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alam al-matāhif: museum studies in Saudi Arabia

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abstract | abstrakt ▷

In Saudi Arabia, museum studies ('alam al-matāhif, science of museums) are a pretty much young discipline as the first museums date back to the late seventies. At the time when Western countries were discussing about the development of existing museum studies and the advent of New Museology and most Arab countries had inherited the idea of a museum from Western settlers, Saudi Arabia was conceiving itself its primitive museum studies by mapping a museums' network assigned to display Saudi Arabian history and educate citizens. Therefore pre-Islamic and Islamic artefacts meet within these museums in which collections are significant elements. They are used to display specific Saudi museum narratives and convey specific meanings related to Islam and the figure of the founder of the Kingdom, King 'Abd al-'Aziz. Today, almost eighty regional and specialised museums and five hundreds private collections and museums are used to spread Saudi museum policy towards the Kingdom.

V Saudské Arábii je muzeologie do značné míry mladá disciplína, protože první muzea byla zakládána na konci sedmdesátých let. V době, kdy západní země diskutovaly o vývoji existující muzeologie a příchodu Nové muzeologie, většina arabských zemí zdědila muzejní myšlení od západních kolonizátorů. Saudská Arábie sama vytvářela primitivní muzeologii pomocí mapování muzejní sítě používané k zobrazení historie Saudské Arábie a vzdělávání občanů. Proto pre-islámské a islámské artefakty nacházející se v muzejních kolekcích, byly považovány za významné prvky. Používaly se k zobrazení specifických příběhů saudských muzeí a předávaly konkrétní významy vztahující se k islámu a postavě zakladatele království – krále 'Abd al-'Aziz. Téměř osmdesát regionálních a specializovaných muzeí a pět set soukromých muzeí a sbírek je dnes používáno k šíření politiky saudských muzeí vůči království.

text/photo: Virginia Cassola

'alam al-matāhif: museum studies in Saudi Arabia

Introduction

In 2010, Saudi archaeological heritage suddenly found itself at museum heritage's rank thanks to *Roads of Arabia* exhibition held at the Louvre Museum, in Paris, France. Visitors were invited to discover millenary objects from Islamic Era that began in 7th Century in Saudi Arabia as far as a great number of artefacts from Pre-Islamic Era. Such an exhibition brought therefore questions up regarding both Saudi heritage preservation and its display while the country is known for its strong Islamic identity that might reject those.

In fact, as the cradle of Islam and guardian of two major holy places for more than two billions believers worldwide, Saudi Arabia holds then a special place in Muslim religion. Thus, Saudi Arabia carries Islamic tradition's weight and a heavy responsibility to protect and transmit it. But this charge is not without compromising the protection of Saudi archaeological heritage. Indeed, Muslims' Qur'an, that underpins policy, legal and social decisions, mentions *Jāhiliya* (translated by ignorance) Pre-Islamic societies as disorganized, plagued by violence and not open the light of Islam. In addition, Wahhabism movement as the major religious trend in the country ordered a complete rejection of all forms of veneration (tawasul), which led to the destruction of nearly eight percent of Saudi Islamic heritage¹.

Nevertheless these religious considerations, Saudi Arabia are faced with a dilemma. In fact, the Pre-Islamic sites discovered since the sixties show a rich archaeological past – as displayed within *Roads of Arabia* exhibition – whose management could find the country on the international heritage scene. Thus, Prince Sultan bin Salman bin 'Abd al-'Aziz al Sa'ud, grand-son of the Kingdom's founder King 'Abd al-'Aziz al Sa'ud and President of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) must tread a delicate

path. On the one hand, he must satisfy the Islamist sensibilities that reject Pre-Islamic heritage as the Qur'an and Wahhabi ulemas ask so; on the other hand, he is aware of the role of archaeological heritage in both the enhancement of Saudi national identity and the cultural, educational and economic development of the country. In a questionnaire posted on SCTA website, Prince Sultan summarized in a few lines the stakes he is assigned:

"The State – May Allah Support It – assigned the field of tourism and antiquities to an official organization which is aware of the country's principles and works for safe of safeguarding its gains within the framework of Shar'ia principles. [...] This will guarantee for us safeguarding country's gains, restricting improper practices and strengthening the realistic and deep understanding of the great values in the Islamic history²."

