

## Chapter 9

# Archaeological Site Management in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Protection or Isolation?

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### Introduction

This chapter<sup>1</sup> reviews the relationship between two actors in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's (KSA) archaeological heritage management. On the one hand, the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) has been actively involved in managing, protecting and studying the archaeological heritage resources in the KSA since the 1980s, leading to scientific excavations, conferences, development projects and exhibitions. The commission explores the country's historical, cultural, architectural, religious and natural values and accommodates a local interest to preserve archaeological heritage as a sustainable resource (SCTA 2010). On the other hand, there is a local community that is affected by the implementation of these projects on the ground. This research begins with the observation that the non-expert audience in archaeological sites of KSA has little awareness of this resource.

As questions about the heritage of specific regions in KSA during preliminary research were answered by a stark 'is there any?', it is suggested that there is a lack of cooperation and communication involving archaeological sites, the SCTA, and the local community. This chapter therefore focuses on the complicated context in which methodologies are devised for preserving and protecting archaeological heritage sites in the KSA. Efforts have been made to analyse the SCTA's experience in protecting and managing the archaeological sites and how this practice has affected the site and the related community. Discussion focuses on the site of Māda' in Sālih, a UNESCO World Heritage site, to illustrate the unique circumstances that surround the site's history and the sensitive global and regional values at play. It also demonstrates the significant challenges that the SCTA faces on a national and international level. Developing a better understanding of the complex history of the KSA region and appreciation of its value as a source of knowledge faces considerable challenges. This chapter proposes that although an

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1 This chapter presents a section of my PhD research on the management and promotion of archaeological heritage in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

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improvement in Saudi communities' attitudes and interests about archaeological sites may be desirable, this would require a partnership between the community and specialists needed to work towards presentation, preservation, interpretation and effectiveness of preparing and opening archaeological sites to visitors.

### Archaeological Research in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Archaeological investigation in Saudi Arabia began in 1976 following the establishment of the Saudi Legislation for Antiquities in 1972. This government initiative sought to locate further information and physical evidence for pre-Islamic and early Islamic historical data concerning the ancient civilisations that once existed in Arabia (UNESCO 1972; Massry 1977, 9–10). The Saudi Supreme Council for Antiquities – the precursor of the SCTA – initiated a comprehensive archaeological survey programme in 1976 directed by Saudi and international archaeological teams. Five-year plans over a period of 25 years were established to cover as much of the KSA region as possible. These surveys were an important first step in exploring the diversity of the archaeological sites in the KSA region. Many archaeological sites have been discovered, and enormous amounts of data were revealed and published in *Atlal: The Journal of Saudi Arabian Archaeology* during the years 1976–2010. These publications consisted of surveys, excavations, documentation of new findings and typological and analytical studies.

The SCTA's first phase of the comprehensive archaeological survey programme can be divided into two parts: the first part consists of collaborations between Saudi and international archaeologists; the second part was almost completely led by Saudi archaeologists. However, Abdulaziz Alguzzi (2007) has found that the reports published in earlier volumes of *Atlal* (1977–88) were of high quality, well structured and well translated, and included investigations that had appeared in earlier published documents and sources. In addition, the reports were supported by photos, maps and illustrations of artefacts. Meanwhile, the later volumes featured reports that disregarded the views that had been discussed earlier in *Atlal* and other sources, and the presentation was of less academic quality (some reports lacked photos and maps of the distribution of the artefacts and the location of the archaeological sites). There were also inaccuracies in translation; for example, *aceramic* was translated as 'a ceramic' (Alguzzi 2007, 49). Accordingly, some archaeological sites were misinterpreted, thus requiring reconsideration and reassessment.

