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EDITORIAL

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is privileged with four archaeological sites that have been listed among the World Heritage Sites recognized by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) UNESCO).

The first site is Mada'in Saleh, also called "Al-Hijr", which was registered in 1429 AH/2008 AD, followed by Al-Turaif Quarter in Historic Dir'iyah in 1431 AH/2010 AD, Historic Jeddah in 1435 AH/2014 AD, and finally Rock Art sites in the Hail region (Jubbah and Ash Shuwaymis) in 1436 AH/2015 AD.

Mada'in Saleh "Al-Hijr" is an archaeological site located in the Northeastern part of Al-'Ula within the Province of Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah. Al-Hijr is the name given to Thamud quarters in Wadi al-Qura between Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah and Tabuk. In the second century BC, the area was inhabited by the Nabateans who had carved temples and tombs out of Al-Hijr's rock faces, and claimed, based on the inscriptions discovered there, to be the builders of Al-Hijr. The city of Al-Hijr includes many Thamudic and Nabatean inscriptions that are not yet decoded and need specialists to understand their secrets.

Al-Turaif Historic Quarter is one of the most prominent landmarks of the Historic city of Dir'iyah, the first capital of the Saudi State, which includes the most prestigious archeological sites and historic palaces and landmarks belonging to the first Saudi state, such as Salwa Palace, established in the late 12th Hejri century, where state affairs were run. The Al-Turaif Quarter also includes Imam Muhammad bin Saud Mosque, Prince Saad Bin Saud Palace, Prince Nasser Bin Saud Palace and the traditional Guest Palace housing the Turaif Hammam (Bath). Turaif Quarter is encircled by a big wall and watch towers that were used to protect the city.

Some of Jeddah's historic buildings date back to the pre-Islamic period; and the city witnessed a considerable transformation, during the reign of the Caliph Othman Ibn Affan (may Allah be pleased with him), who designated Jeddah as a port to Makkah Al-Mukarramah in 26 AH/ 647 AD. With its Islamic character, Jeddah established itself as one of the most important Red Sea cities, and as the Gate to the two Holy Mosques. Moreover, due to its historical and architectural value, Jeddah has been categorized by experts as a representative of the typical Red Sea Basin architectural style, as it encompasses many important landmarks, traditional and archeological buildings and its historic wall.. The historic Jeddah Quarter includes uniquely-architected mosques, such as that of Caliph Othman bin Affan Mosque, Al-Imam Ash-shafi'i Mosque, Al-Pasha Mosque, Akash Mosque, Al-Mi'amar Mosque and Al-Hanafy Mosque. Jeddah's architectural heritage is also evident in the character of its neighborhoods and historic markets. King Abdulaziz's Project for Developing and Improving Historic Jeddah in 1425 AH is considered a precursor of the efforts intended to preserve the architectural heritage of the city, which also includes a package of rehabilitation projects overseen by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage.

The Rock Art sites in the Hail Region, namely the sites of Jubbah and Ash-Shuwaymis are among the major archeological sites in the Kingdom that date back to more than 10.000 years BC. At the site of Ash-Shuwaymis, stone tools were found which depict humans' life 10.000 years ago, where they were mainly relying on hunting and gathering, and recorded their other activities, such as hunting and fighting, by means of engraving or colour painting on mountains' sides, plateaus and rocks, hence reflecting the economic, social and cultural life of inhabitants in modern-day Saudi Arabia .

In addition to its efforts to record the four archeological sites on the UNESCO's List of World Heritage Sites, the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage took a bold leap adding another ten archeological sites to the Tentative List, as a preliminary step to list the sites on UNESCO's World Heritage Sites' list. The new nominated sites are: the Village of Al-Faw, the Village of Rijal Alma', the Village of Thi 'Ayn, Darb Zubaida (the pilgrims' road from Kufa to Makkah Al-Mukarramah), the quarter of al-Dira' in Dawmat Al-Jandal, the Hejaz Railway, the Levantine pilgrim's route , the Egyptian pilgrim's route , the Al-Ihsa'a oases, the site of Bir Hima. Moreover, the Commission has also recorded four intangible cultural heritage, namely falconry, the Arabian Coffee, the Arabian majalis (formal sitting room)) and the Najdi Ardham (folk dance).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was established in 1945. This organization, based in Paris with 191 member states, aims to contribute to peace and security by promoting international collaboration through educational, scientific, and cultural reforms. Having more than 50 bureaus and numerous institutes around the world, UNESCO undertakes the task of declaring the list of World Heritage Sites that deserve to be protected by the world community (states, governments and communities) for the benefit of future generations.

Before listing a site as a World Heritage Site, the representatives of the World Heritage Committee study the proposals put forward by member states, and then, experts consider these proposals and report their final appraisal to the Committee which solely decides on the nominated sites. The Committee works in close consultation with the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), a consultant body for selecting the natural characteristics of world heritage; the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), a non-governmental organization that provides counsel on evaluating the cultural possessions nominated for World Heritage Sites; and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM).

The Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage was ratified in the General Conference in November 1972. According to the preamble of the Convention: "The General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ...

Noting that the cultural heritage and the natural heritage are increasingly threatened with destruction not only by the traditional causes of decay, but also by changing social and economic conditions which aggravate the situation with even more formidable phenomena of damage or destruction,

Considering that deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world,

Considering that protection of this heritage at the national level often remains incomplete because of the scale of the resources which it requires and of the insufficient economic, scientific, and technological resources of the country where the property to be protected is situated, ..

Considering that, in view of the magnitude and gravity of the new dangers threatening them, it is incumbent on the international community as a whole to participate in the protection of the cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value, by the granting of collective assistance which, although not taking the place of action by the State concerned,

Adopts this sixteenth day of November 1972 this Convention.

(See the Arabic site at <http://www.arcwh.org/ar>)

In November 2016, archeologist Dr. Abdulhalim Nourreddin (1943-2016), the head of the Egyptian Archaeologists, the ex-Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, passed away. Having served for a long time in Cairo University, Faculty of Archaeology, Nourreddin produced great and respectable works in archaeology, and received both local and world recognition, in addition to receiving many awards and decorations. He received the Leiden University Medal in 1995, the French National Order of Merit, the Italian Order of Merit in 2002, the Mainz Museum Decoration of Honor in 2002, Egypt's State Merit Award in Social Sciences, the Cairo University Scientific Distinction Award in 2007. He authored many distinguished scholarly books.

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