

## Beni Hassan an Endless Story: Reviving Tourism

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### Abstract

Beni Hassan is characterized by great community values and attractions. The main aim of the research is to indicate the major attraction in the area of Beni Hassan and apply the appropriate facilities to revive it through a project for tourism development at the area. This is achieved by reviewing the distinctive characteristics of the area in contrast to the other architectural sites at El Minia governorate in particular and at Egypt in general. As a result of the research, the suggested project could be an encouraging start for more investment projects in the area.

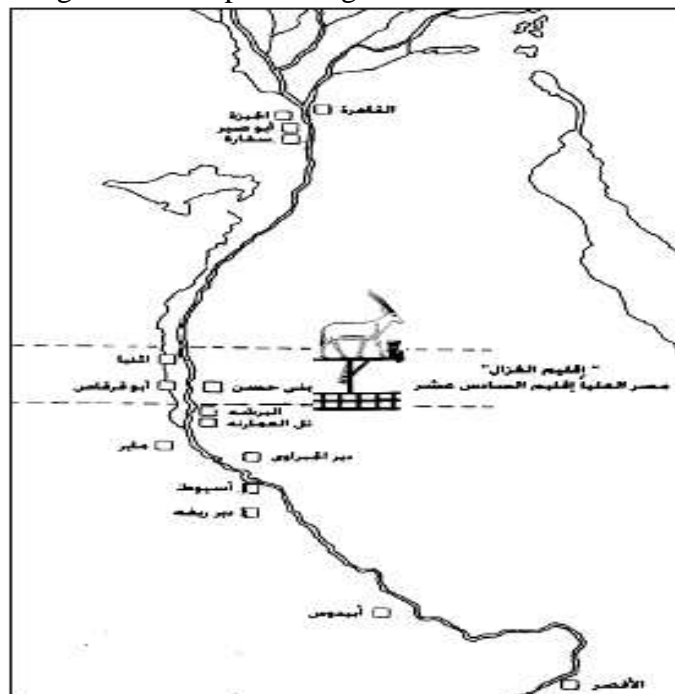
**Key Words:** Beni Hassan, Sport, Ball game, Sky ball, Playing court, Festival.

### Introduction

Beni Hassan is one of the most important architectural Pharaonic sites in Egypt. It is located on the eastern bank of the Nile River, about 12 miles (20 km) to the south of El Minia governorate, and 150 miles (240 km) south of Cairo. The history of the area dates back to the Middle Kingdom Period. (Kretchmar *et al.*, 2017)

The site is remarkable for its rock-cut tombs that date back to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty officials of the 16<sup>th</sup> Upper Egyptian nome (the Oryx nome). About 39 private tombs found in the site. They are painted with daily life scenes and important biographical texts (Kanawati and Woods, 2010). Among the distinguished daily life scenes are the sport scenes of different kinds of games that will strongly serve the main idea of the Tourism Development project at Beni Hassan.

Figure 1: A map showing the site of Beni Hassan



(شديد، 2016)

**Table 1: The main categories of sports found in the scenes of Beni Hassan tombs**

categories of sports	Sports depended on dexterity	Sports depended on skill and agility	Sports depended on strength	Sports depended on thinking and concentration
The gender of the players	Both men and women, either individually or together in groups.	Principally women.	Only men.	Only men.
Examples of the sports	The actions of men swinging women round by the arms, and rising from the ground. (Newberry, 1894)	The ball game. (Abdou, 1961)	Wrestling and raising weights.	The game of throwing a sharp instrument like knives into a wooden block. The game of cups. The game of draughts. (Newberry, 1894; Wilkinson, 1854) The game of stick and ball. (Newberry, 1894)
Details and Observations	These actions and performances of gymnastic feats are widely known as acrobats similar to those included in the shows of the modern circus. (Abdou, 1961)	Its modern name is the sky ball. It had various ways of playing.	The first sport is mainly represented in most of the tombs. (Newberry, 1893; Newberry, 1894) About 220 wrestling groups. (Gardiner, 2002) It includes various attitudes of attack and defense.	The main goal of the first game is to fix the knives in the center of a ring painted on the block. In the second game a small ball was placed under one of the 4 cups of the game and the opposite player should guess where the ball was exactly placed. Such games are also included in the shows of the modern circus. The third game is like the modern chess board game. The game of stick and ball looks like the modern hockey, in which two players seeking to snatch from each other a

				small hoop or ball by a curved stick or a hooked rod. (Carlisle, 2009; Craig, 2002; Wilkinson, 1854)
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Source: the researcher