*Atlal* consists of 20 volumes to date, including, excavations, surveys and typological and analytical studies of archaeological sites. Nevertheless, *Atlal* lacks any up to date information regarding when the comprehensive archaeological survey programme was or will be concluded. Also conspicuously absent from the *Atlal* volumes is any mention of issues of preservation and management of archaeological sites, including mention of the local communities surrounding them. Although some may argue that archaeological reports are not traditionally

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host to preservation discussions, their absence reveals a lack of consideration of management issues in the discipline. In 2008, the SCTA launched the second phase of the comprehensive archaeological survey programme, again following five-year plans over 25 years. Since 2008, volumes 17 to 20 of *Atlal* show an effort by the SCTA to overcome the issues of poor interpretation and a lack of illustrations. The SCTA has also initiated management and conservation development projects at some of the archaeological sites, such as the two sites that KSA has nominated and had inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List: Māda'in Sālih in the Al-Ula region (inscribed 2008) and the At-Turaif district in Ad-Dir'iyah (inscribed 2010), the first capital of the Saudi state, thereby making them accessible to visitors. Discussions in this chapter focus on the first of these sites. At the second site, At-Turaif district, the SCTA has started projects to restore and develop the site. For example, several museums are currently established, such as the Social Life Museum established in the Omar ibn Saud Palace and its associated buildings, which displays aspects of Saudi daily life, customs and traditions, and tools used during the first Saudi state (Tatweer 2010, 42).

The SCTA (2007) stated in its strategic report that in the first phase of the comprehensive archaeological survey programme in 1976 there were some concerns about archaeological investigation, protection and presentation schemes in place for some sites that deserved closer attention. For example, some reports in the first comprehensive archaeological survey programme neglected to study, interpret and explore some of the archaeological sites, and they lacked any development plan in their first iteration. The first Saudi archaeological investigation of the management of the archaeological heritage resource faced concerns over accuracy, thoroughness and evidence (Alguzzi 2007). The second phase of the investigation is now underway; however, as discussed, it needs to be advanced in terms of the quality control in the *Atlal* survey reports and excavations. Accordingly, the SCTA in this strategic report promised to solve these problems in the second phase of the comprehensive archaeological survey programme (SCTA 2007). For instance, the SCTA has made an effort to record Islamic heritage sites from Saudi Arabia and around the world by establishing The Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdul Aziz Database, which includes a large amount of geographical and historical information from about 52 sites, illustrating the significance of these sites to the Islamic world (SCTA 2010).

### Current State of Preservation and Representation of Sites

KSA archaeological sites are owned by the Saudi government and protected by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Legislation for Antiquities, issued by Royal Decree No. 26/M on 8 March 1972. However, the Saudi Legislation for Antiquities stipulates that the SCTA is responsible for regulating archaeological heritage sites. It decides which sites should or should not be included in this protection plan. The Saudi Legislation for Antiquities has stated that all archaeological

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sites and artefacts should be protected from acts of vandalism, and it penalises any violations.

The SCTA is responsible for the first stage of protecting and managing archaeological sites. It identifies the sites, undertakes field surveys and conducts excavations. Additionally, it fences off and guards archaeological sites, and conducts regular inspections, supervisions and expropriations if necessary (Al-Magmam 1998). However, other authorities are also involved in protecting archaeological sites, according to the Saudi Legislation for Antiquities, including the Saudi police, Customs Authority, General Investigations Authority, the Ministry of Transportation and the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs. They are responsible for ensuring that the adoption and implementation of their future strategic plans does not damage archaeological sites. The Ministry of Justice is also responsible for reporting and holding any properties that have traces of ancient societies. The Ministry of the Interior has some responsibility to protect the archaeological heritage and promote it for tourism, yet this role is not clear in terms of what protection strategy should be used or how it should be applied (UNESCO 1972; Al-Magmam 1998; Al-Zahrani 2007).

The Administration of Research and Economic Studies, Saudi Chamber of Commerce and Industry published a report (2002) on the need to make the private sector a partner with the government sector in managing the archaeological heritage resources of the KSA. Such a partnership should be seen as necessary due to the significance of archaeological heritage as a source of knowledge, and its importance as a sustainable resource in the tourism sector. However, the main point of this paper is to argue that archaeological sites in the KSA have not been managed effectively, as evidenced by the uncertain relationship of the public to their heritage. One of the obstacles that gives rise to this failure is the provisions of the Saudi Legislation for Antiquities, which limits collaboration between the private and government sectors. For example, Article 38 states that 'the archaeological sites can be rented for one year, renewable after that period' (The Administration of Research and Economic Studies, Saudi Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2002, 130–3), potentially cutting short the time needed to prepare and manage an archaeological resource in the long term. Such time limitations may be at the expense of a benefit to both the sites and the private sector, as one year is simply not enough to prepare and present a site to visitors.

