

# The Conservation of Dirre Sheikh Hussein Heritage Site

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## **Abstract**

As an important historical and cultural heritage of Ethiopia, Dirre Sheikh Hussein Heritage site have not paid appropriate conservation measures so far. It has been a neglected and even undermined heritage until recently. At present this heritage has received important attention from the government and has been recognized as the National heritage. There is an effort to put it into the World Heritage List. This effort has to be supported by appropriate conservation and management plan. This paper analysis the conservation efforts done so far and recommends the need of management and development plan for the sustainable conservation of this heritage.

## **Introduction**

Dirre Sheikh Hussein is one of the outstanding cultural heritage site. It is located 620km southeast of Addis Ababa in Bale Zone, Oromia Regional National State, Ethiopia. It is located about 1500 metre asl in the semi-arid valley of Wabi Shebele River, mid way between the peaks and the plains, in the eastern foothills of the spectacular Bale Mountains range. The 600km road from Addis Ababa to Dirre Sheikh Hussein passes through different natural and cultural landscapes with a variety of attractions.

## **Description of the Property**

The sanctuary of Sheikh Hussein Comprises different components that include mosques, shrines, stone-walled fences, tombs, water ponds, festive and ceremonial yards natural forests/landscapes and a historically associated human settlement. There are 11 buildings in and around the sacred zone which are historically, aesthetically, religiously and architecturally important. Many of the historical buildings are located in the walled compound of the shrine. The sacred site of Dirre Sheikh Hussein is large area of about 90km<sup>2</sup>. The beautiful scenery of the valley of Wabi Shebele River is part of the landscape of the sanctuary.

The first building in the sacred zone of Dirre Sheik Hussein was the Mosque of Balla, which is located some 5km away from the present compound. This mosque was demolished and only the ruins remained. We do not have sufficient information why the sheikh changed his centre from Balla to the present location.

All the built heritages and natural elements in the sanctuary have their own particular importance and values. The sanctuary and whatever exists around it have meaning for the people of Dirre Sheikh Hussein and to the followers of the cult. Every ruin, rock, cleft, tree, water ponds, forest, wildlife is imbued with mythical significance and believed to be abode of spirits.

Of the many building in the sanctuary, the Mosque of Zuqtum, the mausoleum of Sheikh Hussein, and the shrine of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani are the most significant from historical, spiritual, aesthetic, and architectural point of view.

The nucleus and the oldest standing structure (built heritage) in the sanctuary is the Mosque of Zuqtum. Oral traditions assert that this mosque was built by Sheikh Hussein himself and his first disciples 900 years ago. The structure was built of dry jointed limestone masonry bonded with a lime and mud mortar, both on the outside and inside, and compacted earthen floor. The roof is rip-rapped with timber beams and topped by layers of limestone and limewater proofing. The mosque is rectangular in shape and laid on an area of 85m<sup>2</sup>.



An extension of the building was constructed attached to the old mosque as a prayer hall (id Salat) some 50 years ago by local community. This recent extension/the prayer hall was constructed with the same materials and the same style as the old inner portion. It is large in size and covers an area of 325 m<sup>2</sup>. Eighty-one stone masonry pillars are erected as support structure at a very close distance to each other. The verandah was made of masonry stone.

Of the many shrines the most beautiful and the largest one is that of the mausoleum of Sheikh Hussein. This huge and magnificent shrine where the body of the Sheikh is said to have laid, stands at the centre of a spacious compound beneath a gleaming white washed cupola thirty feet high. The outer part of the cupola have a protruding stone structure. This shrine is the heart of the sanctuary upon which all the pilgrims ultimately focus their energies.

Another magnificent shrine is dedicated to Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani. Abdulqadir was the founder of the Qadiriya order. Although this famous saint was died in Baghdad in A.D.1166, he is widely believed among the Muslims of Northeastern Africa to have lived in their country. The shrine of Abd-al-Qadir was constructed by the initiative of Emir Abd al-Shakur of Harar. It is a small cupola-shaped building. The shrine of Aw Muhammad, an important missionary of the late 18thc, is located some distance outside the compound of the sanctuary.