### **The main Idea of Tourism Development Project at Beni Hassan**

The main project idea is represented in re-creating the ancient Egyptian experiences in sport and playing the games that were widely depicted in the tombs of Beni Hassan, and thus reviving the tourism at the area. (For the significant role played by sport activities on increasing tourism industry, see Çelik and Çetinkaya, 2013)

The research will discuss one of the previously mentioned sports as a core for the project. This sport is a female one depended on the skill and agility of women. Its traditional name is “Ball Game”, and the Greek name is “Urania”, while the modern one is “Sky Ball”. (Golden, 2004; Perrottet, 2004)

### **The Various Ways of Playing the Sky Ball in Ancient Egypt**

(Craig, 2002); Wilkinson, 1857)

1. Throwing several balls up in the sky and catching them in succession. This way depends on the individual skill of the player.

Figure 2: Tomb of Khety No. 17, north wall



Figure 3: Tomb of Baqet No. 15, north wall



This way is so popular in the modern circus shows. Sometimes the balls were replaced by bowling pins (tall, thin wooden objects) or hoops as a kind of excitement, challenge and skill.

2. Throwing one ball, as high as the player could, and leaping up to catch it before his feet touch the ground again. Sometimes the throwing ball was intended to be caught by another competitor in the same manner while jumping from the ground. The usual attitude for throwing the ball was the standing on the two legs, but sometimes the player could throw and catch the ball while standing on one leg and his hands behind his back.

Figure 4: Tomb of Khety No. 17, north wall

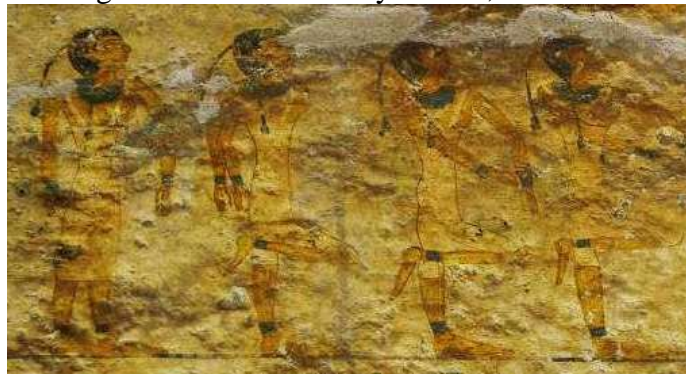
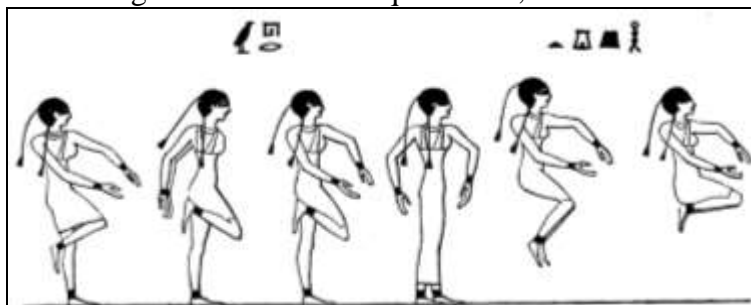


Figure 5: Tomb of Baqet No. 15, north wall



(Wilkinson, 1854)

3. Two teams, each of two players. One player of each team seated on the back of his companion. The upper player in the first team throws the ball to the opposite upper player of

the other team. If a team fails to catch the ball, the players of the team have to change or replace their attitudes. The Greeks named the player who dropped a catch the ass that had to carry his companion on his back. (Gardiner, 2002)

The winner player was identified as the king of the game, while the team that had failed in the game was obliged to submit the commands of the other victor team.

