PRESERVING THE PAST FOR NOW AND THE FUTURE

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Jordan Museum
Amman
50 YEARS OF WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION

JORDAN

WADI RUM by night | 2020
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Florence University Medieval Petra Archive
Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration.

Through the World Heritage Convention, which turned 50 on 16 November 2022, UNESCO created an international movement for protecting heritage by merging two international movements: the preservation of cultural properties and the conservation of nature. The Convention recognizes the way in which people interact with nature, nations’ shared responsibility in conserving outstanding cultural sites, and the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two.

Jordan, in particular, has a rich cultural heritage, comprising of more than 12,000 archaeological sites, 6 sites inscribed on the World Heritage List and 14 properties on the Tentative List. This wealth of cultural heritage assets is a significant contributor to its economic and development goals through tourism, services, handicrafts and the cultural industries, as well as being components of national values, identity and social cohesion. Thus, this rich heritage requires global attention and adequate capacities to continue its promotion of cultural conservation.
Situated between the Red Sea and the Dead Sea since prehistoric times, the capital city of the Nabateans became a major trading ground for the incense of Arabia, the silks of China and the spices of India, acting as a crossroad between Arabia, Egypt and Syria-Phoenicia during Hellenistic and Roman times. Petra is half-built, half-carved into the rock, surrounded by mountains with passages and canyons. An effective water management system allowed settlement of a vast, dry area during the Nabataean, Roman and Byzantine periods. It is one of the world’s richest and largest archaeological sites set in a dominating red sandstone landscape.

The Outstanding Value of Petra resides in the vast extent of elaborate tomb and temple architecture; religious high places; channels, tunnels and diversion dams that, combined with an extensive network of reservoirs, controlled and conserved seasonal rains; and the extensive archaeological remains, including copper mines, temples, churches and other public buildings. The fusion of Hellenistic architectural features with traditional Nabataean rock-cut temples and tombs represents a unique artistic achievement and an outstanding architectural ensemble of the first centuries BCE to CE. The archaeological remains and architectural monuments from prehistoric times to the medieval periods bear testimony to the now lost civilisations that inhabited the site.
Well-regarded as one of the New 7 Wonders of the World, Petra – a city half-built, half-carved into rock – is one of the world's richest and largest archaeological sites. Its archaeological remains and architectural monuments bear testimony to the now lost civilisations that once inhabited the site.

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PETRA, THE TREASURY
©Jordan Tourism Board
PETRA, THE TREASURY | 2017
©Linda Al Khoury/Darat Al Tasweer

PETRA, THE THEATER | 2017
©Linda Al Khoury/Darat Al Tasweer
Petra, Al Siq | 2010
Lebanon Fritillary (Fritillaria arabica Gandoger)
©Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos

Petra | 2014
Edom Iris (Iris edomensis)
©Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos
Built in the early 8th century beside the Wadi Butum, a seasonal stream, this desert establishment was both a fortress with an army of guards and the residency of the Umayyad caliphate. The well-preserved palace comprises of a reception hall and hammam (a bath complex with a changing room, warm and hot rooms), all decorated with figurative murals that reflect the secular art of the time.

The extensive paintings on the walls of the bath building and reception hall are unique for Islamic architecture of the Umayyad period. They depict animals and birds; Byzantine style portraits and hunting scenes; exhibit influences from classical pagan themes; and are accompanied by inscriptions in Greek and Arabic. The representation of the zodiac on the domed ceiling of the caldarium (hot room) is one of the earliest known surviving portrayals of a map of the heavens on a dome.

The desert establishment, of which this palace is part, was one of several created in the semi-arid area east of Amman, for the purpose of interacting with the tribal region of the Wadi Butum. As such, Quseir Amra is an outstanding example of a specific type of architectural ensemble which relates to the administrative strategy of the first Islamic caliphate.