Saudi Arabia seems to have personally integrated its duties towards tradition to the development of museum studies since the creation of first museums between 1967 and 1971. Few years before that date, the need for museums urged as thousands of archaeological artefacts were discovered among five excavations missions held by the newly-opened Department of Antiquities (1963).

Starting from archaeological artefacts, a *'alam al-matāhif* (science of museums) closely linked to museums opening and to the objects they may contain was born in Saudi Arabia. Thus Saudi museum studies unexpectedly rose from Saudi authorities' success in surpassing their object issues relating to tradition and religion and were made concrete by a museum network implemented and constantly developed since. Saudi museum studies have not been written down except in few SCTA

¹ Since the adoption of Wahhabism religious trend in 1744 when Emir Muhammad bin Saud and Imam Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab concluded a political pact and established the first Saudi state, Wahhabi partisans have destroyed several Islamic sites (houses, cemeteries) as far as former Christian monasteries.

² Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities website. AL-'AZIZ, Prince Sultan bin Salman bin 'Abd. [online]. [cit. 2014-04-19].



work documents, reports or museum guides that present the objectives assigned to some museums but do not strictly expose theoretical ideas about the museum in Saudi Arabia. But the word 'alam al-matāhif exists and may refer to something this article aims to present.

Archaeological objects paved the way for Saudi museum studies (1963–1969)

Context

Since the creation of the First Saudi state in 1744 to the unification of the current kingdom in 1932, Saudi Arabia has never been under any Western protectorate. Contrary to several Arab countries (i.e. Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Syria, Jordan) the idea of collecting and safeguarding cultural heritage pieces was not therefore implemented by foreign settlers used to laws and safeguarding institutions (museums, universities) since the eighteenth century. Neither was the idea of using heritage to legitimate the newborn nation put into effect strictly after the unification of the Kingdom. It seems that the will to deal with tradition and identities issues was at the heart of archaeology collecting and safeguarding in Saudi Arabia.

In 1963, the first Saudi Department of Archaeology was created within the Ministry of Education and in 1966 a chair of Archaeology was created in the Department of History of Riyadh King Saud University (KSU). Both were at the initiative of Dr 'Abd al-Rahman al-Ansari who received a DPhil diploma in Semitic studies from British University of Leeds. When he returned to Saudi Arabia, Dr al-Ansari succeeded convincing the Saudi authorities to start archaeological excavations arguing that the territory would abound in archaeological treasures as some had already been explored and occasionally collected by Western travellers and scholars³. He also remarkably succeeded in convincing Islamic authorities that excavating Saudi sacred land would neither act against Islamic values nor call into question what the Qur'an said about Pre-Islamic societies. The most important, archaeological remains would never speak against early Islamic times'

greatness spread over believers' minds. Thus Saudi authorities strictly decided themselves to start archaeological excavations throughout the Kingdom and to collect artefacts and remains from both pre-Islamic and Islamic periods.

Archaeology collecting

From 1965 to 1969, five main archaeological excavations mapped the territory and led to the discovery of important sites from Pre-Islamic Arabia such as Qariyat al-Fāw Dadān (5th Century B.C. – 1st Century B.C.), ancient trade city Qu'a Bani Murr (1st Century B.C. – 4th Century A.D.), as well as major sites from early Islamic Arabia such as al-Rabadhah (9th Century A.D.) and al-Mabiyat (8th Century A.D. – 12th Century A.D.). Thousand of objects including inscriptions, pottery, stone tools, metal sculptures and currency were collected, registered, documented and assigned to "antiquities" status:

"'Antiquities' are defined as movable and immovable manmade objects, which are at least two hundred years old, but any younger object of national importance can also be regarded as an antiquity⁴."

In 1967, an archaeological museum opened within Riyadh King Saud University after the excavations of both Pre-Islamic Qariyat al-Fāw site and early Islamic Al-Rabadhah site launched by archaeologists and students from the University. KSU Archaeological Museum opened right after the collect in order to "illustrate the archaeology and history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, from the earliest times to the illustrious Muslim era" and to "familiarize archaeology students with archaeological finds relevant to their theoretical and practical studies⁵". In fact, the museum is still opened principally for students – male students above all. The museum shows Pre-Islamic and Islamic artefacts at the same level, as Islamic identity seems not to supplant the narratives. The objects are displayed in showcases according to their material (i.e. clay, ivory, bronze). Exhibition components such as labels, panels and maps convey information about the objects. At that time, the museum in Saudi Arabia was strictly

connected to university courses and served as artefacts container.

