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**Editorial Director** Lazare Eloundou Assomo

**Editor** Matilda Saori Machimura

**Publisher** Richard Forster, Peter Warren

**Production Editor** Caroline Fort

**Copy Editors** Cathy Nolan (English), Bérangère Chevallier (French)

**Editorial Board** ICCROM: Joseph King, ICOMOS: Regina Durighello, IUCN: Tim Badman

**UNESCO Culture Sector** Jyoti Hosagrahar, May Shaer, Mauro Rosi, Himalchuli Gurung, Frédérique Aubert, Berta de Sancristóbal, Muhammad Juma, Alessandro Balsamo, Guy Debonnet, Nolwazi Mjwara, Seoyoung Oh, Coline Guego

**UNESCO Publishing** Ian Denison

**Editorial Staff** Culture Sector, UNESCO  
7, Place de Fontenoy, 75007 Paris, France

Tel : +33 1 45 68 1422

E-mail: [n.mjwara@unesco.org](mailto:n.mjwara@unesco.org)

**Advertisements, production** Publishing For Development Ltd, Midsummer Court, 314 Midsummer Boulevard, Milton Keynes, MK9 2UB United Kingdom

Tel: +44 2032 866610

E-mail: [pwarren@pfdmedia.com](mailto:pwarren@pfdmedia.com)

**Subscriptions** Jean De Lannoy, DL Services sprl  
Avenue du Roi 202 - B 1190 Brussels – Belgium

Tel: +32 2 538 43 08

Fax: +32 2 538 0841

E-mail: [subscriptions@dl-servi.com](mailto:subscriptions@dl-servi.com)

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Himā Cultural Area,  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



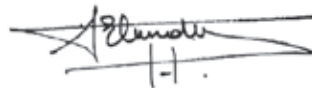
# Letter from the Editor

As the extended 45th session of the World Heritage Committee begins in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we express our gratitude to our hosts for convening the first in-person Committee since the onset of COVID-19. Surrounded by old friends and young professionals alike, we are reminded that this meeting is more than the sum of important decisions taken. It is a powerful platform where we rekindle the sense of 'heritage community' and renew our commitment to heritage.

This issue of World Heritage magazine features African heritage leaders who are empowering peers and creating positive ripple effects from Egypt to Mozambique. A report on climate change details the critical benefits provided by World Heritage forests notably through carbon absorption, with one caveat – their capacity will continue to decline unless we act now. A compelling story comes from Havana, Cuba, where a major UNESCO programme Transcultura is blending tangible heritage, intangible practices and contemporary creativity, true to the way culture intersects in the local communities.

Readers may notice the new design of this World Heritage magazine, which pays homage to the original iconic look. The first issue in 1996 put a spotlight on the accelerating international cooperation to conserve Angkor, bearing fruit in 2004 with the removal from the List of World Heritage in Danger. Just as the magazine has been a witness to history, it continues to champion the evolving principles of heritage safeguarding. This is why this revamped magazine will centrally feature stories of custodians, innovators and trailblazers, in line with the 'fifth C' (Communities) of the Strategic Objectives.

The words by the 80-year-old Havana resident Noemí Moreno should echo with many of us: 'In the end, we are nothing more than a bird that comes and flies away. History is what remains'. And so we get to work together, pooling experience gained over the past five decades of the 1972 Convention and the ancestral knowledge passed down over centuries, to preserve the remnants of history as best as we can.



Lazare Eloundou Assomo  
Director of World Heritage



# Message

Audrey Azoulay  
Director-General of UNESCO

In the heart of AlUla oasis, in north-west Saudi Arabia, lies the prodigious archaeological site of Hegra: its more than 100 monumental tombs, carved in stone, bear witness to the richness of Nabataean civilization, as well as to the multilinear history of Saudi Arabia.

Hegra is one of the 1,157 jewels that make up the World Heritage of humanity. For more than 50 years now, this shared treasure has been protected by the World Heritage Convention and its vigilant guardians: 195 States Parties, alongside UNESCO.

In September, these States Parties will once again gather for the World Heritage Committee in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. This committee will take up a number of challenges, at a time when heritage faces a myriad of threats, from armed conflicts to climate disruption. We will be asking ourselves a simple question: where will World Heritage be in 50 years' time?

Our first challenge is taking steps to ensure that this heritage is truly universal and representative of human ingenuity.

Progress has been made, but much remains to be done. At present, 27 UNESCO Member States have no World Heritage sites, including 12 African countries and 15 Small Island Developing States. This is why UNESCO is working hand in hand with these countries to support the inscription of new sites and train heritage experts.

Another major challenge is preserving heritage in the face of two potentially existential threats.

The first is climate disruption, the consequences of which are threatening 7 in 10 marine World Heritage sites. Just recently, in Madagascar, Pakistan and Peru, precious heritage has been ravaged by climate disasters. UNESCO has taken urgent action, sending experts to assess damage and prepare for reconstruction. But we also need to focus on the long term, by rethinking the management, development and protection of sites.

Another danger is the proliferation of armed conflicts, which cause collateral – or deliberate – damage to heritage. UNESCO is therefore working in Mosul, Ukraine and Yemen, for example, to protect and rehabilitate heritage. This is essential not only to safeguard the traces of the past, but also to lay the foundations for peace.

This reconstruction can and must involve local communities, young people, and women – you will discover some fine examples of this as you browse the following pages. The aim is not only to make these groups active players in the reconstruction of their own heritage, but also to create opportunities for employment and social integration, thereby contributing to the equality and stability of societies.

We are not the owners of World Heritage: we are its guardians, its inheritors. These monuments and landscapes, however majestic they may appear, are not immortal: their future depends on us.



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# Message

Saudi Arabia is a land of ancient civilizations, diverse heritage and abundant archaeological resources. As part of our efforts to advance international cooperation in cultural heritage, we are proud that the Ministry of Culture, represented by the National Commission for Education, Culture and Science - is hosting the 45th Extended Session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. We remain focused on protecting heritage, which has a transformative impact on nations, societies and their own cultures. The Session will enable us to engage in a dialogue with our partners around the world, as well as introduce our cultural heritage to new audiences.

Given its deep-rooted history spanning several civilizations, Saudi Arabia has a diverse heritage spanning its thirteen regions, each with a unique cultural identity. We believe heritage is critical to understanding our past, as well as the evolution of our cultures and traditions through generations. In the context of globalization today, heritage plays an important role in defining our identity and sense of belonging while maintaining cultural diversity.

Saudi Arabia has embarked on a transformation guided by the Vision 2030 framework, which set a roadmap for diversifying the economy and developing a range of sectors such as culture and tourism. With this journey underway, we continue to preserve our heritage and showcase the breadth and depth of the cultural landscape. An extraordinary opportunity exists to create valuable international partnerships and exchanges.

The Vision of the Ministry of Culture is to create social and economic opportunities. The cultural sector is set to contribute more than US\$23 billion to the Saudi economy and create more than 100,000 jobs by 2030. We are investing in local talent and infrastructure to support communities across Saudi Arabia.

We will continue to develop our cultural infrastructure and build on the success we have achieved so far. We look forward to hosting you in Saudi Arabia where you can experience our culture, witness our heritage and get immersed in our history.



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**HH Prince Bader bin Abdullah  
bin Farhan Al Saud**  
Minister of Culture,  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



# The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and UNESCO: a lasting partnership



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The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's relationship with UNESCO dates back to 1946, when it was one of the first founding countries of the Organization. The Kingdom was one of twenty countries that met in London after the end of World War II to establish UNESCO. That relationship continues to this day, as the Kingdom hosts the 45th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee this year.

As the body responsible for all relations between the Kingdom and UNESCO, the National Committee for Education, Culture and Science is delighted that the Kingdom will be hosting the 2023 event, stemming from the global importance of cultural and natural heritage, as well as the substantial cultural, economic and social dimensions these sessions represent. As the Kingdom welcomes the international community in Riyadh, we anticipate showcasing our vast historical and cultural assets, the successive civilizations that have thrived on its land and the profound legacy maintained by its people through the ages.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stands out for the cultural diversity which has shaped life within it and contributed to a unique identity for its people. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is comprised of thirteen regions with each region possessing its own unique culture, customs, traditions and heritage (both tangible and intangible), inspired by its diverse environment, nature and varied topography.

The hosting of this session and its forums reflect the shared goals of the Ministry of Culture, the National Committee for Education, Culture and Science, and the World Heritage Committee, coming together to showcase and preserve the world's many thousands of heritages and heritage sites.

**Rakan bin Ibrahim Al-Touq**  
Assistant Minister of Culture and General  
Supervisor of the National Commission for  
Education, Culture and Science,  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

**Adorned by  
the sun**

**World Heritage  
in the Kingdom of  
Saudi Arabia**







## Hegra Archaeological Site (al-Hijr / Madā' in Ṣāliḥ)

Inscribed on the UNESCO  
World Heritage List in 2008

Hegra Archaeological Site is located in AlUla, which is an open-air living museum located 1,100 km from Riyadh and set among lush oases and towering sandstone mountains. Its ancient cultural heritage sites date back thousands of years, to the era when the Dadanite, Lihyanite and Nabataean kingdoms governed the region. The trade routes that traversed it have an even deeper history, indicating human presence dating back as far as 200,000 years.

Hegra is the most renowned and distinguished site in AlUla. It served as the southern capital of the Nabataean kingdom (from the late 4th century BC to the 2nd century AD). Documented research also suggests that Hegra was the southernmost outpost of the Roman Empire after they conquered the Nabataeans in 106 AD. Breathtaking in scale, the heart of Hegra is surrounded by over 100 well-preserved monumental tombs with elaborate facades carved from the sandstone outcrops surrounding the walled urban settlement.

Hegra was also a vibrant city at the heart of the historic Incense Route, one of the legendary trade routes of antiquity. The decoration adorning several tombs showcases a rich cultural interaction with ancient civilizations including Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome.

Given its historical and architectural values, Hegra was inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 32nd Session of the World Heritage Committee

in 2008, becoming the nation's first UNESCO World Heritage site.

Considerable progress has been made to study and share this heritage with the world, as well as to protect its future for generations to come. Since 2002, the Madā' in Ṣāliḥ Archaeological Project has been leading research and excavations at Hegra and continues to gain insights into how the Nabataean population lived and were remembered when they died. This work has revealed a rich tapestry of craftsmanship, beliefs, funerary practices, agricultural prowess and water management, highlighting Hegra as a source of intercultural discovery.

Perhaps one of the most profound discoveries is that of 'Hinat', as she is affectionately known by the archaeologists who discovered her, the near-complete skeleton of a Nabataean woman excavated from one of Hegra's monumental tombs in 2008. The inscription on the tomb, which contained around 80 individuals, reads: 'This is the tomb that Hinat, daughter of Wahbu, made for herself and her children and descendants for ever.' The inscription provides clues about the role of women in Nabataean society – as owners of property and with the financial means to commission their own tombs.

In 2019, the Royal Commission for AlUla also undertook an ambitious project to bring Hinat to life through cutting-edge forensics and technology. A round table was hosted in London that convened

**previous page**

Tomb of Lihyan, son of Kuza, also known as Qasr Al Farid

**right**

With its 111 monumental tombs, 94 of which are decorated, and water wells, the site is an outstanding example of the Nabataeans' architectural accomplishment







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international experts in Nabataean studies and Arab archaeology, establishing scientific boundaries and guidelines for the reconstruction process. This resulted in the creation of a profile with images of reference for clothing, hair and jewelry. In 2023, this world-first reconstruction of a Nabataean woman was presented to the public at the Hegra Welcome Centre. For the local communities, Hinat represents an unprecedented encounter with history, a chance to gaze into the eyes of their ancestors.

The year 2023 marks the 45th anniversary of Saudi Arabia's ratification of the World Heritage Convention. In this spirit, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia renews its promise to protect, preserve and rejuvenate Hegra. The Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) seeks to connect the world to the enduring spirit, stories and significance of AlUla's ancient heritage. A future museum dedicated to the Incense Route will enable a deeper exploration of this historical era and the lively cultural discourse, sparking curiosity, inspiring

**Today, Hegra is central to the Kingdom's ambitious Vision 2030 which emphasizes the indispensability of culture to the quality of life.**

exchange and facilitating 21st century skills through the prism of enquiry-based discovery.

Hegra is a tangible source of enrichment and enjoyment, curating journeys of discovery for visitors and locals alike. 'Hegra Unlocked' is part of an expanding educational program that includes on-site activities as well as engaging learning modules, aimed to inspire an affinity with heritage for AlUla's future stewards.

Today, Hegra is central to the Kingdom's ambitious Vision 2030 which emphasizes the indispensability of culture to the quality of life. Furthermore, the fifteenth anniversary of Hegra's global recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site offers the opportunity to reflect on our commitment to this heritage, reinforced time and again by its legacy and spirit of the region.

### **left**

Hinat, the near-complete skeleton of a Nabataean woman







### At-Turaif District in ad-Dir'iyah

Inscribed on the UNESCO  
World Heritage List in 2010

The at-Turaif in ad-Dir'iyah World Heritage site, is a former royal palace complex. Once fortified, at-Turaif extends across a plateau above Wadi Hanifah, an oasis that runs for over 120 kilometers through the heart of the Arabian Peninsula. Diriyah was the capital of the first Saudi state. The site of at-Turaif in ad-Dir'iyah is the ultimate expression of the flowering architecture of the central region in the 18th century, representing a balance between the harsh environment, limited building materials, and the need for defense of a settled society. At-Turaif is part of a wider network of towns in Diriyah, located along Wadi Hanifah, with a complex system of fortifications across the landscape.

The District has largely remained intact, with periods of temporary occupation up to the 1980s. The site has historic and cultural significance in Saudi Arabia and has benefited from careful conservation and preservation. At-Turaif was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2010. Since 2019, the site has been under the stewardship of the Diriyah Gate Development Authority (DGDA), which has convened an expert team to care for the site and the wider cultural landscape. The team enlisted local experts, who comprise 95 per cent of its membership. They work alongside a number of international colleagues to ensure the sustainable management of the site and its surroundings.

At-Turaif, largely built from mud, is inherently delicate. The mud buildings decay at a faster rate than those built of brick, stone or timber, and require continual maintenance. It is therefore essential to consider the intention of the original builders

and how this is incorporated into the conservation works. The current approach to conservation at at-Turaif is one of minimal intervention, allowing us to better study decay mechanisms and decide on the best approaches for the different buildings and construction typologies. This approach also allows us to reconsider previous interventions and see how to better understand their impact before devising a course of action that can result in improved outcomes for authenticity.

A comprehensive system of monitoring is being set-up based on detailed surveys and studies, which create a clear baseline to measure change and provide appropriate mitigations. Through the World Heritage site management plan process, several key risks have been identified. The primary risk recognized is climate change. In the case of at-Turaif, this could mean greater rainfall. Just recently, at-Turaif recorded in one year a rainfall seven times the annual average. Higher wind speeds and more frequent dust storms are other risks. Some mitigation measures are clear, such as the construction of modern drainage systems, while others require better understanding of the different types of construction at at-Turaif and their interactions with the different types of weather events they may face.

The site is made up of streets, houses, palaces, mosques and other buildings, as well as five main galleries and a visitor centre. Prior to at-Turaif's public opening, private guided tours were the sole way to explore the site. In anticipation of the increased scale of public demand, the visitor design

#### previous page

An outstanding example of the Najdi architectural

#### left

At-Turaif District in ad-Dir'iyah bears witness to the Najdi architectural style, which is specific to the centre of the Arabian peninsula

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was adapted to a 'free flow' experience that could be supplemented by guided tours and small human touchpoints, zoned guides and ushers.

At-Turaif has a vast story to be told. A full interpretation strategy has been developed to identify the three main areas of focus, as well as a series of sub-themes that can be modulated each year to give greater depth and variety to the narrative. This is the story of the royal residence of the first Saudi state, a city built of mud of international importance, but also a place that continues to reflect the values of the people of Saudi Arabia today.

As an iconic World Heritage site in Diriyah, on the outskirts of the capital city of Riyadh, at-Turaif is expected to become a global landmark and a major tourist destination. The site has actively developed changing programmes of experiences that provide local audiences with reasons to return, as well as seasonal cultural activities and approaches such as the walks, prayers and Hawama which were first held during Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr in early 2023.

At-Turaif is part of a wider cultural landscape based around the oasis of Wadi Hanifah. The oasis represents the interaction of humans and landscape over many millennia that has influenced archaeology, architecture, natural heritage and cultural practices. The emerging understanding of this wider cultural landscape today informs the transformation in the surrounding area and inspire the development of Diriyah beyond the buffer zone of the World Heritage site. Significant efforts are being made to recover and enhance the valley setting of the World Heritage site, with an understanding of native species and appropriate planting.

Substantive work still needs to be done in the management and conservation of at-Turaif and the wider cultural landscape, building on the pivotal efforts made in the 1980s and 1990s led by the then Governor of Riyadh, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Custodian of the Two Holy

**This is the story of the royal residence of the first Saudi state, a city built of mud of international importance, but also a place that continues to reflect the values of the people of Saudi Arabia today.**

Mosques. At the heart of this endeavour is to build local capacities to interpret the site, as well as in the fields of conservation, archaeology, museology and heritage management. Specific programmes have been developed to familiarize future heritage professionals with a range of approaches and to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise. Partnerships across Saudi Arabia and the world are under development, expected to attract the widest spectrum of expertise and facilitate best practices exchange.

At-Turaif benefits from detailed and professional management, with an energetic, skilled and growing team dedicated to its conservation, exploration and study, with an aspiration to be among the world leaders for their work. They receive the outstanding support of DGDA's Board of Directors under the leadership of its Chairman, HRH Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, as well as the Heritage Commission at the Ministry of Culture and the Saudi National Commission for Education, Science and Culture.

**right**  
Decorative style characteristic of  
at-Turaif District in ad-Dir'iyah









## Historic Jeddah, the Gate to Makkah

Inscribed on the UNESCO  
World Heritage List in 2014

Located on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, Historic Jeddah, the Gate to Makkah shaped its dual identity as a gate to Makkah and a hub for international maritime trade. The site has witness to a rich cultural diversity, nurtured by a commercial-based economy and multiculturalism.

Historic Jeddah, the Gate to Makkah bears two historical meanings. One symbolic importance is its role as the entry point to Makkah. Since the 7th century AD, it has welcomed those reaching Arabia by sea for the Hajj, the annual Muslim pilgrimage to the Holy City of Makkah. Having been designated as an official port of Makkah by the 3rd Caliph Othman ibn Affan, Historic Jeddah hosted many pilgrims from Asia, Africa and the Middle East who embarked, resided and worked in the city. As a port of disembarkation for them, the site welcomed Muslim pilgrims and became a lively place of religious debates. Hajj influenced its urban structure, architecture and social fabric. The close link with intangible elements is manifested through the existence of Ribats and the Wakalas that used to accommodate the pilgrims, the internal structure of the houses, as well as the coexistence of Muslims from all around the world within the city.

This site also served as a pivotal port for Indian Ocean trade routes between the 16th and early 20th centuries. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, coupled with the introduction of steamboats

Historic Jeddah hosted  
many pilgrims from Asia,  
Africa and the Middle East  
who embarked, resided  
and worked in the city.

bridged East Asia and Europe more closely. As a result of these developments, many merchant elites enjoyed a flourishing sea trade in this region and accumulated enormous wealth. In the second half of the 19th century, tall, richly decorated Roshan towers were built with large wooden façades. The wealthy merchants also built many souqs and mosques in the city. Goods, spices and food from Asia and Africa were imported and sold in the city. The exchange of human values, building materials and techniques across the Red Sea region and along the Indian Ocean routes were essential sources of prosperity, as well as the cultural diversity of Historic Jeddah.

**previous page**

Tower houses decorated by large wooden Roshan built  
in the late 19th century

**right**

Historic Jeddah is an outstanding reflection of the Red  
sea architectural tradition, a construction style once  
common to cities on both coasts of the Red sea





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Historic Jeddah stands as the last remaining urban site along the Red Sea coast. The cityscape reflects outstanding architectural characteristics, consisting of remarkable tower houses decorated with large wooden Roshan and dense lower coral stone buildings. Jeddah's Roshan tower houses

illustrate both Arab and Muslim architectural styles. The remarkable features include the absence of a courtyard, Roshan-decorated façades and ground floor places rented out to pilgrims. This architectural typology, which originated in Jeddah, was further spread to the neighbouring cities of Al-Madinah,

**The humid and hot climatic conditions have given the buildings unique features, with isolated outward-facing houses, coral masonry constructions, and innovative technology for internal ventilation.**

Makkah and Taif in the Hejaz region. Along with tower houses built in the late 19th century by rich merchants, coral masonry constructions dedicated to trade, religion and the accommodation of pilgrims add value to its landscape.

