

The Relationship between Archaeological Databases and Cultural Tourism in Oman

Mohammed Ali K. Al-Belushi

Abstract—Archaeological tourism in Oman is still in its early stages and the current dialogue between the two sectors of heritage management and tourism in the field of archaeological tourism is still insufficient. The current plans of this type of tourism are not designed base on a comprehensive source of information about the nature and characteristics of the archaeological sites and monuments. The role of the modern systematic archaeological databases in designing and planning the Omani heritage tourism is still absent. This study is an overview of the potential values of the archaeological databases in the Omani archaeological tourism. It aims to highlight the potential role of these databases in the processes of selecting and managing the archaeological sites and monuments that are planned to be exploited as touristic attractions. The study concludes that the archaeological databases have not yet been utilized by the organizations concerned with archaeological tourism. Finally, it is hoped that this study will draw the attention of the Omani decision makers to the potential values and significance of the archaeological databases in designing cultural tourism plans.

Keywords—Archaeological databases, archaeological heritage management, archaeological tourism, cultural tourism, Oman.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE relationship between archaeology and tourism has always been of a controversial nature. One of the principal obligations of archaeological managers is the preservation of sites and monuments from the various threats that could impend them. Today, tourism is one of the most observable threats that affect the different types of archaeological sites. However, it has recently appeared that considerable attempts and efforts have been made to strike a balance between archaeology and tourism. Fruitful projects of cooperation and partnership between the two sectors have been initiated all over the world. In Oman, tourism has become one of the most important sectors that the government is depending on to diversify the various sources of the national income. In the recent years, the Sultanate has been able to accomplish many achievements in the field of archaeology tourism. However, these efforts have missed the opportunity to use the archaeological databases in planning and developing archaeology tourism [1], [2]. Today, these databases are considered among the most reliable tools in the archaeological resource management [3].

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II. PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

A glance at the Omani archaeological tourism is enough to show that this type of tourism is still in its infancy [4], [5]. The current plans of this type of tourism are not designed based on a comprehensive source of information about the nature and characteristics of the archaeological sites and monuments. The criteria that are currently used to select the archaeological and historic sites for tourism exploitation are not comprehensive. They are not based on a reliable and complete source of information that can offer a factual representation of all characteristics relating to the exploited sites. Absence of the archaeological databases has resulted in the limited diversity of the selected monuments.

III. METHODOLOGY

To evaluate the role of the archaeological databases in planning the archaeological tourism projects, visits to the concerned authorities were conducted. This has offered an insight into the concepts and practices of archaeological tourism planning. Due to the lack of information about the use of archaeological databases in the Omani tourism, interviews have been carried out with a number of respondents to collect information about the past and present approaches and practices of this type of tourism. Documentary survey and observations from the visits to the sites and monuments currently utilized as touristic attractions have also provided a clear picture about this issue.

IV. ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURISM IN OMAN

Systematic archaeological tourism in Oman is still in its establishment stage [6]. Cooperation and partnership between the two sectors have only started recently [5]. This has led to the delay of the development of cultural tourism in Oman. However, it should be mentioned that the government has achieved a great progress in protecting the archaeological heritage of the country [4], [7]. A considerable number of historic fortifications have been restored. The most notable of these are the restorations of Jabreen (Fig. 1), Bahla, Al Rustaq, Nizwa, Nakhal (Fig. 2), Mutrah, Sohar, Al Hazm (Fig. 3), and Quriyat fortifications [6]. The government has also initiated in the year 2000 a program to utilize 23 restored forts and castles as tourist attractions. These are the fort of Murtha and the castle of Quriyat (in Muscat Governorate), the castles of Barka, Al N'uman, As Suwayq, Al Hazm, and the forts of Al Rustaq and Nakhal (in Al Batinah Governorates), Khasab Castle (in Musandam Governorate), the castles of Al Hillah and Al Khandaq (in Al Buraimi Governorate), the castle of Ibrī (in Al Dhahirah Governorate), the castles of Bayt al

Ridaydah and Jabreen and the fort of Nizwa (in Al Dakhliyah Governorate), the castles of Al Mintarib, Jaalan Bani Bu Hasan, Ras Al Hadd, Bilad Sur and Sunaislah (in the Ash Sharqiyah Governorates), and the castles of Taqah, Mirbat and Sadah (in Dhofar Governorate) [6]. Development plans for the selected sites have been formulated. The selected fortifications were equipped with the requirements that make them able to receive visitors [8], [6]. A number of small museums have been established in some of these fortifications. On the other hand, the prehistoric archaeological sites have not yet been utilized systematically.



Fig. 1 Al Rustaq Fort.



Fig. 2 Nakhal Fort.



Fig. 3 Al Hazm Castle.

V. THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATABASES

In many parts of the world, extensive research has been conducted on the advantages and disadvantages of utilizing archaeological sites and monuments for tourism purposes [9]-[12]. It has been proved that the archaeological databases are useful tools for planning and developing tourism attractions. However, the potential values of the archaeological databases in developing Oman's archaeological tourism have not been taken into consideration by the related organizations. These values can be summarized in the following points: (a) the archaeological databases can be used as the primary source of information in the process of selecting the sites and monuments to be utilized; (b) the databases can be helpful in planning the infrastructures of the country. Integrating the archaeological resource as one of the priorities within the infrastructure plans will help in developing a systematic archaeological tourism; (c) the databases can provide planners and investors with valuable information about the best sites to be utilized. They can also help them in assessing the implications of their projects; (d) the databases can help in gauging the negative impacts of tourism on the archaeological sites; (e) they can help in identifying the unknown and small archaeological sites in order to utilize them as touristic attractions. This will also help in reducing tourist pressures on the well-known sites; (f) the databases can help tourism planners in creating new themed tours and routes; (g) the databases can also help in introducing and promoting sites to the tourism commercial investors and marketers as they are helpful tools for selecting the sites to be utilized; (h) with the help of GIS and VR tools the archaeological records can help in enriching the presentation of the sites and monuments to the various categories of visitors; (i) the databases can help tourism managers in providing tourists with up-to-date information about the ongoing archaeological investigations.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has shown that utilizing the archaeological sites as touristic attractions in Oman is still in its early stages. It has also illustrated that planning for cultural tourism, and in particular archaeological tourism, has not utilized the potential benefits and values of the archaeological records. Using such records will, no doubt, enhance the efficiency of the archaeological tourism plans and will improve the levels of coordination between both sectors.

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