Saudi Arabia within the world development of museum studies

In the late sixties, experts from Unesco were sent over the Gulf countries to establish a picture of archaeology and museum fields in such newly states. In 1968 and 1969, the archaeologist Amanalanda Ghosh travelled to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar and there wrote reports in which he presented the situation of state's archaeology and delivered some advices regarding the Unesco-tinged required creation of museums to protect and display archaeological results. As a case in point in Saudi Arabia, he recommended that excavations carried out should be better recorded as well as that a museum should be established in Jeddah, the chief port-town visited by a large number of foreigners at that time – and not in Riyadh even if it is the capital and the seat of the Department of Antiquities and a major university⁶. He suggested that such a museum should display both archaeological and ethnological objects but his recommendations do not take into account any Saudi museum specifics that might have been existed at that time.

In fact, while Western museum theorists were preparing the advent of New Museology as a museum practice shifting from collections towards visitors, Saudi Arabia was facing enormous collections as it was facing the reality of a past not even told in historical books⁷. In addition, late sixties and early seventies were marked by the emergence of a local historiography written by citizens among tribes located through the territory⁸. Thus in first place, the museum in Saudi Arabia appears to be the right place to both protect artefacts and promote official historical narratives.

Collections-based museum narratives (1970–1985)

Context

The idea of a museum that will protect and present the excavations results as well as display official narratives was behind the creation of a museum network through the Kingdom

³ Among them are Englishman Charles M. Doughty in 1877 (the first archaeological mapping of Tayma oasis); the French Dominican fathers Antonin Jaussen and Raphael Savignac 1907–10 (Tabuk oasis, Mada'in Salih, in al-'Ula) and the Briton Hillary St John Philby between 1922 and 1951 (in particular explorations in the Empty Quarter).

⁴ GHOSH, Amanalanda. *Saudi Arabia. Protection of Cultural Property and Development of a Museum*. Paris: Unesco, 1969, p.8.

⁵ AL-SAID, Said. *Museum of Archaeology of College of Tourism and Archaeology*. Riyadh: Ministry of Higher Education King Saud University College of Tourism and Archaeology Department of Archaeology, 2005, p.6.

⁶ GHOSH, Amanalanda. *Ibid*, p.20.

⁷ DETERMANN, Mathias. *Historiography in Saudi Arabia. Globalization and the State in the Middle East*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013.

⁸ *Idem*.

in late sixties. In fact, Saudi Arabia decided not to conceive only one museum in Riyadh or Jeddah, but thirteen museums near regional archaeological sites. In this way, Saudi Arabia positioned itself against the museum politics in the Gulf countries where a unique museum has been conceived directly after the proclamation of their independence (e.g. Fujairah Museum in 1970, Dubai Museum and Al-'Ain Museum in 1971, Omani Museum in 1974, Qatar National Museum in 1978)⁹. In 1974, the Department of Antiquities called on UK-based Michael Rice & Co to carry out the museological planning of these first ten Saudi regional museums. Hence international experts had to dress up the first Saudi museums that would be opened to all citizens and not only to the students. The experts had to bring together museum best practices – unknown by the Saudi – and authorities' desired narratives to successfully perform.

Hence Saudi ideas about museums are known thanks to Michael Rice & Co booklet edited during the eighties, as there were no articles neither published nor even written about Saudi first museums. Once again, Saudi museum narratives could be grasped only by study exhibitions or read related archives and documentation.

Among the tenth museums created at the turn of the seventies, both Riyadh Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography and Taima archaeological site museum are worth noticing in order to understand the development of Saudi museum studies.

Riyadh Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography (1977)

After KSU archaeological museum, Riyadh Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography was the first institution of its type to be set up in Saudi Arabia thanks to King Khalid (r. 1975–1982) who decided to pursue later King Faisal's will (r.1964–1975) "to encourage the scientific examination of the country's past and its communication to the citizens"¹⁰. Then Riyadh equipped itself with a museum displaying archaeological artefacts and traditional objects from the surroundings without a strict national frame such as Gulf national museums mentioned above. Riyadh Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography was not conceived as a national museum but as the prelude to an ambitious project

to create a museum network all over the country. At that time Saudi Ministry of Education wanted the museum to be an educational place in displaying the richness of Saudi archaeological and historical heritage as a continuous narrative¹¹.

