The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area

Nomination Document for Inscription on the World Heritage List

January 2023

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



DOCUMENT PREPARED BY: HERITAGE COMMISSION MINISTRY OF CULTURE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA https://heritage.moc.gov.sa/en#







هيئـــــة الـتــــراث Heritage Commission



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

State Party

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

State, Province or Region

Riyadh Region Wadi ad-Dawasir Governorate

Name of Property

The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area

Geographical coordinates to the nearest second

	Latitude	Longitude
Center of the property	19°46'56.59"N	45° 8′52.50″E
North	19°49′51.95″N	45°11'27.84"E
East	19°48'44.59"N	45°12′16.87″E
South	19°43'33.09"N	45°10′59.89″E
West	19°45'8.62"N	45° 8'23.28″E





Textual description of the boundaries of the nominated property

The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area covers an area of 4,847 hectares and encompasses more than 99% of the almost 12,000 archaeological features identified to date. Along with the landscape, these components characterize the two historically and spatially distinct phases of occupation of the Nominated Property.

The boundaries of the Nominated Property mainly follow the physical features of the landscape and comprise the main cultural attributes in all their diversity.

To the West, in the alluvial plain, the limits coincide with the fence whose delimitation is based on an archaeological and geographical logic. It begins 7 kilometers northeast of the ancient city and includes the rocky outcrop of Fardat al-Faw, distinctive because of its isolated position and the archaeological features that it bears.

The boundaries pass 2 kilometers north of the cliff and then run along the western edge of the archaeological zone, almost parallel to Road 177, excluding the current research and interpretation center, and extend South for 5 kilometers, then East for another 2.5 kilometers to reach the rocky escarpment.

The eastern boundary of the Nominated Property follows the topography of a mountain ridge on the eastern slope of the Jabal Tuwayq, to include a sector of the plateau of a width ranging from little less than 1 kilometer up to 2.5 kilometers. This part of the property is not fenced, but is nevertheless highly protected as it is included within the 'Uruq Bani Mu'arid Protected Area, benefitting therefore from the highest national level of preservation measures.

A4 size maps of the nominated property, showing boundaries and buffer zone

See maps next page: A4 map of the nominated property and of the buffer zone.

Cultural Landscape

The property is nominated as an organically evolved relict landscape.



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Documents prepared by: Heritage Commission, Ministry of Culture (WGS_1984_UTM_Zone_38N - satellite image: SPOT 7_20210205, Airbus DS)

45°10'13.31"E 45°15'35.50"E

45° 6'22.28" 45° 4'2.29"E



BUFFER ZONE Buffer Zone: 27,548.33 ha





GENERAL VIEW OF THE LAND-SCAPE: OLD CITY, TOMBS, SOUK, JABAL TUWAYQ AND FARDAT AL-FAW (T. CREISSEN, 2021)

Draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

a) Brief Synthesis

The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area stands at the junction of the Empty Quarter desert and the Wajid sandstone outcrops of Tuwayq escarpment in the south of Saudi Arabia. The ancient richness of water in this site underpins its value over the course of human occupations. The relict landscape today evokes extreme conditions for human survival; it also witnesses the climatic changes in the interior of the Arabia throughout the millennia, from being significantly wetter than today, to a drier region, and finally to one of the driest deserts in the world.

The oldest human traces at Al-Faw date back to the Paleolithic, but a wide variety of tangible remains are associated to the Protohistoric periods, including the spectacular "avenues" of stone structures, dating from the second half of the 3rd millennium to the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE, radiating out from the oasis, possibly indicating transhumance routes.

The numerous tumuli at the foothill of Jabal Tuwayq date to the Protohistoric period (likely 2000-1900 BCE). They belong to a second group of nomads, linked to the Gulf and the Mesopotamian civilization, attracted by the rich water resources of Al-Faw site.

The antique caravan city and its oasis appear later, from the middle of the 1st millennium BCE. The archaeological remains show the richness of the urban and architectural legacy of the city. To feed its population and herds, Qaryat al-Faw relied on a vast irrigation network sustaining an oasis of impressive dimensions. The history of the city spans almost a millennium, until the irreversible depletion of water resources led to its definitive abandonment before the Islamic period. Currently, the oasis has completely disappeared leaving only the traces of the ancient plantation pits.

During Antiquity, the city was an important caravan relay on the route leading from Najran to central and eastern Arabia. The remains bear witness of a thriving and cosmopolitan caravan city, benefitting from a dynamic trade network. The rich revenues, and the long-distance contacts with several ancient kingdoms and cities, are highlighted by the discovery of an archaeological assemblage of exceptional quality showing multiple cultural influences.

The large caravanserai and commercial quarter north of the residential area demonstrates that the reception of merchant visitors was the very essence of Qaryat al-Faw. An impressive necropolis for Al-Faw upper class, made of very visible tower tombs, is found around the residential area. It highlights the relevance of lineage and genealogy for these tribal populations. The presence of various groups is attested by the linguistic diversity of inscriptions found in the residential areas and in the necropolises. Later, during the last period of its occupation, the city assumed a political role as capital of the ancient kingdom of Kinda, a federal organization of Arabian desert tribes.

