



THE PRESERVATION OF DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE IN SAUDI ARABIA AND THE LARGER ARAB WORLD

Multistakeholder Consultation Report

CONSULTATION REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

With the support of the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU), UNESCO's Memory of the World (MoW) Programme is implementing a project to preserve and raise awareness of documentary heritage in AlUla, Saudi Arabia, as well as the larger Arab world. The initiative aims to enhance the identification, preservation, accessibility, and awareness of documentary heritage in the region under-represented on the MoW International Register. The project will conduct capacity-building workshops, research projects, and awareness-raising initiatives and mobilize support for forming a National MoW Committee under the leadership of national actors. It will also organize a flagship conference in AlUla, Saudi Arabia.

The Cultural Archive Center (CAC) at the Ministry of Culture (MoC) in Saudi Arabia is leading the digital archiving of Saudi cultural heritage, including visual heritage, films, records, and documentary heritage. In collaboration with the CAC and the National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science, UNESCO and RCU organized the first Memory of the World Consultation in Riyadh on Oct 22-23, 2023. The consultation aimed to initiate a national dialogue on the feasibility and desirability of setting up a National MoW Committee and Register, explore the needs of Saudi documentary heritage preservation, mobilize support, and solicit feedback from national stakeholders and regional experts for the KIP conference.

The consultation lasted two days and was divided into four main sessions and twelve sub-sessions. It featured national, international, and regional experts who provided an overview of the preservation needs of documentary heritage in Saudi Arabia and the larger Arab Peninsula. The experts presented the best practices for preservation and conservation. They highlighted various initiatives and strategies implemented at national and regional levels to preserve and promote documentary heritage throughout the region.

OPENING SESSION

During the opening session, Dr Raed Alsufiyani, General Manager of the Cultural Research and Studies General Department at the Ministry of Culture, emphasized the importance of Saudi Arabia's documentary heritage as a testament to the historical and cultural depth of the region. This heritage spans diverse cultures from ancient civilizations to the Islamic era and modern records. Dr. Alsufiyani explained that the Cultural Archives Center (CAC) is vital in physically preserving heritage and connecting present generations with the past. The Center does this through various means such as creating and empowering competent authorities, fostering partnerships, capacity building, documentation, digital preservation, publications, and technological advancement.

Mr Yasser Arafah, Director of the Communication and Information sector at the National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science, highlighted the significance of raising awareness through UNESCO's Memory of the World Program. He also shed light on the pivotal role of the partnership between AlUla and UNESCO since 2021 in various collaborative initiatives aimed at preserving heritage. Additionally, Mr. Arafah discussed the Kingdom's commitment to preserve heritage and culture. This commitment is evident in Saudi Arabia's inclusion of cultural dimensions in the G20 summit, establishment of the Saudi Fund in UNESCO, and support for creative economy initiatives in line with UNESCO's goals for sustainable development.

José Ignacio Gallego Revilla, Advisor for UNESCO and Cultural and Scientific Diplomacy programs, at Royal Commission for AlUla, echoed this aspiration and shared that RCU aims to contribute to the national efforts by creating a dialogue mechanism, open to the Arab region, which will serve as a public sphere for discussion and presentation of best practices and novelties related to documentary heritage. He further stated that the UNESCO and RCU partnership was conceived with an intersectoral approach, which is coming to fruition with the active involvement of national actors.

During the event, Mr. Salah Khaled, Director of UNESCO GCC & Yemen, and Dr. Fackson Banda, the Chief of the Unit for Documentary Heritage (Memory of the World Programme Secretariat), gave opening remarks on behalf of UNESCO. Mr. Salah stated that preserving Saudi Arabia's documentary heritage is a testament to its rich history, making a significant contribution to the country's memory and the collective heritage of the larger Arab region and the world. In his remarks, Dr. Banda appreciated the commitment and ownership demonstrated by the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Culture via the Cultural Archiving Center and the National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science in Saudi Arabia. He reiterated UNESCO's support for national initiatives being undertaken in the field of documentary heritage preservation in Saudi Arabia and the Arab region.



SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION (MOW PROGRAMME & AIULA DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE PROJECT)

1.1. OVERVIEW OF THE UNESCO MOW PROGRAM & ITS INSTRUMENTS, MOW COMMITTEE FORMATION AND SETTING UP NATIONAL REGISTER & NOMINATION PROCESS

During the first session, Dr. Fackson Banda, gave an overview of the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme. He explained the policy guidelines and recommendations of the program and presented its key instruments, including the International Advisory Committee (IAC), UNESCO/Jikji Memory of the World Prize, and the 2015 recommendations for preserving and accessing documentary heritage in digital form. Dr. Banda also provided insights on the process for setting up a National Memory of the World Committee, its structure, function, and the nomination process for the International Memory of the World Register. The presentation also provided guidance on the criteria for submitting nominations to the International Memory of the World Register, the role of Regional Memory of the World Committees in supporting countries without National Committees, and the opportunities these mechanisms bring to promote the preservation of documentary heritage in the long run.

1.2. AIULA DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE: SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM GOALS OF THE PROJECT

Continuing the introduction, Maliha Shah, the Project Officer at UNESCO, explained the objectives of the AIULA documentary heritage project. The primary goals of the documentary are to raise public and stakeholder awareness of the global significance of documentary heritage in AIULA and the Arab region and to enhance the capacity of Saudi Arabian memory institutions in identifying, preserving, and ensuring accessibility to documentary heritage. The key activities under the project include capacity-building workshops for memory institutions and mapping and survey to be conducted to assess the needs of Memory institutions in KSA; consultations mobilize stakeholders and assess the feasibility of setting up MoW national Committee & Register; promoting scholarly research on preservation and access to documentary heritage as a tool for intercultural dialogue and the Kingdoms Institute Platform Conference in AIULA to create a forum for dialogue in the larger Arab region. The Implementation and coordination partners of the project are UNESCO Headquarters, UNESCO GCC & Yemen, Royal Commission for AlUla (Kingdoms Institute) in close cooperation with the Ministry of Culture of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science.



1.3.VISION FOR THE KINGDOMS INSTITUTE PLATFORM FOR PRESERVATION OF DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

After that, José Ignacio Gallego Revilla, the Advisor for UNESCO and Cultural and Scientific Diplomacy programs at RCU, presented RCU's vision for the Kingdoms Institute Platform for the Promotion of Documentary Heritage in the Arab World. Mr. Revilla announced that AlUla would host the first edition of the Kingdoms Institute - UNESCO Platform for the Promotion of Arabic Documentary Heritage in the Arab World in 2024, as a conference. The initiative aims to create a stable dialogue mechanism open to the Arab region, which will act as a public sphere for discussion and presentation of best practices and novelties related to documentary heritage in the Arab world. It will be a biannual gathering of memory institutions from the Arab world in AlUla. He explained the Kingdoms Institute Platform's value proposition for documentary heritage based on creating and sharing knowledge, skills, and opportunities for cooperation. It will contribute to Vision 2030 and sustainable development goals by promoting peace and intercultural dialogue.



ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION / QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

During the roundtable discussion that followed the presentations, the participants talked about various practical and conceptual challenges in promoting documentary heritage from the Arab region. Dr. Humaid Al Nofali, a member of the Oman National Memory of the World (MoW) Committee, highlighted that only 3% of the items inscribed on the International MoW register are from the Arab region. Dr. Nofali emphasized the significance of comprehending the reasons behind the lack of representation, considering the region's vast and diverse documentary heritage. He presented an instance of documentary heritage items that exhibit remarkable creativity and skill but may not receive recognition and appreciation from expert committees if they are not presented convincingly or thoroughly understood. Dr. Fackson Banda, the Chief of the Documentary Heritage Unit at UNESCO, said that MoW aims to ensure equal representation on the expert committee. Currently, there are members from Egypt, the UAE, and Morocco on the International Advisory Committee (IAC), but there is a need for more meetings and events in the Arab region so that experts can participate and listen to the intricacies of Arab regional perspectives to appreciate their value. Meanwhile, the MoW Register Subcommittee usually consults as many experts as possible who are familiar with the region's documentary heritage.