Riyadh Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography therefore "[followed] a sequence determined by chronology and the treatment [was] strongly thematic and interpretative" in which objects are used as illustrations to the story of Saudi pre-Islamic history until the Revelation of Islam¹². Among these objects, some stand out as surpassing works of art segregated from the flow of the story. Michael Rice & Co stated finally that the use of texts – in both Arabic and English – was particularly extensive to address the Arab culture that is known to be verbal. Riyadh Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography do not exist anymore and was replaced by a National Museum in 1999.

Taima Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography (1981)

Right after the construction of Riyadh Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, six archaeological site museums opened across the Kingdom in Hofuf, Al-Jawf, Al-'Ula, Taima, Jizan and Najran cities. These museums were set up to both display archaeological remains and serve archaeological zones as protection and research agencies¹³. They were followed by seven other site museums with which they map today a network of local and regional museums throughout the Kingdom.

The six museums are all identically laid out with exhibition areas, laboratory facilities, photographic facilities and accommodation for visiting scholars. They display archaeological remains as a sequence determined by chronology. As an example, Taima site museum tells the story of the site from 1000 BC to the early Islamic Era where Arab caliphate was set up in Northern Arabia¹⁴. More surprising is the last room that display narratives and documents regarding King 'Abd al-'Aziz and his role in unifying the Kingdom. What are such narratives displayed in an archaeological site that did not play any particularly role during the unification of the Kingdom in 1932? This may be explained by the role played by the increasing local historiography of Saudi

Arabia during the seventies. At that time, local historians from all regions aimed at describe the history of their own places and intellectually fight for their recognition in the history of Saudi Arabia. Therefore the site museums appear to have played a significant role in controlling such individual feelings towards Saudi national narratives officially displayed and assumed in Riyadh National Museum in 1999 where objects increased their power of signification.

Regarding the objectives appointed, early Saudi museum studies seems to promote collections as major key components of Saudi museum narratives. The archaeological collections tended to be displayed in order to familiarize citizens with *Arabia's* past that definitely not started with the Revelation to Muhammad in the 7th Century. Thus Saudi museum appears to be a *musée-récit* as defined by Martin R. Schärer where "objects, texts, graphs and illustrations [are] skilfully gauged and discreetly displayed [...]. We grant a dominating place to the object that we consider as central element of this museum. Such conception is based on the idea that the object can contribute to enlighten the past when it is placed in a specific context"¹⁵. At that time nor later, Saudi authorities are not asking how the national visitors may take over such new historical narratives they are not used to learn at school. Visitors are asked to take for granted based-objects museum narratives as another educational tool on Saudi Arabia's history.

Collections in the service of the nation

Context

Since the unification of the Kingdom, Saudi Arabia had to face several political and economical issues that contributed in shaping the place of Saudi Arabia on both regional and international stages. In 1973, oil crises permitted the Al Saud to access higher oil incomes and thus to place itself at first worldwide oil exporter. In 1990–1991, the Persian Gulf War may have been a risk to the Kingdom and US troops were sent to prevent an Iraqi invasion of the territory. Saudi Arabia saw then the raise of moderate activists as important protests against this US participation and the raise of Islamist throughout the region¹⁶. Thus Saudi authorities had

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.26.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.32.

¹⁴ MASRY, Abdullah Hassan. *Archaeology and the Establishment of Museums in Saudi Arabia*, in Kaplan F., *Museums and the making of ourselves: the role of objects in national identity*, Londres. New York: Leicester University Press, 1994.

¹⁵ SCHÄRER Martin R. *La relation homme-objet exposée: théorie et pratique d'une expérience muséologique*. *Publics et Musées*. N°15, 1999, p.37.

¹⁶ ZUHUR, Sherifa. *Saudi Arabia: Islamic Threat, Political reform, and the Global War on Terror*. Darby: Diane Publishing Co, 2005, p.24.

