

Harar Jugol, the fortified city, Ethiopia



Evaluation Mission for potential World Heritage nomination

ICOMOS

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Report on Evaluation Mission to Harar Jugol, the fortified city, Ethiopia.

1. Background

Harar Jugol, the fortified historical town, in Ethiopia is nominated by the State Party for inclusion in the World Heritage List. As advisory body to UNESCO a site evaluation mission was arranged by ICOMOS to take place from November 1-8, 2004. The evaluation report is made on basis of the nomination dossier prepared by *Association Europeenne pour le Patrimoine Architectural et Urbain du Pourtour Meriditerraneen*, January 2004, on behalf of the City of Harar, Harari People National Regional State.

The observations and recommendations are based primarily on discussions with the individuals met during the mission as listed in Annex I, and corroborated further by direct observations on extensive site visits as indicated in Annex II.

2. Cultural values

The ICOMOS evaluation mission is invited to express opinions on significance, although it is not required. However, as the statement of significance is providing the very basis for the nomination and the evaluation of authenticity, I consider it necessary to make comments on the Statement as presented in the nomination report.

Harer Jugol developed as a trading post between the coast and the interior highland as well as serving as a commercial centre of the surrounding sedentary agriculturists. But the town people themselves also relies partly on farming, which give rise to close urban-rural linkages supporting the economic basis of the city.

The trade connections and migrating groups have contributed to the multiethnic composition of the population through a complex network of cultural interchange by such ethnic groups as the Oromo, Amhara, Argobbe, Hamrari, Gourage and Somali.

The Harari domestic house type and the numerous Islamic shrines, tombs and mosques give the immediate impression of an Islamic town characterised by a maze of narrow alleyways and the forbidding external appearance of the houses. Landmarks representing the Orthodox Church and Abyssinian kingdom, as well as vernacular housing in wattle and daub of a genuine African origin, all intermingle to form a distinct architectural character.

The commercial importance considerably declined by the construction of the railway connecting the port of Djibuti and Addis Ababa via the new city of Dira Dawa, leaving Harar isolated from the technological development at the beginning of the 19th century, possibly counting for the preservation of the town walls. The short lived Italian Fascist colonisation left a marked influence on the town by cutting a straight access road into the centre of the town and imposing a new town planning scheme immediately to the west of the old city.

Especially two characteristics need to be emphasised additional to the historic and architectural significance of townscape and buildings: i) the social organisation of the communities through the *Afocha* and the Kebele administration; ii) the close urban-rural linkages, which are also significant in the Harari language by the reference to *ge-usu*, *ge-fage* and *gafa* (meaning ‘people of the town’, ‘gardens of the town people’ and ‘fallow land further away from town’).

According to Arnold Toynbee (1965), Harar was the only inland city worthy of the title in East Africa between the Ethiopian city of Gondar to the North of Lake Tana, and the Arab city of Zanzibar on the East African coast before the rise of Addis Ababa and Nairobi. At any rate, contemporary urban settlements along the coast were depending on harbour facilities and it may be safe to argue that Harar Jugol represents an inland urban settlement with a distinct architectural character and social organisation, which cannot be compared to any other town in East Africa. As the commercial centre of trade with the interior, as well as centre for the propagation of Islam, the town has exercised tremendous historic influence and represents together with Axum, Gondar and Lalibella main stages in Ethiopia’s history.

3. Authenticity and constraints

The development of the specific Harari house is closely related to the *Argobba*, allegedly a migrating people originating from Saudi Arabia. The vernacular houses are still existing in villages near to Harar. In this rural environment external walls remain unplastered appearing with the rough masonry of local porous rock set in clay mortar and wall foundations of coursed stone with a more solid composition.

Old photographs from the early 19th century presently on display in the Rimbaud House show that houses inside Jugol at that time largely had a similar unplastered external finish. The town wall still appears largely with the same rough character and reddish colour from the clay mortar, which together with the dirt road and the surrounding fields and gardens make up a genuine authentic appearance. This rural character is generally about to disappear as the streetscape has turned more urban during the intermediate time with external walls mainly plastered and lime washed in different shades of white, green and blue. The shop front houses along the new main street are briskly painted in bright, contrasting colours. Former flat clay roofing has been almost entirely substituted in favour of corrugated iron sheeting. Original wooden doors are being substituted by iron and many such gradual changes are about to appear. Most conspicuously perhaps is the number of parabolic reflectors beginning to show at the roofscape.

