

EDITORIAL

At the close of the 1380s of the fourteenth Hijri century (the 1960s of the twentieth century), I and a group of students and academic staff members of King Saud University embarked on a trip to various archaeological sites. Our itinerary started from Riyadh, to the Eastern Region, through Hafir al-Batin and its archaeological sites, to Arar and the valleys of Badana and Bedaina where Paleolithic artefacts along with Badia inscriptions were found. We then descended south to al-Jawf. There, we visited the area's archaeological sites, then moved to Dumat al-Jandal and viewed the sites it had which still remain as they used to be since centuries ago, clear of the touch of the hand of development.

Finally we headed to the Region's town hall in the city of Sakaka; the Emir was not there for he was enjoying his yearly vacation. Nevertheless, his sons welcomed us with immense hospitality that made us forget the hardships we went through during the trip. That reception was more than welcomed; the area had no restaurants or cafes that might provide alternatives to invitations to food. The Emir at the time was Abdul Rahman ibn Ahmed al-Sudairy; Faisal ibn Abdul Rahman al-Sudairy, one of the Emir's sons, was our host. Memory still treasures enormous scenes of life there. However, life in that area was not so singular; rather the condition prevailed in most regions of the Kingdom.

A decade later, thank God, conditions changed: roads were implemented, towns connected, cultural and educational movements spread. If earlier we were seeking who might host us, a decade later we were invited to al-Jawf, yes to al-Jawf. I did go only to find myself lecturing in an auditorium fully equipped with modern audio-technology. There was also the al-Jubah publication which records the cultural activities in the region.

With a galaxy of scholars, including the venerable Sheikh Hamad al-Jasir, I was invited once more to take part in a forum on the archaeology of al-Jawf. At this time, we were accommodated in private villas built especially for guests in a rich farm that had all kinds of fruits including olives and date palms. Our host was the first to rise at dawn to personally serve our breakfast. What was most enjoyable in those breakfasts was the taste of Semh bread (Semh -Mesembryanthemum- a dark brown grain finer than sesame; from its milled flour many things can be baked: 'asida [thick pasta], bread, and pastries. Most delicious of all, however, is Semh bread with butter and honey).

I was stunned when to lunch our host posted a public invitation to all people rather than a select group. This incident brought back to my mind the famous line of the old Arab poet Turfa ibn al-'Abd in which he commemorates his tribe's hospitality, saying: "Our invitations to food are never to a hand-picked few; but the public at large is always welcomed, especially during the hard times of winter."

What might we find on the tables of such an invitation? We did find enormous amounts meat stretched over lined plates: full cooked camels stuffed with cooked lambs which, in turn, were stuffed with cooked birds. I hesitated a little, reluctant to eat from such piles of meat. But finally I moved forward and started eating. The meat was the most delicious I ever tasted, was tenderer than chicken, and more tasteful than what one may find in the most famous restaurants of Paris. A group of people were around serving us: some were holding water, some holding butter milk in colorful jugs, whereas others were holding gilded washing basins and jugs to serve whoever is done eating.

Having bestowed on us all forms of veneration and hospitality, our host, as we took our leave, did not fail to provide us with publications and recordings. Of these were the Arabic copy of his book, *The Desert Frontier of Arabia: al-Jawf through the Ages*, and his poetry on tape. Emir Abdul Rahamn was always a promoter of literary life and culture; it is not therefore surprising to find him engaging in kind with poets of Wadi al-Sirhan. I still remember that Beduin who, as we were leav-

ing, stood close to our car bidding us goodbye in an eloquent and charming farewell poem.

Emir Abdul Rahman al-Sudairy had established a scientific and cultural base that materialized in a foundation of science and charity. Abdul Rahman Al-Sudairy Foundation has embodied a work that was clear in his own mind but became an official reality in 1403H (1983). Two decades earlier, in 1383H (1963), he already had established a public library under the name of the Library of Public Culture, which still exists today as "Dar al-Jawf Lil Illoum." This library started with a modest number of books (some three thousand books); today it boasts more than 150,000 books, 250 journals and newspapers, along with a collection of manuscripts, historical and archaeological inscriptions, coins, and stamps. Moreover, the library is also equipped with the most advanced audio-visual technology, providing its clients with all they need. The Foundation also has a competent professional administrative body that extends help, overlooks archives and organization, and administers the institution.

A library of that size at that off beaten track place! way away from the springs of knowledge in large cities, and has such a library that looks forward to becoming a university library from which students of knowledge and sciences may quench their thirst! That library was no mirage but a true fresh water spring that satiates the thirst of those who seek knowledge.