Since the 1970s, the SCTA has done a great deal to manage and represent the KSA archaeological heritage sites, through archaeological excavations, conferences and exhibitions. For example, in 2009, the SCTA held a mutual collaboration exhibition entitled *Unity within Cultural Diversity*, the Second Exhibition of Antiquities of the Arabian Gulf Countries at the National Museum in Riyadh, to display features of the Gulf countries and emphasise their regional identities (SCTA 2010, 242, 328). In addition, a travelling exhibition continues to be directed by SCTA entitled *Saudi Archaeological Masterpieces through the Ages*. It began in 2010 at the Louvre Museum in Paris and then travelled to La Caixa Foundation in Barcelona, the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg,

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Russia, and the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. After that, the exhibition went to American institutions, starting with the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC (SCTA 2010, 328–9). Furthermore, a memorandum of cooperation has been signed between the Saudi National Museum, the Louvre, and the British Museum to showcase the history of Arabia, exchange knowledge, appreciate the diverse culture that has resided in Arabia, and represent ancient Arabian kingdoms and Islamic civilisation to the world (SCTA 2010). These activities are part of broader efforts to showcase Arabia as far more than just deserts, camels and tents through exhibitions such as *Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam* and *The Horse: From Arabia to Royal Ascot*, both shown at the British Museum in London in 2012, as noted in the British Museum website on January and May 2012, respectively. The former exhibition was at the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar from October 2013–January 2014, as currently featured in the website of the museum.

At the domestic level, the Saudi national school curriculum includes selective parts of the KSA's history, with a focus on the immediately pre-Islamic and Islamic eras. However, it excludes the prehistoric era (The Comprehensive Project for the Development of Basic Education Curriculums 2012). Even at university level, the Department of Fine Arts and Design at Princess Noura bint Abdul Rahman University offers components in the Art History modules in Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Islamic civilisations, focusing on their history, art and architecture, but without mention of the ancient civilisations that once existed on the territory of the KSA (NCAAA 2010). In 2012, the SCTA took further steps on the issue of representation of archaeological heritage within the KSA; as of October 2012 the SCTA listed on its website a series of short documentary films. The film *Roads of Arabia*, for example, presents snapshots of the ancient history of the KSA, starting with Islam and Saudi traditional heritage, and then gives a brief overview of most of the previous civilisations and kingdoms that existed on the Arabian Peninsula, whereas the film *Al Hijr* presents the Nabataean Kingdom. Furthermore, in September 2012, the SCTA listed publications on its website that address the nation's heritage and constitute excellent avenues for the appreciation of heritage resources. The website offers books, research about KSA archaeological sites, and magazines such as *Saudi Voyager Magazine* are seasonally published on the SCTA website and the Saudi Voyager independent website, which is operated by the SCTA.

The significance of the conservation and presentation of KSA's archaeological sites is not limited to the field of archaeology. It must be considered that the findings of archaeological investigations can refine and re-define the understanding of ancient societies and chronicle dramatic changes to the region's natural environment, population, vegetation and fauna, as discussed elsewhere (Thorne and Reams 1991). It has been extensively argued through primarily Western case studies that there is also a strong rationale for making conservation and presentation relevant to surrounding communities (Carter and Grimwade 1997; Millar 2007). In contrast to the academic agendas of archaeologists and heritage managers, it

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has been long assumed that a community perceives the value of an archaeological site in light of its own positive or negative experiences with the site, a perspective that requires consideration in any future decisions pertaining to the management of archaeological sites (Carter and Grimwade 1997). In instances in which an archaeological site is part of the community which has forged a connection to the site, an interest in stakeholder involvement in heritage management identifies the community as a resource of traditional stories and histories that may be integral to the interpretation of the archaeological heritage, according to their unique perspectives. Outreach activities, spurred by the rise and global expansion of community archaeology (Simpson 2010), identify the community as a possessor of unique knowledge about the past, a relationship which benefits the visitor through improved interpretation (Hall and McArthur 1998; Tripp 2012), but more significantly, benefits and enhances the memory of a community (Field et al. 2000). Likewise, it has been argued that managing archaeological sites without the active participation of the surrounding community may lead to conflict (Hall and McArthur 1998, 56), a multifaceted tension that I will consider below.

