

Zeila: Neglected Historical Site

“Besides a large floating population, Zayla contains about 1,500 souls. They are comparatively a fine race of people, and suffer from little but fever and an occasional ophthalmia. Their greatest hardship is the want of the pure element: the Hissi or well is about four miles distant from the town, and all the pits within the walls supply brackish or bitter water, fit only for external use. This is probably the reason why vegetables are unknown, and why a horse, a mule, or even a dog, is not to be found in the place.” (Richard Burton, 1924).

Abstract

Historical, cultural and tourism cities play major part in conserving and realizing value of our heritage, physical heritages, landscape and cultural heritage. If people protect and value their cultural heritage they understand who they are and where they from, but in the contrary if they destroy and neglect their ancestral heritages and physical heritages they lost their historical identities. This is matter exist in Zeila historical site (s), because all physical and cultural heritages were destroyed civil wars, mater of elate immaturity or archeologists activities those who investigate the history of that sites.

This article identifies how Zeila is neglected either government or its community. It would point out brief historical background of this place and how it is valuable, because the theory of heritage conservation people preserve their ancestral and historical heritages.

The article also dig out and reveal other problems which are treat and challenges to the people in Zeila at present such as lack of infrastructure, weak of health service and educational institutions. The article would also give a message to the government and other concerned stakeholders.

Brief Historical Prospective of Zeila



The Zeila (Saylac, Zaila/Zayla) is officially under the Awdal region (unofficially is the capital city of Salel), on the north coast of Somaliland. It is historical port city Zeila situated around 25 km from the Djibouti border. As far back in the historical prospective, Zeila is historical site which became part of British Somaliland in 1888. Before this era Zeila was under the Ottoman Empire rule for more than three centuries.

At the end of 9th century it was the time that Ziela had appeared in the Arab Record when Al Ya'qubi mentioned and later other historian wrote a lot about it. The town became the political and economic place of Arab, because of its geographical location. In the eye of economic, it was one of the main ports of Abyssinian traders with Arabian and orient. At this time Somalis in Zeila had been traded, produced and exported leather, gums, ghee and ostrich feathers and slaves and Ivory from Abyssinian hinterland, they also imported clothes, dates, iron, weapons, China ware and pottery (Lewis, 1981).

Apart from the economic, Lewis also explained that Zeila was a dynastic city and politically important place, because it had been the center of Muslim Emirate of Adal (Part of the state of Ifat) and when the port enters the record of Arab history the population of the town had become Arab, Somalis and Danakil (Afar). Historians argue that no one knows when these three

populations form the Zeila culture and dialect which had combined Arabic, Somali and Afar. There are also other minor groups such as Indian and Persian who settled the port.

In 1081 A.H (1670-71 A.D) the Shanabila Sayyids were the Kazis of Ziela and have the control of the town for 138 years, because it passed two generations ago into the hands of Mohammed Musa, A Hawiyah. In 13th century Zeila was ruled by Walashma dynasty claiming Arab origins and in the 14 century Zeila became place of holly war, because Muslims and Abyssinian Christian competed and fought the control of the town. Nevertheless, Abyssinia kings conquered it and the Muslim territories in Zeila fall into the hands of Christian. The land were laid waste, mosques were destroyed and converted into churches, while Abyssinians returned their mountains. After A.D 1400 prince of Zayla, Saad el Din surrounded his city by the Hatze David II and he run away his people in the hands of their enemies, while his sons, Sabr el Din, Ali, Mansur and Jamal El Din fled to Arabia and found refuge with the kind of Yemen, after they were returned and Walashma dynasty took the title of kind of Adal (*Richard Burton, 1924*)

After nearly hundred years of war, Adal found their charismatic leader, Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Ghazi (Left handed(1306-43) and his powerful army had recovered and recapture Zeila from Abyssinian Christians (Lewis, 1981).

Ibnu Batuta in his voyage of Africa-which he wrote the book called Al Buldanah- he mentioned and described Zeila town as this, “I then went from Aden by sea, and after four days came to the city of Zayla. This is a settlement, of the Berbers, a people of Sudan (Black), of the Shafia sect. Their country is a desert of two months’ extent; the first part is termed Zayla, the last Makdashu. The greatest number of the inhabitants, however, it is one of the Rafizah sect. Their food is mostly camels’ flesh and fish. The stench of the country is extreme, as is also its filth, from the stink of the fish and the blood of camels which are slaughtered in its streets.”