The built settlements of Historic Jeddah also demonstrate the specificity of architecture

in this region, taking into account both aesthetic and functional aspects. The humid and hot climatic conditions have given the buildings unique features, with isolated outward-facing houses, coral masonry constructions, and innovative technology for internal ventilation.

### **left**

The construction's style is characterized by the imposing tower houses decorated by large wooden Roshan built in the late 19th century by the city's mercantile elites









## Rock Art in the Hail Region of Saudi Arabia

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2015

The World Heritage site Rock Art in the Hail Region consists of important components in Jabel Umm Sinman at Jubbah, and Jabal al-Manjor and Raat at Shuwaymis. The region bears exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition that has disappeared, but its social, cultural, and religious value has been preserved through the efforts of dedicated professionals.

Surrounded by the expansive golden sands of the great Nafud desert lies Jubbah, a small green oasis that once thrived as a cultural hub at the dawn of civilization in Arabia. Adjacent to the oasis, overlooking a freshwater lake, was the hill range of Jabal Umm Sinman, which offered refuge and water to both humans and animals alike. From approximately 15,000 BP following the conclusion of glaciation, it is on these hills that people began to carve hundreds of human and animal figures, exhibiting exceptional craftsmanship and artistic skill.

Jabal Umm Sinman has of several hills, a large mountain, and a dry lakebed to its south and southeast. At present, it stands as one of the largest well-preserved rock art sites in Saudi Arabia and indeed the Middle East.

One prominent feature in Jubbah is the presence of a large integrated paleolake, which retained water until around 8,000 BC. In the past, the climate exhibited greater humidity and experienced substantial rainfall. As temperatures rose and aridity intensified the lake gradually diminished, resulting in erosion of the hills in and around Jabal Umm Sinman,

giving rise to diverse and varying forms. Composed of multihued sandstones ranging from grey-pink to light brown, these hills offered an ideal medium for carving, pecking and engraving.

The Neolithic sites of Jubbah are located near rock shelters in close proximity to rock art panels. The artifacts found from these sites often consist of arrowheads, bifacial points, blades, side and bi-face scrapers, and disc cores characteristic of the pre-pottery Neolithic period in the Arabian Peninsula.

The chronology of the rock art of Jubbah can be categorized into five phases: Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and early Islamic period

The Neolithic rock art found at Jabal Umm Sinman is characterized by large depictions of human and bovid figures. The artistic renderings of humans, animals, weaponry and dress serve as an invaluable source of information about Neolithic culture, religion, and social, cultural and economic entities and practices. These images stand as exceptional examples of human creativity in their display of intricate human and animal petroglyphs.

As the climate transitioned from cool and humid to hot and dry conditions, the emergence of camels as a prevalent motif marked the Bronze and Iron Ages. The advent of literacy is represented by thousands of Ancient North Arabian inscriptions, followed by early Islamic Arabic inscriptions.

The inscriptions, along with the surrounding

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Camel figures in various sizes are located at Jabal Al-Manjor, Shuwaymis

### left

Rock Art in the Hail Region of Saudi Arabia reflects numerous representations of human and animal figures covering 10,000 years of history

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The artistic renderings of humans, animals, weaponry and dress serve as an invaluable source of information about Neolithic culture, religion, and social, cultural and economic entities and practices.

archaeological sites in Jubbah and Hail, illustrate the area's significance as ancient caravan and pilgrimage routes connecting Syria, Mesopotamia, South Arabia, and the holy cities of Makkah and Al-Madinah. The exceptional aspect of Jabel Umm Sinman lies in its uninterrupted artistic legacy, which spans over 10,000 years, making it a cultural site of global significance.

Each rock art component is connected by unpaved paths that allow access for visitors to closely observe the rock panels. At present the Saudi Heritage Commission of the Ministry of Culture, which manages the site, is revising the interpretation and visitor management plan, with the aim of conveying the site's values effectively and sensitively while safeguarding its integrity and authenticity. Additionally, social media has been used as a means to raise awareness of the site among the general public and to encourage understanding of archaeology's significance through its conservation and protection.

Research of rock art and inscriptions is an integral aspect of the Commission's work. It has implemented several digital documentation projects for the rock art panels and Ancient North Arabian inscriptions, which have been digitally archived for future publication in an accessible portal for the benefit of researchers and interested individuals. The Commission is also actively engaged in studying and assessing several new rock panels.

Training has been a strong focus for the management team, as per the Saudi Heritage Commission's long-term capacity-building strategy for World Heritage sites. Site staff at the property have been trained in site interpretation and visitor management, site security and protection, conservation and sustainable development, material conservation, impact assessment, World Heritage Convention principles, and rock art monitoring. The implementation of this World Heritage capacity-building programme will continue, with the aim of strengthening the management of all heritage sites in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.







## Al-Ahsa Oasis, an Evolving Cultural Landscape

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2018

The World Heritage site of Al-Ahsa Oasis, an Evolving Cultural Landscape, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2018 and comprises twelve components including archeological sites, built heritage properties, gardens, canals, springs, wells and a drainage lake that, together, form the oasis. Al-Ahsa Oasis stands as a testament to the enduring presence of human settlement in the region. From the site of Ain Qinas, dating back to the earliest prehistoric culture in the area, through the progression of successive cultures from the Neolithic period, the Iron Age, the great development of the region at the beginning of Islam and in the Middle Ages, until the Ottoman and Saudi periods, the oasis has exemplified the evolving sustainability of this area right up to the present day.

The exceptionalism of Al-Ahsa lies in the endurance of a great oasis throughout millennia. The landscape still maintains the defining characteristics that led to the creation of the initial oasis formations: the geo-morphological and water conditions, and the sociocultural landscape composed of nomadic, sedentary and marine-lacustrine environments. The Al-Ahsa Oasis techniques are exemplary practices for the creation of fertile soils, agricultural production, water management, recycling, energy efficiency and desert survival. This landscape preserves skills and knowledge that are crucial in confronting the

Traditional songs, music, culinary traditions, agricultural methods and social practices are still present and characterize the life of the local community up to the present day.

challenges posed by global warming, desertification and ecosystem collapse.

The site of Al-Ahsa, coupled with its historical journey, have given rise to the formation and evolution of the initial oases. Al-Asfar Lake offers a glimpse into the prehistoric landscapes of the oasis and evokes the ancient environment. The original system of springs, along with the archaeological relics of fortified wells and ancient waterways, date back to the Obeid period.

The tangible elements of Al-Ahsa are complemented by the living heritage of the local community. Traditional songs, music, culinary traditions,

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Sea of palm trees, Al-Ahsa Oasis, an Evolving Cultural Landscape

**right**

Al-Ahsa Oasis is composed of twelve component parts forming the largest oasis in the world with more than 2.5 million palm trees







## PORTFOLIO

**Al-Ahsa Oasis is a source of inspiration for generations of researchers, heritage professionals and environmental scientists, and a source of pride for the local communities residing in and around the site, across Saudi Arabia and the wider Gulf region.**

agricultural methods and social practices are still present and characterize the life of the local community up to the present day. These intangible attributes play a significant role in shaping conservation and development policy, which aims to preserve the agricultural role of the oasis while scientifically verifying the potential of traditional knowledge for the sustainable development of the region.

The region remains a major agricultural and commercial pole, becoming a major urban area inhabited by 1.5 million people that continues to produce dates and other agricultural products that are exported worldwide. The vestiges of the palaces, fortresses, mosques, markets and houses preserve a complete catalogue of the architectural elements composing the urban settlement of Al-Ahsa from the early Islamic period to the present day.

Today, private landowners, who inherited the agricultural lands, own most of the oasis farms within the perimeter and they play a key role in site management, while monuments, archaeological

areas, mountains and deserts are public properties. The urban areas included in the buffer zones have a mixed private and public ownership pattern. The existing legal framework guarantees the protection of the serial property and ensures that its Outstanding Universal Value is maintained over time.

Al-Ahsa Oasis is a source of inspiration for generations of researchers, heritage professionals and environmental scientists, and a source of pride for the local communities residing in and around the site, across Saudi Arabia and the wider Gulf region. The Saudi Heritage Commission, with local stakeholders, continues to enhance and strengthen the management system through risk preparedness, implementation of impact assessment mechanisms, conservation monitoring, research development, and interpretation and communication of values. Al-Ahsa Oasis will evolve and its future will be safeguarded through a robust management system that is anchored in the community, respecting the values with which it identifies.

### **left**

Palm dates are the main agricultural staple of Al-Ahsa Oasis, local communities are involved in packaging and making use of modern technologies to assure the wide spread marketing and distribution of their product





## Ḥimā Cultural Area

Inscribed on the UNESCO  
World Heritage List in 2021

From ancient times, Najrān was the major station for the caravans going from South Arabia to the Mediterranean world, and to the Gulf and Mesopotamia. As a hub of the incense trade, Najrān developed into a large city thanks to its abundance of water resources and fertile land. The Ḥimā Wells, located 90 kilometers north of the city, were the first stop for caravans leaving Najrān on long journeys.

Ḥimā Cultural Area in Najrān was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2021, becoming Saudi Arabia's sixth World Heritage site. Managed by the Heritage Commission of the Ministry of Culture of Saudi Arabia, the property englobes tangible forms including epigraphy, rock art, prehistoric wells, archeological traces, pristine desert landscape, as well as the intangible heritage of the site's local community.

Located just beside the Ḥimā group of wells is a long Ancient South Arabian inscription, describing a military campaign of the Ḥimyarite king Yūsuf As'ar Yath'ar (known as Dhū Nuwās in Islamic tradition) to Najrān in the 6th century AD. This is just one of the many treasures found in this area – numerous inscriptions and petroglyphs belonging to various periods are distributed along the periphery of the great Empty Quarter desert, over dozens of kilometers from the wells. Local inhabitants, trade caravans and armies left their traces on the sandstone rock surfaces over 7,000 years, transforming this area into a 'library on rock' that reflects Saudi Arabia history.

The Ḥimā Wells, located 90 kilometers north of the city, were the first stopping place for caravans leaving Najrān on long journeys.

Ḥimā rock art comprises large-scale engravings of highly stylized humans and animals such as bovines, ibexes and ostriches. Even after the emergence of written civilization in the Iron Age, people continued to produce vast amounts of rock art. Depiction of bovines decreased with aridification, but we see a variety of animals such as camels, ostriches and lions, as well as fat-tailed sheep unique to this region. Notable human figures include women with long hair and accentuated physical features, men with daggers, and horse riders. In addition, a recent discovery of rock art depicting elephants, including one mounted by a rider, is reminiscent of Abraha's expedition in the 6th century AD, which was accompanied by elephants according to Islamic tradition.

In Saudi Arabia, the area between Ḥimā and Wadi Tathlith, through which ancient Yemeni caravans seem to have traveled north, has a concentra-

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Ḥimā Cultural Area contains a substantial collection of rock art images

**right**

Ḥimā Wells, dating back some 3,000 years





## PORTFOLIO

tion of Ancient South inscriptions. Ancient North Arabian script indigenous to this area, now labeled as Himaitic, and several other North Arabian scripts have also been observed, showing the long and diverse traditions of Ḥimā's written culture and its connection with remote places. It is especially noteworthy that some Christians of this area (probably from Najrān) left their writings in Arabic script, newly developed from the Nabataean script in the 4th century AD, which was previously believed to be used solely in northwest Arabia and Syria. In addition, this area comprises many Islamic Arabic inscriptions from the earliest stage of the Islamic period.

Tens of thousands of rock art designs and inscriptions in Ḥimā form the enormous corpus of living traditions and demonstrate the importance of the site's intangible cultural heritage.

Research has been developing continually in Ḥimā Cultural Area since 2007. Partnership with international research institutions has resulted in a series of programmes that cover inventories, mapping, documentation and interpretation of the epigraphic and rock art panels. The ongoing research work will increase our knowledge and progressively ensure a precise mapping of the rock art, allowing access to researchers and interested individuals.

Ḥimā Wells, one of the main components of the property, comprises the oldest existing wells in Arabia dating back around 3,000 years. This major built and archaeological heritage is undergoing a long-term conservation programme that provides a study of the current situation of the wells, their use and their settings. The pilot project to restore the authenticity of the six wells at Ḥimā is being approached with great caution, as it is necessary to maintain the function of water use for the local community. Local community has been consulted throughout the planning stage to ensure all works

**Tens of thousands of rock art designs and inscriptions in Ḥimā form the enormous corpus of living traditions and demonstrate the importance of the site's cultural intangible heritage.**

are conducted with respect to their connection and usage of the site. Furthermore, an oral history project was conducted to document the community's relationship with the wells, while the latest technology like drone surveying, photogrammetry and 3D modelling are being used to update data on them.

As protection, conservation, research and documentation continue, interpretation and visitor management planning are evolving. They are currently being refined to enable access to the history and values of the site through interpretative tools and engaging visitor experience facilitated by trained guides and rangers. The Heritage Commission is committed not only to protecting the property, but also to ensuring that the voices of community are heard.

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Depiction of human figures

# Africa, home of heritage

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By Lerato Mogoatlhe







IMPERO

**It's Friday morning in Giza, Cairo.** Abou al Hool street is a hive of activity with scores of people getting out of buses and taxis to stand in line at the entrance of the Giza pyramid complex. Inside, camels take visitors around the complex, from the grand pyramid to the smaller ones, and finally, to viewing points. There are families, couples, schoolchildren, tour groups, content creators, and solo explorers. Along Abou al Hool, there are shops selling perfumes, rugs, traditional clothes and jewelry. There are also countless hotels and rooftop cafés that entice visitors to stay longer with epic views of pyramids, while horse-drawn carriages are on hand for a tour of Giza beyond the monuments.

With its web of activities and businesses supported by the existence of the pyramids, Giza epitomizes the importance of preserving and promoting heritage. As the surviving wonder of the ancient world, the pyramids are also a testament to the importance of African heritage to the rich history of humanity.

Yet, for all of the continent's plural cultural identity, biodiversity and history, African heritage is not yet as prominent as it could – and should – be. Against this backdrop, Priority Africa, a global strategy devised by UNESCO, enters to reimagine African heritage promotion and preservation.

### **A vision in action**

Africa made its first appearance on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1978 with the inscription of two cultural properties and one natural property: the Island of Gorée in Senegal, the Rock-Hewn Churches of Lalibela and the Simien National Park in northern Ethiopia. Today, there are only 98 African sites inscribed, while the World Heritage List features 1,157 properties.

'Africa is recognized for its richness. It's also one of the key places in terms of nature and biodiversity. But there is a marked dissonance, between a continent considered very rich when it comes to culture and nature and its representation on the UNESCO World Heritage List, where it only makes up 12%', says Albino Jopela, Head of Programmes at the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF). Additionally, nearly 41% of properties featured on the List of World Heritage in Danger are African. 'The numbers are skewed,' Jopela underlines.

The AWHF was founded in 2006 to respond to a key gap in the continent's financial and technical capacity to effectively implement the objectives of the World Heritage Convention.

'We contribute to better representation of Africa by helping States Parties to identify suitable sites for nomination on the World Heritage List. We also help improve the state of conservation for properties already inscribed. There are many African sites in danger, mostly due to conservation issues, although there are others such as conflict and climate change,' says Jopela.

These dynamics are what make Priority Africa Strategy crucial. The UNESCO strategy aims to increase Africa's representation on the World Heritage List, support African countries in removing properties from the List of World Heritage in Danger, and enhance the role of African experts through capacity-building. It also contributes to boosting the role of youth, women and local communities in heritage management, and developing innovative digital technologies. 'A key challenge to African sites is to ensure that communities and custodians of heritage can benefit from them. The issue of how to derive those benefits, and use heritage for sustainable development within communities, has been one of the Fund's main focus areas,' Jopela adds.

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Asmara: A Modernist African City (Eritrea)

**right**  
Vibrant street in Historic Cairo (Egypt)





### left

Fort Jesus, Mombasa (Kenya)

Priority Africa places Africa at the heart of World Heritage, rekindling efforts to harness heritage for development. Ongoing actions across the continent by UNESCO and its partners are contributing to shifting the image of the continent – home to remarkable cultural and nature diversity, and some of the most astounding sites on earth.

For its part, the Fund has trained over 700 professionals through workshops and supported almost 70 projects in 40 countries. AWHF also helped to strengthen systems and processes in 80 sites, and played an instrumental role in having 30 new African sites listed and funding their restoration and preservation.

### Promoting heritage, enriching communities

Fort Jesus in Mombasa, Kenya was built between 1593 and 1596. One of the most outstanding and well-preserved examples of 16th century Portuguese military fortification, it was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2011. Fatma Twahir has been working here as a site manager for the past five years, ensuring that the Fort and its three museums are in top shape, from their maintenance, talent management and visitor facilities, to student internships and the temporary exhibitions she curates.

To Twahir, heritage sites like Fort Jesus are not just monuments from the past. They are inextricably linked to creating a richer sense of identity and bringing communities together. She observed this first-hand when Fort Jesus launched public programmes in order to work closer with the communities. ‘It gives them a sense of ownership and a linkage with the historical evolution of the site,’ says Twahir.

Heritage sites also create jobs and enable economic participation for women and young people. ‘Fort Jesus is run by staff of approximately 50 people, who rely on a monthly salary paid by the government. They are involved in visitor management, interpretation,

To Twahir, heritage sites like Fort Jesus are not just monuments from the past. They are inextricably linked to creating a richer sense of identity and bringing communities together.

conservation and maintenance of artifacts, administration, procurement, supplies and accounts.’

‘Other economic benefits come from supporting tour guides, photographers, and curio and food sellers enriching the Fort Jesus experience for our visitors,’ Twahir continues. ‘We also offer internship opportunities to students of tourism and other subjects, and we have a temporary exhibition space where women and young people can sell their crafts, capitalizing on those visiting Fort Jesus.’

Fatma also wears the hat of chairperson of the African Site Managers Network (ASMN): ‘The organization connects the managers of the 137 World Heritage sites in Africa to share experiences, challenges and successes. They talk about management issues, highlight common capacity requirements relevant to our needs, while emphasizing local expertise. The ASMN is also a platform to spread opportunities,’ she explains.

‘It is not about isolating Africa from the rest of the world,  
but rather about domesticating expertise.’

The Network testifies to the power of partnerships towards the reimagination of how African heritage. Through ASMN, research on climate change impact on Fort Jesus was implemented, resulting in the construction of a protective sea wall. The Network also enabled capacity-building in Disaster Risk Management both locally and regionally, leading to the drafting of Risk Management Plans. Drawing inspiration from ASMN, Fort Jesus now runs Youth Heritage programmes, passing down knowledge and values of heritage, while capitalizing on young participants’ energy, creativity and aptitude for new technology to bring in a new approach to heritage interpretation.

### **A ripple effect**

Maria Manjate’s interests led her to study management and cultural studies and to work as a cultural administrator in the performing arts, cinema and heritage spaces in Mozambique. Her job at the Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa focuses on creating legislative frameworks aimed at preserving heritage. While her passion for culture has always been matched by her professional experience, in recent years she realized that she needed more – skills, resources and networks – to help put her country on the map. At the moment, only the Island of Mozambique is on the World Heritage List.

So, she applied to the pilot phase of the Mentorship Programme for African Professionals, launched in 2022 to connect heritage professionals to

regional and global networks of skills and expertise. The year-long programme was an opportunity for participants to gain tools necessary for effective heritage management, designing community programmes and using heritage to contribute to global development goals. In addition to refining her project design and technical skills, she also built networks that brought her speaking opportunities at conferences and seminars.

James Wakibara, a mentor with more than 20 years of experience in the heritage sector in Tanzania and beyond, says that the programme’s biggest impact is the ability to help mentees upskill, connect and draw inspirations.

The programme also puts emphasis on localized knowledge and expertise. ‘Let’s suppose there is a heritage site in Ghana that wants to be put on the World Heritage List, and someone comes from Europe with all the knowledge and experience. We still need a distinct strategy adapted to the African context. We need to capacitate Africans to be experts of their own heritage. It is not about isolating Africa from the rest of the world, but rather about domesticating expertise,’ says Wakibara. ‘We need a large field of African professionals who are skilled enough to be able to perform efficiently and serve the aspirations of the World Heritage Convention.’

The mentorship is creating positive ripple effects across the continent. Many mentees go on to sharing their newly acquired skills with their colleagues and heritage communities. Manjate organized regional seminars for







heritage practitioners in Africa's Portuguese-speaking countries, discussing ways to increase the region's representation through inscriptions, and connecting with African experts with rich experience in heritage management.

### **Unlocking Africa's greatest asset**

A field of African heritage cannot be established without young people at its centre – this is what Espera Donouvossi, programme manager for Youth Heritage Africa at the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), believes.

'Africa has a young population and some of the most vibrant heritage globally. By combining these two assets, we can help the continent progress on its agenda for the heritage promotion and restoration,' Donouvossi says. He calls the youth population 'key agents' in this endeavour. 'They know how to use innovative tools, so if you want to sustain the way heritage is protected and preserved, you need to get young people on board.'