Prof. Sherif Kamel Shaheen, Chair of the National MoW Committee for Egypt, highlighted insufficient efforts by member states to differentiate between cultural heritage in general and documentary heritage. He emphasized the need to give special attention to digital heritage to preserve documentary heritage effectively. Dr. Banda agreed and added that the concept of documentary heritage needs a clearer definition. He stated that during the COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts, digital preservation has become more critical, and UNESCO has multiple ongoing projects in Africa to preserve digital documentary heritage. During a discussion on the future of the MoW Programme, Mr. Abdulmajeed Al Mahboub, the Vice-Chairperson of MoW Committee for GCC & Yemen, asked if it could become a convention. Dr. Johannes Joseph Maria Bos, the former Chair of the MoW Register Sub-Committee, stated that the MoW programme is managed independently by experts, and hence, a convention may not be the ideal way to achieve the program's objectives. Dr. Fackson Banda further added that experts believe it is better to maintain autonomy, as the 2015 Recommendation has already received unanimous approval from UNESCO Member States.

SESSION 2: DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE ECOSYSTEM IN KSA AND ONGOING PRESERVATION INITIATIVES

2.1. ONGOING RESEARCH AND PRESERVATION INITIATIVES ON DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE IN AIULA

Ms. Giorgia Cesaro, Program Manager for Culture at RCU, presented ongoing research and preservation efforts on documentary heritage in AlUla. Two items of documentary heritage from Saudi Arabia are inscribed on the International MoW Register: Inscription of Zuhair (644 AD/24 AH) and 'Jabal Ikmaah – Arabian Chronicles in stone'. She shared that the AlUla Museum Archive preserves collections such as First Travelers' Accounts, AlUla Families Photographic Collections, Historic maps, Hijaz Railway Documents, and maps from different historical periods. An initiative for Rock Art and petroglyphs Dating by Varnish Analysis is being carried out for a comprehensive survey and mapping of rock art and ancient inscriptions at 24 sites within AlUla County. She also informed the audience that efforts are underway to develop the Jabal Ikmaah VR Experience and the Manuscript Conservation & Digitization Project to preserve community treasures. Upcoming projects include the 'AlUla Inscription Corpus Analysis Project (AICAP)' and 'AlUla Rock Art Documentation and Analysis.' She concluded that through these research and preservation initiatives, the Kingdoms Institute Platform at RCU aims to become a knowledge hub that contributes to documentary heritage preservation in Saudi Arabia and the Arab region.



2.2. OVERVIEW OF PRESERVATION OF DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE IN KSA, EXISTING MECHANISMS, MANDATES, AND CAPACITY OF MEMORY INSTITUTIONS & OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Dr. Hani Hayajneh presented a plan for preserving and managing Saudi Arabia's documentary heritage. He emphasized the conceptual framework for understanding the tangible value and role of documentary heritage in society and development in general as inscriptions and documents have been used as a tool for those in power to record history, from the invention of writing to archives, poetry, music, and mathematics. He stressed the importance of understanding the value of documentary heritage in society and development in the Arab region, highlighting the risks to it and the necessity of digital preservation.

Dr. Hayajneh also shared the actions taken at national, regional, and international levels to promote and improve accessibility for users, including developing media tools for awareness, conducting needs assessment, exchanging information between national archive centers, formulating laws for archive use, and conducting educational and capacity building activities for memory institution employees.

Dr. Hayajneh stressed the importance of establishing standards and protocols for maintaining information in digital records of documentary heritage, as outlined in the Saudi Guide for Documentation of Cultural Heritage and its Digital Archiving. He also supported the creation of an advisory board or committee for documentary heritage at the national level to oversee long-term capacity-building programs and grants for targeted audiences like affiliates of archive centers, organizations, library associations, and other institutions. Dr. Hayajneh emphasized the need for specific training on inscribing items of documentary heritage on the UNESCO Memory of the World International Register. He also highlighted the importance of greater cooperation and an international legal instrument with the World Intellectual Property Organization to protect documentary heritage at risk of illicit tracking or forgery. Dr. Hayajneh highlighted the significance of raising public awareness, specially among young students about the importance of documentary heritage in each generation and preserving it for future needs.