### The Māda'in Sālih Site

The archaeological site of Māda'in Sālih is located within Al-Medīnah al-Munawwarah, in the Al-Ula region, which lies in the northwestern part of the KSA (Al-Zahrani and Kbashi 2008, 78). Located in a rural area about 22 kilometres from the city of Al-Ula, the nearest city of significant size, Māda'in Sālih is surrounded by desert, some private farms, mountains and several small villages. The Al-Ula region has significant historical resources and value and was, for a long time, home to several prehistoric Arabian Kingdoms as well as a few early Islamic period cities: the archaeological sites of Dadan and Al Khuraybah, located to the northeast of Al-Ula, were home to the Dedan and the Lihyanite Kingdoms; Qurh Al-Mabiyyat, situated south of Al-Ula, was an early Islamic city known for its water reservoirs; the Old City of 'Addera', an early Islamic city; and finally, Māda'in Sālih, which is situated north of Al-Ula. For reference (see Figure I.1), the site is located 500 kilometres southeast of the famous Nabataean site of Petra in Jordan (Al-Talhi, et al. 1988; Al-Zahrani and Kbashi 2008).

The Māda'in Sālih site dates to the Nabataean Kingdom and was chosen by the SCTA for UNESCO World Heritage List status because of its historic significance in the Arabian Peninsula during the period from the second century BCE to the sixth century CE. The site also played a key role in monopolising the frankincense and myrrh trade starting in the second century BCE (Healey 1986). It was the first archaeological site in the KSA to be placed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2008 (SCTA 2010, 327). The archaeological area occupies about 1,621 hectares (Al-Talhi et al. 1988; UNESCO 2007; 2008). The site is well preserved and includes significant features such as important inscriptions on tomb façades that highlight the political and social development of the Nabataean Kingdom

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(Healey 1986). Māda'in Sālih is located in an arid area; it is hot in the summer with temperatures consistently above 30°C and mild in the winter, with temperatures ranging from 12 to 22°C, making it difficult to visit in the summer.

The site has several features spread across the archaeological site: the necropolis area, the worship-area at Jabal Ithlib, the Nabataean settlement area, and the Nabataean water reservoir system, which contains wells and cisterns (Al-Talhi 2000). The site was originally known as Hejra, according to ancient sources such as Strabo, Pliny the Elder, Ptolemy and Stephanus of Byzantium (Nehmé 2007, 12). According to Greek and early Islamic historiographers and historians such as Josephus and Al-Tabari, it was in this land that a well-known Arabian kingdom was located at the beginning of the first century BCE (Al-Talhi 2000). Although it is known archaeologically as a Nabataean site, it is much more popularly known in the community as the Thamūd dwelling and Māda'in Sālih, which means 'Salih's town'. Laila Nehmé (2007, 12) states that the name Māda'in Sālih first appeared in the eighteenth century. It was given this name according to the Muslim belief that, in this place, the Prophet Sālih, peace be upon him, asked his people, the Thamūd, to worship God. However, his people rejected his message and as a consequence, God punished the Thamūd. This story was mentioned several times in the Qur'an (Healey 1986):

[And] verily, the dwellers of Al-Hijr [the rocky tract] denied the Messengers.<sup>81</sup> And we gave them Our Signs, but they were averse to them.<sup>82</sup> And they used to hew out dwellings from the mountains [feeling themselves] secure.<sup>83</sup> But As-Saihah [torment, awful cry] overtook them in the early morning [of the fourth day of their promised punishment days].<sup>84</sup> And all that they used to earn availed them not. (Surat Al-Hijr 81–4, *The Noble Qur'ân*, 345)

Therefore, according to Muslim tradition, Māda'in Sālih is considered an unpleasant area (Healey 1986), a negative association that characterises a conflict between the historical significance and value of the site and the beliefs and spiritual values of the surrounding community. This could be the reason behind the failure of the site to earn the local appreciation that a UNESCO World Heritage Nomination would command. It has been reported that visitors have defaced the tombstones in Māda'in Sālih with graffiti, suggesting that such a prestigious international designation does not carry the anticipated authority for local residents. The Saudi government, on the other hand, has made considerable efforts towards its protection.

