SOMALIA’S IRON AGE BEGINS WITH EL ALI.
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**Introduction:** El Ali, a 15 metric ton iron meteorite, was found in Somalia in 2020. It’s cultural context and physical characteristics were reported in 2021.¹ El Ali is now for sale in China with an asking price of $4,000,000. Concerns were raised about El Ali’s future in 2023.² Two centuries ago the Inuit use of cold-forging to mine the meteoritic boulders at Cape York was discovered. Their surfaces share a common attribute with El Ali; Their many concave facets reveal intense, extensive, and prolonged hammering. At Cape York the harvested iron was reworked into knives on those same rocks, attested to by those who did the mining. Iron imposes a unique subsistence calculus on any society that embraces it. Whether smelted from ores or mined from meteorites, its production is expensive. There is every reason to expect that the like Cape York irons, the El Ali meteorite was used to fashion knives.

**Cape York:** The ethnohistory of the Cape York thus provides insights into El Ali. “Of all the great meteorites of the world’s collections... the... Cape-York meteorites, must, from their exceptional size... and their human associations, be conceded to rank first,” proclaimed their discoverer, Robert Edwin Peary in 1898.³ He credited Captain Sir James Clark Ross for his interviews of the Inuit in 1818. “Each of the natives was provided with a kind of knife, made of small pieces, or plates of iron, which were set close together in a groove made in a piece of narwhal’s horn: the end piece was rivetted, but the others were kept in their places merely by being driven tightly into the groove. Very diligent enquiry was set on foot as to where they found the iron of which these knives were made; but all we could learn from them was, that they met with it near the shore, at some distance from this place. Our conjecture was, that it was native iron, and that they were afraid of giving us much information respecting it from an apprehension of our taking it away... They procure the iron... from a mass of native iron, distant... about a day’s journey eastward of this place... Their only object, in coming so far from their own country... is to procure some of this iron, which they break off with some difficulty by means of stones, and then beat out into small plates of which the knives are made. Thus far their description agrees so well with what we find these rude instruments to be, that I think there cannot be any doubt of the truth of what they related... There were two insulated masses of it,” ⁴ the “Woman” and the “Dog.”

**El Ali:** As natural objects, Cape York is the world’s 2nd largest meteorite; El Ali is the world’s 9th. As cultural objects, each begins the Iron Age in its own region. Both display facets from hammering to move the plastic iron into ridges from which it will be broken off. Peary photographed a circle of hammerstones surrounding the “Woman.”⁵ Fifty metric tons were gathered from 80 km away.⁶ El Ali is also ringed by stones, it’s tops are domed as anvils, its sides are broadly faceted, and it displays ridges in the process of iron removal. Knives made from Cape York were traded as far as 1400 km.⁷ While El Ali is itself a cultural artifact, no artifacts made from it have yet been recognized. Salvage archaeology is planned, despite the presence of Al Shabab. El Ali is an object of world cultural and natural heritage significance. In lieu of receiving the curation, it deserves, we present an analysis of 9 videos and 20 stills.⁸

The culturally modified, multi-faceted cold-forged surfaces of El Ali and the Cape York “Woman.”