Many other shrines /buildings are still located in the fona, the religious area encircled by a wall. Besides the oldest mosque, Zuqtum, there are four mosques in the site. These are constructed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. There are several other built monumental shrines dedicated to Sheikh Hussein's father, mother, and other saints. The sacred area is encircled by a compound of high wall layered by stones and lime and mud mortar.

Another most important feature of Dirre Sheikh Hussein is the construction of water pools or ponds. There are seven pools constructed at different times by different persons for local and pilgrims use. Of these pools, the oldest one is called Haro Luku which was constructed by Sheikh Hussein and his students 900 years ago. These water pools testify an important traditional cultural value of water harvesting and preservation in a semi-arid area where water shortage is a major problem. The tradition can be employed to ease the problem of the present shortage of water in the area.

With respect to the buildings it can be said in summary that the nucleus of Sheikh Hussein's shrine (Zuqtum Mosque) goes back to the 12thc, and that parts of his mausoleum and Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani's Shrine and the whole of the present sanctuary were constructed in the late 18thc.



Apart from size and beauty, the shrines of Dirre Sheikh Hussein are very similar in their layouts, structure, and composition. All the shrines were built from local sandstone, limestone, wood, lime mortar and soil. They are painted white with burnt log ash combined with lime which is prepared locally in traditional way. The wood used for the roof was particularly resistant, and made it possible for the structure/buildings to stand for centuries. The buildings reflect the architectural tradition of their time and in some cases resembles to Harari architecture of approximate period.

Aesthetically and architecturally the sanctuary is quite compelling. The builders were able to produce magnificent, well-designed and culturally and artistically executed shrines. This certainly lends credence to the creative prowess and perception as well as the local knowledge and skills of those who constructed the shrines. The engineering technology, materials, local know-how and skills are highly regarded.

What particularly added special beauty and grace to Dirre Sheikh Hussein is the unique environment in which it is located. It is located midway between the peaks and the plains, in the eastern foothill of the Bale Mountains range, home of several endemic wildlife of Ethiopia. These mountains and the great gorges of Wabe river highlight the grandeur and magnificent scene to Dirre Sheikh Hussein and enhance the visual experience of the visitor.

## Historical, Cultural and Social Significance of the Site

Dirre Sheikh Hussein, also known as Annajina, is a cultural and religious center of great significance to millions of the followers of the cult throughout Northeast Africa. The roots of the cult date back to the late 12<sup>th</sup> C. and associated with the holyman named Sheikh Nur Hussein. He was the most successful Muslim missionary who played a crucial role in the spread of Islam in southern Ethiopia, and particularly among the Arsi Oromo. According to oral traditions, Nur Hussein lived 30 generations ago. This would cover a time-span of about 922 years and consequently leads back to the late 12<sup>th</sup> c.

Dirre Sheikh Hussein (the plain of Sheikh Hussein in Oromo language,) is situated c. 1500 meters above sea-level in the valley of Wabi Shebelle River, midway between the peaks and the plains, in the eastern foothills of the magnificent Bale mountain ranges.

Sheikh Hussein is known to have been the standard bearer in the spread of Islam in the southern Ethiopia. He was a distinguished counselor and an accomplished teacher. This has made Dirre Sheikh Hussein the leading Muslim capital and the major centre of Islamic learning and religious culture in the whole of southern Ethiopia. Sheikh Hussein was and still is universally regarded as a saint. He is not only venerated but almost deified.

All available oral traditions emphasize Sheikh Nur Hussein's role as an outstanding hero of Muslim missionary endeavor in the area. The oral traditions and also the "Rabi-al-Qulbu" claim that Sheikh Hussein's veneration as a saint already commenced during his lifetime as a result of the numerous miracles which he performed. But the establishment of the Abd-al-Qadir shrine in Annajina in late 18<sup>th</sup>C led to a steady increase of Sheikh Hussein's importance and finally resulted in its rise as one of the most remarkable spiritual centers of Northeast Africa.

