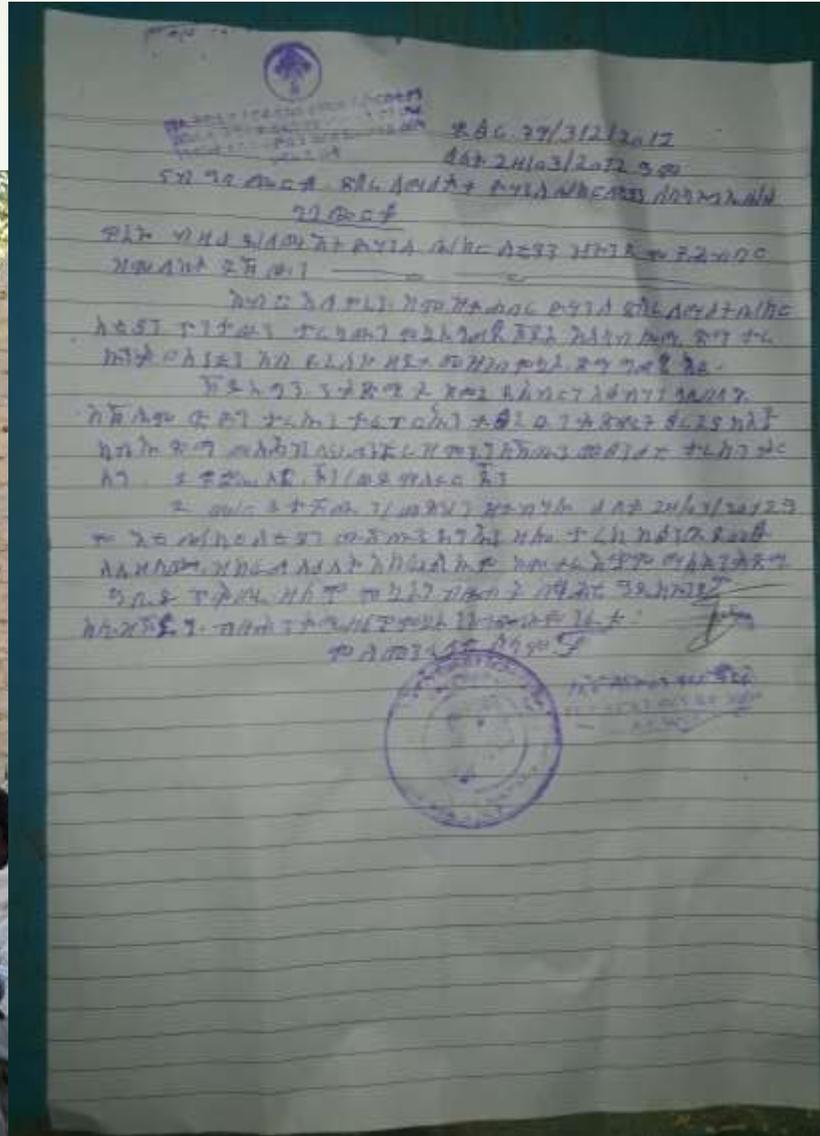
“Disrespectful tourist in Omo”



# Challenges

- ▶ Common drawbacks of international tourism in developing countries
  - ▶ Locations that are highly valued in local religious beliefs
  - ▶ Specific challenges
- 