ICCROM engages young people in various ways, starting with helping them understand the different heritage Conventions and the entire scope of heritage management. 'Getting young people to cherish heritage

**'Young people used to see heritage as something that belongs in the past. They now see it as the present and the future and are becoming experts of the communities' heritage.'**

gives them a sense of ownership. It also allows them to take advantage of its wide-ranging economic benefits, from providing employment to creating technology innovators and entrepreneurs,' Donouvossi says.

Since in 2020, ICCROM reached more than 3,000 young people across Africa, spearheaded 37 activities at heritage sites, and established hubs in South Africa, Rwanda, Kenya, Senegal, Benin and Egypt, giving young people 'space to co-create and develop ideas.' ICCROM also offers grants to monetize these ideas, from documenting heritage sites to developing apps and using virtual reality.

'Young people used to see heritage as something that belongs in the past. They now see it as the present and the future and are becoming experts of the communities' heritage,' adds Donouvossi.

On Africa Day in 2022, young people from 17 African countries came together in Cape Town, South Africa, to develop a call to action. They called on more involvement of youth in identifying, promoting and benefiting from heritage sites, as well as championing heritage on the continent.

Across this dynamic continent, heritage is on the continuous rise.

### **left**

Tsodilo (Botswana) is a site that has witnessed visits and settlement by successive human communities for many millennia

STORY

# Building capacity for a flourishing World Heritage ecosystem



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By Eugene Jo,  
ICCROM-IUCN World Heritage Leadership  
Programme Manager



**left**  
Participants in the Dolomites, Italy, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2009

**right**  
Participants at the 2023 course 'Managing World Heritage: People Nature Culture', reviewing the lessons learned and designing next steps

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People are at the heart of World Heritage, as heritage is valued and cherished by people, created by people, and conserved by and for people. It is people that initiate actions for protection of their heritage and its values, and people that derive benefits from heritage. Investment into developing the capacities of people and communities, therefore, is not only logical but crucial for the future of heritage.

Issues and challenges that impact World Heritage are ever-changing and increasingly complex. Climate change factors have heightened disaster vulnerability, exposing more World Heritage sites to both extreme and slow-onset of disasters. The institutional and individual capacities for management remain very low, with outdated tools and processes hampering their ability to respond to crises. An analysis of the recent State of Conservation reports shows that the lack of understanding of the wider context has diminished the effectiveness of heritage management.

In this context, a new perspective is needed – one that simultaneously recognizes the systemic, pervasive issues of our times and the need for solutions tailored to particularities of each site involving diverse stakeholders. Interlinking the global agenda to concrete action on the ground is only

possible when we recognize that the responsibilities for heritage safeguarding is increasingly spread across people and institutions. We must empower individuals, communities and institutions to navigate the complexities of effectively managing their own sites, countering the narrative that there is one correct way to solve the myriad of issues. To achieve this shift in approach, capacity-building holds the key.

ICCROM, as the advisory body on building capacity, works actively with UNESCO, IUCN and ICOMOS to provide sustained and structured capacity-building for the World Heritage community. In 2011, we launched the World Heritage Leadership programme to prepare professionals for the ever-evolving, dynamic field of heritage safeguarding. The programme, accompanied by the World Heritage Capacity Building Strategy (WHCBS) also launched in the same year, provides capacity-building, tools and guidance to improve the conservation and management practices in line with the World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines. The programme is defined by openness and inclusivity – empowering a diverse range of people associated with the heritage properties to look after them and pass onto the future generations. Online and in-person training events as well as knowledge-

## STORY

### The World Heritage Convention has paved the way in linking nature and culture, and in identifying ways that World Heritage can contribute to sustainable development, by putting people at the centre of its work.

exchange opportunities are made available to site managers, stakeholders, national heritage services, regional institutions and communities.

Acknowledging that institutional capacity is crucial for modernizing the systems, the ICCROM-IUCN programme actively engages with the processes of World Heritage, and responds to the actions requested by the World Heritage Committee. For instance, we collaborate with UNESCO to set and promote new standards for nature and culture conservation within the World Heritage Convention, such as through the recently developed resource manuals: *Managing World Heritage*, *Disaster Risk Management*, *Enhancing our Heritage Toolkit 2.0* and *Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context*.

Working with communities to enhance the effectiveness of management systems of World Heritage sites is another key action. Strengthening the learning network of sites and practitioners for peer learning is our core focus. The programme strives to promote new collaborations with conservation and development partners so they can connect World Heritage to wider practice. Additionally, the programme accommodates regional needs and specificities, which often implies going beyond World Heritage sites. Indeed, we regularly work with other international organizations, conservation and development specialist organizations in States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, universities,

UNESCO Category 2 Centres, the civil society and NGOs, and other international conventions and programmes.

Capacity-building is a conscious and long-term investment in people and in World Heritage conservation. It demands directing efforts to expand the range of actors making heritage-conscious decisions. The programme targets both individuals and institutions. Individual heritage practitioners can participate in the courses, workshops and forums, while institutional partners from World Heritage sites or national authorities can design and deliver capacity-building opportunities tailored to their context, challenges and needs. The programme continues to seek partners and sponsors to contribute to global capacity-building efforts, both in the areas of producing practical tools and manuals and providing increased opportunities for courses and activities.

The World Heritage Convention has paved the way in linking nature and culture, and in identifying ways that World Heritage can contribute to sustainable development, by putting people at the centre of its work. Through capacity-building, the World Heritage system can continue to be a vibrant and flourishing ecosystem where lessons learned are shared, resources are maximized, and collective action propels inspirational and exemplary conservation actions across the globe.

**right**

Participants exploring linkages between nature and culture elements, and the ecosystem services harnessed from World Heritage areas, at the 'Managing World Heritage: People Nature Culture' 2023 course. Field visits to the World Heritage site Getbol, Korean Tidal Flats





Now building:  
Caribbean  
future through  
culture



**On Cuba Street in Old Havana**, the people stand on their balconies in the morning to see how the roof of the former Convent of Santa Clara is coming along. They leisurely sip some freshly brewed coffee and, amid the noise of hammers and saws, watch how carpenters place pieces of wood. This job requires skill and a lot of patience, and they must cover more than 100 linear metres of wooden truss roof. One of the largest of its kind in Latin America, it occupies two square blocks. When the structure is finished, they will climb back up again under the blazing Caribbean sun to lay 10,000 tiles.

A murmur is heard below, and the neighbours quickly look down. Archaeologists are taking out their brushes and plastic bags, checking the time and taking notes. In the Convent's old orchard, something has been found.

### **A new life for Havana's first convent**

The Santa Clara Convent was the first cloistered religious house for women in Havana. It opened its doors in 1644 at the request of the town's wealthy families who wished to secure the future of their unmarried daughters, and it remained as such until 1922. Since then, the building has served several purposes. It housed, for example, the Ministry of Public Works and the Centre for Conservation, Restoration and Museology (CENCREM) and during that period, great Cuban architectural works, such as the Capitol and the Central Highway, were planned from this site. Furthermore, numerous specialists in heritage conservation in Cuba were trained there.

Such is the case of the Deputy Director General of the Office of the Historian of the City of Havana, Perla Rosales, who is charged with reinstating the building's former educational role. 'This rehabilitation constitutes a great opportunity to recover a building of high heritage value and place it at the service of heritage conservation and promotion, not only in Havana or Cuba, but also across the Caribbean,' she underlines.

With a contribution of five million euros, the UNESCO programme *Transcultura: Integrating Cuba, the Caribbean and the European Union through Culture and Creativity*, funded by the European Union, has provided the principal donation to these rehabilitation works. The major programme also receives support from other partners such as the Italo-Latin American International Organization, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) and the World Monuments Fund (WMF).

Once the rehabilitation is complete, the former Convent will be reborn as the Santa Clara College for Training in the Arts and Restoration Trades of Cuba and the Caribbean. This centre, which is part of the Caribbean Cultural Training Hub created with the support of *Transcultura*, will train specialists in the conservation and promotion of heritage across the Caribbean.

'This is a landmark project for UNESCO as it demonstrates the power of heritage to change and improve the livelihoods of people. Santa Clara College of Restoration will be a centre of excellence for research, for capacity-building and for the professional development of young people. What is more, it will be a teeming heart of cultural life for the surrounding community and its residents,' said the Director of World Heritage, Lazare Eloundou Assomo, on his recent visit to Havana in May 2023.

The rehabilitation works are centred on the first and oldest cloister, which will house the Aula Magna of the new college, as well as the classrooms and workshops for mural painting, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, easel painting, mosaics, stained glass, metal objects and carpentry. It will also have a library, a media library and conference rooms with simultaneous interpretation services in English, French and Spanish.

Once the rehabilitation of the first cloister is completed, the centre will start giving courses in 2024. 'This will be of particular interest for students, as it will allow them to gather hands-on experience and learn the

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The UNESCO *Transcultura* workshop held during the 2022 Caribbean Festival  
**right**  
Rehabilitation works underway in the Santa Clara Convent in Havana







rehabilitation trades on the same site from where the rest of the cloisters will continue to be rehabilitated,' says Gladys Collazo, Director of Cultural Heritage of the Office of the Historian of the City of Havana.

### **Opportunities for young people**

In the Caribbean, heritage offers young people the possibility of a future. The UNESCO programme taps into this potential by build capacities and creating opportunities for culture professionals between the ages of 18 and 35 from 17 Caribbean States: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

'With the richness of the cultural heritage in Cuba and the Caribbean region as a whole, connecting the topics of heritage, culture, entrepreneurship and youth offers tremendous opportunity for socio-economic development and new ways of creation and employment, based on diversity, and creativity,' states Isabel Brillhante Pedrosa, Ambassador of the European Union to Cuba.

The initiative harnesses the Caribbean's cultural diversity to become a driver for sustainable development, through exchange and cooperation within the region and with the European Union. This is particularly relevant for the cultural and creative sectors in the region, badly hit by COVID-19. More than 2 million jobs were lost in Latin America and the Caribbean, as confirmed by the data published by the project Evaluation of the impact of COVID-19 on cultural and creative industries, a joint initiative of MERCOSUR, UNESCO, IDB, SEGIB and OEI.

There are other difficulties that complicate the situation of young people in the region, such as the high unemployment rate, which particularly affects women, and the absence of inter-regional networks. These challenges limit not only their personal development, but also their contribution to countries' economic growth.

**'With the richness of the cultural heritage in Cuba and the Caribbean region as a whole, connecting heritage, culture, entrepreneurship and youth offers tremendous opportunity.'**

On this road to economic development, heritage safeguarding has the potential to create career opportunities while fostering a sense of belonging and social cohesion. 'Whether it is through management, crafts, creative jobs for enhancing heritage or entrepreneurs linked to tourism at heritage destinations, Transcultura offers young people possibilities to thrive,' underlines Anne Lemaistre, Director of the UNESCO Regional Office for Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean, the office that oversees the implementation of the Transcultura programme.

### **Caribbean youth: weaving a common history**

The Latin America and Caribbean region has 147 properties inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Among the values recognized by UNESCO are archaeological sites from pre-Hispanic times, historic centres in an excellent state of conservation, and landscapes endowed with great

#### **left**

Singer and tres (traditional Cuban instrument) interpreter Yarima Blanco

## FEATURE

biodiversity. In many of these sites across the Caribbean, young people are involved in conserving and promoting the region's cultural heritage through management, design and research.

The Antigua Naval Dockyard and Related Archaeological Sites, located in Antigua and Barbuda, is one of the Caribbean properties inscribed on the World Heritage List. Likisha Donawa, a graphic designer at the Heritage Department of the National Parks Authority, still remembers what made her fall in love with this location. 'When I was a little girl, I first walked into the Naval Dockyard and was captivated by its breath-taking landscapes and its beautiful architecture, which always takes me back in time,' she recalls.

Heritage sites become a constituent part of cultural identity beyond a mere appreciation of aesthetics.

This is illustrated by the results of a recent research project carried out by the Heritage Department of the National Parks Authority. 'A genealogical project has revealed the names and contributions of African enslaved workers and soldiers in the construction of the Antigua Naval Dockyard, names that are still found in my community. The surname Donawa is one of them.' Now, through graphic design, she wants to contribute to sharing and maintaining the legacy of her ancestors.

Donawa believes that young people have the power to raise awareness of preserving heritage through design, art and creativity. 'Our generation is nurtured by innovative ideas that have enormous potential to bring about significant change, driving us towards a future that prioritizes sustainability.'

### 'Through heritage we revisit the past, reflect on the present and move towards the future.'

In May 2023, she participated in the event Designing Development: Young Designers and Intellectual Property in the Caribbean and Europe, organized by UNESCO. She explains that the exchanges promoted by this programme not only established regional networks, but also enabled them to weave a shared history in the Caribbean.

From Old Havana, art historian Amanda Ramírez insists that she 'owes everything' to heritage. 'Through heritage we can learn about the history of humanity and its expressions, historical development and all the components comprising cultures. Through heritage we revisit the past, reflect on the present and move towards the future,' said the manager of the Centre for the Interpretation of Cuba-Europe Cultural Relations, the Segundo Cabo Palace.

As one of the participants in the online courses of the Transcultura programme, Ramírez acknowledges that, in her case, heritage is a source of employment. The

tools offered by this training have provided her with opportunities to continue contributing to the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage.

Effective management of heritage sites is another important aspect promoted by Transcultura. An event on the maritime fortress as a resource of sustainable tourism will take place in December 2023 in Havana, Cuba, fostering networks between Caribbean and European site managers.

### **Santa Clara Convent: restoring the future of the community**

In the Santa Clara Convent, the word 'demolish' does not exist. As a matter of principle, everything that can be saved is diagnosed, analysed and conserved. The professionals who work there use chisels to restore structures, doors, windows and the three-century old timber-framed ceilings, with materials imported by

**right**  
The view of the Santa Clara Convent





Transcultural. Some of them have worked in the trade for more than 30 years. Other jewels of Cuban architecture have also passed through their hands and can now be seen from other balconies in Old Havana.

‘We are referring to the Santa Clara Convent, a priceless gem of Cuban colonial architecture: impressive wood-framed ceilings, tapial walls, columns with a thick stone base, a centuries-old cistern, a bell tower and still hidden archaeological treasures. The task of rehabilitating this remarkable structure presents both a formidable challenge and a privilege for any lover of restoration,’ confesses architect Norma Pérez-Trujillo, head of Investment at the Office of the Historian of the City of Havana.

On the back cover of the project portfolio, there is a sketch of the building signed by Eusebio Leal, the former historian of the City of Havana and the mastermind behind the recovery of the Cuban capital’s Historic Centre. Office specialists recall that Santa Clara was a great dream.

The same holds true for Noemí Moreno. She is 80 years old and has lived on Cuba Street for 60 years, which crosses Old Havana from one end to the other. Together with the streets Luz, Habana and Sol, they surround the former Convent of Santa Clara de Asís. Moreno worked there for ten years when the building housed CENCREM. ‘I’m as happy as if my house was being repaired,’ she says, as a workman cleans the crinkles on the wall across the street.

The refurbishment works will restore the building to its former glory and its function as a training centre, highly specialized and technologically advanced. ‘But they will also benefit the community surrounding the Convent with the rehabilitation and renovation of the public spaces,’ highlights Gladys Collazo, Director of the future College.

From the wooden windows of a 1923 building, Noemí looks at the scaffolding. The Convent is now closed for construction works, but she sees from afar. She reaches the courtyard of the first cloister, passes the nuns’ old washbasins and climbs to the top floor to look down from the railing at the original cistern.

A pigeon perches on the scaffolding and sighs as if it has just realized something of essence. ‘That pigeon has come to make its nest and then it will leave. In the end, we are nothing more than a bird that comes and flies away. History is what remains.’



© UNESCO / H. Bejerano

**left**

Noemí Moreno, living in the neighbourhood of the Santa Clara Convent in Havana

**above**

Norma Pérez-Trujillo, Head of Investment at the Office of the Historian of the City of Havana, explaining the rehabilitation process in the Santa Clara Convent

# The Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage



© Heritage Commission of Saudi Arabia





**left**  
Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH) in the Kingdom of Bahrain

**right**  
ARC-WH supports countries in their efforts to preserve World Heritage sites in the region

© Heritage Commission of Saudi Arabia

The Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH) is a Category 2 Centre under the auspices of UNESCO. It provides vital assistance to 19 Arab countries in the protection and management of cultural, natural and mixed sites through technical support and the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the World Heritage Committee. ARC-WH was established by Bahrain, as an autonomous and independent legal entity to support States Parties of the Arab region to fulfil their obligations as stipulated in the 1972 World Heritage Convention.

The only centre of its kind in the Arab region, the ARC-WH celebrated its ten-year anniversary in 2022, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention. The celebration offered an opportunity for ARC-WH to reflect on its work through the past decade and examine its vision for the upcoming years.

Since its establishment, ARC-WH has provided technical support to the States Parties to enhance the representation of the heritage across the region on the World Heritage List and safeguard properties on the List of World Heritage in Danger. ARC-WH places particular importance on building the capacities and skills of heritage site managers and professionals

through workshops, training programmes and courses tailored to their regional and national needs. It provides Arabic translations of relevant resources to ensure professionals, institutions and decision-makers have access to the latest information and knowledge they need to protect heritage in their countries. ARC-WH is currently working to establish a network of experts in the region to further reinforce peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange.

The past decade has witnessed close cooperation between ARC-WH and international, regional and national stakeholders and States Parties, in which the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been an important partner. In 2022, ARC-WH and the Saudi Heritage Commission of the Ministry of Culture organized a training programme for the national heritage professionals on the mechanisms and concepts of the World Heritage Convention. A collaboration with ICCROM-IUCN World Heritage Leadership programme resulted in a workshop on Impact Assessment for World Heritage.

ARC-WH and the Saudi Heritage Commission also partnered with the UNESCO Chair on Underwater Cultural Heritage at Alexandria University, Egypt, to organize the first Arab Regional Course for Capacity Building in the Field of Marine Archaeology and

## STORY

Underwater Cultural Heritage. The innovative training, which was held in March 2023 in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, contributed to building synergies between two UNESCO legal instruments – World Heritage Convention and the 2001 Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage.

Building on these achievements, ARC-WH looks to the future, guided by its Action Plan which utilizes the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to address the priorities identified through the Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting in the Arab States region. The year 2022 saw the launch of two major initiatives: Arab Youth for Heritage and Rihla. The Arab Youth for Heritage is an awareness-raising initiative for young people, encouraging them to participate in heritage protection. The second edition of the My Heritage film competition was launched in partnership with the Saudi Heritage Commission, inviting youth from the Arab region to visit, document and create films about World Heritage sites in the region.

The initiative encourages them to cultivate their own narratives and create connections with communities. The winning films will be presented in September 2023 during the World Heritage Young Professionals Forum in Riyadh and at the Al-Ahsa Oasis, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The second initiative, Rihla, aims to use tourism as a catalyst to incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals into World Heritage site management. The two initiatives represent the Centre’s strategy in the coming years to engage with wider communities and the heritage ecosystem.

The establishment of the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage represents the enduring commitment of Bahrain to the 1972 World Heritage Convention, and to conserving the region’s diverse heritage. The ARC-WH reaffirms its responsibility to continue collaborating with partners, organizations and States Parties to support the preservation, conservation and management of humanity’s heritage for present and future generations.

### below

ARC-WH promotes the visibility of UNESCO World Heritage sites in the region by engaging stakeholders on their premises

### right

ARC-WH’s capacity-building activities saw the participation of several professionals, academics and experts from the region



© Heritage Commission of Saudi Arabia



# Spotlight on: women site managers

**Juliana Strogan** is responsible for the Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site in Norway, a hydroelectric based industrial ensemble. It is situated in a dramatic landscape of mountains, valleys, and waterfalls, where the natural topography enabled large amounts of hydroelectric energy for industrial production at the global level.

The site dates back to the early 20th century and the Second Industrial Revolution. Hydroelectricity enabled the effective development of scientific production systems and human endeavour ensured high efficiency by implementing welfare and social added values as a key factor into the systems' equation.

Juliana Strogan describes it as a people-nature collaboration in contemporary times. She thrives on working with others to find the best solutions for cultural heritage: 'There is a fantastic feeling of achievement in securing the funds for a project or programme for the site, but one of the most fulfilling tasks I have is supporting the local community in putting in practice their own initiatives. It's amazing to see how engaged, creative and capable individuals and groups are.'

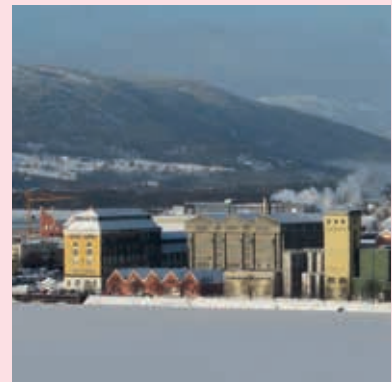
She has been lucky to have met amazing women who empowered her as a young professional: 'They shared their knowledge, experience and strength, and gave me the support and motivation I needed to stand for and implement my ideas.'