This gradual change of appearance indicates the complex and intriguing task of defining and maintaining authentic qualities over time and still allowing for necessary changes. Apart from a single reinforced concrete house under construction the general character of the townscape has so far preserved a general feeling of genuine authenticity, but the level of acceptable change need to be discussed and formulated in clearly understandable terms. The Conservation Office has a big challenge ahead determining the rate of acceptable change, stipulating the required building regulations and raising general awareness about this complex issue.

Poverty, nationalisation of private property during the DERG regime and growing population pressure is another obstacle to preservation of authentic qualities.

The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia gives a total of 17.445 housing units of which about 1/3 is located in the Jugol area, but no reliable up-dated household census data is available. *The Demographic and Socio-economic Profile of Harari Region*, Harari Office of Population, April 2001,

provides some data on housing needs in Harar town, estimated at the scale of 323 new households for relieving overcrowded units and 522 for replacement of dilapidated and ruined housing units. One informant referred that about 700 previously nationalised house units are rented at the symbolic rate of 1-4 Birr, which by no means cover the cost of regular maintenance and up-keep.

Regular maintenance of a traditional roof alone amount to about 150 Birr every 2nd year and the renters have very little incentives to secure the up-keep of the house by traditional materials. It is reported that hardwood roof joists are often sold to provide additional income and the original structured substituted by some makeshift construction. No data is provided about ownership, household income and ethnic configuration of the population. It is evident that acute shortage of housing and lack of maintenance are serious problems, which effect long term sustainability and authenticity of the build fabric.

The specific *Afocha* organisation and Kebele administration has succeeded to ensure a peaceful coexistence of the many ethnic groups in the town. As an international appreciation Harar was awarded UNESCO's Cities for Peace Prize 2002-2003.. 'recognising the Municipality's effort for strengthening social cohesion, improving living conditions in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and developing genuine urban harmony and diversity'.

Harar Jugol is the very centre of the Harari cultural identity with shared values and religious consensus. The Harari National Council in particular has great concern for the preservation of the special character and cultural heritage of the city. However, the people met during the mission were mainly representing the Islamic community in one way or the other. Treating the intriguing concept of authenticity, it will be important to acknowledge that the multiethnic composition of the population has influenced on the shaping of the town and its appearance.

4. Infrastructure development and betterment of living conditions.

Three major initiatives are underway to improve the infrastructure in Harar:

- Water supply project piping water from Dira Dawa to Harar is currently under implementation at the estimated cost of 297 mill Birr.
- Tropies Consulting Engeneering Consultant Company (Addis Ababa) has prepared a project for Jugol Sullage Waste Collection and Disposing Project (August 2004) to alleviate the current waste disposal problem of the town. The total cost is estimated at 25 mill Birr and the first phase, budgeted at 6 mill Birr will start later this year.
- The Transport Construction and Design Share Company (Addis Ababa) has prepared a project and the bidding documents for the Arterial Asphalt Road Projects. The bidding procedures are expected to start in two weeks time. The cost is estimated at total 4 mill Birr.

All these major work plans have tremendous influence on the future preservation of Harar Jugol. It appears that the projects have passed through a review process including all relevant stakeholders and it is argued that proper heritage concerns have been included. However, the Agency for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH) has not been consulted. This alone is critical as ARCCH is maintaining the overall responsibility for Cultural Heritage preservation on behalf of the Federal Government as State Party to the WH Convention.

Archaeological surveys in particular will be required in connection with any major infrastructure work within and close to the Jugol. The obligation to carry out relevant research was raised during discussions with the Mayor and the issue has likewise been brought to the attention of ARCCCH.

The project for the construction of a circular asphalt road all around the Jugol is especially critical posing potential threats to the preservation of authentic heritage values. I have therefore expressed strong reservations towards the project and recommended that the bidding process be put in abeyance, pending revision of the Master Plan for the greater Harar City.