In the 1970s the government spent US\$50 million to purchase the properties around the site, in order to protect the site and ensure there would not be any direct threat by human action to the archaeological area, the tombs and the natural environment. The site has since been protected by the official police force, equipped with patrol vehicles to control any disturbances at the site (UNESCO 2007, 54; 2008). In 1982, a metal fence was erected surrounding the site by the SCTA and was subsequently expanded several times through the

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year 2000 (UNESCO 2007, 47, 86). Until 2008 the site remained fenced off in such a way that the local community itself was not allowed to access it. This caused misunderstandings and adverse reactions from the local community. The SCTA's main aim in fencing off the archaeological sites was to protect them from irresponsible actions as well as from treasure hunters, given their historical value. However, isolating a heritage site for protection is not ideal and can have strong repercussions.

### Community Engagement in the Archaeological Heritage of KSA

The community itself and its activities surrounding this site area are not noted in any heritage documents by UNESCO, SCTA or the Al-Ula local museum.<sup>2</sup> The community in Al-Ula and areas around the Māda'in Sālih site is, in general, a combination of Saudi citizens and foreigners. In 2010, the population of the city and the surrounding rural areas was 64,591 inhabitants, according to the Saudi Central Department of Statistics and Information (CDSI 2010, 4).

Ongoing research has confirmed that development plans for the SCTA do not consider the community. On-site informal interviews with SCTA members, archaeologists from both national and international archaeological teams working in KSA, site guards at Māda'in Sālih, and curators of some Saudi local museums such as Hail local museum and Faid Museum in northern Saudi Arabia confirm this position. Furthermore, the vice-president of the SCTA, Ali Al Ghabban, has also presented a lecture and made statements on the SCTA website on several occasions about the relationship between the community and historical and cultural heritage that suggest that the community is not actively engaged in these issues. It is worth mentioning that several individuals were interviewed – from the SCTA and the Saudi/French archaeological team – regarding the possibilities of establishing cooperation between their teams and the surrounding community with regards to the exploration and investigation of archaeological sites. Given the challenges, these individuals expressed particular concerns regarding the difficulty and complexity of exploring and investigating these archaeological sites. On the other hand, an interview with a guard at one of the KSA archaeological sites revealed that his family members repeatedly discovered artefacts in and around their farms but that they have no plans to inform the SCTA about their findings because Saudi Legislation for Antiquities would permit the SCTA to seize their lands in such a case. There are some families who would welcome such an act by the SCTA because the payments that they would receive from such seizures would be greater than the present value of the land to them, but others are attached to their lands for sentimental or other reasons and would not wish to move for any amount of money.

<sup>2</sup> Further research is planned by the author to investigate in detail the relationship between the community and archaeological sites.

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Observations made during visits to several KSA archaeological sites in 2011 including the Māda'in Sālih site suggested that the protection strategy in place both involves and excludes the surrounding communities. This ambiguous strategy consists of two approaches: on the one hand, there is a physical boundary set by the fencing off of the archaeological resources, and on the other, individuals employed to guard the site are Saudi citizens that inhabit the surrounding areas. However, the community is not involved in other aspects of the site's management and interpretation. In conversation with Mr Mutlaq S. Almutlaq, archaeologist and curator of Al-Ula local museum, in April 2011, it was revealed that he has encouraged local residents to tour the sites and volunteer to lead school and university groups. However, it could be argued that this kind of engagement is not enough to get a community truly involved, protect the site and create appreciation and an intellectual connection between the community and the history of its region.