⁹ ERSKIN-LOFTUS, Pamela. *A Brief Look at the History of Museums in the Region and Wider Middle East*, *2A Art & Architecture*, special edition 'Museums in the Middle East', issue 13, winter/spring 2010, p.20.

¹⁰ MICHAEL RICE & CO. *Museum Design and Planning Services*. London: The Company, 1980, p.25.



Fort Masmak Museum – The Pioneers

to work hard to regain both its regional position and its legitimacy among Saudi citizens.

In January 1999, Saudi authorities took advantage of national celebrations to enhance the national identity among the citizens and to regain their trust and national museum was born.

In January 1902 (1319 H), King 'Abd al-'Aziz captured Riyadh Fort Masmak¹⁷. This event led to the unification of the Kingdom under the Saudi banner in 1932. Saudi Arabia decided to hold celebrations of the *hijri* centenary of this major event in Saudi national history. This was the first time that national celebrations were organised because Saudi ulemas were constantly rejecting them as pagan festivities. Before that date, in 1995, a museum opened in the Fort Masmak itself

¹⁷ The fort was built in 1865 under the reign of Mohammad ibn 'Abdullah ibn Rasheed, the ruler of Northern Ha'il province at that time. King 'Abd al-'Aziz succeeded in capturing the fort from ibn Rasheed garrison and thus restored Al Saud control over Riyadh. This event took a specific part in the mythical status of King 'Abd al-'Aziz and its actions.

where the story of its capture by King 'Abd al-'Aziz and his companions was told. But this museum was not conceived as a national museum despite its location and the narratives displayed. The museum remains today but may be a bit disappointing as the spirit of the place¹⁸ is completely detracted in favour of factual narratives and aseptic display walls and staircases.

The 1999 national celebrations went well-timed as festivities that might gather Saudi citizens and convince them to confirm their citizenship and pride in the nation during political hard times. On the other hand, the celebrations had to show Saudi authorities' understanding of its citizens' remarks and issues. Thus decision to conceive

¹⁸ *Quebec Declaration of the preservation of the spirit of the place* (2008) defined the spirit of place "as the tangible (buildings, sites, landscapes, routes objects) and the intangible elements (memories, narratives, written documents, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colors, odors, etc.), that is to say the physical and the spiritual elements that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to a place." Declaration adopted in 2008 as part as ICOMOS 16th General Assembly, Quebec, Canada, 29 Sept – 4 Oct 2008.

a national museum in Riyadh as part of the celebrations and as a place where authorities and citizens might meet came out in 1996 when Canada-based Lord Cultural Resources agency has been asked to conceive the museum near the former King 'Abd al-'Aziz Murabba Palace.

Riyadh National Museum and its role in the affirmation of Saudi museum studies

In January 1999, Saudi Arabia was finally¹⁹ equipped with a National Museum. As the museum opened during particular festivities, one may expect to see narratives on King 'Abd al-'Aziz, his actions and achievements as in Fort Masmak museum. In other words, one may expect a display relating Saudi Arabian history from a *Saud* point of view related to the Saud royal family. In fact, Riyadh

¹⁹ In 1969, Amanalanda Ghosh already recommended "that a central museum, which may as well be called the National Museum, with two sections – archaeological and ethnological – to be established." Op.cit. p.20.



Fort Masmak Museum – Yard

National museum narratives are way subtler as they focus on one key component of Saudi national identity: Islam and the role of Allah in the existence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia²⁰. Riyadh National Museum aims thus to present the story of Islam “as understood by Muslims²¹” as part of the history of Saudi Arabia. In fact, the nearly 30 000 m² are divided into two wings: one telling the story of Arabia before the advent of Islam in the seventh century AD, and the other telling the story of Islamic Arabia until the death of King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz in 1953. The two wings are linked by a corridor shaped with a colourful frieze

representing moments from the Prophet’s journey from Mecca to Medina – the Hegira –, symbolizing this event as a bridge between dark pre-Islamic times to lighter Islamic ones. In addition, the exhibition ends with a hall presenting the pilgrimage and the Two Holy Mosques as a reminder for the ready-to-leave visitors that Saudi Arabia is the guardian of these two Holy Muslim sites according to Allah’ will.