QUSAIR AMRA (1985)

كان قصر الصحراء هذا، المُدْبِر في بداية القرن الثاني ميلاديًا، بحثًا عن السبيل السياسي المسمى بوادي اليمم، والذي تُنَسَّم المحافظة عليه بشكل خاص، فَقِهَة ثَوْأَر الحُراَسٍ وَمَكَانٍ قَبْلَة اللَحَفَاء، أَمْوَيَّة. لِلَّذِينَ هَوَّلَ زِينَة فَنَّ قَٰصِدٍ فِنَّ الْإِسْلَامِ يَسْتَعاَمْنٍ مَعَ غَرَقَة لَتَفَرَّقٍ، وَيَغْرَقَهُ مَدْفَنٌ أُخْرِي سَاحِنُهُ مَلَِّي بِالْرَسُومَ التَّصوِّرِيَّة مُعَلَّوَة عَلَى الْجَدرَانِ الَّذِي تَعَسَّكُ أَسْلُوبَ الْفُنُونِ الْعَالِمِيَّة النَّاسِدَ آنَذَا.

تَبَيَّنَ الرِّسُومُ العَدُيدَة عَلَى جِرِّدُ الْحَجَّامِ وَفَنَاَة الْإِسْلَامِيَّة. وَالْإِسْتَعاَمُ، عَلَى الْجَدرَانِ الْبَيْزِيْنِيُّ وَمَشَاهِدٍ صَوْدِلٍ، وَمَشَاهِد مُنْتَجَة مِنْ الْفُنُونِ الْكَلاسيكِيَّة، وَتَصَوَّرَ عَلَى مَكَانِ اللَّهَبَة الْبَيْزِيَّة. وَكَأْنَ هَا تَتْجَزَّأ الْبُروِج عَلَى سُفْق قَبْة الْكَالَادَارِيُّ (الفِنْوَة الْعَالِمِيَّة)، وَحَدِيداً مِنْ مَلَِّي مَعَارِفِ الْتَحْوَيْلِ المَفْرَعِيَّة دَاخِلَ الْجَرِّدَانِ.

كان هذا القصر جزءًا من عدة مبانٍ صحراوية في المنطقة شبه القاحلة شرق عمان، والتي تبنى بقصد التفاعل مع قبائل وادي اليمم، فلا يُحكم قصر عمرة نُحَّةً مُعمَّارِيَّةً فحسب، بل هو مثال بارز على الاستراتيجية الإدارية لأول خلافة إسلامية.
Built in the early 8th century, Qusair Amra was both a fortress and residency of the first Islamic caliphate. The palace's interiors are decorated with well-preserved paintings and murals that are unique for Islamic architecture of the Umayyad period.
a temminck’s (Horned) lark perching over a rock.
©Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos

Wild pistachio (Pistacia atlantica) during sunset.
©Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos

A Temminck’s (Horned) Lark
©Department of Antiquities of Jordan

©Jordan Tourism Board
Located south-east of Madaba on the edge of the semi-arid plain, this archaeological site, which started as a Roman military camp and grew to become a town from the 5th century, is largely unexcavated. It comprises remains from the Roman, Byzantine and Early Muslim periods (end of 3rd to 9th centuries CE), including a fortified Roman military camp and 16 churches, some with well-preserved mosaic floors. Particularly noteworthy is the mosaic floor of the Church of St. Stephen, with its representation of towns in the region. A tall square tower and associated buildings are probably the only remains of the Stylite monks (ascetic monks who had a practice of spending time in isolation atop a column or tower). Um er-Rasas is surrounded by remains of ancient agricultural cultivation, including terracing, water channels and cisterns.

The Outstanding Value of the site resides in the extensive settlement of the Byzantine and Umayyad period. These remains occupy the interior of the former Roman fort and extend outside its walls to the north, including the churches with mosaic floors that are of great artistic value. Further to the north, in a separate group of ruins, is the uniquely complete tower accommodation of the Stylites. The archaeology and inscriptions show evidence that monastic Christianity was tolerated and continued during the Islamic period of the 7th and 8th centuries, contributing to the spread of monotheistic beliefs in the region.