# Problems of access, with various rationales



# Gender-neutral geotourism vs patriarchal religious attitudes

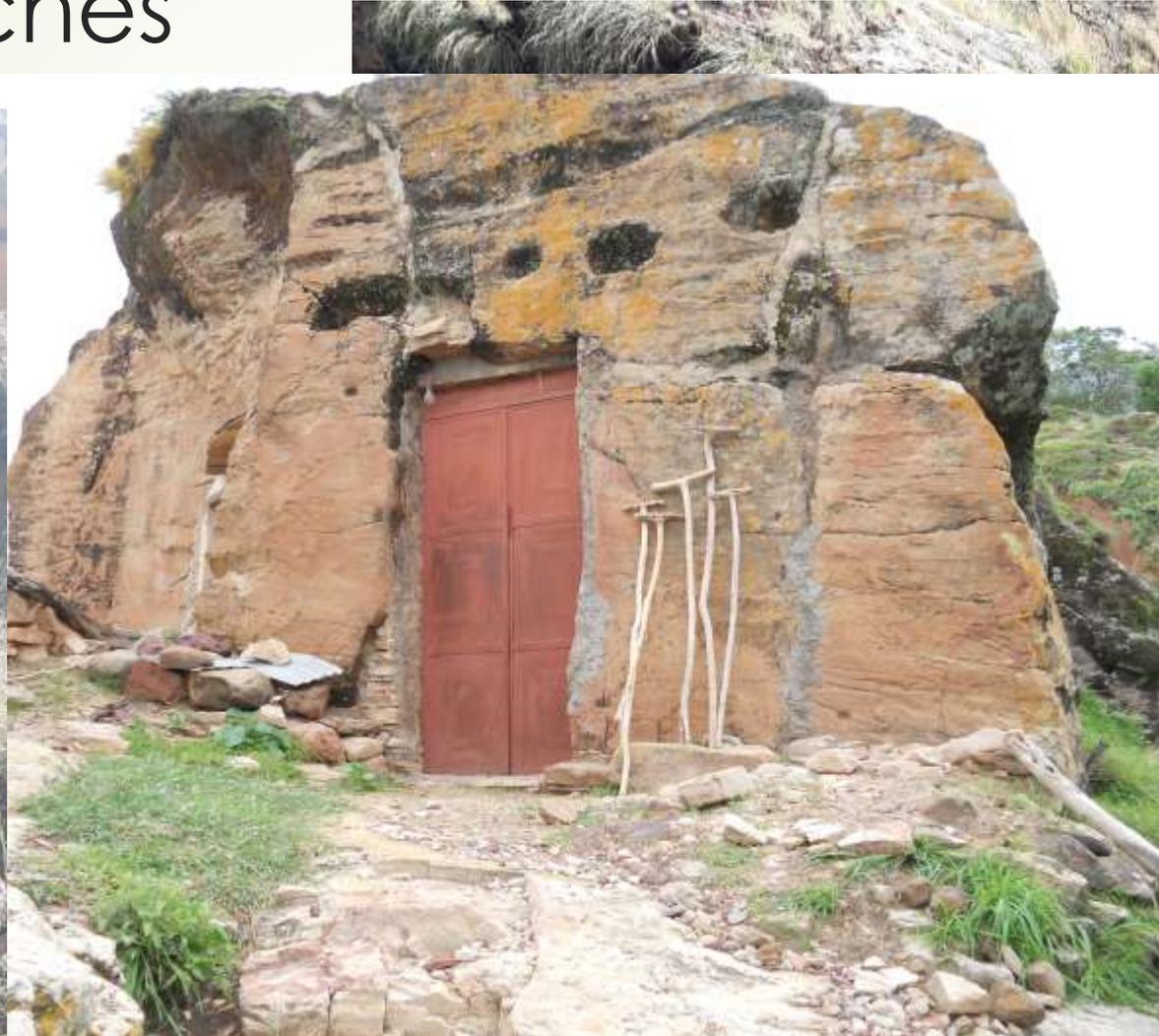
Asmara Maryam (© Cheryl Hatch)



Wukro Ch'erkos (© Cleo De Wolf)



# Conservation vs modernization of churches



# Conservation vs modernization of churches



Wukro Ch'erkos (© Bernard Chagnon)