As the greatest patron saint, there is a notion that the spirit of a Muslim saint should still be capable of performing miracles and people expected to find spiritual consolation in him. Although he died several centuries ago, people still continue to believe that his shrine possesses strong spirits that could be capable of performing miracles, and continued to venerate him as a mediator between man and God,

capable of ensuring the well being of their tribe, their children, the fertility of their women, and the uninterrupted bounty of their harvests. For various reasons people strive to partake of the saint's **baraka**, his beneficial power, and to approach God through his mediation. Pilgrimages/devotees to the Sheikh consider/ believe that the Sheikh was, and still is, the channel through which all blessing from Waqa /God/ Allah reach them.

When life is diminished in every form: good health, fertility, material well- being, peace and stability... etc people turn to Sheikh Hussein with the greatest hope to seek the remedy for all their ills, the consolation for all their griefs, and the solution to all their problems. And, peace that reigns, the rain that comes, the health, the fertility, material well being.. etc that are achieved, the votives that are fulfilled are considered as the **baraka** of Sheikh Hussein.



Dirre Shekh Hussein is also significant for its value as a unique testimony of a living cultural and religious tradition deep-rooted in the cultural tradition and history of the Oromo people. It has powerful religious and social values. It provides the laws of social conduct /or the rules of social behaviour/ for living together, mutual help, cooperation, peaceful relationship and peaceful resolution of conflicts and disputes.

It provides the law for caring human beings, wildlife, trees, water, and the land that supports existence. Natural objects and wildlifes of

the sacred zone are protected. The people of Dirre Sheikh Hussein do not cut trees, and kill wild animals. Caring for the trees, ponds, forests and the land is an essential part of their tradition. As the result about 94km<sup>2</sup> of area of, the sanctuary and the sacred zone is conserved and preserved by the people. The forests, wildlife and indigenous trees in this sacred zone are conserved and safeguarded by the people. The people of Dirre Sheikh Hussein still believe that caring for the land and its inhabitants is of prime importance and an essential part of their tradition. Thus, the cult of Sheikh Hussein provides the social code of behaviour followed by the community today which governs both interpersonal and the management of natural environment. This behaviour has important value in terms of the conservation and preservation of cultural heritages and natural environment, and has to be appreciated.

Dirre Sheikh Hussein represents an exceptional case where one of the monotheistic religions, Islam, transforms indigenous beliefs and supplants them, often adopting an existing shrine and sometimes some of the former practices. At the same time, it represents a case where traditional religion continued to exist while accommodating Islam in the cult of Sheikh Hussein. The cult of Sheikh Hussein and the pilgrimages to his shrine were developed on the roots of the traditional Oromo religion and cultural practices. It is important to note that here, on sacred ground, Islamic and traditional religious ideas entwined or combined to create a potent religious synergy. At the same time, Islamic elements were also adopted and performed at Dirre Sheikh Hussein. Names of localities and sites as well as certain practices have been copied from the Meccan model. It has, therefore, a universal value as a unique testimony of a particularly tolerant and accommodating nature of Islam in contrast to the Muslim orthodoxy or Islamic fundamentalism of the contemporary world.

People selected those Islamic elements that can merge with their traditional way of life and thought. They say “Sheikh Hussein incorporated so many things our ancestors treasured.” For the Muslim Oromo “Sheikh Hussein is a Shrine for ancient values”. In short, the Oromo sought and found in Sheikh Hussein a support for their most



cherished values against the impact of social and political changes and pressures.

The sanctuary of Sheikh Hussein and the whole sacred zone around it is looked after by hereditary guardian, known as the darga. The darga formed a historically very important settlement pattern at Dirre Sheikh Hussein. There are 11 dargas (groups of settlers). The groups are formed depending on historical sequence on succession of their settlement at the place starting from the earliest settlers to the latest. The descendents of the earliest settlers claim that their ancestors arrived here at or had been there during the life time of the Sheikh. Other came or settled at the Dirre one after the other several hundred of years ago.



Since the darga were considered (claimed to be) the traditional ‘owners’ of the whole sanctuary, their knowledge and role as custodians of the sanctuary have been properly recognized. The darga have the combined traditional functions of guardian of the sanctuary and the role of transmitting the rituals, ceremonies and traditions of the cult. Its standards and values are transmitted orally.