Figure 6: Tomb of Baqet No. 15, north wall



Figure 7: Tomb of Khety No. 17, north wall



**Table 2: Artistic Details in the three Ancient Egyptian Themes of Playing Sky Ball**

The theme	The first theme	The second theme	The third theme
Headdress	The same style in the three themes; the short wig that covers the forehead and sometimes the ears with three thin and long braids reaching to the waist and symmetrically distributed on the head; two on the sides beneath the ears and hanging down on the shoulders, while the third one is high in the center of the head and hanging down on the back.		
Dress	A long tight transparent dress with two straps on the shoulders and exposing the breast.	The dress differs in its length. Here it is a knee length dress to be suitable for the actions of leaping up in the air to catch the ball, or standing on one leg, while raising the other. One player in the theme is represented with the long dress, but in this case the legs are side by side on the ground.	The same of the first theme.
Jewelries	The same jewelries in the three themes; the short collar of one strand surrounding the neck, bracelets, and anklets. Sometimes the collar consists of two strands as in the first and second themes.		
Body attitude	The body is usually in profile, except for one player with a frontal attitude in the first and second themes. The head is also in profile, and is slightly raised up with a high look towards the throwing ball in the air.		In this theme the head is not raised. The lower players appear with a kneeling body and the head with a downwards look to the ground. The three braids here are hanging down towards the ground.
Arms attitude	Raising the arms together up. The arms are not straight but slightly bent, and are in profile. The hands with an open fist to hold the ball that usually appears between the thumb and index fingers. The thumb set lower and apart from the other four fingers that are close fitting without any lines as if they were gathered in one finger, which is the index finger. One player in the	The arms as in the first theme are in profile and slightly bent, but are not raised up. The direction of the arms and hands is down towards the ground and not upwards. The unique crossed arms of the first theme are now separated with a frontal attitude and directed downwards. One player here appears with a close fitting and slightly bent arms behind the back.	Concerning the upper players; the attitudes of the arms and hands are either in the act of throwing the ball (with one upraised arm, while the other bent forward), or in the act of catching the ball (with the two hands). Concerning the lower players; the arms are straight with hands resting with an open fist on the knees.

	theme appears with a unique arms attitude; the frontal crossed arms on the chest as a kind of experience and high skill in catching the throwing balls.		
Legs attitude	Slightly bent legs with a wide forward step.	<p>This theme shows different attitudes for the legs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Raising and bending the two legs side by side backwards beneath the buttocks in the act of leaping. The level of the legs here with the rest of the body forms a right angle of 90°.</li> <li>-Leaping and bending the legs backwards with acute angle less than 90°, little higher from the ground and side by side (the player in this attitude appears as if he is sitting on the air).</li> <li>- Standing on one straight leg, while bending the other backwards beneath the buttocks.</li> <li>- Bending one leg backwards and placing it on the knee of the other straight leg.</li> <li>- The two legs are straight side by side on the ground.</li> </ul>	<p>Concerning the upper players; they are in the attitude of sitting with the legs side by side hanging down at the same level of the head of the lower player.</p> <p>Concerning the lower players; the two legs resting on the ground with a wide step forming acute angle less than 90°.</p>
Number of balls	The total number of balls used in playing in each theme is three, except for one player in the first theme playing with just one ball. All the balls are of the same size, very like to the modern one about 3 inches in diameter. The balls in the first theme appear at the same level of height. The balls were usually made of leather, sewed with string and filled with bran, or rinds of corn.		

Source: the researcher

### The Modern Sky Ball

It is a simple game, in which a player of one team throws a small ball up in the air, as high as he could. The throwing ball must be caught by the opposite player of the second team before falling on the ground. If the ball is not caught, the first team scores one point. The play continues until each player on one team has one throw. The second team then becomes the throwing team. The winner of the game will be the team that scores more points than the other. (Heaton, 2014)

The sky ball is similar in its rules to the modern Volleyball game that is of American origin. (Bottenburg, 2001)

It is a game for also two teams, usually of six players, in which a large ball is hit by hand over a high net, the aim being to score points by making the ball reach the ground on the opponent's side of the court.

