

WHAT THE LOCAL PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT THE EL ALI METEORITE.

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Introduction: In the past, the El Ali meteorite was not unknown to the locals; rather it was one of their most important landmarks in the area. Its cultural heritage significance was the elephant in the room. El Ali has been a symbol for the local people for a long time and was known as “Shiid-birood,” which means the iron stone (because of its properties of resonance and its ductility). Eventually, the name was given to the area surrounding it.¹ The characteristics of the El Ali meteorite’s (Shiid-birood’s) environment include: plants do not grow up around it for a distance of about 10 meters, and it is surrounded by black rocks that appear as a burnt stones.² Past familiarity with this stone is evidenced by local stories saying that “during the colonization period, the Italians tried to take it, but they couldn’t due to its heavy weight and to the locals who were against it.”² At sunset, the stone appears in the shape of an animal, and the livestock fear it and run away from it. People describe it as looking like a horse, and the local children play on it and ride it like a horse.

Location: In El-Ali city, there are two parallel roads that lead in from the west. Both are used for transportation for locals to neighboring cities and for camel watering from the El Ali borehole. The two roads are marked with two huge twin stones. One is called “Shiid-birood” (the El Ali meteorite) and the other is called “Afeelaha.”¹ The Afeelaha stone is located on the south road which is about 10 km distant from the Shiid-birood stone. Afeelaha means sharpening and it is used to sharpen all cutting tools such as axes and knives.¹ The Shiid-birood stone is located on the north road in the Shiid-birood area which is located about 25 km west of the El Ali city.²

Removal: The advent of smartphones provided access to Shiid-birood from major cities, such as the capital Mogadishu, and was an opportunity for knowledgeable people in geosciences to suggest that this stone could be valuable if further research were done.¹ This led to sending a sample to a Chinese Company based in a neighboring country that corroborated the value of the stone.³ When the locals received the information about the stone, they wanted to remove it from the site for the benefit of marketing, but they disagreed with one another.² After disputes between the locals, it was removed and transferred to the Buqda-aqable, the main administration of the area.³ In 2020, businessmen bought it from Buqda-aqable and transferred it to Mogadishu. After an interruption from the government, the businessmen managed to get the stone out of the country. Its export to China was a concern of the locals who were taken by force.³

Publicity: In 2022, the evolution of global interest in information about the Shiid-birood stone (El Ali meteorite) started again when the sample taken from the stone was discovered to contain two new minerals (elaliite and elkinstantonite) never seen before on the Earth and the meteorite’s name was officially changed to “El Ali,” the ninth largest meteorite known in the world.⁴ Additionally, there was a possibility of further new discoveries if more samples were obtained from El Ali.⁵ The El Ali meteorite is now for sale in China at a price of \$5,000,000. New studies that highlight its natural and cultural heritage significance promote its value, so it is not strange that its price will double.⁶

Future: Although the Shiid-birood stone was hidden from the eyes of the locals, the name will never disappear. It will still remain attached to the area. For security reasons, it is difficult to visit the site, but there is still a chance to obtain further samples and information from what remains of the massive meteorite impact site at its *in situ* location.¹ The future of the El Ali meteorite seems uncertain. The outstanding question is whether this national treasure will eventually return to its original country, or will simply be forgotten.

References: [1] Personal communication, 10 May 2023, El Ali elders, chief Mohamed Omer Hussein. [2] Personal communication, 17 May 2023, El Ali resident, Hassan Ali Mahamud. [3] Jezow, D. A. (2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgF190wCbfs&ab_channel=MARACADDESHOW [4] Gattaceca, J. et al. (2022) MAPS, 57, 2102-2105. [5] MacPherson, A. (2022), *New minerals discovered in massive meteorite may reveal clues to asteroid formation*, ualberta.ca/folio. [6] Hussein, A. A. (2023), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbHNOp6WydK&t=46s&ab_channel=HudHud1

Note: This information is based on personal communications with residents of El Ali in May of 2023.

