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EDITORIAL

The Arab World is indisputably rich in important archaeological sites of worldwide fame, given that it has been home to the most ancient civilizations through time. The Arabian Peninsula was a cradle for the civilizations of the Arab kingdoms before Islam, and countless civilizations flourished in the Levant, Iraq, Egypt and Sudan. In addition, north African countries had numerous ancient civilizations. Therefore, Arab countries have been rich in achievements that chronicled the civilizations that prevailed in successive historical periods. Some of these achievements vanished as a result of natural and human causes. However, some of the most prominent of these achievements are still standing until today, as a testament to the cultural richness Arab countries have seen.

Consequently, the responsibility to preserve these cultural treasures, and maintain them so they remain standing for future generations as a testament to the Arab cultural heritage falls on the official antiquities departments in the Arab countries .

Therefore, all countries do their best to register their archaeological sites on the UNESCO World Heritage Sites List, for the gains they would globally achieve. In addition, all countries work hard to protect and preserve these sites from any actions that may destroy, damage, or expose them to theft or intentional or unintentional destruction.

The sites registered on the World Heritage List undoubtedly enjoy enduring protection and periodic maintenance. They are also continuously publicized and located on the map of scientific research and global tourism to direct public attention to them; thus, attracting interested investors to launch heritage, tourism and service projects that provide support services to visitors and vacationers, and introduce them to the antiquities and heritage in the country. These projects would benefit the local community, increase employment, and enable heritage sites themselves to develop and receive more attention.

Furthermore, the registration of archaeological sites on the World Heritage List would contribute to enhancing cultural tourism and attracting visitors from all over the world. This in turn would certainly contribute to boosting the national economy, increasing and disseminating cultural understanding between people, and highlighting the civilizational role of each country throughout human history.

The credibility of the World Heritage List is evident as an international testimony that raises the level of interest in cultural and natural sites from the narrow local circles based on limited capabilities, to the global circles of interest that show their well-deserved exceptional world value. This international testimony grants these heritage sites a guarantee to preserve their heritage elements in an effective institutional manner.

The Arab heritage is not exclusively for Arabs; it is a shared treasure of all humanity; a heritage that has contributed to the development of humanity throughout the ages.

In the Arab World, the number of the various sites registered on the World Heritage List has reached 96 sites, including 87 cultural sites, 6 natural sites, and 3 varied sites. The sites are distributed as follows: Tunisia 12, Morocco 9, Saudi Arabia 7, Algeria 7, Jordan 6, Iraq 6, Syria 6, Sultanate of Oman 5, Yemen 5, Bahrain 3, Sudan 3, United Arab Emirates 1, and Palestine 1.

The archaeological site of Al-Hijr (Madain Saleh) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the first site to be included on the World Heritage List in 2008. Registering archaeological and heritage sites on the World Heritage List in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has continued ever since and the number of the registered sites by 2023 has risen to seven sites.

It is worth noting that the World Heritage Committee meets once a year, consisting of representatives from 21 States (Parties to the Convention) elected by their General Assemblies. The Committee is responsible for implementing the World Heritage Convention, determining the allocations of the World Heritage Fund, and considering requests from member states to disburse financial assistance for the maintenance and care of registered sites. The Committee has the final say in determining whether a site should be included on the World Heritage List. The Committee also review reports on the conservation level of listed sites and requests States Parties to take the necessary measures when sites are not properly managed. The Committee also decides on the inclusion or exclusion of sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

The Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, was reported stressing that in order to give heritage greater attention in public policy agendas, UNESCO has activities worldwide, and the number of countries ratifying the Convention has reached around 195 countries. She added that UNESCO needs to rely on this global gathering, adopting its message and spirit to meet the challenges facing the world heritage legacy.

In 2023, the World Heritage Committee listed three new Arab sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List, in Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Palestine. These sites included the natural heritage site of “Uruq Bani Ma’arid” in Saudi Arabia; the cultural site of Djerba, an exceptional example of a settlement pattern in an island territory in Tunisia; and the cultural site of ancient Jericho, Tell es-Sultan in Palestine. Each site has its own significance in enhancing balance, diversity and credibility of the Arab region sites added to the World Heritage List.

Ancient Jericho, Tell es-Sultan: It is located in the Jordan Valley and contains archaeological remains dating back to prehistoric human activity, and includes the adjacent perennial spring of ‘Ain es-Sultan. A permanent settlement was established at this site between the ninth and eighth millennia BC. The skulls and statues found at the site attest to the existence of ritual practices among the people who inhabited the area during the Neolithic era. The Early Bronze Age archaeological material on the site provides insights into urban planning, while the vestiges from the Middle Bronze Age reveal the presence

of a large Canaanite city-state, equipped with an urban center and occupied by a socially complex population.

Uruq Bani Ma'arid, Saudi Arabia: It is located along the western edge of Ar Rub' al-Khali (the Empty Quarter), covering an area of more than 12 km², where the world's largest sand sea meets the second longest mountain range in the Arabian Peninsula to form a unique natural landscape, rich and diverse, despite the harsh climate.

The Island of Djerba, Tunisia: It is a testimony to a settlement pattern on the island of Djerba around the 9th Century AD amidst the semi-dry and water-scarce environment. Low-density population was its key characteristic; it involved the division of the island into neighborhoods, clustered together and connected to the religious and trading places of the island. Resulting from a mixture of environmental, socio-cultural and economic factors, the distinctive human settlement of Djerba demonstrates the way local people adapted to their natural environment.

There are also sites on the waiting list at UNESCO, awaiting official approval at future meetings, if they meet the nomination conditions, including, for example: the Jebel Hafeet Tombs, dating back to the beginning of the Bronze Age in the United Arab Emirates; Bidaa Bint Saud, one of the most famous archaeological sites in the UAE and one of the areas rich in historical features; Umm Al Nar in Abu Dhabi, which includes major discoveries that helped shed light on the culture and lifestyle of the UAE Bronze Age inhabitants. This site was home to a large settlement during the period 2500-2000 BC, playing an effective role in regional trade. Artifacts found showed that the inhabitants of the area traded with distant civilizations, including ancient Mesopotamia, currently Iraq, and the Indus Valley Civilization; currently Pakistan and India.

The "Al-Dur" site in the Emirate of Umm Al Quwain, UAE, is one of the important archaeological sites in the Arabian Gulf region due to the multiple eras of human settlement, the oldest of which dating back to the third millennium BC. The site includes architectural elements that stand as a testimonial to the civilization of the area, the most important of which being the ancient Al-Dur Temple "Temple of the God Sun", dating back to the 1st Century AD, built on a broad base with an Aramaic inscription of nine lines.

Editor -in-Chief