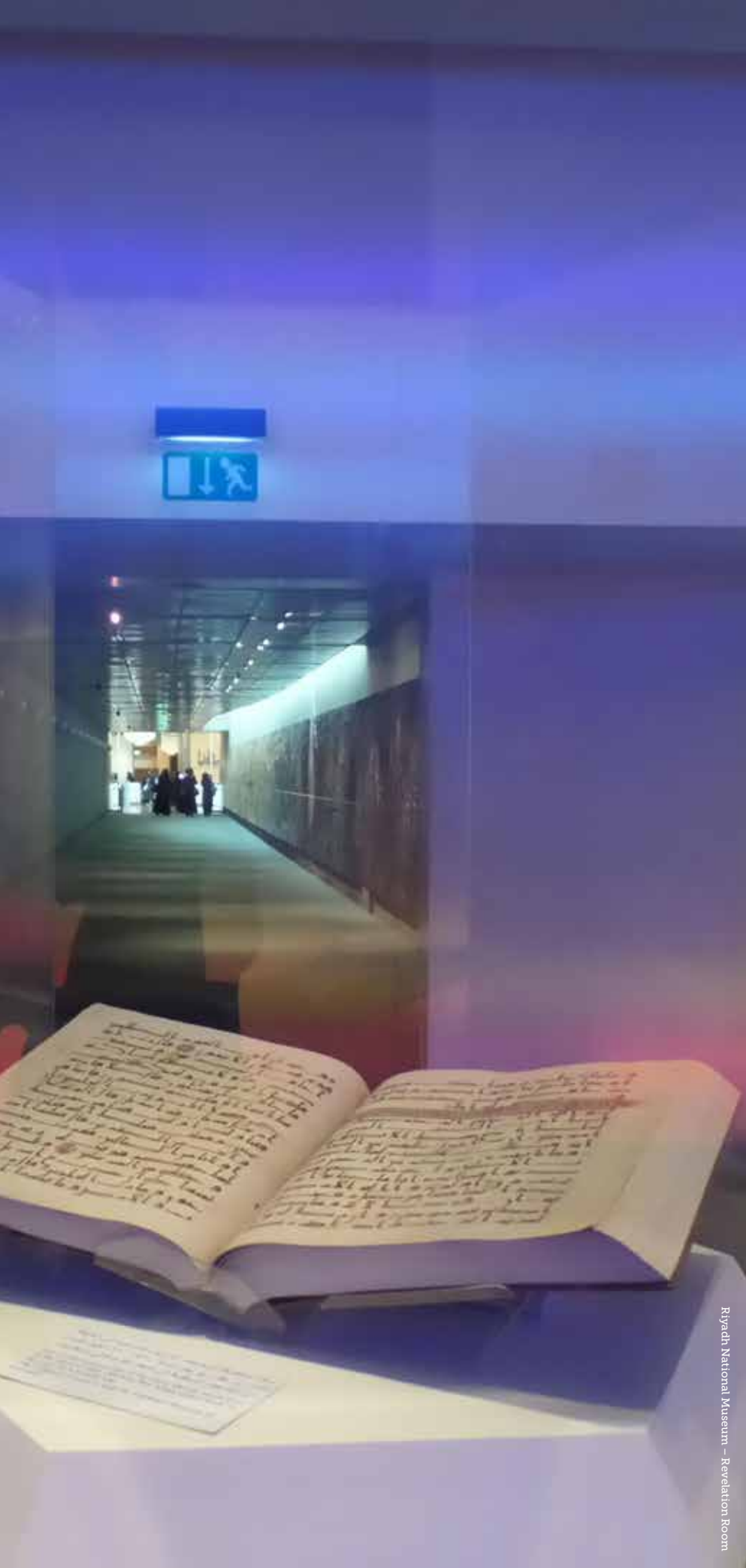
The objects’ agency within the museum and the symbolic use of some of them as linked to three major events in Saudi Arabian history (Revelation of Islam to Muhammad in 610, the Wahhabi alliance in 1744 and the Unification of the Kingdom in 1932) show the way Saudi practiced museum studies at that time.