Strogan continues: 'I try to pass this attitude onwards and be available to my colleagues and communities as much as I can. I am in both formal and informal arenas where women share their ideas, work, successes and challenges. There is as much empowerment in supporting colleagues as in being supported by them. Networking, sharing and support are keywords to stick with.'

**'One of the most fulfilling tasks I have is supporting the local community in putting in practice their own initiatives. It's amazing to see how engaged, creative and capable individuals and groups are.'**



© Juliana Strogan



© Directorate for Cultural Heritage

**above**  
The Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site (Norway) was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2015

**'Every step we take to reach a solution brings joy to us, and to the local community here. So, I always go home as a rich site manager, full of smiles and gratitude.'**

**Dr Ang Ming Chee** is the site manager for George Town Heritage City, part of the Melaka and George Town, Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca UNESCO World Heritage site in Malaysia. It is a unique architectural and cultural townscape that developed over half a millennium of trading and cultural exchange between East and West in the straits of Malacca. She calls the site 'a melting pot with coexistence, and a celebration of diversity.'

With more than 3,000 heritage buildings, the site hosts diverse lifestyles, cultural activities, religions and languages. Many people live, work, visit, and use the site as part of their daily life, including Dr Ang Ming Chee who grew up in the old town and now works there.

She is proud to be given the trust of her government and local people to manage the site. 'My passion is to make heritage available, accessible and affordable for the local people. The job can be lonely and difficult at times, but I am glad to work with the team in finding pragmatic, problem-solving initiatives. Every step we take to reach a solution brings joy to us, and to the local community here. So, I always go home as a rich site manager, full of smiles and gratitude. My mission is to bridge differences between stakeholders, and mobilise collective actions in the conservation, maintenance and safeguarding of heritage, particularly from the youth. We need to encourage healthy debates and accept new ideas in heritage. We have a duty to think outside the box in reaching the end goal of making heritage a sustainable resource for the local people.'

Asked how she inspires others, she says: 'I am lucky to be treated equally by my colleagues and seniors in the field. Yet, it is important for me to ensure that equality shall be available, and always defended for everyone in the heritage community. I have refused to stay silent on inequality and have raised my concerns for those being treated unfairly.'



© Dr Ang Ming Chee



© OUR PLACE The World Heritage Collection

**above**

The City Hall in George Town, part of the Melaka and George Town, Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca (Malaysia) World Heritage site, inscribed in 2008

## PORTRAIT

**‘Tunisian women are key players in the management and promotion of cultural heritage. My appointment, along with other colleagues, as managers of World Heritage properties is a testimony to the confidence given to women’s abilities to take on complex responsibilities.’**

**Manel Chaari Ep Mekaouar** oversees the Medina of Sousse, originally a commercial and military port and part of a coastal defence system during the Aghlabid period between 800 and 909.

The Medina is located directly by the sea, in the historic centre of one of the major cities of the Tunisian Sahel. Steeped in history and inspiration, its ramparts remain complete, and it contains multiple historic monuments including its casbah, an exemplary ribat, its splendid grand mosque and lively and colourful souks.

‘Managing a living heritage is the biggest challenge I encounter each day. Connecting heritage conservation with the satisfaction and needs of the occupants of the property in modernity can be difficult to achieve,’ says Manel Chaari Ep Mekaouar.

She continues: ‘This has been a source of fruitful exchange that allows me to improve my perception of heritage and to enrich my capacities in communication, persuasion and awareness. Getting together around the management of a heritage asset with actors from different areas of interest, with different constraints and visions is sometimes difficult, but I think that’s what makes my job interesting.’

Asked if she considers herself a role model for other women, she says: ‘As in most areas of activity, Tunisian women are key players in the management and promotion of cultural heritage. My appointment, along with other colleagues, as managers of World Heritage properties is a testimony to the confidence given to women’s abilities to take on complex responsibilities. This confidence can only motivate us as women to work harder to achieve our goals.’



© Manel Chaari Ep Mekaouar



© UNESCO/ Christian Manhart

**above**

The Medina of Sousse (Tunisia) was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1988

**'If a woman does relevant and noticeable work as a site manager, the community takes notice and will be prompt to appoint other women to important roles in the managing of sites.'**

**Dr Louise Noelle Gras** is an Art Historian and Technical Secretary on the Committee of Analysis for the Urban, Architectural and Engineering Interventions at the Central University City Campus of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

The Campus design began in 1949 and involved over 50 architects. Based on Le Corbusier's principles, it combines functionalism with bold sculptural expressionism. Several well-known artists contributed murals to the ensemble of buildings, sports facilities and open spaces. In the 70 years since the campus has grown to support tens of thousands of students. It was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2007.

Louise Noelle Gras' expertise is the history of 20th Century architecture. Her work on the campus relates to its values, ensuring it is properly promoted and maintained. She also supervises the conservation of the buildings and the preservation of their intrinsic values.

The biggest challenge is the number of conservation issues: 'Some of the difficulties are derived from the original materials that have not aged well and are hard to replace. In some cases, they are no longer produced. It is a living heritage and academic changes in some schools, as well as the growth of the student body, bring about modifications that have to be solved too. All changes have to be justified and reviewed by a Commission that takes the final decision on implementation, always taking into account the preservation of the original aspect and plans.'

Louise Noelle Gras was recently recognised by Glocal Design Magazine with the Noldi Schreck Award for Academic Trajectory, for her dedication to the study and defence of 20th Century architecture.



© Dr. Louise Noelle Gras



© Javier Benítez

**above**

Mural of the Central Library at Central University City Campus of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) (Mexico) World Heritage site

When asked if she sees her role in empowering other women site managers and the surrounding community she answers: 'The small group that I work with at the Analysis Committee is composed of women, and in the future they will take up the baton. To my mind, if a woman does relevant and noticeable work as a site manager, the community takes notice and will be prompt to appoint other women to important roles in the managing of sites.'

## PORTRAIT

**'As a curator of such a prestigious site, I get to meet all sorts of people, diplomats, business people, academics and tourists of all ages, some of whom I show around and exchange various ideas on partnerships and collaborations towards.'**

**Fatma Twahir** is a site manager at Fort Jesus on the coast of Kenya, a site she describes as majestic, robust and dynamic. The vast military fortification is a landmark of Mombasa that was built by the Portuguese between 1593-1596 in the shape of a human. It has original remains and later additions following a forceful takeover by the Omani in 1698.

Today the Fort has three museum galleries housing ethnographic artefacts from archaeological collections along the coast. The surrounding area has vibrant communities of tour guides, photographers, food and curio vendors amongst the residential neighbourhood and is visited by a wide array of people both young and old, local and international seeking knowledge and experiencing the grand open structure.

Fatma Twahir describes the site as 'a representation of dynamic architecture with flexibility to accommodate variable functions with changing user needs; from the Portuguese, Omani and British historically to presently as a museum, social space and place of reflection.' She continues: 'As a curator of such a prestigious site, I get to meet all sorts of people, diplomats, business people, academics and tourists of all ages, some of whom I show around and exchange various ideas on partnerships and collaborations towards.'

Considering if she empowers other women site managers and her surrounding community, Fatma Twahir responds thoughtfully: 'I think my situation has an impact and we can work further to achieve this by encouraging through example, through mentorship and training, through involvement in community initiatives and through giving opportunities to those showing effort in achieving their dreams.'



© Fatma Twahir



© Ninara

**above**

Fort Jesus, Mombasa (Kenya) was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2011



**'I think the best way to empower is to lead by example. The more women site managers we have working in heritage, the more women will be encouraged to choose the same path.'**

**Noura al Sayeh** is Head of Architectural Affairs at the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities. She works in the old historic town of Muharraq, the capital of the World Heritage site 'Pearling, Testimony of an Island Economy' in Bahrain. It is the best remaining example of the built heritage of the pearling era which was central to Gulf communities until the 1930s, a testimony to the millennia-old pearl collecting tradition and the globally significant single-product island economy and social system it produced.

Muharraq itself is made up of courtyard houses connected to one another in an organic way and creating a continuous two storey urban fabric where the start of one house and the end of another seamlessly blend into one another connected by a network of narrow and winding streets.

Noura al Sayeh describes the site as complex, evolving and lively, and tells us: 'The biggest challenges have to do with managing the expectations of the local community, dealing with the administrative and financial hurdles that often slow down the rehabilitation process and keeping the momentum going on projects that can take a decade or more before they are completed.'

In considering her role as empowering other women site managers and her surrounding community, she says: 'I think the best way to empower is to lead by example. The more women site managers we have working in heritage, the more women will be encouraged to choose the same path.'



© Francisco Anzola

**above**  
Pearling, Testimony of an Island Economy (Bahrain) was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2012

# Weathering the Change

By Ruth Francis

une



SCO

**Directly in the middle of Gabon in Central Africa** sits the Lopé-Okanda National Park, a diverse landscape of rainforests, savannas, rivers and hills. The UNESCO World Heritage-Listed park covers an area of around 4,900 square kilometres and is known for its rich biodiversity and unique ecosystems.

A population of forest elephants call this park their home, a critically endangered 'cousin' of the African savanna elephant. They are about half the size of the African savanna elephants with tusks that are straighter and thinner, pointing towards the ground rather than curving upwards.

These creatures are referred to as ecosystem engineers, because of their significant role in modifying and shaping the landscape. They move through the park, foraging for leaves, seeds, grasses and tree bark, and especially for the majority of their diet: fruit from the trees. Their movement creates gaps in the forest canopy, allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor and encouraging the growth of vegetation. The seeds of the fruit they consume are dispensed through their dung, helping to regenerate the forest.

Like many large mammals, forest elephants face numerous threats including habitat loss, poaching and human-wildlife conflict. And even in the remote, relatively untouched Lopé-Okanda National Park where there appears to be little human pressure, these elephants cannot escape the impact of human activities through climate change.

Recent years saw a dramatic reduction in the amount of fruit produced in the forest, likely because of the climate becoming warmer and drier. Researchers have monitored the wildlife and rainforest in Lopé-Okanda National Park since the 1980s and recently reported an 80% decrease in fruit production between 1986 and 2018. As some tree species depend on a dip in temperature to

Forests are among the most  
biodiverse habitats on earth,  
absorbing more carbon  
from the atmosphere than  
they release.

trigger flowering, the increased temperature could mean they are missing their environmental cues.

At the same time, the elephants' physical condition has deteriorated, with a reported average reduction in body mass of 11% in the 2010's. 'We are probably witnessing the beginning of the extinction of forest elephants in Africa. It is tragic, particularly when you realize what an important part these animals play in regulating the climate. Their presence in these forests changes their typology: the trees have denser wood, therefore capturing more CO<sub>2</sub>,' says researcher Robin Whytock of the University of Stirling, United Kingdom.

This is just one study that adds to a growing body of evidence on the biodiversity crisis and the consequences of rapid climatic change. The elephants and the forests are symbiotically connected, each supporting the other, and both experiencing threats.

### **Forests under pressure**

Forests are among the most biodiverse habitats on earth, absorbing more carbon from the atmosphere than they release. Clearly, they play a major role in protecting the planet from climate change, but around the world, forests are suffering. Agriculture, deforestation, wildfires and

#### **previous page**

Lorenzo Bramanti of the Oceanological Observatory of Banyuls-sur-Mer (France) conducts research to understand how deep-sea gorgonians and their ecosystems can survive in the face of climate change

#### **right**

Morne Trois Pitons National Park (Dominica)





invasive species are some of the threats that are taking their toll.

Even UNESCO's protected World Heritage forests are at risk. A 2021 UNESCO report, *World Heritage Forests: Carbon sinks under pressure*, detailed how over the previous twenty years World Heritage sites lost 3.5 million hectares of forest — an area larger than the whole of Gabon. The report found that the 69 million hectares of World Heritage sites' forests, roughly two and a half times the size of Gabon, store 13 billion tonnes of carbon in their vegetation and soils. Each year they absorb 190 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, almost double the emissions of Qatar recorded in 2019.

Half of this carbon absorption is thanks to just ten large sites, but even sites that absorb far less can play a strong role in regional and local climate regulation: an average hectare of World Heritage forest can absorb the same amount of carbon per year that a passenger vehicle emits.

Since the mid-2010s, intense wildfires associated with extreme temperatures and drought conditions have been a cause of high emissions at some sites. Wildfires in Australia's Tasmanian Wilderness and Greater Blue Mountains Area in 2019 and 2020 generated huge greenhouse gas emissions, each higher than the national annual emissions from fossil fuels of more than half the world's countries.

Climate-related storms can lead to loss of tree cover, for example at Morne Trois Pitons National Park in Dominica after Hurricane Maria in 2017. The National Park and other forests are adapted to hurricanes and will recover, but with more frequent and severe storms, forests cannot store the same amount of carbon as when there were fewer and less severe disturbances.

The 2021 report calls for three key actions to ensure that World Heritage forests continue to be reliable carbon sinks that can support future generations against extreme weather and bolster biodiversity.

## The sites can serve as living laboratories and influence policy development.

First: rapid and direct responses can help prevent devastation from climate-related events. In some World Heritage sites, climate change adaptation plans are in place with site managers working with indigenous and local communities. But this number needs to increase to establish policies, plans and processes for managing or reducing disaster risks. More sites should work towards this kind of inclusive planning.

Second: protecting sites' broader landscapes protects the sites themselves. Most pressures to World Heritage sites originate outside of their boundaries, where forest protection is weaker. Forest fires may start outside of World Heritage sites where fire management is not as effective. Protected areas must not be isolated islands within altered landscapes. Integrated management, including the creation of ecological corridors and buffer zones, will add a layer of protection to sites as well as act as net carbon sinks themselves.

Third: coordination and integration with global climate, biodiversity and sustainable development agendas. Inclusion of World Heritage sites in national policies can contribute to international initiatives and climate action plans, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Global Biodiversity Framework. The sites can serve as living laboratories and influence policy development. In fact, the long-running research programme at Lopé-Okanda National Park has underpinned many of the country's conservation and climate policies. In 2021, Gabon became the first country in Africa to receive results-based payments for reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation.

### left

Sanganeb Marine National Park and Dungonab Bay  
– Mukkawar Island Marine National Park (Sudan)

## FEATURE

### Life below the ocean surface

Meanwhile, 3,500 kilometres away off the east coast of Africa, another living laboratory is contributing to our understanding of the ocean and the impacts of our changing climate. In April 2023, a research expedition took place at the Dungonab Bay and Mukkawar Island Marine National Park, Sudan's unique marine World Heritage site.

The site was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2016 and hosts an impressive range of fringing and off-shore reef formations, including some of the world's most northerly coral reefs. Within the site is Sanganeb atoll, the only such feature in the Red Sea, and this alone hosts over 300 fish species, many of which are endemic and rare. It is a refuge for dugongs, sharks, manta rays and dolphins and is a resting and breeding area for marine turtles.

Dr Mona Ibrahim Mohamed Almahy, Associate Research Professor at the Red Sea Fisheries Research Station, set out from Port Sudan to Mohamed Qoul up the coast with her scientific team on 9 April at 5:15 a.m. Here they picked up four young people from the local higher secondary school as well as some local fishermen, taking to the water to start their assignment at 10:00. In calm waters under clear blue skies, the crew spotted sea turtles, dolphins and dugongs as they collected seawater samples and temperature readings. The work done, they returned to shore in the late afternoon, tired, but elated with their efforts. The next morning the scientists were joined by four younger students from a local primary and intermediate school, and they embarked on another successful day of research on the water.

Their mission was part of UNESCO's Global Citizen Science project, currently piloting across 25 marine

By collecting just small amounts of ocean water,  
it is possible to detect hundreds of species living  
on or passing through the area.

World Heritage sites. It aims to better understand marine biodiversity and the possible impacts of climate change on marine life across UNESCO World Heritage marine sites. By collecting just small amounts of ocean water, it is possible to detect hundreds of species living on or passing through the area. As fish and other marine creatures move through the water they shed DNA through waste, mucus and cells: this is known as environmental DNA or eDNA. This genetic material can determine the species richness in an area without the need to take any organisms from their environment.

Over a two-year period from late 2022, UNESCO's Environmental DNA Expeditions will see samples taken in selected marine World Heritage sites to provide

a one-off biodiversity snapshot. Combined with ocean warming data, it can show how climate change is affecting the world's most exceptional marine biodiversity, providing a first glimpse of potential geographical and distribution shifts of fish species, and inform the conservation measures needed today to protect it for future generations.

Back in Sudan, eight students took samples and recorded temperatures from twenty locations across the two sites over the two days. Preservation liquid was added to the samples to fix the eDNA and ready them to ship to a specialized lab for analysis. Here the DNA can be compared with libraries to see which species were present in the area.

right

Los Glaciares National Park (Argentina)







With more than 75,000 species of plants including trees, as well as over 30,000 species of mammals, birds, fishes, reptiles and amphibians, natural World Heritage sites are a remarkable biodiversity haven.

‘The days were long, but the weather was good with calm seas and very little current, and we had shade on the boat,’ says Dr Mona Almahy. ‘The students felt their contribution to their local marine landscape and the bigger UNESCO project as we covered diverse ecosystems, sampling rocky and sandy areas as well as mangrove, seagrass and coral reef. Our expedition was during Ramadan, so we had no food or water during the daytime, but we were in excellent spirits, feeling so proud of what we achieved.’

### **Biodiversity is life**

UNESCO World Heritage sites make up less than one per cent of the Earth’s surface yet they harbour more than a fifth of mapped global species richness. With more than 75,000 species of plants including trees, as well as over 30,000 species of mammals, birds, fishes, reptiles and amphibians, natural World Heritage sites are a remarkable biodiversity haven. They are estimated to protect over 20,000 threatened species and are among the planet’s most critical places for survival of many iconic species.

The World Heritage Convention links the concepts of nature conservation and the preservation of cul-

tural properties, recognizing the way in which people interact with nature, and the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two.

A new UNESCO report, *World Heritage: A unique contribution to biodiversity conservation*, highlights the human-induced threats to biodiversity faced by World Heritage sites, from agricultural expansion and infrastructure development, to poaching and overexploitation of resources. The report estimates that at least one in ten species in World Heritage sites is threatened and every 1°C temperature increase could double the number of threatened species.

Sites such as the Lopé-Okanda National Park and the Dungonab Bay and Mukkawar Island Marine National Park are some of the most exceptional places on the planet. By studying the fruit trees and the forest elephants, the reefs and their endangered marine life, we understand more about our planet as a whole and the life it supports. Working with indigenous and local communities to protect these unique treasures not only safeguards them for future generations, it can also contribute to crucial planet-wide solutions for tackling the biodiversity crisis and mitigating the climate emergency.

### **left**

Redwood National and State Parks (United States) is covered with a magnificent forest of Coast Redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*)



**Ahmad Angawi,  
artist.**

**At the crossroads of  
industrial design  
and heritage**

## INTERVIEW

### **Ahmad, could you tell us a little bit about yourself?**

I am a multidisciplinary creative and arts educator, born and raised in the heart of Makkah in 1981. I studied industrial design at the Pratt Institute in New York and traditional arts at the Prince's School of Traditional Arts in London. In my work, I try to create harmony between these two disciplines, industry and art, striving for a balance that echoes my father's concept of Al Mizan – the fundamental principle of balance. I draw deep inspiration from the heritage of Saudi Arabia's Western region, with my creations paying homage to our cultural legacy while embracing contemporary designs.

I worked on establishing the first school of traditional arts in Al-Balad, the House of Traditional Arts. I've had the privilege of learning from traditional artisans during my travels across the Middle East, reaffirming my belief that today's industrial designers are the custodians of these age-old crafts in our rapidly evolving world.

Currently, I serve as the Associate Director of Al Makmad Foundation, working diligently towards conserving and reviving the heritage of Saudi Arabia's Western region. I am also the founder of Zawiya 97, a cluster of activity hubs serving the local and wider community of artists, designers and craftsmen. Zawiya 97 provides a platform for dialogue and cultural exchange by way of exhibitions, community-oriented projects and educational programmes, as well as the rejuvenation the artisan culture in Al-Balad.

### **How does your artistry intertwine with World Heritage sites? How do these places inspire your creative process?**

Growing up in the vibrant, multicultural Western region, I was surrounded by an eclectic fusion of cultures, dialects and artistic influences. This deep-seated appreciation for diverse cultural heritage largely underpins my work.

My fascination with traditional craftsmanship was first kindled in my father's carpentry workshop, watching artisans from various corners of the globe breathe life into

the wood. Wood, to me, is a living entity; it carries a vibrant history and soul that deeply resonates with me.