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UM ER-RASAS, CHURCH OF ST. PAUL | 2021
Church Interior.
©Mauro Foli, Emma Cimatti

UM ER-RASAS | 2021
Detail of the Castrum.
©Mauro Foli, Emma Cimatti
Photogrammetric reconstruction by photographic images and laser scanner of the Church of St. Stephen (about 2000 photos at a height of about 170 cm), in the framework of a project of the Italian National Research Council funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. ©Gabrielli, Galatà/CNR
UM ER-RASAS, CHURCH OF ST. STEPHEN | 2012
A mosaic of Kastron Mefa’a, Um Er-Rasas in Arabic.
©Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos

MADABA

Mosaics of cities.
©Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos

GAZA

PHILADELPHIA
(Known today as Amman)

JERUSALEM

NABLUS

SEBASTIA

Mosaics of cities.
©Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos

CAESAREA ON THE SEA

DIOSPOLIS
(Known today as Lod)

ELEUTHEROPOLIS
(Known today as Beit Guvrin)

ASKALON

PHILADELPHIA

JERUSALEM

NABLUS

SEBASTIA

Mosaics of cities.
©Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos
UM ER-RASAS, CHURCH OF THE LIONS. | 2012

A colourful portion of the mosaic of one of the lions from the central apse of the Church of the Lions.
©Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos
The 74,200-hectare Wadi Rum Protected Area (WRPA) is located in the southern part of Jordan, east of the Rift Valley and south of the central Jordanian plateau. It is one of only 3 mixed World Heritage sites (properties that contain elements of both natural and cultural significance) in the Arab World and holds the title exclusively for Jordan. WRPA’s natural values include desert landforms developed within continental sandstones. These landforms have been developed under the influence of various controlling factors, such as the chemical composition of the rocks, tectonic activities and surface processes, representing a million years of ongoing landscape evolution.

Widespread petroglyphs, inscriptions and archaeological remains testify to 12,000 years of human occupation and interaction with the natural environment, illustrating the evolution of pastoral, agricultural and urban human activity in the Arabian Peninsula and the environmental history of the region.
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WADI RUM | 2010
©Department of Antiquities Archives of Jordan

Star trails.
©Linda Al Khoury/Darat Al Taaweer
WADI RUM, ANFASHEH | 2014
Thamudic inscriptions depicting animals and people.
©Alessandra Blasi

WADI RUM | 2011
Star trails.
©Linda Al Khoury/Darat Al Tasweer
WADI RUM | 2022
The Arabian Oryx is being reintroduced to Wadi Rum after eight decades of its extinction from the wild in the area. ©Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos

WADI RUM | 2022
©Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos

WADI RUM | 2011
©Linda Al Khoury/Darat Al Tasweer

WADI RUM | 2015
A parasitic plant, the Violet Broomrape flower, in the sand (cistanche violacea). ©Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos
The Baptism Site “Bethany Beyond the Jordan” (Al-Maghtas) situates itself in the Jordan Valley, north of the Dead Sea. The site contains two distinct archaeological areas, Tell el-Kharrar, also known as Jabal Mar Elias, and the area of the Churches of St. John the Baptist. "Bethany Beyond the Jordan" is of immense religious significance to most of the Christian faith who have accepted this site as the location where Jesus of Nazareth was baptised by John the Baptist. This reference encouraged generations of monks, hermits, pilgrims and priests to reside in and visit the site, and to leave behind testimonies of their devotion and religious activities, dating to between the 4th and 15th century CE. At present, the site has regained a popular status as a pilgrimage destination for Christians, who continue to engage in baptism rituals on site.

Physical remains associated with the commemoration of the historic baptism event include a water collection system and pools, as well as later-built churches, chapels, hermit caves, a monastery, a baptismal pool and a pilgrim station. These archaeological structures testify to the early beginnings of the site’s religious significance, which initiated the construction of churches and chapels, habitation of hermit caves and pilgrimage activities. Beyond its key significance, the site is also associated with the life and ascension of Elijah (also called Elias) and Elisha, which is of common relevance to the monotheistic religions of the region.