Hum Ecol (2016) 44:715–730  
DOI 10.1007/s10745-016-9868-z

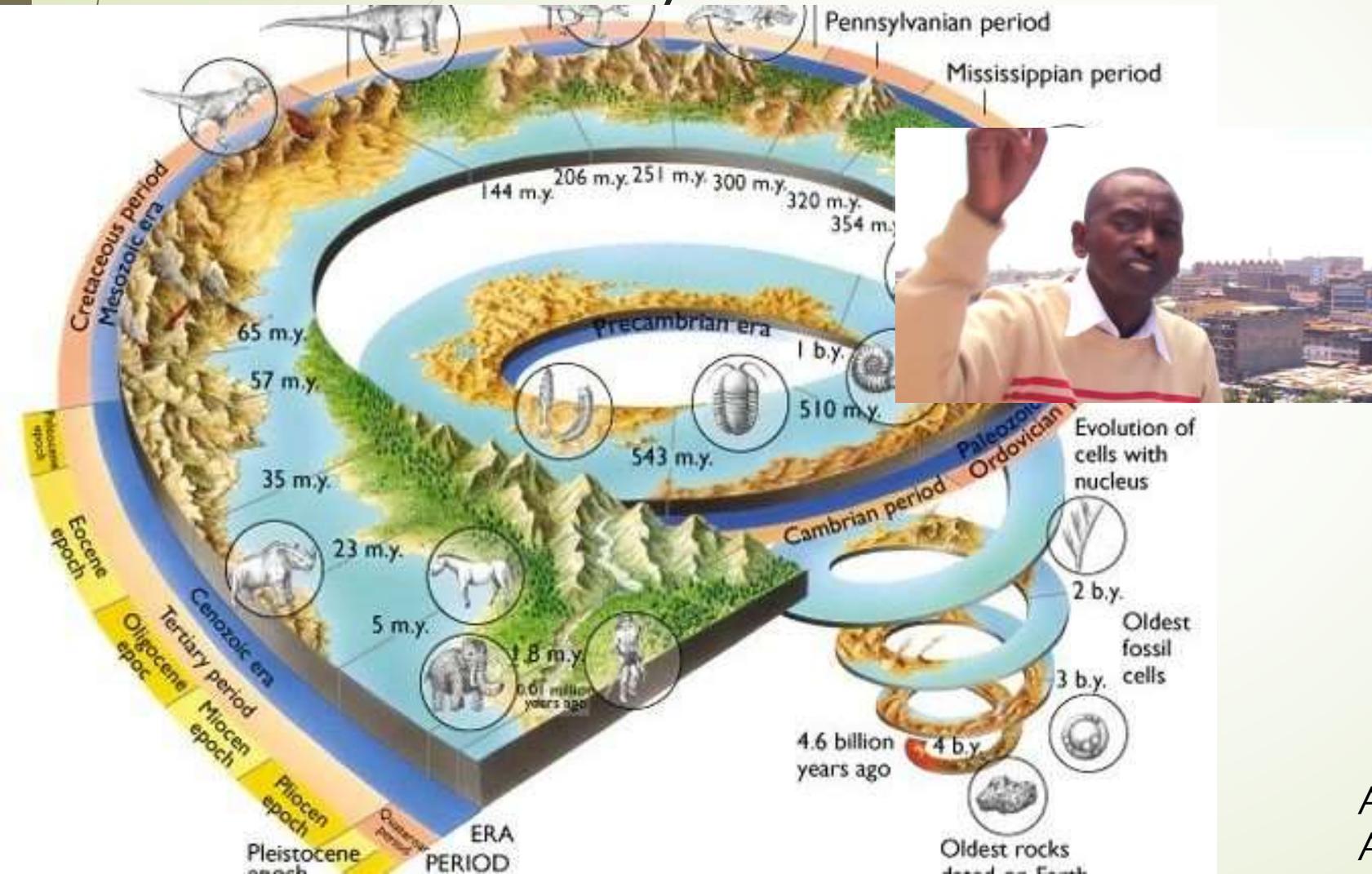
## Ethiopian Church Forests: A Hybrid Model of Protection

Peter Klepeis<sup>1</sup> · Izabela A. Orłowska<sup>2</sup> · Eliza F. Kent<sup>3</sup> · Catherine L. Cardelús<sup>4</sup> · Peter Scull<sup>1</sup> · Alemayehu Wassie Eshete<sup>5</sup> · Carrie Woods<sup>6</sup>



