

EDITORIAL

It was in 1968 (1387H), two years after having returned from the University of Leeds in England, that I had the pleasure of accompanying the erudite scholar Shaikh Abdul-Qudus Al-Ansary in his second visit (my first) to al-Suwaidrah. What I saw there was astounding and breath-taking. I even talked to my students about what I saw in that trip, especially the drawings of the Lion, something I never saw the like of which in my life. And I had the pleasure of reading some of the old writings of Shaikh Al-Ansary. The memories of that trip rushed to my mind when my generous colleague, Professor Saad bin Abdulaziz Al-Rashid, offered me a copy of his recent book (one should say an encyclopedia) on Al-Suwaidrah.

Professor Al-Rashid documents his book with photographs, maps, and a probing study of the Islamic texts which exceed two hundred and fifty. He tentatively dates the texts to the period falling between the first and second or between the second and third centuries of Hijrah. Yet he is never satisfied with mere dating; he probes each text in search for the identity of the author, his learning status and importance, and his relation to the route. Nor has Al-Rashid neglected to briefly address the prehistoric period or to send the ancient texts to Professor Suliman bin Abdulrahman Al-Dhyaib for a corroborating reading and study. I only wish that Professor Al-Dhyaib could have done these texts the service Al-Rashid has done the Islamic ones. His, however, has not measured up to what is well-known of his scholarship.

In a future issue I will review this valuable book for the readers of Adumatu. I do, however, wish that Professor Saad bin Abdulaziz Al-Rashid would address Islamic texts in northwestern Saudi Arabia, and with his colleagues collect all the texts they find, and then attempt to provide an accurate and authentic dating of Arabic script since its inception up to the Ottoman period. To undertake such a project and to issue it in the form of an encyclopedia will surely be an honor to whoever contributed to or benefited from it.

When I visited Ukaz two years ago to see its archaeological sites, I noted the more than one grotto. The preliminary examination suggested that these caves must contain the remains of the "Taif Man." Drawings and Letters also indicated the presence of human activities. Pleased with this discovery, I encouraged the members of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities and the College of Tourism and Archaeology (King Saud University) to archaeologically survey and excavate the sites.

In 2006 (1427H) we also uncovered in Khaiber a colossal grotto, located in Harrah to the east of the town, and locally called "Umm Jersan" (literally: mother of bells). When we asked for the reason behind the name, we were told: it is home to countless rattle snakes.

In response to a generous invitation by Shaikh Abdullah Bahamdan, Shaikh Abdullah Bugshan and the trip organizer Dr. Omar Bamahsoon, we visited in a private Jet the Heritage towns of Hadramawt. Our group included some figures from the weekly "Thursday Forum of (late) Shaikh Hamad Al-Jaser."

Our trip program included a visit to the Island of Socotra, a place I have always wished to see. There we saw the most beautiful of all trees, the famous "dragon's blood tree" (*Dracaena cinnabari*). The beaches of the Island are as beautiful as those rated best in the world: these are clean, pure, and colorful, with white dunes and friendly unwary birds that blend with people. We spent a full day there and before we left, we had a look at a large and deep cave. Regrettably, we did not have a chance to see what was inside.

Anyway, abundant data is available. Professor Saeed Basmal, a learned scholar, has from time to time supplied me with rich information. Recently, he sent me the publication of the Saudi Geological Survey on the largest cave in the Arab World; namely, that of Umm Jersan. Its dimensions are: 1500 (fifteen hundred) meters long, 12 (twelve) meters high at the highest point, and 45 (forty five) meters wide. The cave contains archaeological remains of human skulls and naturally mummified bones (owing to their being inside the natural habitat of the cave). Other remains include stone utensils.

Professor Zuhair Nawab, head of the Saudi Geological Survey, says samples

of these finds have been sent to specialized laboratories in Poland to have them dated and classified. Prior to the discovery of Umm Jersan, the largest cave in the Arab World was the 922 meter long Cave of Harrat al-Sham, northeast Jordan.

Needless to say, here we are certainly in the presence of world class museums of caverns that bring together both cave tourism and the archaeology of the man whose life has run from the age of caves to the age of writing and beyond. HRH Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, head of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, will no doubt add the caves in Saudi Arabia to the domain of tourism. Such an addition will illuminate the diversified environs in which man's living developed from natural land fissures to man-made architectures.

One can only say: blessed be our Kingdom; Allah the Almighty have granted us enough of everything: a holy book for sure guidance, rulers we love and who love us and maintain justice and righteousness, dignified and plentiful living, security shielding our wellbeing, and a rich heritage inciting us to add to it better than what our ancestors had offered.

Editor -in-Chief