> DRAWINGS AND INSCRIPTIONS CARVED ON THE ESCARPMENT OF KHASHM QARYAH (F. CRISTOFOLI, 2022)



b) Justification for Criteria

Criterion (ii)

Since the Neolithic period, nomadic human groups met at the site of Al-Faw, due to its long-standing exceptional water richness. From the middle of the 1st millennium BCE, the caravan city of Qaryat al-Faw was built through the influences and cultural exchanges between the tribes of the desert and the trading groups that occupied and resided in the area over time. The city bears witness to the exchange of human values across the vast space of inner Arabia and beyond, from the South (Red Sea and Yemen), the North (Northwest of Arabia, the Fertile Crescent, and the Mediterranean world), and the East (Gulf region, Mesopotamia, and Persia). A very rich collection of archaeological findings and inscriptions underlines these cultural exchanges.

Criterion (iv)

At the junction of a sandy desert and a dry rocky plateau, successive human communities at Al-Faw developed different approaches to the occupation of space in specific contexts and times. The tangible heritage of the oldest periods consists of two successive types of stone structures and necropolises that form an exceptionally well-preserved Protohistoric relict landscape. The vestiges of the city represent a rich and highly developed caravan society in the heart of Arabia, with a complete set of monumental, urban, and rural creations: dwellings, administrative and religious buildings, caravanserai and the merchant quarter, the city necropolises, and a vast agricultural area with a sophisticated water management system.

Criterion (v)

The tangible evidence of the different human communities that lived in *The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area* reflects the ability of these groups to adapt and thrive in an unfavorable and evolving natural environment. The ecological evolution experienced by human communities since prehistoric times is reflected in the rock carvings and petroglyphs portraying the evolution of local fauna and their relationships with human group through hunting and domestication. Successive human cultures have lasted for millennia in this area showing both the ability of human being to adapt and evolve in the face of drastic and changing natural conditions, and their sustainability over the centuries.

c) Statement of Integrity

The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area a remarkable completeness of cultural remains from at least three successive civilizations from Protohistory to the late pre-Islamic period. It encompasses a diversity of manifestations of the interaction between humanity and its natural environment: the Protohistoric stone ceremonial avenues and necropolises, with a clear typology and a clear topography; a large and diverse set of urban and architectural attributes illustrating the archaeological caravan city of Qaryat al-Faw, and an ancient oasis and its hydraulic supply system. They are reinforced by an exceptional collection of archaeological findings, rock art and paleo-inscription in diverse pre-Arabic languages. Associated to a well-preserved natural setting protected from any modern development, it forms a remarkable cultural landscape very evocative of a specific geo-cultural region where the harsh natural environment was made progressively accessible by human development via hunting, pastoralism, oasis agriculture, and the development of caravan routes with associated commercial and relay places perfectly illustrated by the archaeological vestiges. In accordance with its spectacular natural environment, *The Cultural Landscape of al-Faw Archaeological Area* forms a very complete and legible whole, constituting a very emblematic cultural landscape within one of the earth's most inhospitable deserts.

d) Statement of Authenticity

The natural setting of the archaeological site and its landscape bear witness to an exceptional level of visual preservation. The Protohistoric stone ceremonial avenues on the plateau of Jabal Tuwayq and the necropolises at its western base, are fully authentic and extremely well preserved. The archaeological vestiges of Qaryat al-Faw, although having suffered inevitable damages caused by centuries of erosion, and occasional human degradation, present a good state of preservation. No reuse in former time, or recent attempt to reconstruct the ruins, have affected the site. The urban design of this complex ensemble has been preserved and it is still very readable. The diverse qualities required to assess the authenticity of the site are fully met: the original design of the two ensembles of Protohistoric vestiges and of the urban and architectural components are well preserved. The caravanserai, the temples, and the tower tombs permit to understand the ancient elevations of these monuments. Plantation pits, wells, and canals materialize the ancient hydraulic system. Authentic materials are kept in their original location both in the necropolis and in the archaeological city, without any attempt of reconstruction of ruins or abusive restorations. All the remains and structures of The Cultural Landscape of the Al-Faw Archaeological Area show a high level of authenticity.

e) Requirements for Protection and Management

The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area is entirely state-owned. Responsibility for its management is shared between the Heritage Commission of the Ministry of Culture (below the escarpment), and the National Center for Wildlife (above the escarpment). The whole Nominated Property is registered as National Heritage Site and protected by the Law of Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The escarpment and the plateau are also protected by the Protected Areas Law as part of the 'Uruq Bani Mu'arid Protected Area. The vast Buffer Zone, mostly composed of public lands, ensures the protection of the cultural landscape. Responsibility for the management and protection of the Nominated Property lies with the Wadi ad-Dawasir office of the Heritage Commission. The main stake for its long-term preservation is the conservation of the excavated ruins of the archaeological city. Innovative technical solutions are being developed with the support of international experts and laboratories, and a step-by-step scientific conservation program has been drafted. This nomination is the culmination of a 50-year-long national commitment for the protection of this extraordinary site that began with the first archaeological seasons in 1972.



Name and contact information of official local institution/agency/organization

Institution

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https://heritage.moc.gov.sa/en# (EN) https://heritage.moc.gov.sa/# The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area

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