A proper impact assessment study is indeed needed, analysing the consequences to the existing intimate relationship between the site and the surrounding landscape. The authentic character of the site is also at stake, requiring a detailed study to determine surface material, future capacity, layout and siting, needs of pedestrians, limitation to vehicular traffic, street lights if any, and all such subtle aesthetic considerations, which goes beyond purely technical specifications.

5 **Boundary and buffer zone**

The delineation of the proposed World Heritage Site is indeed clearly defined by the town wall, but opinions differ on the extent and treatment of the buffer zone. The Proclamation relating to establishment of the Conservation Office stipulates a zone 100 meters away from the wall, and this delineation is corroborated by the view expressed by people met during the mission. The general understanding is that existing houses need to be cleared away eventually and the area kept free of any new development. The delineation proposed in the nomination dossier gives a more differentiated view of the buffer zone emphasising on the partly inclusion of the *ge-fage* area and preservation of the springs and riverbeds to the north, south and east of the Old Town.

The proposed buffer zone is extended a little in western direction to include the cluster of former Italian administration buildings. These structures are now housing the Municipality and the Regional State Office forming the administrative nucleus of Harar. It may be worthwhile to consult the original Italian town planning scheme and include this plan as part of the buffer zone eventually.

The intimate relationship between Jugol and the surrounding rural area is indeed part of the authentic cultural and functional character, which contribute to the outstanding setting of the site. Lush vegetation and cultivated gardens also provide recreational amenities to the town dwellers, although the aesthetic qualities are badly diminished by the amount of accumulated rubbish. The use of the riverbanks as public dumping grounds should not be part of a World Heritage environment.

The current Master Plan, originating from the 1960's has been revised four times with a 10 years interval approximately. The latest update was done in 1999. Public Works and Urban Development Bureau (Addis Ababa) is starting a new review and update of the Master Plan for the greater Harar City including the Old Town, later this year. It is expected that the new Master Plan will include development proposal for rural areas located to the North and East of Harar Jugol in order to bust new vitality into the old town. Although well intended this prospect may be counteracting to the creation of a buffer zone, which preserve the intimate relationship between Jugol and the rural areas.

This scenario also relates to the planned ring road composing potential threats to the authentic values of the site. Any such comprehensive planning proposal need close scrutiny, possibly involving external cultural heritage expertise, especially in view of the possible nomination as World Heritage. I suggest that the buffer zone includes a larger rural landscape extending as far as to the Ay Kokehe Hills to the south of Harar. The exact delineation should be based on a thorough assessment of architectural and cultural values in the environment, including formulation of a policy for future preservation.

6. Legal Protection

The formation of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia after the fall of the DERG regime in 1991 led to the creation of a new decentralised political structure with delegation of considerable administrative and legal power to the regional states.

In the case of the Harari People National Regional State two elected bodies with legislative power were created: The Harari National Council and the Peoples Representative Council. Due to the specific demographic structure and multiethnic composition of the population, the National Council was created to secure democratic rights of the Harari people, who has become a minority group in the new regional state, and the Council is assigned to deal especially with cultural and religious issues.

Harar Jugol Conservation Office was set up in 2003. The long time that elapsed from the formal creation by Proclamation no 21/1992 to its establishment eventually indicates the practical and organisational problems evolving from the creation of a new democratic political system and owing to the general lack of qualified people in heritage conservation. The Proclamation stipulates the formation of an Advisory Council with representatives of relevant stakeholders and outlines the duties and obligations of the Office. The Council is established and the head of office has been appointed.

It appears from the Proclamation that the established buffer zone is extending 100 meter from the town walls and all officials met during the mission share this conception. The buffer zone is delineated more appropriately in the nomination dossier, but no formal legal protection seems to be in place.

It is foreseen that properties of heritage value will be issued with a certificate of registration, stipulating the owner's specific duties and obligations. So far special by-laws and preservation guidelines have not as yet been prepared and judging from the information received, the administration is based more on a feeling of consensus rather than specified legislation. Traditional practise and administration, which have been exercised through the communal control of the Kebele administration and the social *Afocha* organisation, seem to function as a strong communal regulation of the community within the Jugol.