2.3. PRACTICES OF THE CULTURAL ARCHIVE CENTER

The session ended with a presentation by Dr. Mohammed Bay, Senior Consultant at the Ministry of Culture's Cultural Archive Center, on the Center's role and practices. He explained that the Cultural Archive Center was established in 2021 as a central entity in the Ministry of Culture to inventory, document, and digitally archive cultural heritage. The center's strategic pillars focus on building a baseline of cultural and documentary heritage across Saudi Arabia, ensuring public access to heritage, establishing policies and guidelines related to cultural heritage, and serving as a credible source of knowledge for the preservation of Saudi cultural heritage.

Dr. Bay further explained that the center manages and governs the inventory, documentation, and digital archiving agenda of cultural heritage through strategic planning and organization, monitoring of operational entities, and management of digital archives. Additionally, the center is responsible for determining the readiness of the nomination of cultural heritage properties and elements to UNESCO. The center has developed policy tools and guidelines such as the 'Documentation Guidelines of Cultural Heritage and Its Digital Archiving in Saudi Arabia' and 'The National Plan for Inventory, Documentation and Digital Archiving Management of Cultural Heritage'. Dr. Bay shared that the Cultural Archiving Center aims to work closely with legislators, heritage custodians, practitioners, users, and beneficiaries while developing adequate IT infrastructure, governance mechanisms, human and financial capital, and partnerships to develop a holistic approach toward cultural heritage. The center hosts a collection of databases and records that document the local culture in all its forms, including photos, films, recordings, documents, and others, thereby ensuring that cultural heritage is preserved for future generations.



ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION / QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

After the presentations, participants discussed the alignment between the MoW program guidelines and the Cultural Archive Center's ongoing initiatives. They also discussed the challenges and opportunities for maintaining and sharing archival databases across countries to make digitized documentary heritage accessible. Dr. Munirah Mushawh, Archaeology Survey Manager and Dr. Paul Christians, Senior Manager for Cultural Heritage Research Senior at RCU, shared two relevant databases, OCIANA Project and DASl, that contain thousands of inscriptions from AlUla and across the wider region. The participants emphasized the need for sustained efforts to support these initiatives.

The importance of documentary heritage as a distinct category was emphasized. The current framework mainly focuses on tangible and intangible heritage, but Dr. Khaled Alsumait, a senior consultant at the Ministry of Culture's Cultural Archive Center, pointed out that there is a need to improve the quality of legislation by learning from other countries' best practices. He also noted that there are currently not enough memory institutions in Saudi Arabia that have a broad focus, as most are specialized, and there is no single cultural organization that is aligned.

Participants emphasized the importance of completing reports and records of documentary heritage to ensure new projects are well incorporated into the official inventory. Dr. Mushawh invited consideration of rearranging priorities if Saudi Arabian infrastructure is not aligned with the current scale of ambitious projects. Dr. Bay noted that the National Plan will assess the capabilities of each organization working on documentation, archiving, and digital archiving to determine the next steps. The CAC's strategic goal is to track Saudi Arabian heritage beyond the nation's borders and provide access to such items. Dr. Humaid Al Nofali emphasized the need for regional and international cooperation in repatriating documentary heritage. He suggested the creation of a commission or committee comprising notable figures to formalize a mechanism for the larger Arab region.



SESSION 3: BEST PRACTICES AND CASE STUDIES

3.1. SHARING BEST PRACTICES#1: SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES ON PRESERVING DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE IN OMAN

During the session, speakers presented initiatives for preserving documentary heritage in the Arab region. Dr. Humaid Al Nofali gave an overview of the best practices for safeguarding documentary heritage in Oman. He shared the history of Omanis' dedication and passion for creating and maintaining documentary heritage, which flourished through the emergence of manuscript markets and trade. These practices have continued to thrive over time with state support and patronage, local transcription tools, manuscript ownership traditions, private and public archives, and endowments.