Both the Revelation and the Wahhabi alliance are displayed with *objects-symboles* whom the visitors, even the non-Saudi ones, may easily understand signification and power. Georges Henri-Rivière defined the *object-symbole* as object that “bears within itself the tension upon which the display is based [...]”. It symbolically sums up the whole message that the exhibition wants to convey²².” Hence a Qur’an – a copy of one from the fourteenth century held by Istanbul Topkapi Museum – stands in the unique showcase in the middle of a room. As the Wahhabi alliance is described as “the sacred alliance of the sabre

²⁰ Precious information given to the author by Barry Lord, co-founder and co-President of Lord Cultural Resources (16th April 2014).

²¹ LORD CULTURAL RESOURCES. *Ibid.*

²² RIVIÈRE, Georges Henri. *La muséologie selon Georges Henri Rivière: Cours de muséologie, textes et témoignages*. Paris: Dunod, 1989, p.279.



Riyadh National Museum – Revelation Room

and the Qur'an²³, a showcase displays copies of a Qur'an and a sword with no superficial explanations. A shrewd eye may notice that the showcase is facing another one displaying objects related to magic that people used to hold before the return of the true Islam in the Arabian Peninsula with such a sacred alliance. Regarding the event of the Unification of the Kingdom from 1902 to 1932, the display uses more than one or two objects to explain the importance of the event as an entire gallery focuses on King 'Abd al-'Aziz' achievement. Indeed, architectural reconstitutions and regional ethnographical objects are facing swords, guns and official documents. Thus the visitors understand that the latter helped to capture the former.

The conception of Riyadh National Museum represents a turning point in Saudi museum studies. Thus expected visitors and their place in the museum are more strictly defined: Saudi citizens, schoolchildren (boys and girls on separate days) and foreign official visitors²⁴ would be expected attendees. Saudi government was thus aware that 'museums have educational and cultural missions and [that] they play a role in developing the sense of loyalty to the country²⁵'. Thus citizens would have to use a national museum "to confirm pride in Arab heritage and reverence for Islam²⁶" where objects (originals and copies) acquired more power to convey meaning and narratives.

The decisive role of museum collections in national identity

Today, Saudi museum studies are still placing the collections at the heart of the narratives and objects are acquiring more and more national signification with time. Once again, such position is determined by current political events that may damage internal security of the Kingdom. The more the legitimacy of Saudi nation is weakened, the more the heritage is called to the rescue.

In January 2011, Tunisia entered the so-called Arab Spring", bringing with her Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria. In February, shi'a demonstrations appeared in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia gathering thousands

²³ RIGOULET-ROZE, David. *Géopolitique de l'Arabie saoudite*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2005, p.26.

²⁴ <http://www.nationalmuseum.org.sa>. [online]. [cit. 2014-02-28].

²⁵ AL-KAHTANI, Delayl Bint Mutlaq. *Museum education in the national museum: Origin, targets and achievements*. Riyadh: Sausi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, 2009, p. 6.

²⁶ LORD CULTURAL RESOURCES. *The National Museum of Saudi Arabia & Darat Al Malik 'Abd Al 'Aziz historic Murabba' palace complex in Riyadh*. Work document, 1999.





Riyadh National Museum – Holy Mecca Room

of participants²⁷. The demonstrators who expected reforms and a fairer division of the power have been arrested and all demonstrations have been forbidden. In December 2011, King 'Abdullah and SCTA launched a *National Campaign to Enhance the Cultural Dimension of the Kingdom* in order to “seek to highlight the cultural dimension of the Kingdom which integrates well-known three dimensions; the Islamic dimension, political dimension and economic dimension”. Thus Saudi citizens have to realize “how it is important [to] being proud of [the heritage]

components as well as protecting it from stealing, misusing, destroying or removal”. Thus King 'Abdullah aimed at “guide [citizen] to become the first guard of the national antiquities because antiquities’ misuse or damage means a clear aggression against his cultural acquisitions and national accomplishments as well as a threat to his national identity²⁸”.