The draft proclamation of January 2000 concerning general heritage preservation within the Regional State does include a reference to Harar Jugol as a special preservation zone (para 15), but the draft is inappropriate to the purpose of providing legal protection of the old town without a thorough description of the site and the extension of the clause. Generally the proclamation needs revision and further detailing before its adoption eventually, especially with a view to the distinction between movable and immovable cultural heritage. In view of the potential World Heritage status also the ARCCCH of the Federal State needs to get involved in the actual formulation of appropriate legal protection, possibly with additional assistance of UNESCO.

7. Management and conservation

The setting up of a formal heritage management system is relatively new in Ethiopia. The Centre for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (now renamed as an Agency, ARCCH) was established as late as 1976 through assistance of UNESCO. A Master Plan for the Preservation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage in Ethiopia (F. Aalund, 1985) provided an outline of preservation needs in Harar, but the political situation at the time slowed down on any comprehensive preservation planning.

A systematic survey of heritage values of the old town has been completed in recent years by two largely independent initiatives:

1. A EU funded conservation project carried out by the the Interuniversity Research Center for Sustainable Development (La Sapienza), based at the University of Rome. This project has accomplished a GIS based mapping of the Old Town including identification of landmarks and location of major cultural heritage property.
2. A French university study identifying physical cultural heritage characteristics, including a street-to-street inventory of private property and survey of selected houses. The same group of university teachers has been commissioned to prepare the application report for World Heritage listing.

The first priority of Harar Urban Planning Department is the implementation of the ambitious infrastructure improvement programme for providing piped water, sewage and solid waste disposal. This undertaking is also a challenge to the administrative and professional capacity of the new Conservation Office. As a very urgent measure I have focussed on the risk of destroying archaeological remains. There is a responsibility to monitor the work and to carry out required research including documentation of all findings, but the intervention relates also to re-establishment or improvement to the existing stone pavement and similar cultural heritage issues.

Tenders for the restoration of Ras Makonne House has been invited and actual work is expected to start later this year. Resettlement of the present occupants and a successful completion of the restoration of this landmark is a further test to the efficiency of the newly established Heritage Conservation Office.

Several obstacles to a comprehensive and sustainable preservation of the heritage are imminent, requiring the formulation of a socially balanced approach to conservation needs and housing improvement. The 1992 Proclamation on *The Establishment of the Harar Conservation Office* stipulates e.g. the need for reducing the population number and arrange for required resettlement. This long term planning exercise might be part of the town planning review eventually and the outcome have a bearing on future heritage preservation.

The management is also hampered by the lack of a land register with title number of properties within Jugol area and the GIS registration carried out by *La Sapienza* has for some obscure reasons not as yet been released for use by the Conservation Office.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

While strong arguments speak in favour of recommending inclusion of Harar Jugol in the World Heritage List, poverty, population pressure and general neglect of the building stock during a period of several decades impose a real threat to securing a sustainable preservation of the cultural heritage values. However, in spite of all constraints and problems the Harari community has maintained a unique social cohesion and organisation and there is a strong dedication to preserve the specific cultural identity, which is intimately related to the Jugol area.

The ethnic composition and demographic structure implies that the Harari community is the biggest minority group within the Jugol area, and the democratic elected Harari National Council have been afforded specific privileges and obligations to work for the preservation of the cultural heritage. This concern for heritage preservation, however, need to include all valid contributions by different ethnic groups.

An elitist and perfectionist apprehension of World Heritage may be challenged by the complex task of preserving the authentic character of a living, multiethnic town. The complexity of this task is outlined specifically in the Operational Guidelines (para. 29). The poverty in particular will pose restraints to preservation – on the other hand it can be argued, that lack of funds has slowed down on development and helped maintain genuine authentic qualities in the environment, not least because of limited vehicular traffic. Soon there will be a great demand for improvements, including better access to private cars, change of dirt roads and traditional street paving of local stone in favour of asphalt and similar expectations of modernisation.

A number of issues need special and immediate attention in view of the possible World Heritage listing.

1. *Ring road project.*

The Arterial Asphalt Road Project will have considerable impact on the environment and the authentic feeling of the potential World Heritage Site. It is therefore recommended that the City Municipality and ARCCH give serious and urgent consideration to this project and make further and detailed impact studies on the consequences to the environment and to the future character of the buffer zone.