With his well-known insightful vision, Emir Abdul Rahman al-Sudairy recognized the nature and innate tendencies of the Jawf community and realized what those people were able to do well. He, therefore, brought them together under the umbrella of an annual festival, started in 1383H (1963) with the famous Camel Race; the festival continued until 1405H. The Race has had its active promotion of interest in camel distinguished breeds and attracted the attention of people in other regions. Such favorable reception led to the development of the festival along various tracks, notably agriculture and its products and weaving with its pleasant colors. I personally had attended one of those festivals and saw first hand how citizens vie in presenting their best camels, sheep, palm-dates, fruits, honey, etc. Prizes were awarded to the best.

The publication of al-Joubah continued to record the cultural and educational movement, then was terminated to be replaced by Adumatu that tied the local to the international. At this time when most people are busy enjoying the attractions of life, Adumatu seeks to highlight an aspect to which no one before had paid attention; namely, to provide an umbilical cord for Arab scholars in the Arab world through highlighting the roots that tie all Arabs together. Still, yearning for al-Joubah brought it back again; and now there are two tributaries: one attends to the local activities; the second, Adumatu, serves who belongs by blood or knowledge to a civilization spreading from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf.

Emir Abdul Rahman ibn Ahmed al-Sudairy had contentedly entrusted his soul to Almighty Allah on Sunday 26/Safar/1427H (March 26, 2006), having bequeathed to his nation a great legacy in the field of education and culture to be enjoyed by the nation's youth and scholars, and left behind loving sons who bear the same banner at other civilization centers in this bountiful home of ours.

Festivals usually last for days or weeks; the festival of Muscat, however, covers a full year. This year, it has deservedly been crowned the capital of the Arab Culture for the year 2006. After all, Muscat is the capital of the Sultanate that carries a historical fragrance stretching back in time to more than 10,000 years. Its geographical location made it an international water way, overlooking, as it does, the Arab Sea from which it reaches out to the eastern coast of Africa, and the Gulf (which is part of the western coast of Africa) from which it communicates with Persia and India. With such credentials, Muscat had dealt with different nations, east and west, and had impacted and been impacted by those various civilizations. To the Arabian Peninsula, Muscat brought the traditions, manners, and civilization of those with which it came into contact.

The capital of the Arab Culture has already commenced its festivities with an international forum on "The Archaeology of the Arabian Peninsula through the Ages." The participants are distinguished scholars who have strong affinities with the Arabian Peninsula whether through their studies or observations or through excavations, surveys, examinations and comparisons of what they have had. For the forum, therefore, a collective expertise has materialized, presenting in word and image its knowledge about previous ages through which the Sultanate of Oman had lived, ages stretching from the early Paleolithic era up to the contemporary civilization. Thousands of years are presented for us in a chronological order by honorable scholars who know the value of the word and assign to every piece of information what it deserves. The forum, accordingly, became a dialogue between civilizations that had passed between China and India to the east and the Arabian Peninsula and its neighborhood and Africa to the west.

No doubt, a highly competent and experienced organ must have been behind the organization of this distinguished crowd of scholars and this temporally and topically graded program. That organ is embodied in the highly qualified professionals working at the Omani Ministry of Heritage and Education under the leadership of His Highness Haythem ibn Tarig Al Said, the Minister of Heritage and Education and his deputy, Engineer Sultan ibn Hamdoun al-Harithi, along with a group of youth that execute their work with love, sincerity and positive outlook. Of those I should name Mr. Hassan ibn Mohammad al-Louati, the Director General of Archaeology and Museums at the Ministry, who sent out the invitations to scholars and researchers, and Mrs. Bioba bnt Ali al-Sabiri, the Director of the Department of Excavations and Archaeological Studies, who followed through communication with those to whom invitations were sent out.

It is pride inspiring that the people of Oman have brought such an effort to a wonderful finish; our pleasure, however, will be greatly enhanced when we receive the proceedings in their publication form and see them take their place in libraries becoming enlightening sources for pursuers of knowledge.

At the end of our forum on the "Arabian town: Inception and Development" and with the publication of issue 12 of Adumatu, we felt a need to review our efforts and to restructure the journal which, thank God, has been able to continue for six full years without any interruptions. During that period, we were monitoring the cooperation of the Advisory Board, what every member had contributed to the well-being of this fledgling infant: be the contribution papers, notes, suggestions after the appearance of each issue, or the seriousness taken in reporting when refereeing papers, etc.

The forum was a great opportunity to build bridges with famous scholars who are still active in scholarly works and archaeological excavations relating to the Arabian Peninsula and the Arab town. When we updated the Advisory Board, our choice of the new members had nothing to do with privileging them over those we chose to take out; the choice was based on introducing the journal to a new scholarly milieu. Having had the pleasure of their company for six full years, and still believe that Adumatu remains their home, we feel it is our right to invite others to share the responsibility with us.

Of those who did not find their names on the new Advisory Board, some have blamed us; and here we want to affirm that we have nothing but admiration and respect for them and for the efforts they provided during the previous stage. We hope they will share with us the pleasure of the company of the new members; for we, new and old, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf, have to march with the caravan of knowledge about the heritage of the Arab World.

Editor-in-Chief