They are also responsible for digging water ponds and maintaining them for the use of pilgrims. Maintaining law and order during the religious festival is also the duty of the darga. They also build temporary shelters for the accommodation of pilgrims. Besides preserving the traditions and rituals, guarding the sanctuary, digging

and maintaining water ponds, maintaining law and order, the darga also provided hospitality and care for the pilgrims.

The cult of Sheikh Hussein, with its sanctuaries and traditions, is conserved and preserved in its totality by the expertise of the darga without any external help and interference. Therefore, the darga represents a popular and traditional cultural heritages in the form of a particularly distinct pattern of human settlement and conservation of heritages of outstanding value from historical and traditional system of community-based management point of views. It represents an outstanding example of community-based cultural resource management strategy. This cultural achievement is a source of pride and self-confidence. It is a pride of heritage that identifies the small village settlement and small group of people of Dirre Sheikh Hussein.

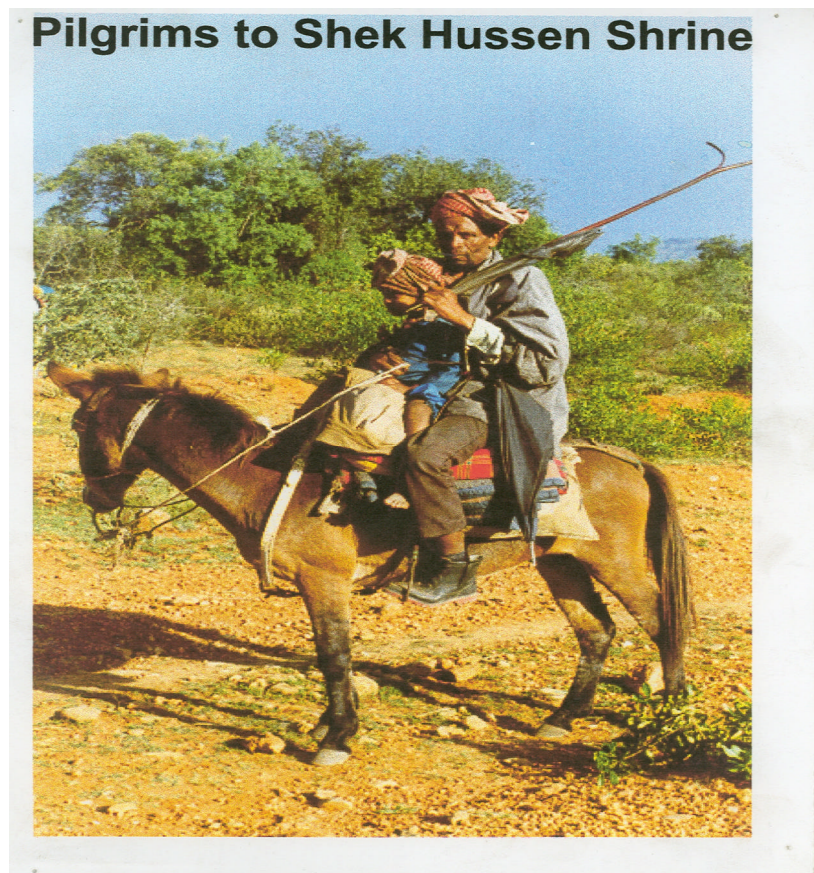
The cult of Sheikh Hussein, the patron saint of Muslims, was spread and became popular in Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya. He is venerated as the spiritual leader and saint of the Muslims in the Northeast Africa. His birth place and the place where his shrine located, increasingly acquired reputation of a “Northeast African Mecca “and became the major centre of pilgrimage.

As an important pilgrimage center of super-regional importance, Dirre Sheikh Hussein has a powerful universal integrative value that represents, peaceful relations, social interactions and cultural exchanges between peoples of different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.



Pilgrimages to Dirre Sheikh Hussein take place twice a year. The main pilgrimage time and the main festival of Sheikh Hussein is his ***birthday***, a Tuesday which is fixed in the beginning of August by the traditional Oromo calendar. This month is called ji'a Sheekh Hussen, the moon or the month of Sheikh Hussein in Afan Oromo. The second important date of pilgrimage is the feast "***id al-kabir***," the great feast' at the end of the "dhu'l-hijja," the month of the pilgrimage to Mecca and the last month of the Muslim year. This date changes according to the Muslim lunar calendar.