One particular architectural element that I've been drawn to is the Roshan, a wooden carved window covering. It's a unique feature of many long-standing homes in Historic Jeddah (which was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2014), as well as the cities of Makkah and Medina. Intricate yet practical, the Roshan lets in light and air while maintaining the privacy of residents. Especially captivating is the Mangour, an interlocking wooden part of the Roshan. It symbolizes unity, strength and societal interconnectivity, mirroring the collective strength of individual components.

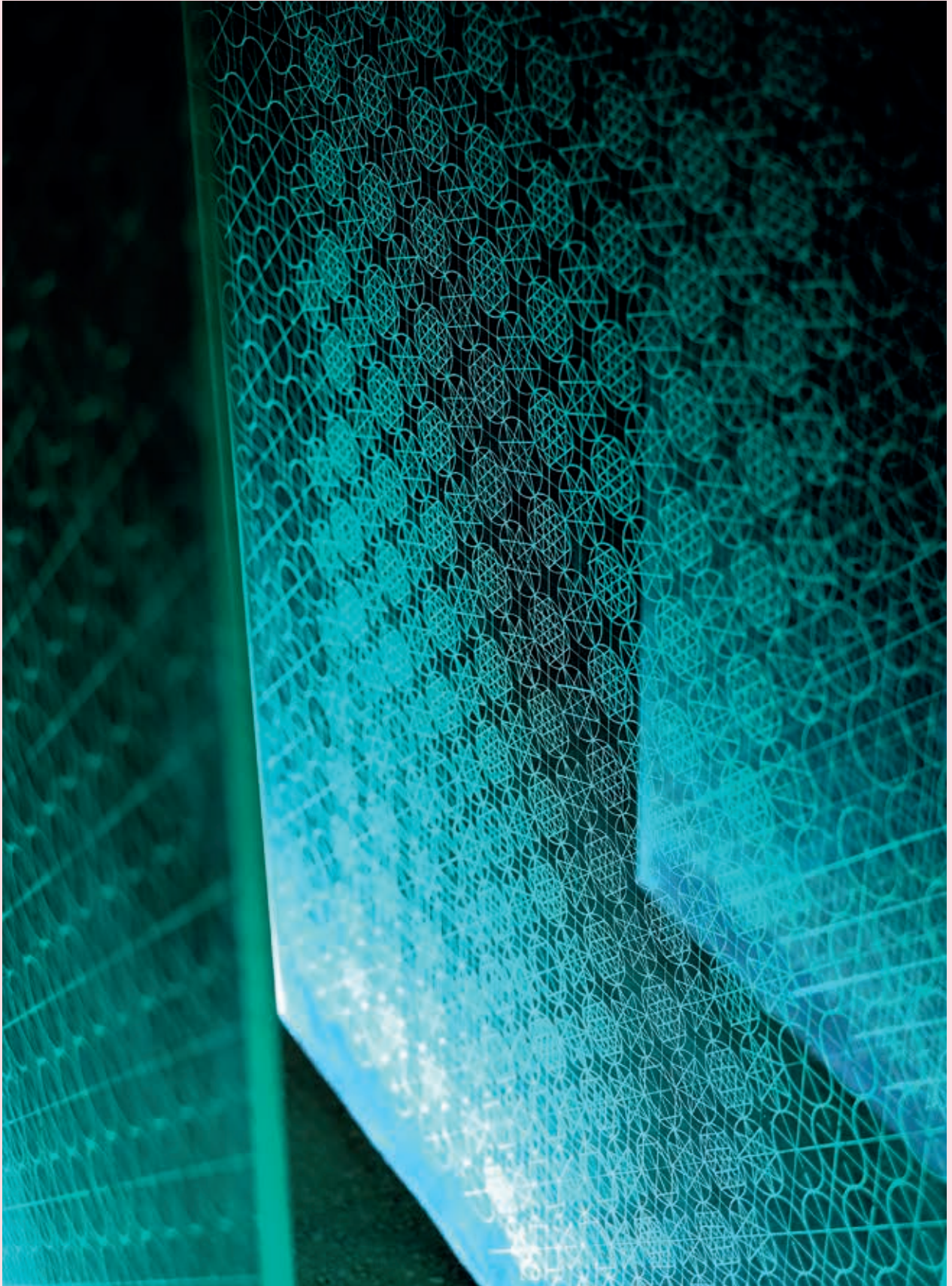
My artistic connection to these World Heritage sites is defined by this blend of function, aesthetics and symbolic resonance, fueling my creativity and informing my designs.

### **How did you discover your artistic talent? When did you become passionate about design and heritage?**

I was fortunate to be raised in a home where creativity was always encouraged. My father's carpentry workshop was like a second home to me, and it was there that I began to understand the allure of design and craftsmanship. I was able to observe and appreciate the process of transforming simple materials like wood into something beautiful and functional. I found myself instinctively drawn to the process, eager to learn and experiment. It didn't take long for me to realize that I had a knack for understanding the complexities of design, the interplay of form and function and the expressive potentials of various materials.

### **Tell us about a creation that you feel best represents your artistic journey and vision.**

One of my most prominent works revolves around the exploration and reimagination of the Roshan and Mangour, the two architectural elements intrinsic to the heritage of the Western region.







## INTERVIEW

‘I draw deep inspiration from the heritage of Saudi Arabia’s Western region, with my creations paying homage to our cultural legacy while embracing contemporary designs.’

I embarked on a project to document, research and reinterpret these architectural features. I sifted through a trove of archival images collected over the years, many depicting structures that no longer exist. My goal was to unearth patterns of symbolism through studying their intricate designs and shapes. I’m currently working on a book on this subject.

**And what are some of the career highlights so far?**

One significant highlight was designing and making the traditional Mangour screen windows as a permanent structure at the Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World at the British Museum in London. Another unforgettable experience was my participation in the Venice Biennale. It provided a platform to showcase my artistic vision and connect with a diverse global audience.

I also had the pleasure to participate in Art Paris at the Grand Palais and the Institut du Monde Arabe. It was truly an honour to have my art displayed alongside renowned artists from around the world.

Locally, I have been actively exhibiting within Saudi Arabia, sharing my artwork with the vibrant art community in the region. These exhibitions take place in respected galleries, cultural centres and heritage sites. In addition to exhibitions, I have had the privilege of delivering talks and lectures at conferences and seminars, both within Saudi Arabia and on an international scale. These speaking engagements have allowed me to share my insights, experiences and passion for traditional arts, heritage preservation and cultural diversity.



© Ahmad Sami Angawi

STORY

# Heritage cities of tomorrow





**previous page and left**  
Urban heritage in the Kingdom  
of Saudi Arabia

© Heritage Commission of Saudi Arabia

Urban heritage is more than a testament to our past. It inspires a search for an ideal relationship between person and place. Saudi Arabia has diverse urban heritage and architectural assets across its thirteen regions, beckoning recognition as one of the world's most important examples of cultural heritage, both in tangible and intangible forms.

But such a title is hard won. For our urban heritage sites to become landmarks of the nation and its people, a truly sustainable approach is required. In recent years, as Saudi cities began the transition from growth to development, the shift towards a holistic city building and references to local urban authentic was natural. Urban heritage became a feature within conservation projects as well as wider urban plans. Urban administration was integrated within the broader institutional, organizational, legislative and technical frameworks. Review of regulations and legislations followed, accompanied by strategic priority-setting. On the ground, rehabilitation of urban heritage sites picked up pace, as did the identification of income-generating opportunities for local communities.

The result is the revival of urban heritage sites, today fully embedded in the urban ecosystem and infrastructures. Urban heritage sites – villages, buildings of value, historical centres, traditional

streets, famed oases and beyond – were once the nucleus around which cities emerged and grew, serving as both a shelter for communities and an embodiment of history. Drawing inspirations from these values, the integrated system of local administration is our new way forward, enabling policies adapted to the community while remaining aligned with the broader goals of the city.

Urban development has not been without fault or adversity. A study by the World Bank found that most cultural heritage sites built in rural areas were abandoned between the early 1970s and 80s due to the rise of development projects in new or adjacent cities, where redevelopment projects replaced historical architecture and its traditional street patterns. Today, only a small percentage of this architectural and historical heritage remains, emphasizing the need for a more concerted approach to the restoration of Saudi cities and villages.

As part of the bold new solutions, Heritage Commission was established by the Ministry of Culture in February 2020 to protect, manage and enable the sustainable innovation and development of cultural heritage. The general areas of focus include urban heritage, along with antiquities, handicrafts and intangible heritage. Its strategy puts emphasis on developing effective methods of preservation, build-

## STORY

### The time has come to enable urban heritage to guide our path towards a more sustainable inclusive future.

ing awareness, leveraging digital technologies, and supporting practitioners and nurturing talents in the field of heritage. Working collaboratively with government agencies, local communities and the private sector, the Commission is able to activate a long-term plan that grants autonomy to the development of urban heritage sites, moulding a more effective legislative and regulatory framework that complements local efforts. Looking towards the future, the Heritage Commission and its partners are currently transforming the system of policies and controls for urban heritage sites. The new system would oversee new legislation for ownership, investment and operating contracts, construction and urban planning controls, and business facilitation. This can allow heritage sites to remain within an independent legal framework.

The establishment of the Commission is just one of many institutional transformations considerably benefiting the Kingdom's urban heritage. Change has been comprehensive, reaching historical mosques, castles, walls, cities, towers, palaces, residential and institutional buildings as well as industrial sites. A number of projects, initiatives and work programmes were approved and funded by the government to develop the sector's infrastructure and enable other sectors to benefit from collaboration. Projects have focused on sites inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List and sites nominated for future inscription, as well as sites classified as Tier One in Saudi Arabia on the National Architectural Heritage Register.

In the past, the New Urbanism drove people away from our villages as they sought the advantages of being in the heart of the city. Today, international practices have proven that investment in urban heritage provides substantial cultural, social and financial values for local communities. The time has come to enable urban heritage to guide our path towards a more sustainable, inclusive future.



© Heritage Commission of Saudi Arabia

#### **above**

Antiquities, handicrafts and intangible heritage are additional elements of focus

#### **right**

Saudi Arabia has diverse urban heritage assets and architecture across the thirteen regions of the Kingdom





# New inscriptions to the World Heritage List 2023

During the 18th extraordinary session of the World Heritage Committee that took place at UNESCO Headquarters on 24-25 January 2023, three new sites were added to the World Heritage List: Rachid Karamah International Fair of Tripoli (Lebanon); Landmarks of Ancient Kingdom of Saba, Marib (Yemen) and Historic Centre of Odesa (Ukraine).



## Rachid Karami International Fair-Tripoli Lebanon

Located in northern Lebanon, the Rachid Karami International Fair of Tripoli was designed in 1962 by the Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer on a 70-hectare site located between the historic centre of Tripoli and the Al Mina port. The main building of the fair consists of a huge, covered hall in the shape of a boomerang of 750 metres by 70 metres, a flexible space for countries to install exhibitions. The fair was the flagship project of Lebanon's modernization policy in the 1960s.

The close collaboration between Oscar Niemeyer, the architect of the project, and Lebanese engineers gave rise to a remarkable example of exchange between different continents. In terms of scale and wealth of formal expression, it is one of the major representative works of 20th-century modern architecture in the Arab Near East.



© Jad Tabet

**previous page**  
Lebanese pavilion

**above**  
Experimental theater, water tank and outdoor amphitheater

**right**  
Lebanese pavilion









## Landmarks of the Ancient Kingdom of Saba, Marib

### Yemen

The Landmarks of the Ancient Kingdom of Saba, Marib, is a serial property comprising seven archaeological sites that reveal the rich Kingdom of Saba and its architectural, aesthetic and technological achievements from the 1st millennium BCE to the arrival of Islam around 630 CE. They reveal the complex centralized administration of the Kingdom when it controlled much of the incense route across the Arabian Peninsula, playing a key role in the wider network of cultural exchange fostered by trade with the Mediterranean and East Africa.

Located in a semi-arid landscape of valleys, mountains and deserts, the property encompasses the remains of large urban settlements with monumental temples, ramparts and other buildings. The irrigation system of ancient Ma'rib reflects technological prowess in hydrological engineering and agriculture on a scale unparalleled in ancient South Arabia, resulting in the creation of the largest ancient man-made oasis.

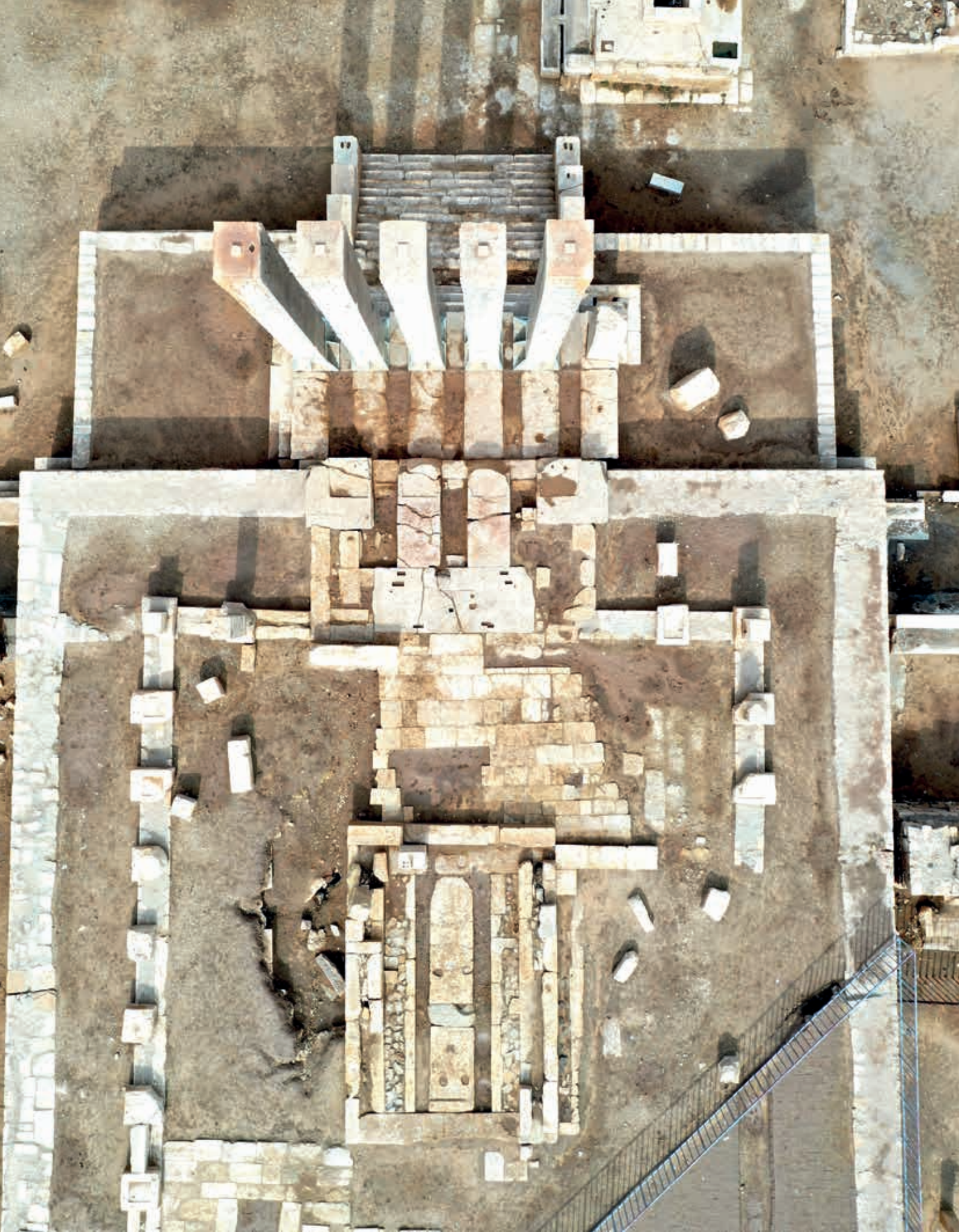


© German Archaeological Institute, Orient Department

**previous page**  
Awām Temple - Columns

**above**  
Ancient City of Sirwah

**right**  
Bar'ān Temple







## The Historic Centre of Odesa

Ukraine

The Historic Center of Odesa, part of the Black Sea port city founded in 1794 on the site of Khadzhybei, is a densely built area characterized by two- to four-store buildings and wide perpendicular streets lined with trees that bear witness to the city's rapid growth until the early 20th century. The site includes theatres, religious buildings, schools, private palaces and tenement houses, clubs, hotels, banks, shopping centres, warehouses, stock exchanges, terminals and other public and administrative buildings designed

by architects and engineers, mostly from Italy in the early years, but also of other nationalities. Eclecticism is the dominant feature of the historic city centre's architecture.

The site demonstrates the city's highly diverse ethnic and religious communities, representing an outstanding example of intercultural exchanges and the growth of multicultural and multiethnic Eastern European cities of the 19th century.



© UNESCO/Dmytro KUVZNETSOV

**previous page**  
The Odesa Harbour

**above**  
Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, traveled to Odesa in April 2023 to reinforce the emergency measures provided by the Organization to this World Heritage site

**right**  
Bristol Hotel





## INTERVIEW

### Dr Jasir Suliman Alherbish, CEO, Heritage Commission

Dr Jasir Suliman Alherbish is the CEO of the Heritage Commission, one of eleven sector commissions of the Ministry of Culture of Saudi Arabia. The Heritage Commission develops, documents and preserves the Kingdom's heritage sites and advances research activities related to national heritage.

In the past, Dr Suliman Alherbish served as supervisor of the Saudi National Handicrafts Program, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education for Scholarships, and Supervisor General of the Saudi Cultural Missions. He also held the position of CEO of the General Authority for Tourism and National Heritage in Al-Qassim.



© Heritage Commission of Saudi Arabia

#### **Please tell us about the 45th Session of the World Heritage Committee in Riyadh.**

Since its founding in 2020, the Heritage Commission has been actively working to advance the heritage sector in the Kingdom. We are working to preserve the Kingdom's tangible and intangible heritage, while introducing innovative practices to help the growth of the sector. In addition, we are working on enhancing the heritage sector's performance, providing training and educational opportunities for archaeologists, scientists and experts, as well as establishing partnerships with local and international entities to create cultural exchange opportunities and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experience.

Saudi Arabia's election as Chair of the World Heritage Committee is not only a recognition of its historic significance and diverse heritage, but also of all our efforts to enhance the heritage sector. It is a result of the Kingdom's commitment to protecting World Heritage along with its national and international partners, and inspires us to further initiatives. For example, alongside the World Heritage Committee's meeting, Saudi Arabia is also hosting this year the World Heritage Site Managers' Forum and the World Heritage Young Professionals Forum.

#### **Why is it important for heritage sites to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List?**

The inscription confirms their Outstanding Universal Value and their historic significance. It helps to showcase and shed a light on the vast breadth and beauty of Saudi heritage.

The Heritage Commission is working on protecting, preserving and maintaining cultural heritage sites across the Kingdom, raising awareness of their significance as they represent a living and permanent record of the great human civilizations that existed in the area.

The inscription goes beyond a mere process. It records the historic value of these sites and widens awareness of the Kingdom's vast heritage that spans the prehistoric, neolithic, Nabataean, Roman, Islamic and modern Saudi eras.

As of today, there are six heritage sites of Saudi Arabia inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, namely the Hegra Archaeological Site (2008), At-Turaif District in ad-Dir'iyah (2010), Historic Jeddah (2014), Rock Art in the Hail Region (2015), Al-Ahsa Oasis (2018), and Hima Cultural Area (2021) – hopefully with many more to come.

## ‘Located at the crossroads of several civilizations and cultural currents, Saudi Arabia is the land of cultural and archeological treasures.’

### In your opinions, what is the historical significance of the Kingdom?

Located at the crossroads of several civilizations and cultural currents, Saudi Arabia is the land of cultural and archeological treasures. Evidence shows that humans first inhabited the Arabian Peninsula over one million years ago. They progressed up the ladder of civilization, moving towards urbanization in the Neolithic period during which horses were domesticated, some 9,000 years ago. Two millennia later, the Arabian Peninsula established cultural and economic relationships that extended beyond its borders. Ties with Mesopotamia, the Levant, Egypt and the Mediterranean basin grew stronger, leading to the establishment of kingdoms and the development of major commercial centres within the Peninsula.

No province is devoid of archaeological sites, including palaces, rock art, walls and buildings unearthed by excavations and rock structures. The number of registered archaeological sites in the National Register of Antiquities has reached 8,788 sites, with the number of registered architectural heritage buildings in the Urban Heritage Register exceeding 1,000.

More than 1,104 sites of rock art with ancient and Islamic inscriptions were discovered, some dating back as early as 6000 BCE. The oldest Islamic inscriptions can be found at Salama in Yanbu, the Zuhair inscription in AlUla, and the Uthman inscription at the Al Jehfa site in the Makkah region.