المغطس (2011)
In the Jordan Valley, north of the Dead Sea, lies the Baptism Site “Bethany Beyond the Jordan” (Al-Maghtas). The site is of immense religious significance to most of the Christian faith who have accepted this site as the location where Jesus of Nazareth was baptized by John the Baptist.
BAPTISM SITE
First Church of St. John the Baptist.
©Jordan Tourism Board

BAPTISM SITE
©Baptism Site Commission
BAPTISM SITE | 2022
First Church of St. John the Baptist.
© Jordan Tourism Board

BAPTISM SITE
© Baptism Site Commission

BAPTISM SITE
© Baptism Site Commission
A bumble bee feeding on an Apple of Sodom flower (Calotropis procera).
© Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos

The stone-curlew (Burhinus oedicnemus) is one of the prominent relatively large birds found around the site.
© Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos

Arabian green bee-eater (Merops cyanophrys).
© Mohammad Asfour/Jordan Photos
AS-SALT: THE PLACE OF TOLERANCE AND URBAN HOSPITALITY (2021)

The city of As-Salt became the capital of Transjordan and a thriving trade centre during the late Ottoman period, experiencing a ‘Golden Age’ between the 1860s and the 1920s. The effects of the Ottoman ‘Tanzimat’ reforms brought enhanced security, administrative structures and trade. As-Salt became central to trade networks and grew in wealth through the arrival and settlement of merchants from Nablus, Syria and Lebanon, who made their fortunes on trade, banking and farming. This prosperity attracted skilled craftsmen, and As-Salt was transformed from a modest rural settlement into a thriving town with a distinctive townscape and architecture. The city features large public buildings and private residences characterized by a central hallway and three bays constructed of yellow limestone. These demonstrate a mix of modern architectural influences and skilful craftsmanship. Adapted to the steep, folded terrain, the urban environment is characterized by a network of interlinked stairways, alleyways, public squares and spaces, and streets. The result is a dense connection of the city's residential neighbourhoods. These tangible characteristics have shaped the urban cultures of the city, including distinctive cultural traditions of tolerance between people of different cultural groups and religions. These traditions of hospitality are understood to reflect a fusion of local cultures, one of which was the incoming bourgeoisie traders during the ‘Golden Age’ of As-Salt’s development.

The cultures of tolerance, hospitality and social welfare practiced by the Bedouin peoples of the region were common throughout the area and have contributed to the construction of a modern Trans-Jordanian identity.

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Communities

It is important to consider the local communities not as passive partners but as co-managers of World Heritage sites. This can be done by establishing participatory management mechanisms that lead to consulting local communities before taking any decisions. This will guarantee a sustainable conservation of World Heritage and its transmission to future generations through the cooperation of all stakeholders.

UNESCO understands that any successful effort at real action for change will require global and society-wide transformation implemented at all levels and among all communities. This wide buy-in can only be achieved when all communities are understood and acknowledged. Culture-based strategies incorporate unique and diverse worldviews, belief systems, related rites and rituals, sacred natural sites, mythologies, spirituality, languages and values. Culture provides both the capacity for dialogue and exchange, which fosters interconnectedness and emphasizes adaptive learning, including the role of creativity and inspiration in adaptation and innovation.

Adopting a general policy that highlights the role of cultural heritage within the community is highly encouraged. Providing vulnerable people with various livelihoods in cultural conservation and tourism development can provide significant revenue streams to local populations while also improving public awareness of the value of heritage sites.
World Heritage properties will be affected by the impacts of climate change at present and in the future. Their continued preservation requires understanding these impacts to their Outstanding Universal Value and responding to them effectively.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites has concluded that "climate change has become one of the most significant and fastest growing threats to people and their cultural heritage worldwide". Increased temperatures and extreme weather phenomena will inflict significant damage to archaeological sites and built heritage. In equal measure, climate change causes change and loss to intangible cultural heritage. The decline and disappearance of vegetation, plant and animal species changes important cultural practices and proliferates food insecurity.

World Heritage properties harbour options for society to mitigate and adapt to climate change through the ecosystem, and cultural heritage can convey traditional knowledge that builds resilience for change to come and leads us to a more sustainable future. Through the global network of World Heritage, UNESCO helps raise awareness around the impacts of climate change on human societies and cultural diversity, biodiversity and ecosystem services, and the world’s natural and cultural heritage, all while respecting cultural and local connections.
The exhibition “PRESERVING THE PAST FOR NOW AND THE FUTURE” was co-organized by UNESCO Jordan, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Department of Antiquities, Jordan Tourism Board, Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, Jordan Museum, Jordan Photos and Darat Al Tasweer.