Oman has made efforts to collect, preserve, and restore documentary heritage. There has been increased awareness about the importance of documentary heritage through conferences, seminars, and media campaigns. Oman's national MoW Committee comprises experts in heritage, tourism, culture, archives, and education. The country actively participates in international training and conferences on manuscript preservation and hosts symposiums on the same. In 2017, Oman's nomination of "Maden Al Asrar fi Elm Al Behar" manuscript by sailor



Nasser bin Ali Al Khadoori was inscribed on the MoW International Register. A database named "Heritage Trustees" has also been created for consultations and cooperation. Dr. Nofali highlighted the example of the Oman Memory Center as a model for non-profit institutions. It collects diverse Omani memory artifacts, organizes conferences, and produces documentaries to raise public awareness. The center's notable projects include the "Oman in the Memory of the World" project which aims to document Oman's presence in the memory of other peoples and track scattered references to Oman in written records from around the world. The "Tarjuman Oman" project carefully selects Omani heritage texts for translation. Another initiative is the "Retrieving Omani Manuscripts Located Abroad" project. Dr. Nofali emphasized the role of community libraries, endowment archives, and forming alliances for preserving Omani heritage.

3.2. SHARING BEST PRACTICES#2: SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES ON PRESERVING DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE IN EGYPT



During a presentation, Professor Sherif Kamel Mahmoud Shaheen, who is the Chairperson of the National Memory of the World Committee for Egypt, discussed the successes and challenges of preserving documentary heritage in Egypt. Dr. Shaheen shared the accomplishments of the committee and its plan of action, highlighting the establishment of the Egyptian Heritage House earlier this year as a key success. The Heritage House was created as part of Egypt's program to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The National Memory of the World Committee in Egypt has submitted several successful nominations to the MoW International register, including the Deeds of Sultans and Princes, Memory of the Suez Canal, Persian Illustrated and Illuminated Manuscripts, and The National Library of Egypt's Collection of Mamluk Qur'an Manuscripts. The Committee has also jointly submitted the 'First Summit Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement Archives', which was inscribed this year. The American University in Cairo's Libraries and Learning Technologies, Rare Books and Special Collection Library in Egypt won the 2022 UNESCO/Jikji Memory of the World Prize for preserving and making accessible documentary heritage.

He stated that individuals and institutions holding materials of global significance, such as Al-Azhar Al-Sharif ancient universities, their colleges (Al-Qasr Al-Aini), endowments, churches, and other cultural, scientific, and professional societies (e.g. the Geographical Society) must be encouraged

to engage with the national MoW committee. Dr. Shaheen also shared that the Egyptian National Commission for UNESCO is organizing a workshop on the applications of emerging technologies in heritage preservation and identification. He noted that any interventions for documentary heritage preservation are incomplete without digital technology. He echoed the need for degree programs in the field of heritage preservation to build local expertise. Additionally, he emphasized that it is essential for specialists to involve young people from universities to ensure that the public can appreciate the value of documentary heritage. When commenting on some of the impediments that the National MoW Committee faces, Dr. Shaheen mentioned administrative bottlenecks, fragmented responsibility/mandate for heritage among multiple entities, and a lack of financial resources as some of the challenges.



ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION / QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

The presentations were followed by a Question and Answers session moderated by Dr. Joachim Gierlichs, a member of the UNESCO MoW Register Sub-Committee. During the session, Dr. Gierlichs noted that the Arab region is diverse, and there is a lot of knowledge to be shared and exchanged within the region and with the rest of the world.

Dr. Nofali answered several questions about the types of documentary heritage materials in Oman. He shared that Oman has materials not only in Arabic but also manuscripts in Swahili, Indian, Portuguese, Persian, and French. He explained that documents of religious, historical, and political value, especially those covering critical political events or rare evidence of a particular historical period, are among the items to be preserved. For example, Zanzibar newspapers from the 19th century were published by Omani migrants. Dr. Nofali also shared that such materials owned by or in the possession of governmental bodies are mostly accessible online in digital form. However, the lack of awareness and visibility makes it difficult for the public to recognize them. The topic of retrieving Omani manuscripts and documentary heritage abroad was also discussed. Dr. Nofali shared that retrieval was made possible through political and diplomatic efforts, and setting up mechanisms for cooperation and understanding can help overcome roadblocks.

Dr. Shaheen also pointed out that it is worth exploring the potential role of the Regional MoW Gulf Committee for the wider Arab region, as it is currently limited to the GCC region.