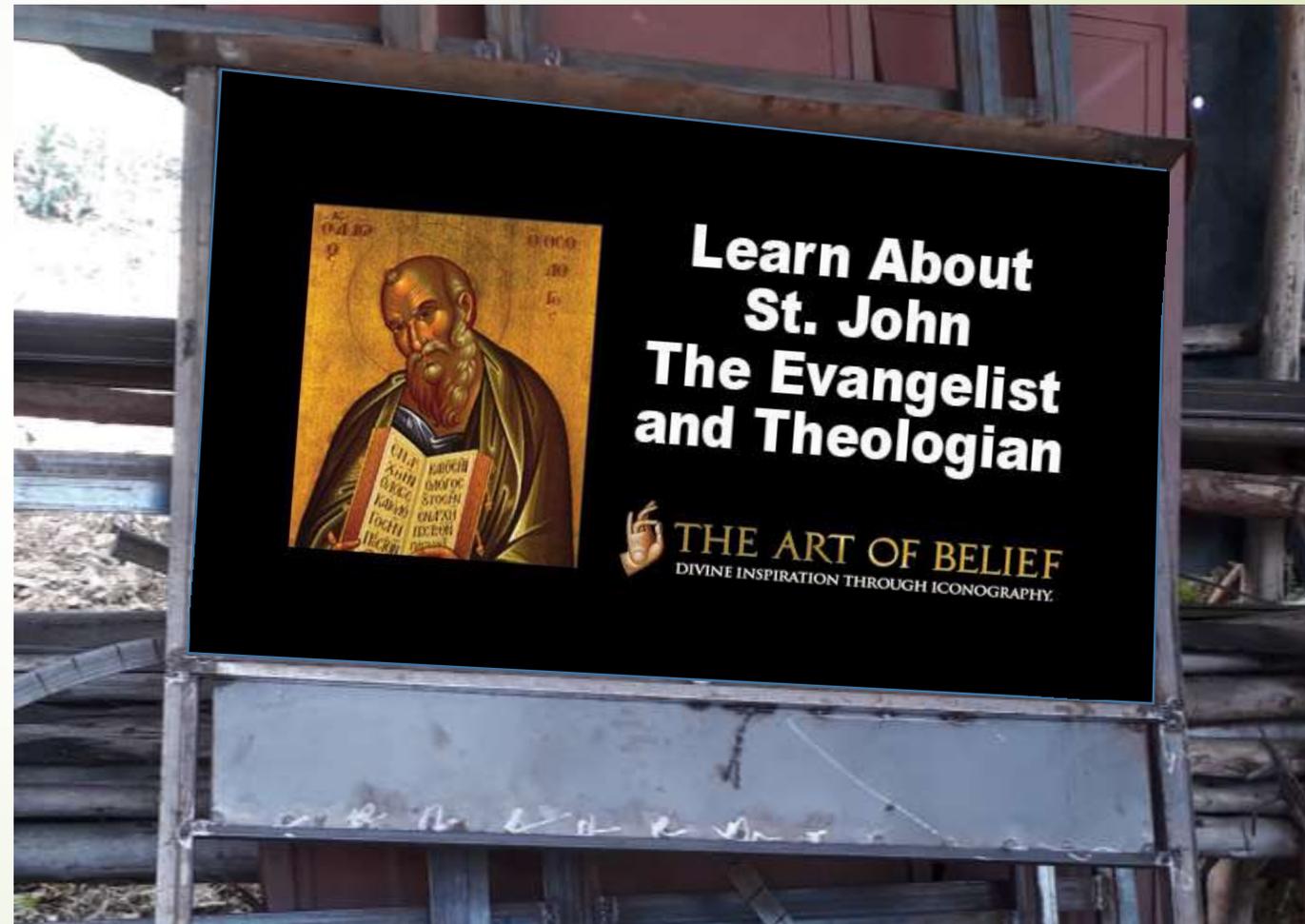
Conventional grave (Klepeis et al., 2016)

# 4.5 billion years History of Earth vs 6000 years since Genesis



Adam and Eve at Abreha and Atsbha church (© Bernard Chagnon)

# Information boards at geosites: religious narratives vs scientific understanding



# Information boards at geosites: religious narratives vs scientific understanding



Algarve (Portugal)



Fuerteventura (Spain)

"dove"

