

EDITORIAL

In Arab States, exhibitions and fairs of all kinds have become too common and widespread; these include among many others: commerce, formal arts, folklore dances, book fairs, etc. One in fact can only admire the energy and enthusiasm with which these are promoted and funded. And one can only feel regret that of all this interest the field of Archaeology in particular has not attracted any. I have no idea why the case is so! I can only speculate as to why archaeology has escaped the wisdom of those launching exhibits and shows. Perhaps such a failure is owed in part to those officials presiding over the field or to those who market such fairs. Or can the reason be in the far-fetched idea that Arabs are worthy of no such cultural activity which is limited to Westerners only? I am sure this idea has not crossed the minds of both officials and interested exhibition promoters, nor did both ever discuss this absence of archaeology from their agenda. However, if deeds speak louder than words, then one cannot help but trace the tracks of archaeology exhibitions.

The track is long and interesting. In fact, deeds here loudly suggest that only Westerners (nurtured since their early days with their love of and desire for ancient knowledge) can enjoy our heritage of archaeology. It is true that knowledge of old and ancient civilizations is both enriching and edifying. After all, the old and ancient have many works that modern technology cannot match; it is as if ancient civilizations did reach a high level of progress and technology then suddenly stopped so that another new civilization began with no ties to the earlier ones. This diversity is life enriching and is worth experiencing by all. Still the question remains: is it limited to Westerners only? Let us examine the track of deeds, and how many cases one may cite to bring closer the far-fetched suggestion I entertained earlier.

One should begin with the well-known cradle of ancient civilization. The exhibitions of Yemen, for example, roamed the four corners of the world, including Paris and Germany and many others, without making a single stop in a single Arab country! How can one justify such a deed? What can the reason be: is it money or the desire to have alone the secret of beauty and knowledge of ancient heritage?

To be sure, the case of Yemen's exhibitions is neither an exception nor out of line with other Arab activities. Egypt is another case in point. Tutankhamun traveled the world over, yet the Pharos legacies were shown in no single Arab country. If these two cases are not enough, one can still cite a third. The Phoenician discoveries in Lebanon, funded by Solidere, made their way to Paris and perhaps were exhibited in other European countries, but were never exhibited in our Arab world.

Closer to home still, the Nabataean civilization, well known to all, is another poignant example. Petra is not only the jewel of its civilization, but is also chosen one of the new wonders of the 21st century world, a choice over which Arabs everywhere felt jubilant. And for Saudi Arabians Nabataean Petra is considered an extension of the civilization of the north-western Peninsula. Still, how ironic the case can be: Petra has not been shown to one single Arab!

If this is the case in the Arab East, the case is no better in the Arab West. The civilization

of North Africa (especially Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco) is an exclusively French. France explored, France excavated, France wrote, and France enjoyed the privilege of touring our heritage, both ancient and Islamic. Even Arab academics who studied and excavated North African archaeological sites have rarely written in a language other than French.

In such a disappointing atmosphere, one can only appreciate the few bright, and hope inspiring spots. The first is the steadfast position taken by Sheikha Husa al-Sabah and her respected husband Sheikh Nasser al-Sabah who both paid dearly to buy rare archaeological pieces which can hardly be found anywhere other than their own collection. Yet, these singular riches were exhibited in Cairo and Saudi Arabia. In both places, they were a source of enjoyment, enrichment, and marvel.

Again, we ought to commend the step taken by the Republic of the Sudan for transporting its civilization of thousands of years to the Gulf where it exhibited in the city of Abu Dhabi for the citizens of the area the depth of its civilization at various stages of the nine millennia BC up to the 20th century AD, mixing in a pioneering move the archaeological and the cultural. This is the admirable activity we hope other Arab States would follow.

Is it not high time for authorities of archaeological conferences in Arab States to put forward a plan for exhibiting the archaeological heritage of each Arab country in other Arab States, enabling us thereby to experience and appreciate our own civilization?

Thirty years have passed since the inauguration of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, College of Arts, King Saud University. Perhaps I am the only one to have felt the passage of this time which witnessed bitter struggle so that the Department may stand tall among the different departments of the College of Arts. Those thirty years began with the department as only a section in the Department of History, then a BA program department and, few years later, it granted the MA. Later on, upon an international evaluation of the department's competence and integrity, it started to offer the Ph. D. degree.

Along the way, the department took the initiative to carefully select outstanding graduates, and nominate them for generous scholarships to pursue their higher studies in Belgium, England, Germany, France, Spain, and the United States. It goes without saying that the department's objective in this plan was, as always, to have an enriching diversity in terms archaeological schools, languages, and various specialties.

The department's BA program is indeed a mark of distinction. Among all departments of the College of Arts, it was the only one to spend a full semester in archaeological excavations at two famous sites: "Qaryat" al-Fau for students of ancient archaeology, and "Rabtha" for students of Islamic archaeology. During this semester, students are trained on excavation, conversation, pottery study and photography, in addition to attending the scholarly discussion the supervising professors hold during the last two weeks on the session's results regarding the excavations and the finds. The student will further be examined orally at the site, and will write a paper on his activities. Again, the student will defend his paper upon the expedition's return to campus in

Riyadh.

Its BA program further provides the student with a strong ground on the civilization of the Near East from Persia and its vicinity to Andalusia and its surroundings. The student of ancient archaeology is thereby introduced to all ancient civilizations, whereas the student of Islamic archaeology is introduced to the Islamic civilization up the end of the Ottoman period, along with courses on traditional architecture. The department used to offer two majors: ancient and Islamic, along with appropriate courses on museums: their kinds, techniques of exhibition, and educational roles.

I felt so happy when the Department became part of the new College of Tourism and Archaeology, but soon felt disappointed. Should not the name of the college at least follow the traditional ethics of our culture in that the older receives precedence? Tradition in this case seems to give in to conditions of the time, and the young seems to win the precedence. Be the case as it may, it seems that the members of the older department feared most the prospect of being annexed to the Department of History, and thus decided to join the new college. The price, nevertheless, seems rather dear! The new and young comer enjoys three departments where as the older faded away with one single major, relinquishing its well-established courses for the benefit of the younger. One may wonder whether it was better for the Department of Archaeology and Museums to remain where it used to be instead of venturing into a new college! When I first heard the news of new college and the department's move, I entertained the hope that it may profit from this situation, and can enjoy as many departments as these of Tourism. These can easily be envisioned:

1. Department of Pre-Historic Archaeology
2. Department of Pre-Islamic Archaeology
3. Department of Islamic Archaeology

In this way, the Department of Archaeology and Museums profits from this move; otherwise, it would have been better to commit itself to the ancient Arab advice: "uphold your turf and earn respect or win eternal rest." Tourism could have been a department in the College of Arts or a fully-fledged college at King Saud University. Either way, the newly born would have benefited from the courses of the Department of Archaeology and Museums and other courses offered by the various university departments. The credit system of King Saud University allows such inter-departmental cooperation.

Editor -in-Chief