In 2012, the SCTA made significant efforts to develop and manage the site better, resulting in its current presentation as a tourist site. The complex now includes a tourist centre, a café and a parking area, as well as indicators for the permitted paths for driving around the area. Signage and interpretation materials are presented clearly in front of tombs, inscriptions and other features, offering Arabic and English information, and accompanied by photos and further narrative. There are also translations of some Nabataean and Arabic inscriptions. Beyond the site, other heritage resources in the archaeological area near the Māda'in Sālih site have also been developed in such a way; for example, the Hijaz Railway Station has been restored, its building now used as a museum containing records, artefacts, photos and other objects related to the Hijaz Railway.

An assessment of the site's preservation and education activities during the fourth excavation season in 2011 around Māda'in Sālih helps elucidate the reasons for damage to this and other sites in KSA. It would appear that the archaeological communication that has taken place has excluded the local community of Al-Ula in particular. For example, in 2011, Laila Nehmé, the director of the French/Saudi team on the Māda'in Sālih archaeological project, offered a series of public lectures following the fourth excavation season at the French Embassy in Riyadh, a lecture on archaeology at the French school in Riyadh for teenage students, and a lecture at the French consulate in Jeddah titled *The Nabataean Stone Cutting Techniques in Petra and Hegra* (Nehmé 2012). It must be noted that these cities are not easily accessible to the Al-Ula community, as Riyadh is located more than 1150 km and Jeddah nearly 800 km from Māda'in Sālih.

On a different but related note, the site presents itself as a place of conflict between local and global perceptions of World Heritage access. Even though the site is clearly demarcated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Māda'in Sālih and other archaeological sites in the area are mostly open to visitors from the Gulf Cooperation Council nations. Entrance is free of charge for these visitors; however, individuals of other nationalities need to obtain and present a permission letter, which is also offered at no charge, from the SCTA. The practice of controlling access by the rest of the global community can be justified by two facts; first, the

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shocking discovery of more than 14,000 archaeological artefacts of KSA origin that have been recovered from abroad through the SCTA's National Antiquities Recovery Campaign in 2012<sup>3</sup> (*National Museum Newsletter*, 22 May 2012), which would make KSA cautious of uncontrolled access to its resources; and second, the need to assure the security and safety of global visitors, which should not be simply interpreted as a simple exclusion.

However, the launching of the aforementioned campaign by His Royal Highness Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdul Aziz, president of the SCTA, resulted in a positive response from the surrounding communities. As noted on the SCTA website on 30 July 2012, in response to this national campaign many Saudi citizens have donated funds to support the National Antiquities Recovery Campaign. For example, Sheikh Abdul Maqsood Khoja donated 337,000 Saudi riyals, roughly US\$89,864 to the SCTA to support this initiative. On the other hand, this initiative prompted many Saudi citizens to return archaeological objects that they had found in either discovered or undiscovered archaeological sites, so that these could be viewed by a large audience at Saudi local museums. It was also noted in January 2012 that the website of SCTA featured an exemplary report: Mr Ali Zaid Al Qarni, a Saudi citizen, returned a remarkable artefact of an ancient southern Arabian style, dating back to the pre-Islamic period, found in the Besha desert in south-western Saudi Arabia in 2012. Since Mr Al Qarni was familiar with the original location of the piece, a team from the SCTA was able to visit the site and undertake a preliminary survey of the area that revealed some interesting features, such as fragments of pottery and petroglyphs, highlighting the advantages of increasing community involvement and dialogue.

This case study demonstrates that the relationship between archaeological sites and the community in KSA is a very complex one. As is the case with many UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Māda'in Sālih offers itself as a meeting ground for multiple narratives and values at the local, regional and international levels. It can then be argued that a failure to incorporate a community's traditional narratives and beliefs into the interpretation and management strategies of Māda'in Sālih is responsible for negative perceptions and reactions toward this archaeological site. I would argue that ignorance on both sides of the management process are to be blamed: ignorance in the local community towards the historical value of their site, and ignorance from the SCTA and other experts towards the consequences of applying a top-down approach that overlooks community collaboration. Facing a similar challenge in the broader Middle East region, the community archaeology project at the site of Quseir al-Qadim in Egypt aimed to integrate local people who had been excluded from all previous international excavations and studies at this site, by involving them in various aspects of the archaeological investigation, hand-in-hand with a group of professional archaeologists from the Quseir local community and Southampton University (Moser 2002). Whereas

<sup>3</sup> It is worth mentioning that 3,000 of these artefacts were returned by Saudi citizens, Saudi private museums and amateurs.