Over 200,000 people make pilgrimage annually to Dirre Sheikh Hussein. Pilgrims came from all over Ethiopia, and there were people from Kenya, Somalia, and even from the Middle East among them. People travel to his holy place overland on foot, or on the backs of mules or donkeys, for as long as six months. All Oromo through whose land they passed, would give them hospitality. Despite the distance and an arduous journey, the pilgrims went to Dirre Sheikh Hussein rejoicing and they came back rejoicing. It was considered to be a very holy pilgrimage. A Person who loves Sheikh Hussein goes as frequently as he can on pilgrimage to his shrine at Dirre Sheikh Hussein.



Pilgrims to Sheikh Hussein carry a Y-shaped sticks, known as “Ulee Sheikh Hussein” as a symbol of the cult. Pilgrimage to Dirre Sheikh Hussein is associated with peace. The very symbol of the cult, the Y-shaped stick, known as ‘Ulee Sheek Huseen’ symbolizes peace. Pilgrims travel unarmed as a sign of their peaceful intentions. Clans /people pass through the territories of hostile groups without being in danger, by carrying ‘Ulee Sheek Huseen’ like the Red Cross flag. However sever hostilities may become, it is said that pilgrims themselves are never attacked. They are often accorded hospitality on their way.

Pilgrimage to Sheikh Hussein is important as a means of bringing together Ethiopians of diverse ethnic and religious groups. It involves the Oromo, Amhara, Gurage, Somali, Tigreans, Afar, Wolayita, Kambata,..... etc people from all over the regions of Ethiopia. Moreover, many Christians and believers of traditional religions are also drawn to the cult of Sheikh Hussein and make pilgrimage to Dirre Sheikh Hussein. Dirre Sheikh Hussein is a unique place where a Muslim saint is venerated equally by the Muslims, Christians and believers of traditional religions. This is a unique and a rare feature of the cult of Sheikh Hussein.



The saint stays as a symbol of the solidarity of all Northeast African Muslims across ethnic and political boundaries. He became a patron saint and a central figure of identification for millions of people.

Sheikh Hussein creates a muslim solidarity which associates all of them, regardless of their ethnic and cultural differences. Even national boundaries lose their significance for the pilgrims in Dirre Sheikh Hussein. All Islamic people in Northeast Africa share a common interest in this spiritual center, just as in a global context all Muslims do with respect of Mecca. In fact, for the poor people from that part of the world, who cannot afford the pilgrimage to Mecca, the “Muda” (pilgrimage in Oromo language) to Sheikh Hussein becomes a substitute.

It is important as a source of inspiration and intercultural exchange and as a means of bringing peoples from different backgrounds closer together. As a holy pilgrimage centre, Dirre Sheika Hussein owed a strong inherent spiritual unifying force and played an important universalistic integrative function/value that transcended ethnic, cultural, religious and even political boundaries. Sheikh Hussein promotes the unity, solidarity, love and brotherhood to the devotees to the cult.

Moreover, Dirre Sheikh Hussein is a place of solving conflicts and disputes, maintain internal peace between individual persons and between ethnic groups by consensus and persuasion. The cult of Sheikh Hussein has an important value as a unique testimony of a deep-rooted living cultural and religious tradition that manifests itself in the daily life of the people. The traditions have powerful religious and social values. It provides the laws of social conduct or the rules of social behaviour for living together, mutual help, cooperation, peaceful relationship and peaceful resolution of conflicts and disputes. Sheikh Hussein is ‘The Law’. The term ‘Adaraa Sheek Huseen’ (‘By the Power of Sheikh Hussein’) is the language most frequently used by the devotees.

### **Integrity And Condition of the Built Heritages**

No detailed surveys have been made so far. Despite this, however, there is no major changes in the building structures, functions and values of the sanctuaries as a whole. The shrines appear as they were originally constructed. The structures have borne well the stamp of wear and tear for centuries.

In 2002, local community have build a cement concrete screed floor on top of the existing earth floor of the Zuqum Mosque and the extended prayer hall and its veranda. They did this to smooth the floor for prayer.

The Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau believe that the construction of a concrete and cement screed floor in this old building is inappropriate from conservation point of view because it destroys the authenticity of the heritage, and in the long run, cement will damage the integrity of the buildings.

Thus, the Bureau, with the consent of local people, decided to remove the concrete and cement screed floor from the old buildings. The new cement screed floor was demolished and replaced with flag stone grouted with lime mortar. This work was financed by the Regional National Government of Oromia. Unfortunately, the removal of the cement concrete floor was not executed with care. Strong force was applied during the demolition of the concrete floor adversely damaged the pillars and the walls. Many of the pillars of the extended prayer hall were cracked. In some cases soil plaster was fall off. The structure of the old mosque also cracked and the wall on one side was bulged out. These preservation actions endangered the overall stability of the mosque's structure. These problems necessitated another measure of intervention in conservation and restoration work.

The second phase of the conservation and structural consolidation of the Sheikh Hussein Shrine was carried out in 2006/7. The project was financed by the US Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation.

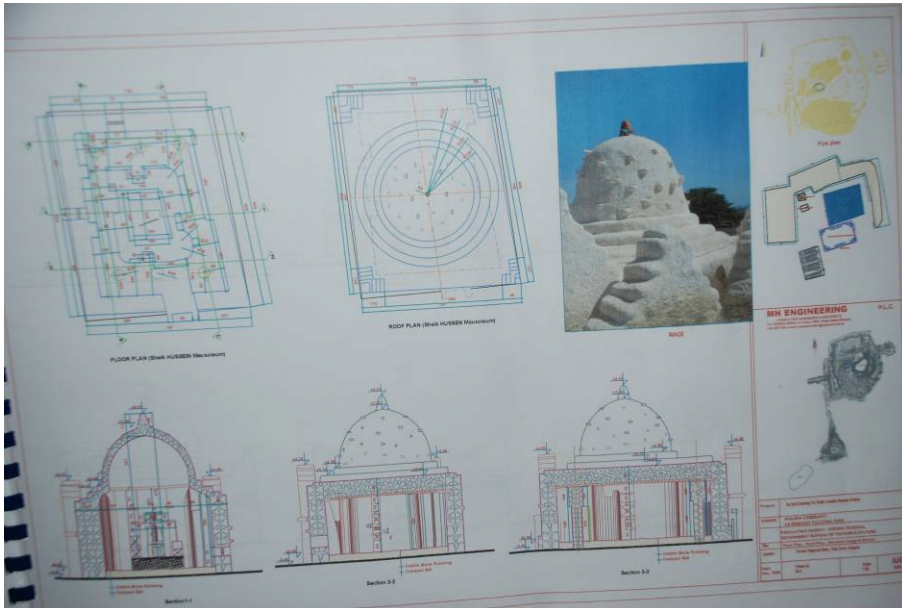
In this phase the following major works were accomplished.

- Ø The roof of the prayer hall (id salat place) building area (103,25 m<sup>2</sup>) and the roof the mausoleum of Sheikh Hussein (45 m<sup>2</sup>) were fully maintained and consolidated,
- Ø A new stone dressed walkway (1.5m width and 582 m length) was constructed in the compound),
- Ø To protect the buildings from erosion, 310m length drainage system ditch was constructed in and around the compound, especially on steep inclines and declines.
- Ø A five steps dressed stone seat of 40m length each was constructed at one of the festival space.

- Ø All the buildings inside the compound were fully painted with the local traditional white paint (2,215 m<sup>2</sup>)
- Ø The walls were plastered, and the cracked pillars were repaired.
- Ø Measurements of the physical features of some of the building in the compound and topographic plan and elevation drawings were done.



Unlike the previous preservation action which was done by non-professionals and with out full involvement of local people, this project was done carefully by professionals and much more respect has been given to the use of original materials and to the advice and involvement of local people and traditional skills. The major lesson learnt from this restoration project is that local knowledge and participation in any project is important in ensuring its success and sustainability.