2. *Buffer zone.*

While Harar Jugol is clearly defined along the perimeter of the town wall, the extent of the buffer zone is disputed. The buffer zone of the proposed World Heritage Site is shown on the map included in the application file, but the authentic qualities of the area and how it shall be treated in the future need a critical examination including assessment of cultural heritage values and subtle aesthetic qualities.

2. *Legal Instruments.*

Delineation of the buffer zone needs further scrutiny and statutory protection as a prerequisite for possible World Heritage listing. This process has further implications on the review of the Master Plan for the greater Harar City, as well as for the revision of the *Heritage Conservation Draft Proclamation of Harari People*

National Regional State of January 2000. The final adoption of this Proclamation should include the designation of Harar Jugol as a special preservation zone and stipulate the related preservation policy.

4. *Management.*

Population congestion and the subsequent degradation of the architectural heritage within Harar Jugol is problematical for a sustainable preservation of cultural heritage values and a real challenge to the new Conservation Office. It is essential for proper management of the town that a land register is completed and long term housing and resettlement policy be adopted by the Municipality. Issuing certificate of registration to owners of cultural heritage property is another priority along with the formulation of guidelines for heritage preservation and adoption of a preservation plan.

9. **Acknowledgement**

Special thanks are directed to Tsehay Esheti, ARCCCH, who accompanied me during the whole mission. In Harar Jugol excellent guidance and assistance was offered in particular by Salahdin Ahmed, Head of the Youth, Culture and Sports Bureau and Emran Abdallah, Head of Harar Conservation Office

Copenhagen, 15 November 2004

Flemming Aalund. Architect MAA, PhD.

Annex I: List of individuals met during the mission.

Unesco Regional Office, Addis Ababa.

- . Awad Elhassan, Director and Representative to Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia and to AU and ECA.
- . Wafa El-Fadli Neguede, Administrative officer in charge of cultural activities

Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH)

- . Jara Haile Mariam, General Manager
- . Kassahun Abare, Public Relation Officer
- . Thehay Esheti, historian, contact person during the mission
- . Tekle Hagos, Head of Documentation and Inspection of cultural Heritage
- . Getu Asefa, Head of Inventory Department

Institute of Ethnografic Studies (Addis Ababa)

- . Ahmed Zacharias

Harar Regional State Office

- . Fuad Ibrahim, President of Harari People National Regional State
- . Nabil Mohammed, Head, Trade, Industries and Urban Development Planning Bureau
- . Murad Abdulhadi, Head, Peoples mobilization, Culture and Social Affairs Bureau

Harar City Municipality

- . Zeydan Bekri, Mayor, Harar Municipal Authority
- . Abdul Hakim, Head, Harar Urban Planning Department
- . Emran Abdallah, Head, Harar Conservation Office

Youth, Culture and Sports Bureau.

- . Salahdin Ahmed, Head of the Youth, Culture and Sports Bureau
- . Ibrahim Abdulrahman, staff
- . Mohammed Yuseff, staff.

Harar Regional National Council

- . Nuria Abdulati, Chair
- . Abdusamah Ideres, member

Additional meetings were arranged with Kebele Heads, as well as with representatives of the Women's Association and community representatives

Annex II: Sites and buildings visited in Harar Jugol.

During the four days spend in Harar City from November 3 to November 6 2004 several stray walks inside and around Harar Jugol provided a first hand impression of the general character of the town. Additionally, the following specific sites were visited:

- . The Rimbaud House, recently restored through bilateral assistance of the French Embassy. The famous house is situated with a commanding view to the roofscape of the surrounding town and to the open landscape to the south and east of the old town. The building is now open to the public as the Rimbaud House Museum with a collection of books and artefacts as well as providing space for changing exhibitions.
- . Sherif Private Museum, private collection of ancient books, coins and artefacts in a traditional Harari house. The collector, Abdulahi Ali Sherif, is 'living heritage' with a thorough knowledge of traditional culture in Harar. His private collection might be moved to the restored Ras Tafari house after restoration eventually.
- . Ras Tafari House, former residence of Teferi Makonnen, the late Emperor Haile Selassie, presently occupied by about twenty families, who will be resettled, when the house is restored eventually. Tender for restoration is currently under preparation.
- . Teke Amennen House, former residence of Teferi Makonnen's wife, presently run-down hutment for homeless families.
- . Kurommi Village, one of several Argobbe villages in the vicinity of Harar.