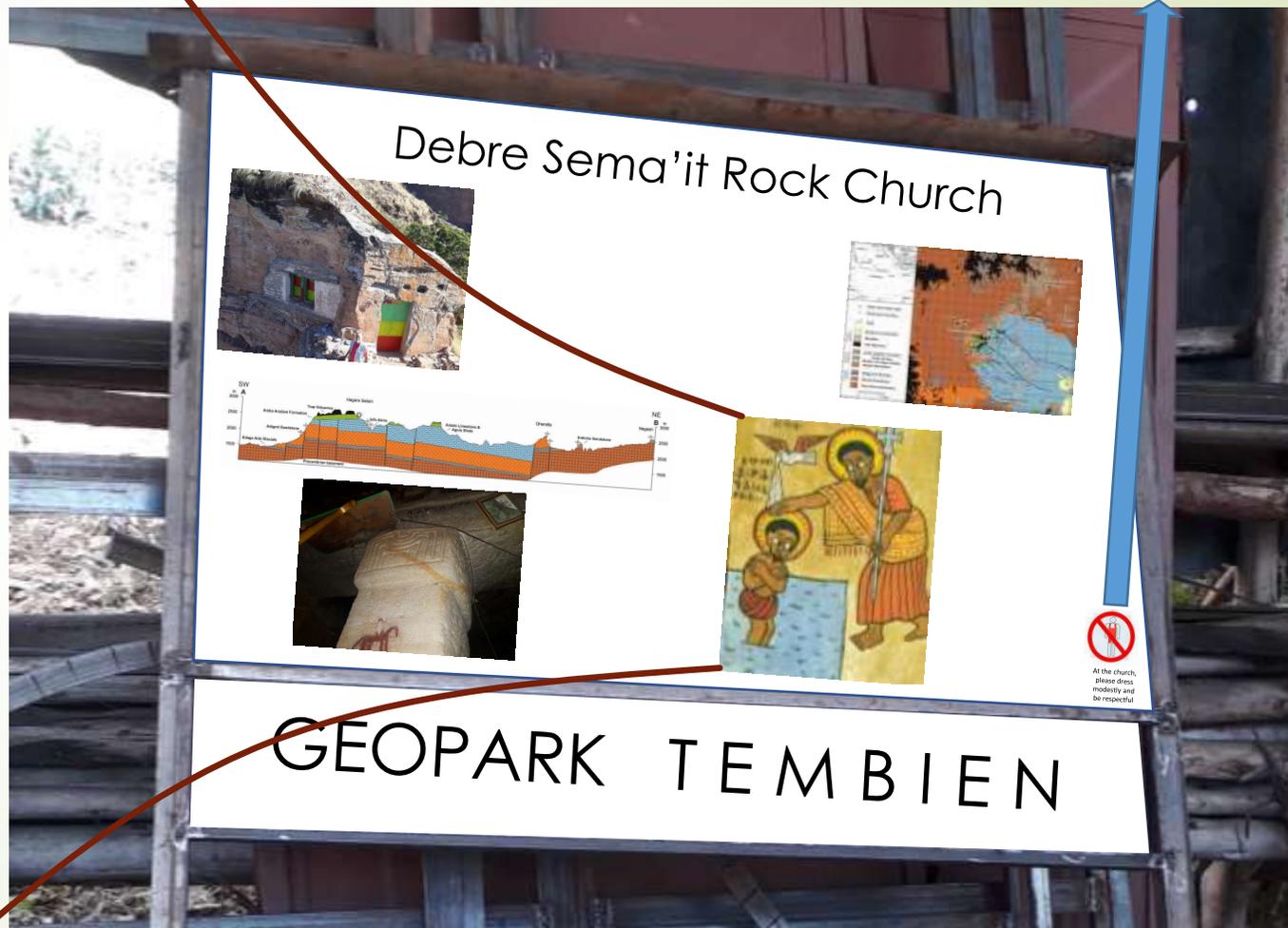


19<sup>th</sup> Century (University of Oregon Museum Shelf Mark 10-844)

boards at geosites: religious scientific understanding



At the church, please dress modestly and be respectful



# Showing appropriate respect to the sacred environment

“And did the priest allow this?”