We cannot forget Saudi Arabia’s distinguished architectural heritage, characterized by its urban, functional, aesthetic and social aspects. This diversity has produced a clear variation between architectural styles in the various regions of the Kingdom and the diversity of the architectural heritage sites and buildings.



© Heritage Commission of Saudi Arabia

### above

The Heritage Commission works on enhancing the heritage sector’s performance through training and establishes partnerships with local and international entities to create cultural exchange and opportunities

# A digital dive into heritage



© Thomas Rigauts & Mohamed Ziane Bouziane



**left**  
Bahla workshop

**right**  
The first Workshop on Digital Documentation of World Heritage in the Arab region for 'Dive into Heritage' took place in Oman in 2023

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In 2022, the UNESCO World Heritage Convention celebrated its 50th anniversary under the theme 'The Next 50: World Heritage as a source of resilience, humanity and innovation'. The achievement of the landmark Convention is evident in figures, with more than 1,100 cultural and natural World Heritage sites in 167 countries protected and promoted under the Convention. As the Convention enters the next 50 years, leveraging new technologies will be crucial, notably in the face of crises.

Information technologies and digital recording tools are increasingly used by heritage organizations worldwide as vital for documentation, risk prevention, digital storytelling, World Heritage nominations, conservation, and promotion. Going one step further, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has the potential to bridge the persisting gap between the identification, introduction and protection of cultural and natural heritage on the one hand, and of intangible aspects of heritage on the other.

The use of digital storytelling tools and communication strategies, meanwhile, can help establish a more intimate connection with audiences of different ages, genders, cultural backgrounds and languages. By taking advantage of digital technology, it is possible to create a more engaging and interactive experience for audiences, immersing

them in local, national and transnational heritage from unique perspectives around the world.

### **Objective and scope**

In 2023, UNESCO initiated the development of Dive into Heritage, an online platform for the safeguarding and transmission of World Heritage and related intangible heritage to future generations, with the generous support of the Ministry of Culture of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This ambitious project aims to enhance the discoverability, accessibility and enjoyment of the world's cultural and natural heritage, and its associated intangible heritage. The pioneering initiative will make different types of digital data accessible on a web platform, including 3D models, interactive maps, geolocated narratives, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) and mixed reality (MR) components.

Dive into Heritage will feature ten World Heritage sites in the Arab States region, carefully chosen for their representativeness within the region and for the availability of digital data that can serve to enhance users' experience. It will serve as an educational tool for the public as well as a resource for experts, academics and governments in their research and preservation efforts. Furthermore, it will ensure the digital preservation of heritage sites in case of damage or destruction, and promote

## STORY

### Visitors will be invited to freely explore detailed 3D models of World Heritage sites, but also guided by digital narratives, enhancing their understanding of World Heritage and its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

effective management and safeguarding practices through research and international cooperation.

During its Pilot Phase (2022-2024), the project focuses on the Arab States region and target the general public. The prototype of Dive into Heritage will feature a limited selection of digitized World Heritage sites with the assistance of user-friendly and interactive user interface (UI). Visitors will be invited to freely explore detailed 3D models of World Heritage sites, but also guided by digital narratives, enhancing their understanding of World Heritage and its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

The first prototype of the platform is currently in development and is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2023. In the subsequent phases, the platform may offer digital analysis research and management tools to heritage professionals, researchers and governments.

#### Data collection

The project revealed the state of digital data on heritage in the region. Following the comprehensive research to map the digital documentation initiatives in the Arab States region, UNESCO noted the existence of 83 digital heritage projects and initiatives in the region covering all States Parties, 73 of which are localized national projects.

One main challenge has been the collection of this digital data, such as 3D models, GIS and 360° panoramic images. The exponential growth in data gathering has resulted in a highly fragmented body of heritage information available on the Internet and elsewhere, owing to the fact that information does not flow freely between users and providers.

The data on the ten pilot World Heritage sites, submitted by States Parties and other data owners and stakeholders involved in the recording, has been in a variety of file formats, sizes and levels of quality. Upon review, UNESCO found that not all digital World Heritage data can be immediately or easily included on the online platform due to the various ownership and usage rights as well as multiple technologies applied. A robust optimization workflow is thus necessary.

To improve the user experience and facilitate the creation, retrieval and exchange of this digital data, the UNESCO project is developing tailor-made standards and guidelines for the platform. These standards will take into consideration the requirements of the rights holders and stakeholders, the quality and accuracy of the content required for users, types of digital media and assets, and the typology of the World Heritage property.

#### Capacity-building

To enhance the capacities of youth and regional experts in the field of digital cultural heritage, the 'Dive into Heritage' project will include an international programme.

To this end, UNESCO organized the first Workshop on Digital Documentation for World Heritage in March 2023 in Oman, as an activity of the UNESCO Chair for World Heritage Management and Sustainable Tourism at the German University of Technology (GUTech) in Muscat, in collaboration with the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH) and the Ministry of Heritage in Oman.

The workshop invited site managers, emerging heritage professionals and students to

**right**  
Bahla fort (Oman)  
textured



## STORY

learn more about digital tools for documenting and modeling World Heritage sites in the Arab States region. Participants learned the basics of surveying and data acquisition, as well as data processing methods for creating 3D models of cultural heritage sites.

It provided an opportunity to digitally document a UNESCO World Heritage site in the region that had not previously been recorded in 3D with the aim of later including this data on the platform. The project team used 3D laser scanning and aerial and terrestrial photogrammetry of the Bahla Fort, focusing on the site's attributes that convey its OUV.

In addition to the documentation, enhancing the capacities of local actors and stakeholders in the

region to better tackle the challenge of integrating recorded data will also remain a key objective of Dive into Heritage.

Since the project launch, Dive into Heritage has built a strong network of diverse stakeholders and experts in heritage documentation, international agencies and the private sector, with the shared vision of creating a platform accessible to the world. The project continues to gather momentum, reflecting the need and interest of the States Parties to use advanced digital technologies for the presentation, interpretation and management of their World Heritage sites.

**below**  
Bahla workshop



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# The Archive

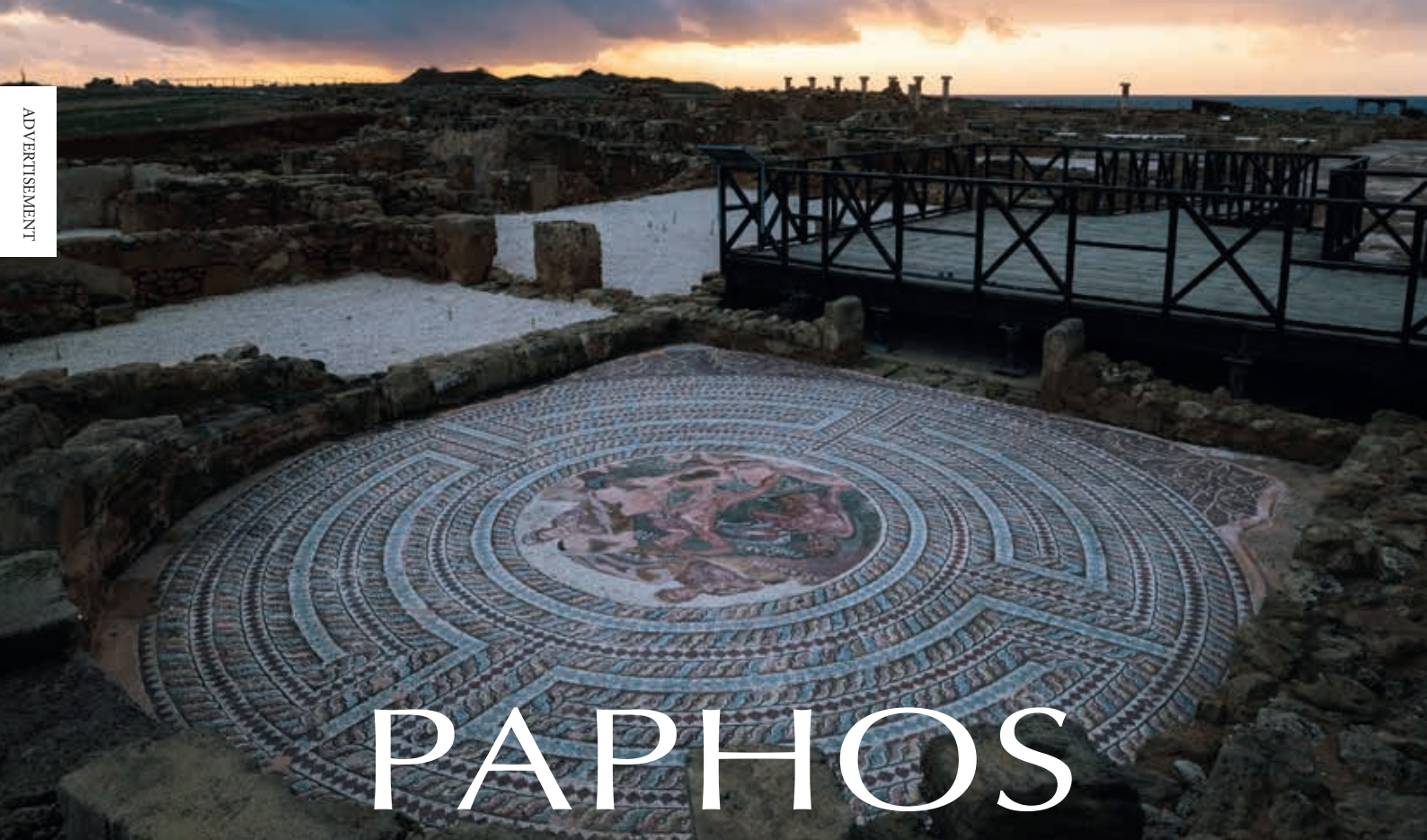
**World Heritage Review, n°1 June 1996**

‘Peace can only be built on respect for other people and on the acceptance of diversity and tolerance for differences. One of the best ways to spread understanding among peoples is to share the world's natural and cultural heritage.’



The first issue of the *World Heritage Review* came out in June 1996, conceived as a novel platform to sensitize and enhance the dialogue with the wider public. It centrally featured the strong international solidarity for the protection of Angkor, which had been listed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. The magazine also emphasized UNESCO's belief

that the engagement of local communities is key to successful heritage work. The beauty of World Heritage wetlands was on display, as well as the routes of Santiago de Compostela. The inaugural *World Heritage Review* introduced then-newly-inscribed sites like Rapa Nui National Park (Chile) and the Historic Centre of Naples (Italy).



# PAPHOS

Delve into Cyprus's rich ancient heritage



*Photos: Nea Pafos, Mosaic from the House of Theseas / Tombs of the Kings. Paphos World Heritage site*



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# Hisham's Palace / Khirbet al-Mafjar (Qasr Hisham), State of Palestine

## A great example of authentic early Islamic architecture and art

Qasr Hisham is one of the most significant early Islamic sites not only in Palestine but also in Greater Syria (*Bilad al-Sham*). It is located 4km to the north of Jericho city and was built by the Umayyads in the 8th century AD.

The site's well-preserved archaeological ruins represent an outstanding example of a complete Umayyad palace complex, in both its architecture and its decorative art. It consists of a spacious two-floor palace, an audience hall with a thermal bath, a mosque, and a monumental fountain with pavilion, which is surrounded by a perimeter wall and annexed by an agricultural estate (*Day'a*) and an enclosure wall (*Hayr*). Visitors are astonished by its architecture and its elaborate art, which includes mosaics, stucco carvings and overall sculptural magnificence. The influence of several civilizations, mainly the early Roman-Byzantine and Sassanian, is clearly evident, as is the imprint of traditions such as the Coptic and the Southeast Asian, albeit to a lesser extent. The Umayyads preserved the continuity of the architectural and artistic traditions of their predecessors, while introducing an independent innovative style of decorative art and architecture.

Visitors to the site can experience one of the largest and most splendid of all Umayyad audience halls (about 900 m<sup>2</sup> in size) with the most beautiful and well-preserved early Islamic mosaic floor to be found in situ to date. It features 38 polychromatic mosaic carpets which are made up of 21 different colours of natural, local Palestinian stone and involve seven repeated patterns in numerous variations. The walls of the hall were covered with stucco panels and human figures, which are well-preserved and displayed in Palestine Archaeological Museum (Rockefeller Museum) in Jerusalem (Figure 1).

The mosaic floor of the audience hall is the most attractive feature at the site. It testifies to the creativity of the fine geometric and non-representational style of Umayyad art. The great medallion basket-weave mosaic (Figure 3) in the middle of the hall is a mesmerizing, swirling pattern, comprising of a network of coloured triangles, minutely small tesserae which gradually grow in size from the centre outwards. Vibrant, natural colours in varying shades, floral patterns, and curving lines of black and white triangles are used to create the effect of a giant rosette of twenty-four overlapping almond-shaped petals which catch the eye and reflect delightful brilliance. The well-known mosaic carpet of the Tree of Life (Figure 2) can be found in the Diwan, a small guest room. It depicts an orange/pomegranate tree with two gazelles grazing peacefully on one side and a lion killing a gazelle on the other, perhaps symbolizing good and evil. Its composition, technical perfection, delicate use of colours, the size of tesserae, the depiction of the animals and vegetation, and all its perfect details make it an exceptional piece of mosaic art with no known parallel example. These mosaic carpets are a masterpiece of Early Islamic art, indicating the peak of architectural and artistic talent of Umayyad luxury and its sophisticated tastes.



1. Statue of the Caliph, an examples of human figures sculpture



2. Tree of Life mosaic carpet



3. The great medallion basket-weave mosaic

Ph: Regione

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Castel del Monte, Andria  
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# Mapping our shared heritage

World Heritage Online Map Platform, UNESCO's brand-new tool for enhanced monitoring and protection of World Heritage is launched on the occasion of the extended 45th session of the World Heritage Committee.

This project, generously supported by the Government of Flanders (Belgium) has begun, to enhance the monitoring and management of heritage. UNESCO has been contributing to the identification and protection of cultural and natural heritage considered to be of Outstanding Universal Value to humanity. However, the cartographic information of UNESCO mainly remains non-digitised, with varying degrees of quality and accuracy. Until recently, it was not possible to visualise the boundaries of multiple sites or components through a single access point. Furthermore, a lack of a geospatial technology-based tool has been identified. This tool has been needed to swiftly locate potential impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage sites and thus monitor their state of conservation in real-time. The need for accessible and user-friendly World Heritage maps has been shared to effectively preserve heritage and ensure evidence-based decision-making.

Against this backdrop, an online geographic information system (GIS) for World Heritage began in October 2021, developed based on existing UNESCO databases. Europe and North America was chosen as a pilot region: georeferenced maps of World Heritage sites in its States Parties were collected on a voluntary basis. The data were gathered in parallel with the Retrospective Inventory project, a baseline data collection project for properties inscribed during the period of 1978 and 1998, as well as the Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting underway in the region between 2022 and 2023. The maps received were carefully examined and integrated into the newly developed platform if they did not differ from the ones approved by the World Heritage Committee. Using an advanced multi-search engine for accurate data extraction and visualization, the platform displays accurate and precise polygons of the boundaries of the World Heritage properties and buffer zones (where applicable) on different base maps fitting diverse purposes. A range of useful tools and capabilities are available to end users, such as area and distance measurements, annotations and drawings, import of shapefiles, export of highly customised maps, pop-ups with basic information about each World Heritage site, etc.

The platform aims to greatly facilitate understanding of the boundaries of protected areas under the World Heritage Convention. This project will also enable potential impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value of properties to be identified better, earlier and by a greater number of stakeholders. One of the added values of this geodatabase (compared to, i.e., the Protected Planet database for natural protected areas) is the accuracy of the data. The displayed data is checked by the World Heritage Centre to ensure compliance with the decisions of the World Heritage Committee and is kept up to date.

It is foreseen that additional layers enabling advanced data crossing will be added to the system, such as the factors affecting properties already systematically listed in the Online Information System on the State of Conservation of World Heritage.

Ultimately, this platform will help to improve the overall quality and consistency of maps

of World Heritage properties. In the medium to long term, it will serve as a basis for more advanced remote sensing systems, thus reaping the benefits of Earth observation technologies. The system will also be instrumental in assisting planners of projects in or in the vicinity of World Heritage sites to better prepare and conduct environmental and other impact assessments. In addition to the stakeholders primarily concerned by the implementation of the World Heritage Convention (States Parties, heritage professionals, site managers, Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee, UNESCO), this tool is set to become a single-entry point into the operations of the Convention for key development players, from mining companies to renewable energy infrastructure. Here, then, is a tool to contribute to reconciling cultural and natural heritage conservation with those of sustainable development, with the shared aim of building a more relevant and just world for present and future generations.

While engaging more States Parties beyond Europe and North America, the World Heritage Online Map Platform hopes to gradually populate with more georeferenced World Heritage sites, with a focus on Africa. The more users there are, the more needs in terms of data analysis capabilities will be identified and covered, extending the platform to corporate sites and users in all regions.

**Project financed by the Flanders Funds-in-Trust**




**Flanders**  
State of the Art

# FROM DREAMS TO REALITY

The Palaces of King Ludwig II of Bavaria:  
Neuschwanstein, Linderhof, Schachen and Herrenchiemsee



In the royal castles of Ludwig II, the cultural history of nineteenth century Germany and Europe is manifested in a unique form. The intellectual world of Richard Wagner, the medieval as well as the Baroque past, and the fascination with exoticism (Orientalism) all unite here to form a "Gesamtkunstwerk", a synthesis of the arts of that time. The extraordinary beauty of the Alpine landscape together with the breathtaking elegance of the royal castles is today recognised across the world as being representative of both the Bavarian and the Germany identity.

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# Antequera Dolmens Site

## World Heritage

*Located in the heart of Andalusia, in southern Spain, the site comprises three megalithic monuments, the Menga and Viera dolmens and the Tholos of El Romeral, and two natural monuments, La Peña de los Enamorados and El Torcal mountainous formations.*



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The Saudi Arabian tourism industry has been growing in recent years, and AlBoraq DMC has played a crucial role in promoting the industry. Our mission at AlBoraq DMC is to make tourism a convenient and enjoyable experience for tourists from around the world, as we are one of the leading companies in the Saudi tourism industry.



## AlBoraq's Commitment to Social Responsibility & Sustainability

Life experience

The AlBoraq DMC recognizes its responsibilities as a Saudi company. Through its services, the company promotes Saudi culture and heritage, helps create jobs, and helps boost the Saudi economy.

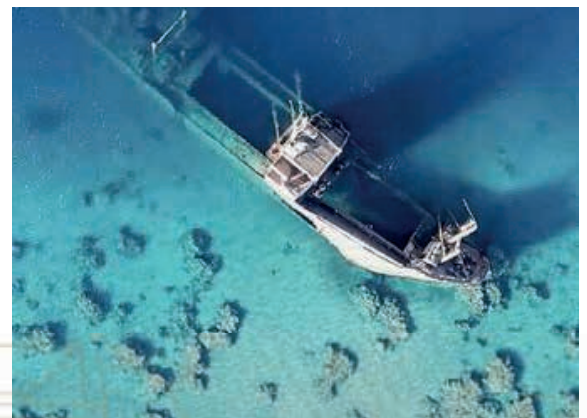
As part of AlBoraq's commitment to social responsibility and environmental sustainability, the company supports local communities and promotes eco-friendly tourism practices. AlBoraq DMC is committed to preserving the environment and society through these efforts.

## *Alboraq's Contribution to Saudi Tourism*

The AlBoraq DMC has played a significant role in promoting tourism in Saudi Arabia. The company offers a wide range of tourism services, such as tours of historic sites, cultural events, and adventure activities.

These services have been designed to meet the needs of different types of travelers, whether they are interested in exploring the country's rich cultural heritage or seeking adventure in the desert.

To reach a wider audience, the company has invested heavily in marketing and promotion. As a result, Saudi Arabia has been able to attract tourists from around the world and has become an important tourist destination.



# Unveiling Oman's Architectural Marvels: Timeless Treasures Resonate with Global Significance



Nestled amidst a tapestry of history and cultural richness, Oman stands as a remarkable testament to the triumphs of human civilization. Its ancient sites captivate the world, offering a window into the past while showcasing the timeless brilliance of architectural ingenuity. From the awe-inspiring Aflaj irrigation systems and the formidable Bahla Fort and Wall, to the mesmerizing city of Qalhat, the ancient city of Al-Baleed in the Land of Frankincense and the legendary archeological sites of Bat, Al-Khutm and Al-Ayn, each one boasts extraordinary architectural features that contribute to their profound universal significance.

## 1. Mastering Nature's Flow: Oman's Aflaj, Ancient Marvels of Hydraulic Ingenuity

Oman's Aflaj: an exceptional system of ancient water channels which demonstrates the mastery of hydraulic engineering. Beyond their vital role in sustainable agriculture, these meticulously designed channels embody the harmonious bond between nature and human innovation. The Aflaj bear testament to the remarkable skill of communities in managing and sharing precious water resources, emphasizing the significance of cooperation and collective endeavors. Step into the world of the Aflaj, where human ingenuity seamlessly blends with the natural environment. These ancient marvels teach valuable lessons about sustainability, highlighting the extraordinary power of collaboration in harnessing nature's life-giving force.