Turkeys or Ottoman Empire defeated kingdoms in Yemen about A.D 1500, then all traders such Indian took refuge in Adel and its partners, then Turkeys saw the great wealthy in to the opposite kingdom. They took also the possession of Zayla and established what they called custom-house and after long possession of Ottoman in Zeila as route of slave trade, gold and other precious commercial things, it became competing port, because an Armament of Portuguese under the Lopes Suares Alberguiera was taken Zayla in July 1516, but they didn’t last long and they returned where they from (Richard, 1924).



Zeila old Mosque and Minarat

In 1888, the Ottoman Empire and Britain entered into agreement which defined the boundaries of their protectorates, that was the time when Zeila became under the British Protectorate as other part of Somaliland, but Britain hadn't made any effort, while France had build real-ways, roads and other infrastructures in Djibouti, but there had been strong historical buildings in Zeila such as mosques, governmental centers and other beautiful building from the Ottoman Empire and pre-dynasties; as you can see if you visit Zeila at this moment, although they are vanished and destroyed by the different wars which Zeila passed through, at least you can see most of the foundations of these historical buildings.

On the other hand, Zeila existed before the Islam spread in Sub-saharan African. The two Mehrab (Qiblatayn) Mosque is the evidence of these argument, because Qiblatayn's one direction faced Mecca and one facing Jerusalem and early Muslims praying toward Jerusalem and some historians claim that Prophet Muhammed's family (PBUH) travelled through Saylac to Aksum in the mid 17th century. In addition to Qiblatayn mosque Zayla is the cemetery of Sh. Ibrahim Saylici. The ancient Somali history mentions that Sheik Saylici was the first Sheik came to spread Islam in Horn of Africa. (Sado, 2015).

Neglected Ancestral History



Qiblatayn Mosque (Two Direction/Mehrab Mosque)

There are plenty of historic cities in Zeila such as Qablatayn and other ancient cemeteries which determines the different successor dynasties in the district, heroes and Sheik from Zeila community, but unfortunately most of them are vanished and the remaining or the foundation of such as the Qiblatayn Mosque (the two Mehrab mosque) is still exist and also there are other cemeteries of Zeila foundries.

Sado Mire mentioned the African Archeology review “Mapping the archaeology of Somaliland: religion, art, script, time, urbanism, trade and empire in 2015, “that the Qiblatayn has faced a lot of destruction through digging and exposure of foundation without conservation or reports.

In March 2016, I visited Zeila and I was one of a group of researchers who were conducting a research about Security assessment report in Zeila, 3 days tour I observed many historical sites such as the Qiblatayn Mosque which is totally disappeared and you can see the left foundations of the buildings. I talked about the Qiblatayn and other buildings some people in Sayla

community, they told me that some foreigners dug and loot the sites and all the sites were destroyed by foreign archeologists, but we can't ignore that the civil wars in the country were parts and parcel the destruction of these historical cities.



Sheik Ibrahim Saylici's Qudbi (Cemetery)

Some Ancient Historians, heroes, governors and religious men in Saylac are buried in Qudbi (Cemetery) in the town, but most of them were destroyed and there no one who can identify their graveyard, exclusion the well known cemetery of Sheikh Ibrahim Saylici who is founder of Saylac. There are also Turkey or Ottoman Empire old buildings which you can see how the decorations of that Empire was. The buildings had built strong stones which you can feel how they were beautiful and strong in the Ottoman era.



Ottoman Empire Public documentary storage

Government and other international bodies who concern world heritage sites are ignored the gradual disappearance of Zayla historical town. If Zayla disappear and become new Zayla as its now, thousand years of history will be nothing and the new generation will know nothing about their unique history.

“Human history has become too much a matter of dogma taught by 'professionals' in ivory towers as though it's all fact. Actually, much of human history is up for grabs. The further back you go, the more that the history that's taught in the schools and universities begins to look like some kind of faerie story.” Archeologist [Graham Hancock](#).