Unpermitted tourist behaviour at a church (© our students in Wukro, 2012)



# Preparation of appropriate and site-specific souvenirs



Lalibela

# Community geotourism

- Local income
- Community lodges

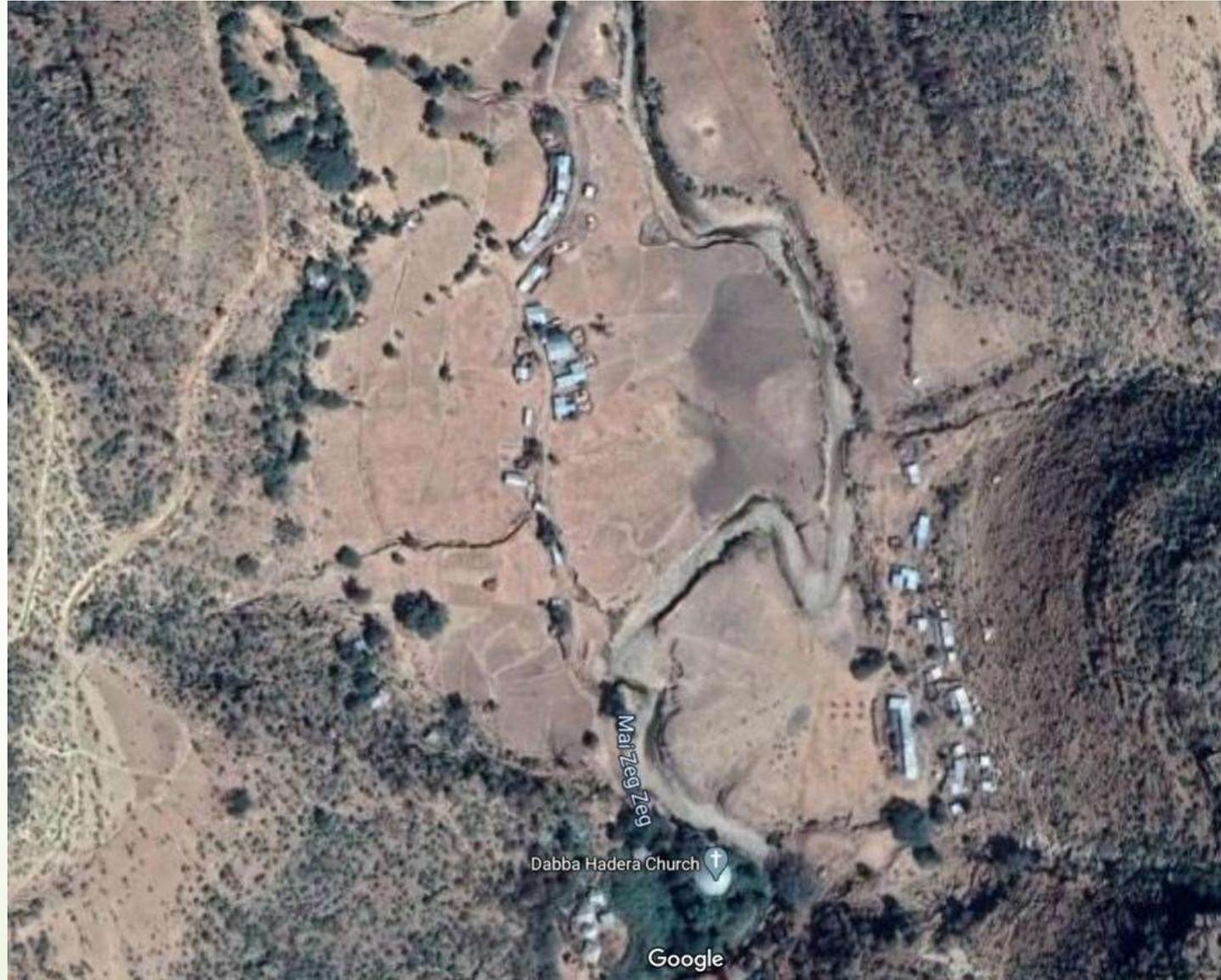


Abune Yosef (©explorergenes)