## 2. Bahla Fort and Wall: Impregnable Defense

In the heart of Oman, the legendary Bahla Fort and Wall stand tall, evidence of the nation's architectural prowess and cultural heritage. These monumental structures, constructed with unbaked adobe bricks, transport visitors to a bygone era of fortified grandeur. The intricate defensive features, from watchtowers to loopholes, were meticulously designed for military advantage. Adorned with intricate motifs and inscriptions, Bahla Fort and Wall reveal a rich mosaic of cultural heritage. The nearby Bahla Oasis adds allure, with lush greenery and tranquil water channels. Recognized as World Heritage by UNESCO, Bahla Fort preserves Oman's legacy of architectural brilliance and cultural richness.

## 3. Archaeological City of Qalhat: Ancient Trading Hub

The architectural wonders of the vibrant city of Qalhat, an ancient hub of commerce and cultural exchange, include the breathtaking Bibi Maryam Mausoleum, adorned with intricate stonework. Qalhat's significance as a maritime powerhouse and its role in the thriving Indian Ocean trade routes comes to life through these structures. A vibrant tapestry of cultures once converged here: East met West and ideas flowed freely. The remnants of stone buildings, palaces and the grand mosque are all testaments to Qalhat's rich history. The city served as a crossroads of civilizations and a melting pot of influences, and the profound impact of maritime trade can be witnessed everywhere.



#### 4. Land of Frankincense: Historical Trade Routes

Sites such as Al-Baleed, Samharam, Shisr and Duka Valley can be found within the enchanting world of Oman's Land of Frankincense. These remarkable sites reveal a melting pot of civilizations, where merchants traded exotic treasures and shared wisdom. Beyond their physical beauty, these sites reflect the profound impact of trade on Oman's history and its global connections. Located strategically along ancient trade routes, they fostered the flow of goods, ideas and cultural practices.

#### 5. The Archaeological Sites of Bat, Al-Khutm and Al-Ayn

This remarkable UNESCO World Heritage property, the Archaeological Sites of Bat, Al-Khutm and Al-Ayn, offers tantalizing glimpses into the remnants of ancient Bronze trading routes. These sites bear witness to the profound influence of the frankincense trade, manifesting its immense impact on the region's economy and cultural exchange. This historic landscape is graced with many architectural wonders such as fortresses, tombs and settlements, each revealing the strategic importance and prosperity that blossomed from this thriving trade. Vibrant civilizations flourished here, leaving behind a legacy of enduring cultural and economic connections.

Oman's archaeological sites are not mere remnants of the past; they are living testimonies to the ingenuity, creativity, and cultural diversity of humanity. From the Aflaj's sustainable water management to the formidable Bahla Fort and Wall, from the once-thriving city of Qalhat to the maritime heritage of Al-Baleed and the historical trade routes of the Land of Frankincense, each site presents a unique chapter in Oman's history. Preserving and understanding these architectural features is crucial to ensuring their Outstanding Universal Value in the future.

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# Great Barrier Reef

## Elevating Indigenous voices to better protect the Great Barrier Reef

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are Australia's first people, who for 60,000 years have cared for their Land and Sea Country. They are the first scientists, farmers, engineers, innovators and conservationists. They successfully nurtured and protected their environment through changing seasons and climates, guided by traditional knowledge and customs passed down through generations.

Following colonisation, Traditional Owners were systemically excluded from Reef management decisions that affected their Country and their communities. For over 40 years, Traditional Owners have sought to remedy this with formal recognition of their inherent rights and interests in the Great Barrier Reef and its catchments.

Today, in partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, Traditional Owners are at the helm of the largest ever co-designed Reef protection effort. By combining traditional knowledge with western science, they're developing and applying innovative solutions to the challenges threatening coral reefs and preserving the World Heritage values of the Reef for future generations.

The lessons we've learned throughout this process are fundamentally important for site managers globally. Just 6% of the world's population are First Nations peoples, yet they steward the remaining 80% of the world's biodiversity. Creating an environment where First Nations peoples are empowered to take leadership roles in conservation is critical to the survival of our planet.

### A world-leading partnership

In 2018, the Australian Government conducted a mid-term review of its Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan. Traditional Owners called for a genuine voice in Reef management decisions and the opportunity to co-design a new era of partnership around the care, management and protection of the Great Barrier Reef and its catchments.

The Great Barrier Reef Foundation rose to the request. Together with Traditional Owners, we co-designed a landmark

\$51.8m Traditional Owner Reef Protection program under the Australian Government's Reef Trust Partnership.

The program aims to build the foundation needed for long-term, inclusive Traditional Owner governance and management of the Reef, stronger Indigenous-led processes, and a broad recognition and understanding of Indigenous cultural values. It will aid Traditional Owners to identify projects to protect biodiversity, improve water quality and combat the impacts of climate change that threaten the World Heritage values of the Reef.

### Genuine co-design and co-delivery

Co-design is an approach to designing with people, not for people. It involves sharing power, prioritising relationships, building skills and creating inclusion pathways. Four years into the partnership, Traditional Owners are leading on-ground activities to care for Country, culture and communities.

Some 49 of the 72 Traditional Owner groups on the Great Barrier Reef are improving water quality, controlling the coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish, restoring coastal wetlands and developing culturally appropriate monitoring and reporting techniques. They're also contributing their knowledge to the world's largest research and development program to help the world's coral reefs adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Strong progress has been made, but the job is not done. The second half of this program will focus on building capacity and career pathways for Traditional Owners, developing leadership programs and creating innovative financing mechanisms to secure sustainable funding.

But the true impact of this program extends beyond on-ground activities. Traditional Owners tell us they see their knowledge and expertise being valued in line with western science and feel empowered to lead conservation efforts in their communities to heal their Country.

Gooreng-Gooreng Traditional Custodian of the Great Barrier Reef and Great Barrier Foundation Traditional Owner Technical Working Group member Malachi Johnson said: "From my view the process that we have been involved in here is really unique – it's actual co-design. It's appropriate inclusion and involvement from the start of the process. For the first time in this Reef space, we get the chance to shape how things are done, create new ways of doing and influence the policies, guidelines and institutional practices. That is massive for us."



Traditional Owners are leading on-ground conservation programs.  
© Brad Fisher, Ikatere Photography



Growing coral larvae for reef restoration in the Whitsundays.  
© Mark Gibbs

### Key to success

Three early decisions were key to driving systemic change at a scale and complexity never achieved on the Great Barrier Reef.

1. The Reef Trust Partnership is tackling the key threats facing the Reef by improving water quality, managing crown-of-thorn starfish outbreaks, and researching restoration and adaptation solutions to help the Reef withstand the impacts of climate change.

Across this \$444m program, funds from each of the five focus areas were dedicated to Traditional Owner Reef Protection, creating a \$51.8m program. This meant there was adequate funding to conduct a thorough co-design process with a broad range of Traditional Owners from across the Reef, and ensured Traditional Owners have a voice across all the Foundation's work.

2. A Traditional Owner governance framework was set up with 19 paid positions to bring Traditional Owners into the heart of design, delivery and decision-making, and to elevate the contributions of Traditional Owners with real-world, lived experience.

3. A Traditional Owner Futures Fund was established to generate long-term sustainable financing that can support Reef conservation efforts and attract philanthropic support.

### What we've learnt

It's widely recognised that Indigenous-led conservation programs deliver outstanding environmental, social and economic benefits. Transformational change is never easy and we've made mistakes along the way. The three main lessons this program has taught us are:

1. Traditional Owners must be central to the decision-making process from the outset. Inviting people in with a partnering mentality from the start helps create a balanced power dynamic.

2. Don't be afraid to have hard conversations. It builds, sustains and deepens genuine relationships with Traditional Owners and creates space for a new type of shared leadership to emerge.

3. How we welcome and care for others in a co-design process matters. Ask people in advance what a culturally safe space looks and feels like and put it into daily practice.

More information at  
[info@barrierreef.org](mailto:info@barrierreef.org)  
[www.barrierreef.org](http://www.barrierreef.org)



Great Barrier  
Reef Foundation

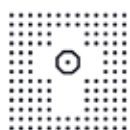
# Restoration project of the cupolas of the Maqsurah **Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba**



## **The Mosque-Cathedral is a global architectonic jewel**

The Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba is one of the oldest buildings in continental Europe. What's more, it retains today the same religious use for which it was created. In other words, as well as being a construction of ancient origin, it is also a building which is living. In order to maintain its use as a cathedral and as a place of culture and tourism, it is necessary to take action to achieve and preserve a perfect state of conservation. Over time, the repairs that are carried out will turn into new layers that will reflect a part of its history.

The Mosque-Cathedral is an architectonic jewel which reflects the history of the city and its cultural diversity. It is an extraordinary building. The urban space on which the current building stands has been the spiritual centre of the city since at least 5 AD. A Christian basilica was demolished in the 8th century to make way for a mosque which was constructed by the emir, Abd al-Rahman I. His successors extended and embellished it, until it became the most important religious building in the Western Muslim world.



## The Maqsurah of the Mosque under the Caliphate

In the 10th century, the caliph al-Hakam II carried out the most extravagant of all the extensions. He constructed a wide mihrab at the back and in the centre of the existing building, and, facing it, a large maqsurah, an area reserved for the caliph and his entourage during prayers. The maqsurah comprised three main spaces, each one with a vaulted ceiling of intertwined arches, the oldest ones known. Both the façades of these spaces and the central cupola, which is located in front of the mihrab, were decorated with elegant Byzantine mosaics adapted in their design to the typical Cordoban Islamic style. The lateral cupolas were decorated with identical designs, of a delicate composition and pattern, using gold coatings and blue and red drawings.

## Later evolution of the maqsurah

Following the conquest of the city in 1236, by the troops of King Fernando III, and the consequent transformation of the Islamic building into a Christian temple, the maqsurah was converted into chapels. In 1368, the space under the western and central domes was used to create St Peter's Chapel, the niche of the mihrab being adapted to become the sacristy. Somewhat later, in 1582, a chapel was established under the eastern dome, the Chapel of the Last Supper.

## Evolution of the conservation and restoration of the maqsurah

Between 1771 and 1772, the Cathedral Chapter decided that the architect Balthasar Dreveton would repair St Peter's Chapel, starting with the cupola, as, due to its state of abandonment and deterioration, it was in danger of collapse. This was the first in a series of actions which were aimed towards restoring the entrance room to the mihrab and its cupolas.

Shortly afterwards, in 1815, the bishop Pedro Antonio de Trevilla initiated a more sizable restoration. He decided to return the mihrab and entrance room to its original appearance, and ordered the dismantling of St Peter's Chapel. Another of his undertakings was to repair the mosaics. Small square pieces of clear glass were placed on painted wooden supports, enabling the decorations to be reconstructed.

The arrival of the architect Ricardo Velázquez Bosco gave, from 1887, new impetus to the restoration of the maqsurah. He paved it with marble, reconstructed the cupolas and, later, renovated the interior of the roof in line with the original design. He also worked on the cupolas of the entrance room to the mihrab. On an aesthetic level, in 1912 he dismantled the Chapel of the Last Supper to recover the space under the eastern

cupola, and restored the mosaic on the side wall of the mihrab. Since then, no further work had been carried out on the maqsurah, until now.

## New restoration project of the cupolas of the Maqsurah

A hundred years on, the Cathedral Chapter has decided to carry out a new restoration of the entrance room to the mihrab. Preliminary multidisciplinary studies were initiated in 2016 with the aim of gaining an in-depth knowledge of the whole structure from various points of view, to identify, in particular, its state of conservation and the causes of its deterioration.

After seven years of studies and analysis, the Mosque-Cathedral's technical team of conservators, along with representatives from other institutions who have participated in the studies, have presented to the autonomous regional government of Andalusia the project for the restoration of these spaces and their cupolas.

The aim is to prevent rainwater and damp from affecting the conservation of this part of the monument. Also, cleaning, strengthening and stabilisation works will be carried out in the decorated areas to recover a part of their now hidden splendour.

The estimated duration of the works is three years with a total cost of more than 3.7 million euros, funded entirely by the Cathedral Chapter itself.

## Restoration of the cupolas of the maqsurah and Exceptional Universal Value

During the 38th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, celebrated in Doha (Qatar) on 23 June 2014, UNESCO recognised the Exceptional Universal Value of the Historic Old Town of Córdoba and, in particular, of the Mosque-Cathedral. UNESCO highlighted that "its continued religious use has ensured in large part

its conservation," and it stated that "the juxtaposition of styles bestows an indisputable authenticity and adds originality", being a "unique artistic creation" which currently retains "its authenticity in terms of its shape, design, materials, use and function." This restoration project which is to be carried out by the Cathedral Chapter will make it possible to ensure the preservation of the cupolas of the maqsurah, which constitute one of the most significant parts of this monument of Exceptional Universal Value.

*By the technical team responsible for the project: Gabriel Ruiz Cabrero (architect), Gabriel Rebollo Puig (architect), Francisco S. Rebollo Piriz (architect), Anabel Barrera Herrera (restorer) and Raimundo Ortiz Urbano (archaeologist)*





# Matenadaran: Preserving the Treasures of Ancient Manuscripts

The Matenadaran, the renowned Institute of Scientific Research on Ancient Manuscripts, proudly bears the name of Mesrop Mashtots, the visionary genius who invented the Armenian alphabet in 405 AD. Situated atop a hill in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, this institution serves as both a guardian of knowledge and a beacon of intellectual pursuit.

The Armenian people's profound reverence for knowledge and books played a crucial role in the gathering and preserving of them throughout the centuries. Presently, an estimated 31,000 Armenian manuscripts persist worldwide, with 11,350 complete manuscript books and nearly 2,200 manuscript fragments preserved in the Matenadaran.

The Institute's remarkable collection not only reflects the profound intellectual achievements of Armenian scholarly pursuits but also includes manuscripts from other cultures, containing approximately 17,000 manuscripts in total. This repository of wisdom has been honored with a distinguished place in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register.

## Resplendent Strokes: Unveiling the Artistry of Armenian Script

The invention of the Armenian alphabet led to the development of Armenian writing and literature. It sparked the establishment of numerous scriptoria throughout Ancient Armenia, where the art of writing was passed down from tutor to student.

The scriptoria also housed schools devoted to the art of writing, each with their own unique traditions. Skilled individuals, often from a religious background, would practice here.

These educational institutions not only focused on cultivating exceptional writing skills but also served as centers for translating diverse works from different languages into Armenian.

Additionally, there were professional scriptoria which operated primarily within monasteries. Scribes and miniature painters collaborated closely with parchment and paper manufacturers, dye makers, and binders.

In total, around 1,500 Armenian medieval scriptoria operated across Ancient Armenia and various other countries where Armenian diaspora centers were established.

While many surviving pre-10th century manuscripts were written exclusively on parchment, some Armenian manuscripts have been discovered which date back to 981 and 998, and were written on paper. Armenian manuscripts hold immense value, particularly in terms of Armenian miniature art, which reached remarkable heights, particularly in Cilicia. Among the more notable artists, Toros Roslin stands out. His work showcases a creative brilliance founded upon innate talent, honed skills, vivid imagination, and a profound inner spiritual world (Fig. 1). The Lectionary of Hetum, written in 1286 for the Cilician King Hetum, stands as a prime example, boasting exceptionally intricate ornamentation (Fig. 2).

Among the most important scriptoria of Artsakh and Utik, the monasteries of Dadivank (Gospel, 1684, Fig. 3), Karahat, near Gandzak (Gospel, 1675, Fig. 4), and Charek (Lectionary, 1665, Fig. 5) stand out. They played a pivotal role in the production and preservation of manuscripts, showcasing the rich intellectual and artistic heritage of the region.

The Armenian manuscript culture, having traversed a long path of evolution, persisted even with the advent of book printing (with the first Armenian book being printed in 1512).

The profound significance of Armenian script is highlighted with its inscription on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2019.

## Illuminating Heritage: Arabic Script Manuscripts at the Matenadaran

The Matenadaran proudly houses a significant collection of Arabic script manuscripts (ASC), the second largest after the Armenian manuscripts. This impressive collection comprises approximately 2,800 codices and fragments in Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Persian, and Chaghatay. The majority of these manuscripts, up to 1,800 codices, are in Arabic and cover a wide range of subjects within Middle Eastern scholarship. These include religious studies, philosophy, history, linguistics,





literature, Islamic law, astronomy, logic, medicine, dreams and talismans. Most of the manuscripts hold religious content, such as Qur'ans, Hadiths, and Tafsirs.

The collection primarily consists of materials acquired from the Holy Etchmiadzin library and the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages. Over time, it has been enriched through contributions from Armenian benevolent organizations, individuals, and manuscript collectors.

The oldest known artifact within the collection is a parchment fragment from the Qur'an dating back to the 8th-9th century. The Catalogue of the Qur'an Manuscripts of the Matenadaran, published in 2016, provides descriptions of 102 codices and 18 fragments. Among these, ten Qur'ans have been highlighted for their historical significance (Fig. 6 and 7).

The Matenadaran's Arabic script collection also encompasses around 450 Persian manuscripts, including valuable copies of poems from the 15th-17th centuries, by Hafez, Saadi, Jami, and Nizami, as well as Qur'ans with underlined Persian translations (Fig. 8).

Among the notable works housed within the Matenadaran's Arabic Script collection are Ibn Sina's "The Canon of Medicine", "The Book of Salvation" (Fig. 9), Al-Zamakhshari's "Asas al-Balagha", "Kitab al-Mufasssal", and "Al-Kashshaf", Ibn Hisham's "Mughni al-Labib", and eight volumes of Al-Ghazali's "Revival of Religious Sciences". One copy dates back to 615 A.H. and was written by Ahmad b. Tahir al-Alau'i, while others date back to 1011 A.H.

It's worth noting that as part of the UNESCO program, "Revive the Spirit of Mosul", the Matenadaran Restoration Department team visited the Center for the Digitization of Oriental Manuscripts in Erbil, Iraq in 2022. This week-long visit built upon a previous workshop organized by Matenadaran in September 2021 for representatives from the Erbil center, which focused on manuscript preservation and restoration. It served the purpose of evaluating local professional and technical capabilities while offering practical support for the restoration of ancient manuscripts.

<https://matenadaran.am/en/>



# Al Zubarah

## World Heritage Site

### The Site Narrative

In 2013, Al Zubarah Archaeological Site became Qatar's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. This town was once an eminent center for pearling and trade, and its history reflects changes in the region and the way of life in the period leading up to the creation of the modern Gulf states. It encapsulates the traditions and lifestyle of 18th-19th century urban populations in the Gulf and reflects the relationship that existed between the people of the Arabian Peninsula and their natural environment.

Al Zubarah Archaeological Site lies approximately 92km northwest of Doha, on the northwest coast of Qatar. It consists of two parcels, the larger of which contains the coastal town of Al Zubarah and its immediate hinterland, including structures related to the defense and supply of the town, as well as the early 20th-century Al Zubarah Fort. Separated by a modern road, the second parcel includes the fort and settlement of Murair, which housed the water supply of Al Zubarah.

In the north, the area is defined by a straight line between the coast and the existing fence around Al Zubarah Fort. The eastern extent encompasses the remains of Murair, while the current road from Al Zubarah Fort to the Ras Ushairiq peninsula defines the southern limit. The intersection between the beach and the sabkha formation southwest of Al Zubarah town forms the western boundary. A vast Buffer Zone, incorporating both the wider hinterland and the extensive coral reef system off the shore of Al Zubarah, surrounds the site. On the hinterland, the Buffer Zone includes the archaeological sites of Qal'at Shuwail, Helwan, and the village of Ain Mohammad.

Al Zubarah Archaeological Site is of outstanding universal value as the Gulf's most complete and well-preserved towns of the 18th-19th century connected to the practice of pearl trading and fishing, and unlike its contemporaries, no later developments occurred on the site. At the time, pearling created a large economic surplus and wealth and was the foundation on which incipient city-states were formed and gained wider regional influence and importance, laying down the crucial geopolitical, social, and cultural trajectories of recent Gulf history, which still shapes the region to this day.