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initially the project focused on establishing mutual collaboration in all parts of the project work, the process of engaging the local community revealed previously unknown archaeological resources through interviews with elderly individuals (Moser 2002, 243), standing as an example of the invaluable contribution of this type of engagement (Moser 2002, 225; Tully 2009). This also acts as a reminder that each project is a unique challenge and that it may not benefit from a copy-paste model of community engagement, in consideration of unique political, social and cultural contexts and complexities.

## Conclusion

This analysis of the Māda'in Sālih site cannot be generalised to apply to all sites in the KSA as not all sites hold religious or potentially negative significance to the surrounding community. It should be noted, for example, that other archaeological sites have also been vandalised, such as the rock art site in Jubbah in northern KSA, featuring prehistoric petroglyphs, and the site of Al-Madīnah al-Munawarah that features early Islamic Kufic inscriptions (SCTA 2009), indicating that it is not only pre-Islamic sites that are treated with disrespect and ignorance by some of the surrounding community, but also some Islamic sites with Arabic inscriptions that people can readily read and understand.

The main point that can be drawn from this discussion is that there is a general lack of awareness and appreciation of history present in the majority of the KSA community and that the SCTA's failure to cooperate with or intentionally engage the locals is only exacerbating this problem. There are, however, other small sections of the KSA community who are already interested in ancient history and Saudi cultural heritage. They are the ones responsible for the many private museums in the KSA and are not necessarily heritage professionals or archaeologists. This element of the community stands as proof that it is possible to engage the public in these topics and bring them to a better understanding of the value and importance of history and archaeology. It can be argued, therefore, that the tensions discussed are internal to KSA and do not amount to a simple clash of global and local values, although these should always be considered when discussing sites attached to the World Heritage discourse. This case study also serves as a reminder of the responsibility that archaeologists have towards forming social partnerships with local communities, communicating and interacting with them in collaborative and responsible ways.

It is generally agreed that archaeologists must respect local traditions and provide residents of the area in which they work with the resources that enable them to understand the expectations of their participation (Pope and Mills 2007). To overcome the challenges identified by the work of SCTA in order to develop and enhance management approaches for heritage resources, it could be easily suggested that KSA adopt and refine global 'best practices' for heritage, site management and presentation. However, any claims that this

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will improve community involvement and sustainable development need to be carefully measured against a series of questions that beg to be asked throughout this discussion, such as: What are the implications of promoting an expert-led, Western-originated agenda of community involvement in KSA? And is it productive or counter-productive to promote the creation of 'a sense of ownership' in the preservation process in KSA, in consideration of the negotiations for global and local heritage rights demanded by the UNESCO status? There is real danger in imposing Western ideas of democratisation and open access to archaeological resources that may or may not be compatible with local traditions, particularly considering the spiritual values that are represented in some of the sites in KSA.

As stated throughout this chapter, the SCTA has been successful in its efforts to represent and introduce the ancient history of the KSA to the world; nevertheless, it has faced some obstacles and circumstances to make such efforts locally. The SCTA recently made Māda' in Sālih accessible to the local community as part of its responsibilities to UNESCO after a long period of exclusion. The site is now physically easy to reach, but it is intellectually isolated in the community's mind. This is one of the challenges that the SCTA must confront. At this stage, it could be proposed that KSA should increase its community outreach activities to schools, universities and other social centres and provide archaeologists, museums, history students and amateurs with the opportunity to become actively involved in the representation and interpretation of the archaeological heritage within its territories. A good starting point would be the designation of the SCTA as having clear responsibility in reference to this challenging task.

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