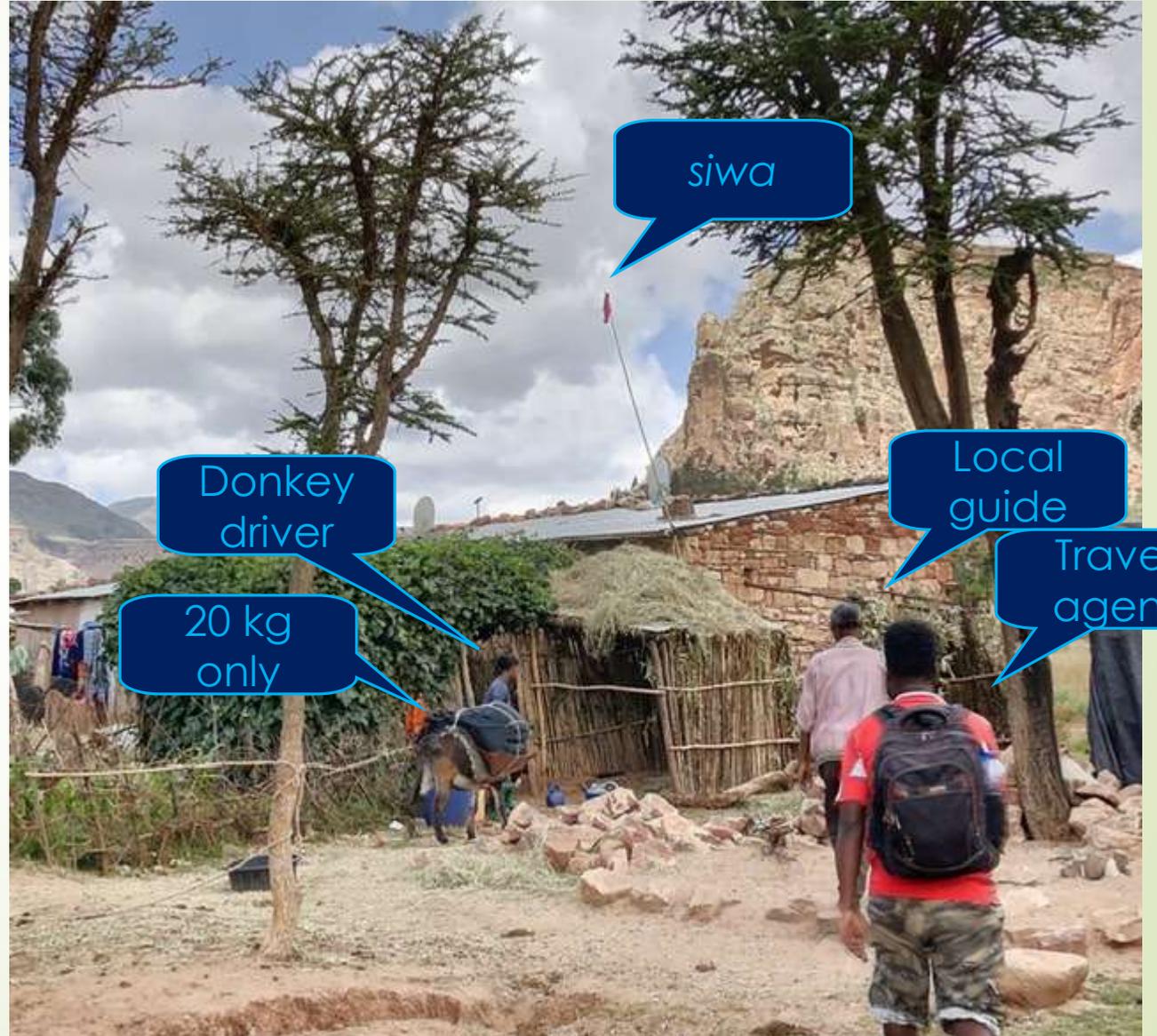
# Community ownership and benefits of geotourism

- ▶ Local income
  - ▶ Community lodges
  - ▶ Private initiative



# Community ownership and benefits of geotourism

- ▶ Local income
  - ▶ Community lodges
  - ▶ Private initiative
  - ▶ Tourist guiding





# Conclusions: religion and geotourism in Tembien

- ▶ Local society has preserved sacred geosites
- ▶ The sites are important for their self-definition as societies protected by divine powers
- ▶ Sharing the preserved sites to (geo)tourists requires:
  - ▶ Mutual respect and openness
  - ▶ Participatory approach

Thank you for  
your attention!



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