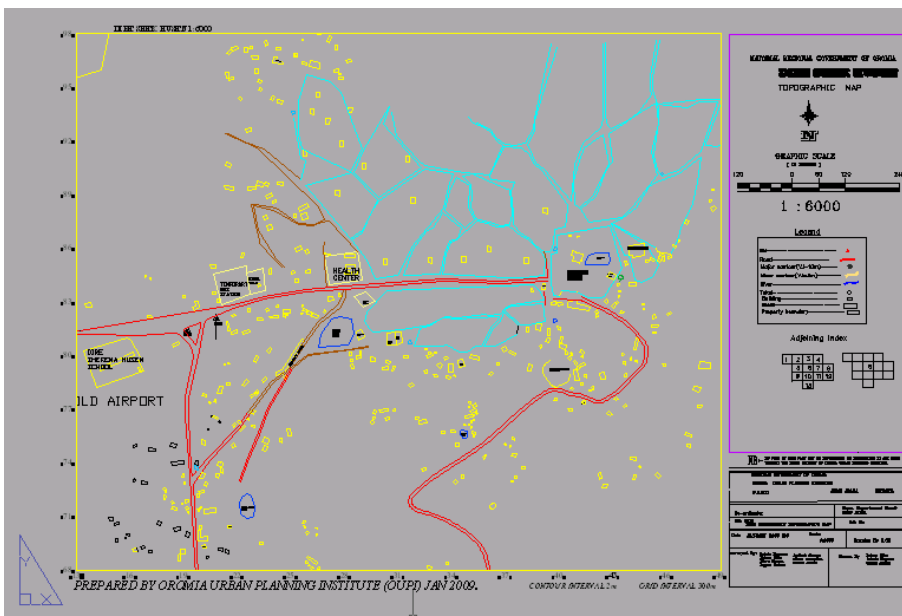


Although these urgent needs of maintenance were made, there still remain a lot of maintenance works that need attention.

Recently (after Lund session) I have succeeded to do two major works.

1. The entire boundary of the site is clearly demarcated with the participation of local people and local government authorities. The site as a whole covers an area of 94 km<sup>2</sup>.
2. The Topographic map of the site is prepared and approved by the concerned government authority.

These are important works for the future conservation and development undertakings.



Dirre Sheikh Hussein- Topographic Map



### **Legal machinery for safeguarding the cultural heritages:**

The Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau is legally responsible government body for the preservation of cultural properties. Apart from this, all the government organs and in-line agencies have a role to play in conservation and preservation.

Since the year 2000 the Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau is given the responsibility of safeguarding, conserving and preserving all cultural heritages in the region . The Bureau with all its structure is working with the stakeholders and administrative bodies and agencies. The experts of the Bureau are enhancing awareness and a sense of value for cultural heritage among the stakeholders. They also identify ways and means to conserve and protect cultural heritages at risk in the face of change. Furthermore, the experts make inventories on the cultural heritages.

The Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau has enlisted the Sheikh Hussein Shrine as the regional heritage. At the same time the Federal government has also recognised the heritage as the National Heritage of significant value.

### **Nomination to World Heritage List**

It was because of the values and significances described above that we start working to put Dirre Sheikh Hussein on the Tentative List of World Heritage under the criterion (iii), (iv), and (vi). Its chances of gaining World Heritage status are very bright. The local communities, which are the key stakeholder, will be involved in the preparation of the nomination dossier and site management.

### **Results and Current Status of Conservation and Development Work**

During the Imperial era and the Military regime, Dirre Sheikh Hussein has received little attention. The Imperial regime considered Ethiopia as a Christian country and did not recognize other religion. The cult of Sheikh Hussein have always been looked askance at and disregarded by higher authorities in the past. But since it is so well established, and because of the site's political role as a center of intellectual resistance, successive Ethiopian regimes had reluctantly shown

tolerance to the cult. Except this reluctant recognition, nothing have been done to conserve, protect, and promote this cultural heritage.

Since the establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 1991, religious freedom have been guaranteed by the constitution. The constitution also provided for cultural equality and the conservation of historical, cultural and natural heritages. A Ministry and an authority and bureaus were established at the Federal and Regional level to this purpose. This right has helped the revitalization of the pilgrimage and the revival of the cult of Sheikh Hussein, and it became a focused heritage site.