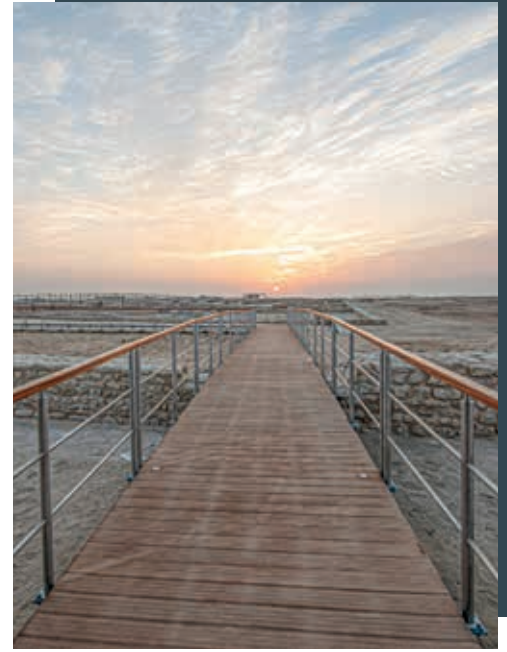
Al Zubarah played a pivotal role during that historic development phase and represented one of the region's most prolific international trading ports. As a traditional settlement located in Arabia in which trade, commerce, and hence social and cultural interaction and exchange were the underlying tenets, Al Zubarah relates to a number of socially and culturally relevant themes. The site reflects the history of tribal migration in the Gulf, as it was founded by merchants arriving from Kuwait and Basra in search of pearls, and by the mid to late 18th century, it



became the Gulf's most important trading hub, connecting the Indian Ocean with Arabia and western Asia, and highlighting how trade and exchange connected people from East and West.

Al Zubarah Archaeological Site's Outstanding Universal Value also pertains to the unique preservation of a complete urban plan. Surrounded and protected by a 2.5km long wall, the town extended over an area of 61 hectares. Due to the abandonment of the settlement at the beginning of the 20th century, the entire layout of the Site is preserved in great detail, providing key archaeological and anthropological data on economic, social, and cultural relations between the inhabitants of the town, as well as traditional pearling practices and tools. This remarkable state of preservation is strengthened by the integrity and authenticity of the site and provides crucial information on human interactions with the land and sea, trade links, and social and economic relationships, which are engrained in this exceptional assemblage of the historic urban fabric.

Today, the site is largely preserved in the form of low mounds, which mask the buried traces of traditional vernacular and religious architecture. The urban fabric of the old town includes courtyarded houses, palaces, mosques, suqs, defensive walls, and palm-leaf fishermen's huts. This represents a unique collection of building typologies, the spatial organization of which is preserved in outstanding detail across the entire townscape, while the Fort showcases how the desert's most precious resource – water – was managed and protected, and how Al Zubarah's rulers strategically protected access to it. The integrity of Al Zubarah Archaeological Site is guaranteed, as it was abandoned in the early 20th century and being located far from any modern settlement, it has remained untouched by modern development.



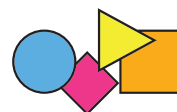
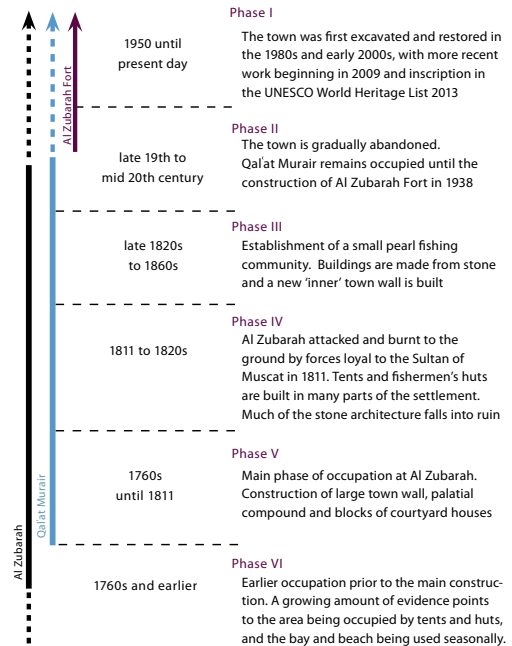
### Al Zubarah Fort

Al Zubarah Fort was built in 1938 on the orders of Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Al Thani to guard and protect Qatar's northwest coast. Together with a series of forts along Qatar's coastline, it formed part of a complex defense system controlling the sea and the freshwater resources of the region. The fort's design recalls earlier features common in Arab and Gulf fortification architecture including pointed crenellations, a traditional type of roof construction, a combination of round and square corner towers, sloping walls, and a square ground plan. Until 1986 the fort was used as a military and police post. Since then, the premises have been used as a museum and heritage attraction.

### Current and Future Outlook:

Al Zubarah Archaeological Site is under continuous development to ensure the preservation and presentation of the site for future generations. In recent years, and under the management of Qatar Museums, the site has seen further excavation and conservation works across the old town, and the installation of a 2 km reversible boardwalk through the ruins, providing an immersive experience into what the site has to offer. A new visitor center is currently under construction to showcase the site's narrative, display discovered objects, and provide a space where children, adults, and educators can be engaged, and where research, development, and outreach programs can flourish. Several other programs and endeavors are currently underway, which are intended to transform the area into the main heritage hub for the State of Qatar.

### Timeline and Archaeological Phases



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# Discover Nigeria's unique heritage

The Ikom Monoliths are part of a large group of venerated carved stone sculptures in the Bakor region of South-South Nigeria. They are representative of ancestors; associated with spiritual and social traditional practices within the forest belt of Cross River State, Nigeria. They are known locally as "Akwanshi" or "Atal" and found as a collection of stone monoliths within family, clan or village lands. The stone monoliths are also believed to represent a form of ancient writing and a complex system of coded information. The monoliths are mostly carved from medium-textured basaltic rock, a few are carved in sandstone and shelly limestone. The common features of the monoliths are that they are hewn into the form of a phallus ranging from about three to five and a half feet in height and are decorated with carvings of geometric and stylized human features, notably two eyes, an open mouth, a head crowned with rings, a stylized pointed beard, an elaborately marked navel, two decorative hands with five fingers, a nose and various shapes of facial marks.



Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove was inscribed on the World Heritage List on 15th July 2005 under criteria (ii), (iii) and (vi). It is a testimony of the rich history of the Yoruba Traditional Religion. The grove covers a core area of 75 hectares and has a buffer zone of about 47 hectares. It is a typical example of a true primary rainforest with a mature, reasonably undisturbed forest canopy which supports a broad diversity of small mammals, birds, reptiles and associated insects. The grove consists of an exceptionally rich flora and fauna. At the core of the grove is the palace, Ile Osun, where Laroye, the first *Ataoja* (king) of Osogbo, and his people first settled. It is located in the Osun courtyard and houses the Osun Shrine and the Temple. The sacred stone stool called the Stone of Authority, which Laroye used more than 400 years ago, is located in the Temple. The sacred palace, Iledi Ohuntoto, was the second residence of Laroye.

Sukur Cultural Landscape is Nigeria's first UNESCO World Heritage site, inscribed in 1999. It is an ancient hilltop settlement with a rich history of iron technology, flourishing trade, and strong political and cultural traditions, and is situated in the Mandara Mountains at the boundary between Nigeria and Cameroon. It is located at an elevation of one thousand and forty-five metres (1045m) above sea level with a distance of 3.8 kilometres from the base of the hill to the hilltop settlement. Key features of the site include its impressive dry stone vernacular architecture spectacularly displayed in the palace complex structure of the Hidi of Sukur; the stone agricultural terraces and stone paved walkways on the hillside; ritual, ceremonial and domestic sites; and a vibrant intangible cultural tradition inherited and practiced over the centuries.



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# iSIMANGALISO WETLAND PARK'S

## Timeless Symphony of Nature and Heritage

Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1999 under criteria (vii), (ix) and (x), iSimangaliso Wetland Park is a place of peace and tranquillity. This breathtaking haven of natural marvels and awe-inspiring landscapes is located on the Zululand coast in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Formerly known as the Greater St. Lucia Wetlands Park, this treasure trove of ecological wonder extends from Maphe-lane in the south of St Lucia to Kosi Bay in the north, at the border separating South Africa and Mozambique, a stretch of over 220 kilometres of pristine coastline. This veritable Eden, graced by the divine touch of Mother Nature, is a harmonious blend of diverse ecosystems and captivating destinations, and stands as an iridescent emblem of conservation and community empowerment, providing an enchanting portal to the world of the wild.

The iSimangaliso Wetland Park, a living testament to Earth's resplendent diversity of life, unfolds like a bewitching tapestry of nature's finest achievements. From the majestic Lubombo mountains that pierce the heavens to the serene allure of grasslands, from the forests that whisper ancient tales to the wetlands that are teeming with life, and from the mangrove sanctuaries to the age-old dunes sculpted by the hands of time, this park is nature's living kaleidoscope. Within its embrace, there are eight interlocking ecosystems and ten distinct destinations, each one a gateway to the heart of the untamed.

The iSimangaliso Wetland Park is an orchestra where the call of the wild, led by 129 terrestrial and aquatic mammals, including the revered black and white rhinoceros, the dignified elephants, the enigmatic buffalos, the elusive leopards, the fabled wild dog and the commanding lion, plays out in splendid harmony.

### A Journey Through Time: A Tapestry Woven with Historical Threads

The annals of time unfurl within the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, where echoes of centuries past whisper on the wind. Stretching back to the Later Stone Age and echoing through the corridors of the Iron Age, evidence of human habitation leaves its mark, a testament to the enduring relationship between man and nature. Arab traders and European pioneers, their footprints indelibly imprinted on the sands of time, are mere chapters in the tale of this landscape. Vasco da Gama's fateful encounter with these shores in 1497 set the stage for a symphony of interactions – a harmonious interplay between explorers, traders, hunters and missionaries that wove the intricate tapestry of culture and history that adorns the region.

The roots of conservation took hold in 1895 with the establishment of the first reserve, giving birth to the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi region – South Africa's venerable conservation cornerstone. The apex of this journey un-

furled in 1999, when the park was inscribed as South Africa's first World Heritage Site. This auspicious moment, graced by the presence of the venerated Nelson Mandela, a global icon of justice and unity, marked the park's rise to global recognition. The rebirth of the park in 2007, with the name of iSimangaliso, a name suffused with the essence of 'miracle and wonder,' encapsulated the very soul of this treasure trove.



**A Symphony of Conservation and Empowerment: Nature's Stewards at Work**

The iSimangaliso Wetland Park's achievements stand as a symphony of dedication to conservation and the upliftment of local communities. A seamless fusion of lands under a united management plan, a metamorphosis from incompatible land uses into 15,000 hectares of vibrant conservation, and the fortification of 230 kilometres of formidable Big Five fencing, are but crescendos in the symphony of ecosystem preservation.

The park's journey has been enriched by the reintroduction of various game species – tsessebe, oribi, elephants, wild dogs, cheetahs, and the regal white and black rhinos – an ode to the harmonious balance that thrives within its boundaries. A symphony of improved road networks and refined water systems facilitate accessibility, all while enhancing the melodic dance of the visitor's experience. The iSimangaliso Wetland Park's devotion to community upliftment sings through various initiatives. The culture and arts program, a chorus of 3,500 jobs, paints a vibrant picture of hope and prosperity.

**A Spectrum of Experiences: An Overture to Wonders**

Journeying through the iSimangaliso Wetland Park is akin to embarking on a voyage through the annals of time, a rendezvous with nature's bounty and human endeavour. A paradise for avian aficionados, the park hosts about 530 bird species, a melodious symphony that awakens the senses. Witnessing the nesting season of leatherback and loggerhead turtles is an exclusive privilege woven into the fabric of this coastal sanctuary. And beyond the famous Big Five, the Big Seven beckons – an assembly that boasts the southern right whale and the awe-inspiring great white shark.

**Guardians of Heritage: A Prelude to Posterity**

The iSimangaliso Wetland Park stands as a testament to the potent melody of conservation, community harmony, and sustainable tourism. Its influence spreads far beyond its verdant borders, touching the lives of locals and wanderers alike. This sanctuary's accolades as South Africa's second-largest protected area and its distinction as the nation's first UNESCO World Heritage site reverberate through time, resounding as a paean to preservation.

This Eden's terrain, graced by mountains, bushveld, palm groves, dunes sculpted by the ages, grasslands that sway in the breeze, and coastal forests that whisper forgotten tales, cradles a menagerie of life. Here, 129 terrestrial and aquatic mammals, 525 avian envoys, 128 reptilian wanderers, 50 amphibian troubadours, 991 marine marvels and 48 freshwater dancers waltz in harmony. Nelson Mandela aptly encapsulated iSimangaliso's resplendent diversity as a realm where the ancient rhinoceros shares space with the colossal elephant, and where the prehistoric coelacanth converses with the titanic whale – a chorus of life that strikes at the heart of wonder.





SCHOOLS, CHURCHES AND LUNCH COUNTERS  
BECAME SITES OF RACIAL INTEGRATION.

## THE YOUNG BECAME UNEXPECTED HEROES.

The fight for racial equality in the United States faced stiff resistance from white supremacists. Children had to step up and be the first to integrate schools. College students had to sit down and be the first to integrate lunch counters. Churches had to shelter civil rights activists as they marched to integrate society. Ultimately, the movement won for all Americans the same rights and opportunities, offering hope to others fighting for equality around the globe. Step into these extraordinary places along the U.S. Civil Rights Trail and feel the incredible sense of struggle, triumph and history.

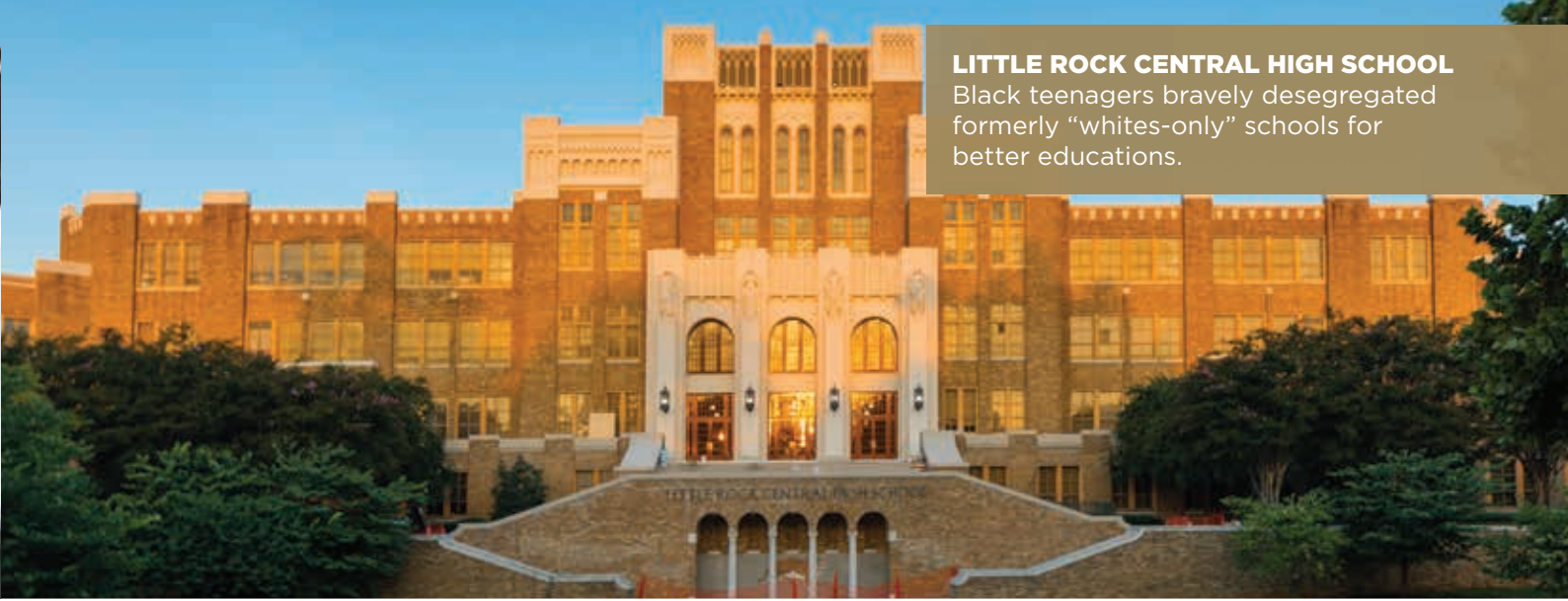
*What happened here changed the world.*

[CivilRightsTrail.com](http://CivilRightsTrail.com)

UNITED STATES

**CIVIL  
RIGHTS  
TRAIL**





**LITTLE ROCK CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL**  
Black teenagers bravely desegregated formerly “whites-only” schools for better educations.



**BIRMINGHAM'S 16TH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH**  
From the church sanctuary, Black youths launched the Children's Crusade for equal access and racial equality.



**GREENSBORO'S WOOLWORTH LUNCH COUNTER**  
Black students sat down at “whites-only” lunch counters and integrated America.



## CONSERVING ALULA'S HERITAGE AT THE CROSSROADS OF CIVILISATIONS

On the occasion of this month's meeting in Riyadh of the 45<sup>th</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Committee, it is with a deep sense of partnership that the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) affirms our adherence to the conservation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's cultural and natural heritage.

RCU is a rising leader on the global conservation scene. With the help of UNESCO, this is bringing immediate benefits for AlUla's visitors and for Saudi citizens – especially the young generation of Saudis who are becoming skilled in heritage conservation.



## CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

Heritage conservation is supported by many RCU and joint RCU-UNESCO initiatives that are part of the comprehensive regeneration of AIUla as a leading global destination for cultural and natural heritage.

This year, we celebrate the 15-year anniversary of the inscription of Hegra Archaeological Site (al-Hijr / Madā' in Ṣāliḥ) on the UNESCO World Heritage List, which was a first for Saudi Arabia. Since that time, many discoveries have been made at the active Hegra archaeological site, while the visitor-facing experience has been enhanced through improved conservation and a promise to connect the world to the enduring spirit, stories and significance of AIUla's ancient wonders.

Now, from September 13-15, AIUla is hosting the inaugural AIUla World Archaeology Summit at Maraya. A diverse group of experts and academics will foster cross-cultural and interdisciplinary discussions, going beyond traditional pursuits to focus on innovative ideas, debate, and solutions with lasting impact. This aligns with AIUla's ongoing development into the world's largest living museum, a destination for the exploration of ancient knowledge – reimagining AIUla's status as a crossroads for civilisations and the sharing of wisdom.

As well as fostering high-level discussions on conservation, RCU is finding ways to bring heritage to life for a wider audience. For example, through our collaboration with the Louvre in Paris, the towering, 800-kg statue of a Lihyanite king which was discovered at Dadan is currently on display for a period of five years, enabling the world to learn more about an important part of AIUla's heritage.

Earlier this year we also unveiled the world's first facial reconstruction of a Nabataean woman. She is named Hinat, after an inscription on the 2,000-year-old tomb where she was found, at the Hegra UNESCO World Heritage site.

To recreate Hinat's face, RCU assembled a team of experts which included specialists from technical backgrounds (3D sculptor, forensic reconstruction experts) and artistic backgrounds (anthropologists, mold makers, experts in Nabataean history). In this way, we employed conservation science to create a human connection with history that is an emblem of the living museum.

Through these efforts and others, the world is recognising the global significance of AIUla's heritage.



## UPSKILLING YOUNG SAUDIS

The statue of the Lihyanite king mentioned above was unearthed by teams working under specialists from King Saud University. As the regeneration of AIUla advances, RCU foresees more such opportunities for Saudis to acquire and apply conservation skills.

RCU and UNESCO are working together on the AIUla Fellowships Programme. The 18-month fellowships will enable 10 recipients to undertake site-based research, conservation and management and engage in the sharing and transfer of knowledge. The fellowships will include time at AIUla and at UNESCO headquarters or field offices. The first recipients are to be selected this year.

RCU has also partnered with the Centro Conservazione e Restauro La Venaria Reale. The centre has welcomed six young women and six young men from Saudi to expand their expertise through laboratory studies and fieldwork in Italy and AIUla. The programme unites Italy's long history of restoration and conservation science with AIUla's cultural, heritage and community development goals.

RCU also selected a group of young Saudis to study conservation science at the Louvre and has created the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)'s first official corps of Heritage Rangers, most of them young people, to protect cultural and heritage sites across AIUla County and the neighbouring areas of Khaybar and Tayma.



## A DEEP PARTNERSHIP

The connection between UNESCO and Saudi Arabia goes back almost 80 years. KSA was among the initial signatories of the UNESCO Constitution in 1946. More recently, Hegra was inscribed as KSA's first UNESCO World Heritage site in 2008.

In November 2021, RCU and UNESCO signed the first-ever cross-sectorial partnership by UNESCO with a regional entity – a testament to the wealth of knowledge and potential in AIUla and its role as an

incubator to grow a global understanding of our shared human history.

Also, this May, Jabal Ikmah, a treasure trove of ancient inscriptions, was added to UNESCO's Memory of the World International Register of documentary heritage.

We look forward to many more years of successful cooperation to conserve AIUla's cultural heritage.

# DIRIYAH

## At-Turaif, UNESCO World Heritage Site

The Birthplace of the Kingdom  
A 300-year-old legacy



DIRIYAH.SA