In the future it will be better to repair and renovate these historic cities either by government or citizens or other international organization. If the government maintains the preservation of Zayla historical cities, it will become tourism and heritages site. Tourism is one of the sources of income which nations manage their domestic and international developments as economics argue.

Infrastructure and other basic Necessities

Zayla as we already mentioned had been a trade center before 7th century and after 19th century, but at the present time it is nothing, the provision of public service-such as health care, education and living standard are completely low (people live under the poverty line).

After the independent of Somaliland both 1960s and 1991 Zayla was neglected. People in Zayla told me during my observation that governmental service are rare, because they are far from the capital city of Hargeisa and Borama, the capital of Awdal Region. Some old men told me that Zayla health center didn't work properly in the last 3 years, because of lack of health staffs, medical kits and other health equipments.

On the other hand, OCVP (Observatory of Conflict and Violence Prevention) conducted in Zayla a district conflict and security assessment report. The report revealed that Zeila's formal justice system had no offices, and that there was no prison in the district.

Coming to the facts we witnessed, Zeila has no road and other routes. When we begun our travel from Hargeisa we were struggling the mountains, valleys and other rough route to Sayla districts. It was drought time; people are suffering because of the severe situation they were in, they had no water, food, shelters and even their livestock were gone. We ask ourselves, if these people would have been road how the situation would be? Off course they would get rescue and people will survive. Thank God, people are prospers now and rainy season come and they get water to survive at least.

After 7 hours long travel and struggle we reach Zeila. The person, who took and will take way to Zeila, realizes the benefit of infrastructure, because community in this neglected historical site would have get their fundamental rights.

“Besides a large floating population, Zayla contains about 1500 souls. They are comparatively a fine race of people, and suffer from little but fever and an occasional ophthalmia. Their greatest hardship is the want of the pure element: the Hissi or well, is about four miles distant from the town, and all the pits Within the walls supply brackish or bitter water, fit only for external use. This is probably the reason why vegetables are unknown, and why a horse, a mule, or even a dog, is not to be found in the place.” (Richard Burton, 1924.

When you look these quote you would realize the problems existed in that era still exist in Zeila; what was wrong with the successor governments? Why don't they understand the importance of Zeila and its community? When would they conserve the historical sites? I left the answers of these questions and many more to any Somaliland government and citizens who are interested patriotically the conservation of their ancestral and holy places.

The economics of Zeila Community is based on fishing and trading activities with especially Djibouti and Yemen, but as they told us they don't have boats and other fishing equipments. Also the port of Zeila is an important route trade between Middle East and Horn of Africa, but It needs development and investment. At the present it is like no man's land.

The last dangerous thing that Zeila's people told us was; that the sea surrounds the city during the rainy season and the city enters what they called "ZERO," because water from the sea block all the roads goes into the town. At this time strong men escapes from the city to the neighbor towns and they left vulnerable people in the town such as women, children and old people. During "ZERO" situation people in Zeila need special care and welfare from the government or any other bodies.

Conclusion

In Zeila there are historical sites such as Qiblatayn (Two direction mosque) and other important sites which need special preservation. These cities determined that Zeila is one of the earliest cities established in East Africa. Islamic religion also reached to Zeila when Prophet Mohamed (PBUH) and his companion migrated to Medina from Mecca. Most of Historian pointed out that Zeila had been the center of Adel and Ifat dynasties. Apart from these ancient history, it is heritage center, because ancestral signs and history are hiding beneath it.

Most of ancestral history in Zeila is gone, but archeologically they can retrieve and conserve. The foundations of historical buildings and other heritage stuffs are better to protect from international and national physical and cultural heritage looters.

On the other side, this neglected historical town needs to provide governmental service because community in Zeila doesn't get basic necessities such as health, education and clean water. Infrastructure is other main problem; without roads, hospitals, schools and other public place these vulnerable and neglected people wouldn't get any better life and their history and live would vanish like they are nothing.

Sea water is also a danger to their lives, because as we already mentioned during rainy season sea water encircles the town and it can drown the town and its people. At this time people in Zeila don't get escape route and they live fear and worried. Their children don't go out and can't go to their schools.

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By: Ibrahim Khadar Saed
LLB, CND MA
CPA, Researcher

Contact at: Email: ibraahimkhs@hotmail.com