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## EDITORIAL

Over the past decades, field surveys and excavations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have contributed to the discovery of hundreds of archaeological and heritage sites in various regions, signifying the historical depth of the Kingdom heritage across various periods, beginning with prehistoric period all the way through various subsequent historical periods. Excavations discovered Arab civilizations and kingdoms that dominated and flourished culturally over several periods of time, leaving behind cultural evidence that bear witness to this day. These reminders highlight the progress achieved by human populations that inhabited various areas of the Kingdom in different fields of life. Most notably, their advanced architectural heritage which has remained a witness to this day despite the damage it has been exposed to over the years due to weather fluctuations year after year, and what it may have suffered from by the people who succeeded, whether by reusing those sites, building residences, or others activities, including agriculture, travel, or invasive excavations. All of these activities have affected some of these archaeological and heritage sites in one way or another.

These archaeological and heritage sites contribute greatly to introducing the cultural heritage, the history of human settlement on the Kingdom's territory, and successive cultural achievements throughout the ages. They also contribute greatly to introducing the Kingdom's cultural ties and relationships with the neighboring civilizations that prevailed during the same period, the extension of trade routes, cities and urban sites constructed, and the trade relations that linked the East to the West and the North to the South, signifying the cultural depth of the Kingdom's history.

The government of the Kingdom has been keen to protect its archaeological and heritage treasures; the memory of its residents throughout the ages, with all their material and cultural aspects. This government's keenness is manifested by giving greatest attention and material and moral support to the official institutions working in the antiquities sector to enable them to perform their roles in protecting and maintaining antiquities. After all, these antiquities represent a historical record that documents the history of people who inhabited the Kingdom through various historical periods and the cultural periods of their dominance.

Within these official efforts to preserve these sites, the government has so far been able to register six archaeological sites on the World Heritage List (UNESCO), namely Mada'in Saleh 2008 AD, Al-Turaif District in Dir'iyah 2010, Historic Jeddah 2014, the rock art in Hail 2015, Al-Ahsa Oasis 2018, and Bir Hima in Najran 2021. There are also other locations still on the waiting list to be registered on the World Heritage List (UNESCO).

In addition to this official effort to register archaeological and heritage sites on the World Heritage List, and the efforts to protect and maintain these sites as a witness to future generations, it is also important to prepare archaeological sites in the Kingdom for tourism. This is a national demand that will help achieve many national gains, including, providing permanent maintenance and protection for these sites, providing numerous job opportunities for the young men and women with college degrees in archeology and tourism, and encouraging the establishment of small and medium-size heritage and tourism projects. This will reinvigorate the National traditional works and handicrafts found in those areas and push them forward. It will also open new job opportunities to a large number of people in the fields of heritage and logistical services needed by visitors and tourists who come to those archaeological and heritage sites, such as housing and hotel services, restaurants, tourist guidance, transportation, marketing, among others.

These efforts also include the restoration of traditional villages and the maintenance of residential buildings in them because such villages represent a cultural memory, and highlight the cultural, social and economic roles they can play in the life of the surrounding community. Restoring such heritage villages makes them tourist attractions and suitable options for holding community events and national cultural festivals. Thus, they provide the opportunity for people to learn about their architectural and cultural elements, and the opportunity to hold these national heritage events.

This also requires the competent authorities to hold various training programs for young men and women in various heritage professions and services related to archaeological, tourism and heritage work. It also requires these authorities to manage and maintain these sites, serve visitors, and establish heritage projects in them to serve tourists and visitors, which will provide a large number of job opportunities for the people of the cities and villages around these archaeological and heritage sites.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia needs to benefit from the expertise of countries that achieved remarkable successes in caring for archaeological and heritage sites and making them global tourist destinations. Such countries have developed archaeological and heritage sites and provided high quality maintenance and protection to ensure the safety of their components, including structures, facilities and assets. Such governments have also paid significant attention to these sites and prepared them for visitors, without exposing them to any harm or vandalism, whether intentional or as a result of the visitors' movement in those sites. They have also provided protection against weather fluctuations to maintain them in such a way to remain a reminder of the civilizations that prevailed in those countries.

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Over the past decades, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has witnessed the proliferation of a large number of local private museums. Owners of these exhibitions have been keen to provide them with all the heritage tools and handicrafts they needed and represented the social history

of the people of those regions. Most of these museums have been established through individual voluntary efforts, mostly self-motivated, without sufficient prior knowledge of the foundations of establishing museums or methods of developing, organizing, operating, and sustaining them. In addition, they had no knowledge of the elements of their maintenance in the future, caring management and permanent funding to develop them and preserve their contents.

Here comes to play the importance of giving these museums and their owners the necessary official attention, whether by providing training and education programs or by licensing and acknowledgement. There also needs to be a national registry for these museums, documenting their locations and addresses, and an adequate overview of their areas of interest and contents, whenever possible.

The Saudi Museum Authority at the Ministry of Culture is responsible for organizing this important sector, as it highlights the region's cultural heritage and cultural history. The Museums Authority is expected to raise public awareness of the importance of museums and their cultural roles in society, encourage private museum owners, and contribute to providing them with training opportunities and education and holding joint exhibitions for the public to learn about their contents and assets. This would provide a large number of job opportunities in the field of local and private museums, supporting the tourism sector in their regions.

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Throughout the Arab World, the region has witnessed several tensions and conflicts that have befallen some Arab countries over the past two decades, making the antiquities and heritage sectors in those countries vulnerable to attack, plunder, and neglect, due to lack of governance, or the inability of the archaeological authorities responsible for protecting its archaeological and heritage components. Therefore, several historical and archaeological treasures were unfortunately smuggled out of those countries, to be sold abroad. In the absence of an adequate protection system and a deterrent legal system for trade in antiquities and national treasures and their smuggling outside their countries, these treasures ended up in international museums.

Arab countries are required to adopt an integrated system to protect their archaeological and heritage treasures in various circumstances. The solidarity of the Arab countries through a special system established for this purpose will contribute to preventing trade in antiquities. Arab countries could get together and demand their treasures that ended up in international museums, whatever the pretexts. They could work adamantly to retrieve the plundered antiquities and return them to their countries of origin.

**Editor -in-Chief**