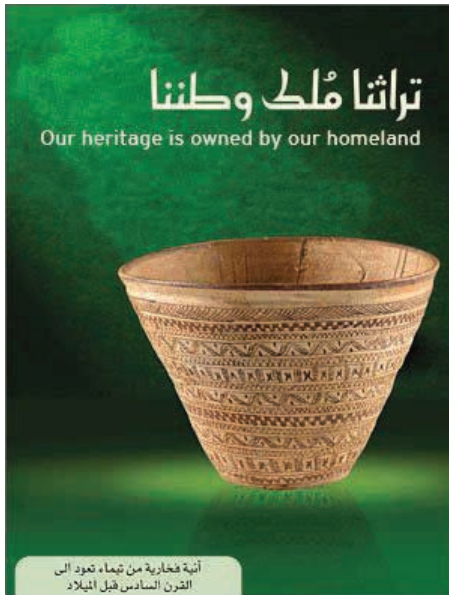
One of the objectives of the campaign was to implant and develop museum culture via related messages²⁹:

- Museum is a mean to link citizen to the history and heritage of his country,
- Museum is a civilized and educational communication mean,
- Museum is a mean to communicate with history and to outlook the future,
- Investment in museums serve local community,
- And museums are cultural landmarks and witness to the heritage of Saudi’s different regions.

²⁷ LACROIX, Stéphane. “L’Arabie saoudite au défi du Printemps arabe”. Sciences Po, CERI, September 2011.

²⁸ Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities website. AL-‘AZIZ, King ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abd. [online]. [cit. 2014-04-19].

²⁹ *Ibid.*



SCTA poster for the National Campaign to Enhance the cultural dimension of the Kingdom

It seems that the museum will be more often surrounded to overcome national identities issues.

Conclusion

This overview of Saudi museum studies development from museums opening shows that they are specific to Saudi Arabia because of Saudi own position towards heritage.

First, museum studies are elaborated by the royal government as guardian of Islamic tradition whom principles have to be watched over. Consequently, this Islamic tradition is at the heart of Saudi museum studies as it appears in all discourses, national campaigns and permanent exhibitions. Hence the museum appears as a key component of the transmission of Saudi Islamic identity and as a place for pride and reverence. Second, Saudi museum studies are concretely developed within museums, universities and national programs. Hence museums are used as laboratories where objects display are more useful than theoretical words.

Conversely, international museum studies taught within universities shows the increasing importance attached to the education of young Saudi citizens to observe protect and transmit monuments and objects from their national heritage. In King Saud University Archaeology heritage management started to be taught right after the first archaeological discoveries in the Kingdom in 1965 whereas

museum studies classes started in 2005 when a College of Tourism was established “to meet the rapidly-growing demand of the country for efficient highly-qualified graduates in tourism, hotel management, archaeology, heritage management and tourism management³⁰.” In 2007, a Tourism Institute was similarly established at Jeddah King Abd 'Al-Aziz University. As part of heritage and tourism management classes, museum studies are taught as another means to teach archaeology as they are used as learning through sense, vision and observation. In other words “museums create new methods and innovation to understand the gradual scientific achievements in various parts of the world³¹.” Museum references given during these courses have to be more specifically studied but a MA thesis defended in 2010 may reveal the essential place held by French museologists such as André Desvallées (*Architecture et aménagement des musées*. Paris, 1993), André Gob and Noémie Drouguet (*La muséologie*. Paris, 2003) and François Mairesse (*Le musée, temple spectaculaire*. Lyon, 2002)³². In addition, it appears that the existence of museums in almost every university departments (archaeology, tourism, medicine, geology, agriculture, etc.) tends to conceive it as an important way of learning.

In conclusion, Saudi museums studies are developed since the sixties to increase national consideration of Saudi archaeological and historical heritage and to help Saudi to show their reverence to Islam. Since 2010 and the success of *Roads of Arabia* exhibition that led the government to renew the Kingdom's old archaeological museums and to implement new specialized ones³³, Saudi museum studies are used to promote Saudi as part as world heritage where international best practices are well used to combine modernity and tradition. ■

Keywords:

Saudi Arabia – Heritage – Recognition – Identity – Museum

Klíčová slova:

Saúdská Arábie – dědictví – rozpoznání – identita – muzeum

Virginia Cassola (*1987)

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³⁰ Riyadh King Saud University College of Tourism and Antiquities [online]. [cit. 2014-04-19].

³¹ Jeddah King Abd al-'Aziz University Museum [online]. [cit. 2014-04-19].

³² ISMAIL, Randa. *Al-mathaf. Tadurat, mufradat, taqniat (Museum. Development, vocabulary, techniques)*. Riyadh: Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, 2010.

³³ Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities projects to conceive a Qur'an Museum, a Currency Museum and a Palm tree Museum.