Despite this, however, the Ethiopian Islamic Council used to discourage pilgrimage to Dirre Sheikh Hussein and did not give necessary support to our Bureau's effort to conserve the site because the cult is not in line to the orthodox Islam. Between 1995-2006 the site was challenged and endangered by orthodox Islamists known as the Wahbists who get support from Saudi Arabia. The Wahbists undermine the cult and discourage pilgrimage to Dirre Sheikh Hussein. In several occasions they robbed and killed the pilgrims during their journey to the site.

In order to halt this threat, the Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau mobilized the support of higher officials from the Federal, Regional and local governments as well as major stakeholders. Besides this active and meaningful promotional works were undertaken. Moreover after a long and continuous discussion and persuasion efforts, we succeeded to achieve the alliance of the Ethiopian Islamic Council. Thus, the threat was curbed.

### **Conservation Measures Undertaken So far**

While the sanctuary of Sheikh Hussein is important to conservation, a more sustainable way and a more comprehensive package of tools and strategies must be developed.

The major effort of the Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau in relation to the conservation of Dirre Sheikh Hussein was linking site conservation to national and regional development plan/strategies. This integration into the national and regional development plan is important to address current problems and also to sustainable

conservation strategy. Such a link should entwine the preservation of the site primarily with the social and economic issues of local people. This requires multi sectoral involvement and cooperation. In this regard, the following important infrastructural development works have been achieved:

- Ø All weather road (gravel road) was constructed from the zonal capital, Robe, to Dirre Shekh Hussein, and to Hararge,
- Ø An asphalt surface road is on construction from Shashamanne to Robe,
- Ø A clinic and a school were established,
- Ø Potable water was drawn by a pipe from a place 50km away (the water supply is not sufficient)
- Ø A visitors'/tourist information centre was established,
- Ø A single line telephone service is introduced,
- Ø A Small power generator was erected. (Only to serve during the annual festivals).

### **Conservation Requirements**

Of the current issues that need urgent attention, the following are the pressing ones;

1. Sanitation facilities- lack and shortage of potable water and dry latrines are major problems and requires urgent attention in order to prevent communicable diseases during the pilgrimage time.
2. Creating means of income generating for local people. Sustainable conservation strategies have to incorporate the needs of the local communities. Their livelihood is depended on the gifts and offerings given to them by pilgrims. They do not have other means of income. It is essential to create alternative means of income.
3. The preparation of Nomination file for World Heritage List should be started immediately.
4. Perpetuating local customs, skills and techniques is often an essential requirement to conserve sites. As elsewhere in Africa, the shrines of Sheikh Hussein and the rituals, ceremonies, and oral traditions have survived thanks to expert

traditional management systems and an orally transmitted knowledge, know-how and skills. This is a local pride. It is, therefore, important to keep local knowledge, skills and know how alive, to re-build this pride and confidence by strengthening the transmission processes, and by well documenting and promoting the skills. It is also important to document the oral traditions, dances, folks, praises, hymns, songs, rituals, ceremonials,..etc that were transmitted orally from generation to generation. The identification and recording of an area's cultural resources and practices, including intangibles such as sense of places, social values and oral traditions require urgent attention.

5. Many of the buildings and the indigenous forests in and around the site need conservation
6. Awareness creation and promotional works should be continued,
7. Maintenance and repair of the fences, festive places, historic buildings within the site.
8. The old airstrip has to be repaired.
9. The site required sufficient electricity
10. Telephone services should be upgraded
11. The present clinic has to be upgraded to Health station
12. Private investors have to be encouraged to establish tourist facilities such as accommodation, restaurants, etc. At the same time it is important to create community based guest houses, camping facilities, etc. It is also important to help the establishment of local small scale entrepreneurs in tourist services.
13. There is also a need to establish a museum in the site.
14. Sustainable conservation of the site also requires land use plan

## **Conclusion**

These holistic approaches to sustainable conservation of a heritage site require a multi sector involvement and the support of local and international donors. This in turn needs building of the capacity of the

Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau and mobilization of stakeholders,

Finally, I strongly recommend the immediate preparation of management and development plan of Dirre Sheikh Hussein by linking it with the regional and national development plan. The preparation has to involve all stakeholders and the participation of local communities. I believe that the management plan will set the road map and the means and the way forward to sustainable conservation of Dirre Sheikh Hussein.

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Annex