### The Main Suggestions of Tourism Development Project at Beni Hassan

1. Organizing the appropriate court for playing the sport of the sky ball in its ancient Egyptian ways and rules.

Figure 8: The suggested chosen space in the area for the playing court



The space is parallel to the land route towards the north. It is reached by entering the main entrance of the architectural area, then walking to the north in a flat passage opposite to the guest rest and a small garden for the kids in the left, and the long stairway leading to the hilly region that contains the private tombs in the right.

Figure 9: The flat passage to the north between the stairway and the guest rest





Figure 10: The guest rest to the right of the northern passage



Figure 11: The small garden for kids beside the guest rest to the right of the passage



Figure 12: Different photos for the end of the northern passage at the chosen space



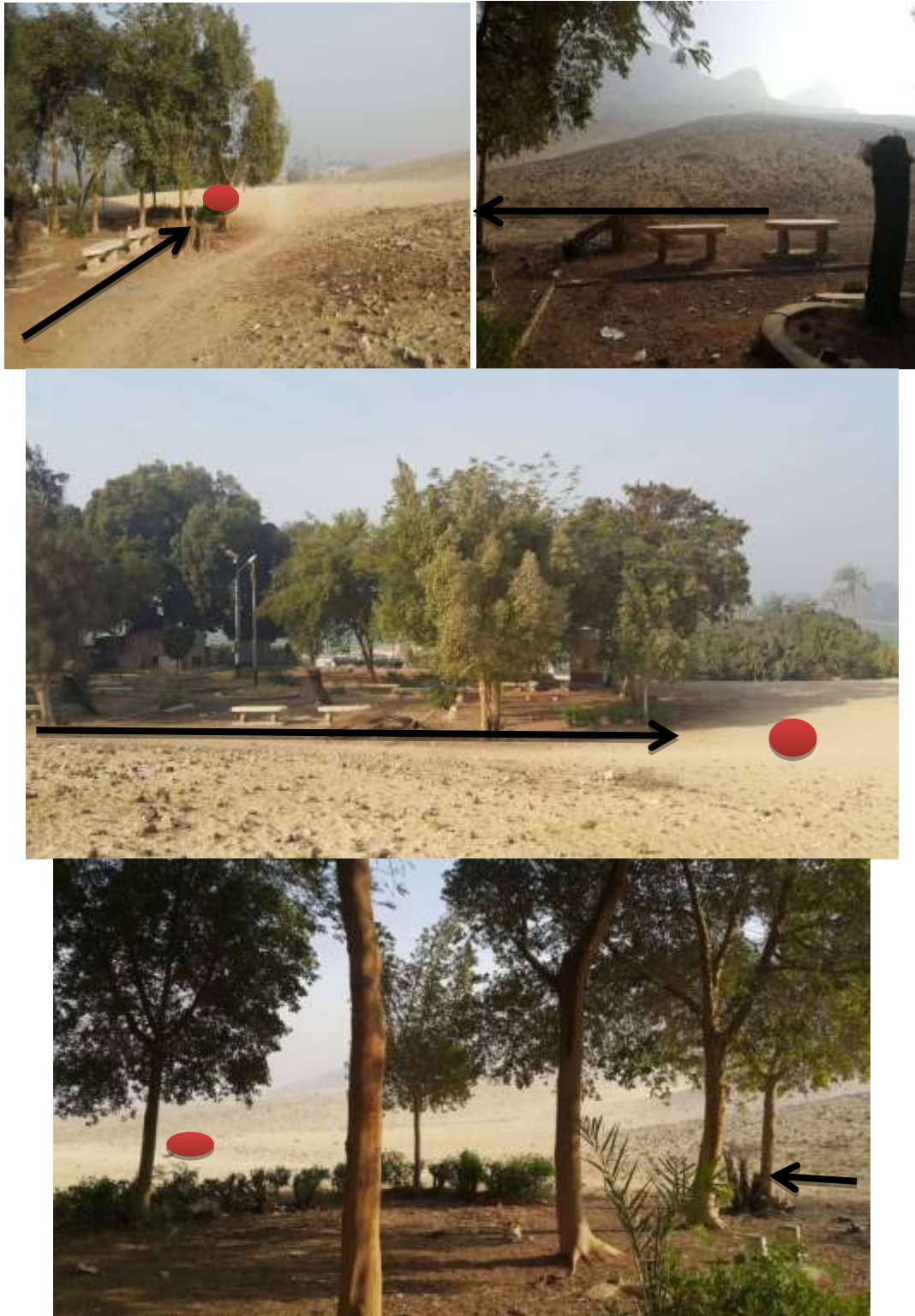


Figure 13: The chosen space parallel to the land route and the agricultural lands to its east side



2. The court will be in the form of a quadrangular area, either open or covered like a large tent or pavilion similar to those devoted to carnivals or travelling amusement shows and circus. It is a simple construction does not affect the nature of such important architectural site.

Figure 14: The sky ball court

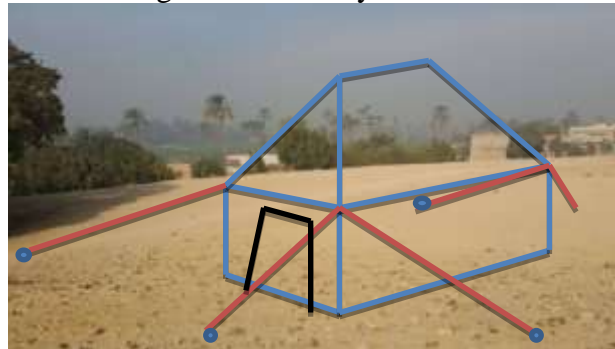
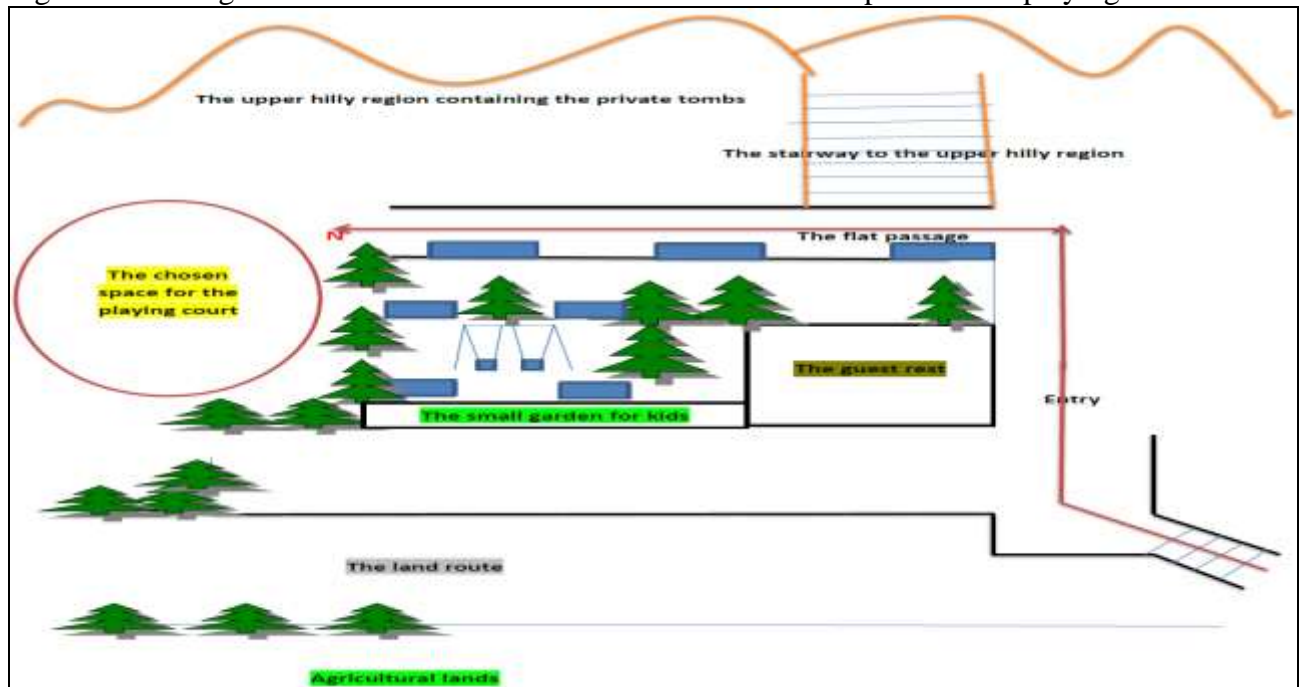


