



## AL-HIJR ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (MÂDAIN SÂLIH)

NOMINATION DOCUMENT  
FOR THE INSCRIPTION ON THE  
UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LIST

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### State Party

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

### State, Province or Region

Al-Medina al-Munawarah province, al-'Ulâ region

### Name of Property/Site

*Al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Madâin Sâlih)*

### Geographical coordinates to the nearest second

*Al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Madâin Sâlih)* is situated in the region of al-'Ulâ.

The centre of the nominated World Heritage Site is at:

Latitude: 26° 47' 01" N

Longitude: 37° 57' 18" E

The limits of the Buffer Zone are identified by the following three points:

North: 26° 49' 00" N – 37° 55' 31" E

East: 26° 45' 52" N – 38° 00' 01" E

South: 26° 45' 59" – 37° 57' 43" E

### Textual Description of the boundaries of the Nominated Site

The boundaries of the proposed World Heritage Site are defined precisely on the ground by the metal fence surrounding the nominated site. Within the protected perimeter a second fence isolates the central area of the Nabataean city.

The World Heritage Site is surrounded by a buffer zone that mostly follows the limits set by the road surrounding the site. It extends beyond the road in proximity of the northern entrance and excludes farming areas East and South. To the West, the buffer zone follows the limits of a small wâdî to include part of the mountains west of the fence.

### Map of the Nominated Site

See page V.

### Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

*Al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Madâin Sâlih)* is of outstanding universal value because of its unique architectural features carved in the sandstone rock. The monumental ensemble of al-Hijr stone carved façades, typical of the Nabataean civilization, is an outstanding example of this type of architecture. Their architectural value is enhanced by their unique setting in a preserved landscape that has not suffered any major change since antiquity.

Located in a valley settled from remote antiquity, where developed the reigns of Dedan and Lihyan, ancient Hegra/al-Hijr was at the crossroad of international trade and of different cultures and civilizations, and played a key role in the exchange of goods and cultural traditions between Arabia and the Mediterranean world, becoming a wealthy and important halt for the caravans crossing the Arabian Peninsula carrying incense and spices from Yemen and India.

Rich in underground water easily accessible through wells, al-Qura valley and al-Hijr area allowed the development of a flourishing agriculture that still characterizes the area. Contemporary farms have moved slightly north of the area occupied in the Nabataean period, yet they still profit of the same underground waters and often reuse ancient wells.

The significance and importance of *al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Madâin Sâlih)* is reflected also in the amount of inscriptions from different civilizations visible on the site. Many façades of the monumental tombs bear beautiful inscriptions in Nabataean, while Thamudic, Lihyanite, Nabataean, Latin, Greek and early Arabic inscriptions are engraved all over its hills and rocky outcrops. Al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Madâin Sâlih) has therefore an extraordinary value not only for architects and archaeologists, but also for linguists studying the origins and development of Arabian languages and scripts.

Al-Hijr is unique because the evidence of these past cultures has been preserved by the dry climate and by their relative remoteness. Their extraordinary state of preservation and integrity, and the absence of later re-use, make the site particularly valuable for researchers while its outstanding aesthetical quality, coupled with the enchanting scenery of Saudi Arabian desert, qualifies it as outstanding universal cultural site.

### Criteria for Nomination

The nomination of *al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Madâin Sâlih)* for inscription on the World Heritage List is based upon criteria (ii) and (iii).

Criterion (ii) requires that ***al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Madâin Sâlih) should exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on development in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design.***

*Al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Madâin Sâlih)* lies at the crossroad of several civilizations and trade routes linking the Arabian Peninsula with the Mediterranean World and Asia. Its importance as international interchange site appears clearly in both the architectural style - showing a synthesis of different cultural traditions - and in the variety of languages and scripts found in the many inscriptions and graffiti visible on the site. Al-Hijr (Madâin Sâlih) was the meeting point of trade, caravan and pilgrimage routes both in pre-Islamic and in early Islamic period, a focal point of different social, cultural and religious entities of international importance.

The occupation of the site covers a period of time ranging from the first millennium B.C. up to the early twentieth century A.D. when the Hijâz railway, linking Damascus to Medina and passing by al-Hijr, was built to facilitate the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Al-Hijr has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'ân and in various Nabataean inscriptions located on the site, in classical Greek and Roman sources, as well as in several books by Arab and European historians and travellers. Its most outstanding architectural remains are a unique testimony of ancient rock-cut technology.

Criterion (iv) requires that it should bear **a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or a civilization which is living or has disappeared.**

The site of al-Hijr is a major Nabataean site presenting a unique combination of urban settlement (including necropolises, living quarters, city walls and cultic areas) as well as the remains of ancient water collecting system (wells). It hosts 94 monumental rock-carved tombs with decorated façades, with a height ranging from 2.3 to 2.50 meters, dating from the first century BC to the second century AD.

Besides, *al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Madâin Sâlih)* **meets the conditions of integrity and authenticity and has an adequate protection and management system ensuring its safeguarding.**

The physical characteristic of the local sandstone and the climatic condition at the site have guaranteed an extraordinary preservation of the decorative elements of the rock-carved tombs. While the protection granted by the Saudi Arabian Authorities - who have fenced a large zone surrounding the major monuments - has allowed not only the preservation of the tombs but also of their extraordinary natural setting.

#### Name and Contact Information of Official Institution

Supreme Commission for Tourism  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
Riyadh, Diplomatic Quarter - 11586  
P.O. Box 66680  
Tel: + 966 1 4808855  
Fax : + 9661 4804693  
Email: info@sct.gov.sa