Figure 15: A diagrammatic sketch for the exact site of the chosen space for the playing court



3. Organizing a sky ball festival that will be held at a regular time every year and involves different activities for competitions. (Such kind of sport festivals designed for cultural, recreational celebration, fun and competition is one of the main categories of the event tourism that played a very important role in marketing and reviving the tourist destination, see Quinn, 2009)
4. The sky ball festival is preferred to be at the same time of important events like Universities Youth Week, and Universities Girls Week.
5. The Athletes representing all the universities in the sky ball festival will compete for medals or any honorary gifts like shirts or balls that are painted with the main ancient emblem of Beni Hassan (the Oryx).

Figure 16: The main emblem of Beni Hassan with the festival label



6. The sky ball court will also be opened in holidays for the school trips for amusement and competitions.
7. Organizing A comprehensive presentation or a panorama in the sky ball court for all the modern sports that have ancient Egyptian roots.

### **The Target Groups of Tourism Development Project at Beni Hassan**

The target groups are the school and university students to be aware of the importance of sport and its pure Egyptian origins. There are several ways for increasing the awareness of the students towards the importance of a tourist destination; (Gunn, 2002)

1. Holding public educational seminars on the values and attractions of the area.
2. Introducing tourism talks and a simple course on the archaeological sites in Minia governorate to school and university systems.
3. Holding hospitality training programs.
4. Offering novels and writings about the area for sale.

**The main elements required for managing and marketing the Project** (For more information and details on management the tourist destinations, see Getz, 2008)

1. Co-operation of many groups: Stakeholders and the main Official Sponsors and Organizers of the Tourism Development Project at Beni Hassan (including Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Antiquities, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Education, Minia Governorate Office, Minia Tourism Development Authority, and Minia University).
2. Goals and careful application of planning strategies (the desired result and the policy designed to achieve this)

3. Resources used (including supply of money, materials, staff, and other assets that can be drawn on by the organization in order to function effectively).
4. Professionalism (skill expected of a professional and the performance quality).
5. The high quality of the public services managed by the government (including water supply, sewage disposal, fire protection, health control, police, and parking).
6. Knowledge creation (organizing a small library for the visitors in the guest rest containing collections of books, periodicals, and sometimes films about the history of the destination, its importance, and main attractions; designing tourist souvenirs and brochures or pamphlets containing maps, pictures and information about Beni Hassan sport scenes, and distributing them to the visitors).
7. The regular evaluation of the project (monitor the feedback and reactions of the visitors towards the project as a basis for improvement the area).

### **The prospective outcomes of the project**

1. Increasing and improving the international and local quality, value, and image of Beni Hassan as a tourist destination.
2. Encouraging new sources of revenue and investment in the area.
3. Attracting and providing the visitors of the area with an unforgettable experience.
4. Increasing the awareness of the local people, particularly the school and university students, towards the main values and attractions of the area (geography, history, and culture).
5. Attracting the media's attention towards the area.

### **Conclusion**

The area of Beni Hassan is neglected in spite of being one of the most important architectural sites in Minia governorate. It really needs to be invested and revived on the tourist map.

The idea of organizing a huge sport festival for the Tourism Development Project at Beni Hassan is considered to be an encouraging start for more investment projects in the area.

The project is a low-cost and high impact way for marketing and reviving tourism at Beni Hassan, both at the international and local levels.

The chosen northern space at Beni Hassan for the Tourism Development Project is very suitable and will achieve the desired aim according to the extent or measurement of the land and the impressive surrounding views; the mountain in the west, the land route and agricultural lands in the east, and the small garden with the guest rest in the south.

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