During his concluding remarks, Dr. Gierlich emphasized that both Egypt and Oman are home to numerous valuable manuscripts, which have been identified. However, the challenge now is to choose the most suitable ones for nomination to the MoW Register. Dr. Gierlich discussed the case of the Aflaj system in Oman, which is an exceptional item of heritage and was included in UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2006. However, in order for the historic documents associated with the system to be successfully nominated, they must demonstrate compelling arguments for their global significance. Dr. Gierlich acknowledged that there may be gaps in different cultures and peoples assessing and marking the value of heritage items, but he assured that the MoW Committee thoroughly considers their value. He noted that the main challenge is often getting the first inscription by a member state, which serves as a learning experience and encourages future nominations.



SESSION 4: THE WAY FORWARD TO PROMOTE ARABIC DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE IN THE ARAB WORLD AND BEYOND

4.1. RECOMMENDATIONS ON WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO IDENTIFY POTENTIAL NOMINATIONS FROM SAUDI ARABIA AND THE ARAB REGION (SHORT/LONG TERM MEASURES)

Dr. Johannes Joseph Maria Bos, and Dr. Joachim Gierlich led the discussion on what should be done to identify potential nominations from Saudi Arabia, and the way forward in general to optimize preservation efforts in the larger Arab region. Regarding the underrepresentation of Arab countries in the MoW Register, Dr. Munirah Almushawh highlighted that insufficient investment and a lack of a clear plan of action by member states were the reasons behind this underrepresentation. She added that this could adversely affect the credibility of the MoW Register and urged the need for increased efforts to encourage more nominations from the region. Dr. Almushawh also suggested that the MoW Programme should come up with innovative solutions for member states to nominate items not hosted in the country. To support her point, she cited examples such as the Rosetta Stone at the British Museum and the Tayma stones that were transferred from Saudi Arabia to Germany. Dr. Joachim Gierlich clarified that under the MoW guidelines, anyone can nominate an item, even if

they are not in possession of it. However, the physical custodians must give their permission, and joint nominations can also be agreed upon. Anissa Harfouche from UNESCO GCC proposed to analyze the success rate of Arab States' nominations for the MoW Register and compare them to other regions. Dr. Fackson Banda mentioned that the MoW Secretariat can provide statistics on Arab success rates, and an upgraded online platform is currently being developed to provide automatic statistics when complete.

During the discussion, Dr. Shaheen emphasized that the problem of underrepresentation of the Arab region will continue until there is a greater recognition and appreciation of documentary heritage, and regular awareness is necessary to bring about change. Dr. Nofali spoke about the importance of national MoW committees in raising awareness, and other participants agreed that these committees should have the autonomy to define priorities and identify challenges. Dr. Fackson Banda suggested that while MoW National Committees should be autonomous, they should be established within the national framework set up by the National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science, which ultimately liaises with the MoW Secretariat. José Ignacio Revilla further emphasized that it is important to maintain independence and professional participation in the composition of National MoW Committees, and since there is no National MoW Committee in KSA, RCU has been working closely with UNESCO and the National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science to integrate national stakeholders as much as possible.

Dr. Gierlich emphasized the importance of having a national MoW (Memory of the World) Committee with a diverse range of permanent members, as it ensures that the submitted documents for inscription come from various sources. He also highlighted that collaboration between memory institutions is crucial for the success of the National Committee. Dr. Gierlich acknowledged that the nomination process is rigorous and that different national committees may have varying capacities and resources. However, the submitting entities can have the opportunity to provide further information and justification for resubmission and refinement. He stated that imperfect nominations are better than no nomination, as they serve as a starting point.

Dr. Fackson Banda addressed various concerns related to the nomination process and representation in the International Advisory Committee. He explained the review process, opportunities for revision, and the role of National Commissions for UNESCO, as well as Regional MoW committees. He highlighted the need to overcome language limitations and understand regional nuances. He also shared the mediation and resolution mechanism employed by MoW Programme in case of contested nominations. He also shared the example of the Jikji Prize, supported by the Government of the Republic of Korea, which incentivizes the recognition and preservation of documentary heritage and stated that a similar initiative in the Arab region would be effective.



Responding to a perceived lack of awareness and initiatives by member states, Dr. Bos emphasized the potential universal and global value of documentary heritage from Saudi Arabia, such as items relating to Hajj and manuscripts related to pilgrimage routes. He concluded by acknowledging the challenges faced by member states in preparing dossiers demonstrating the global significance of items of documentary heritage. He encouraged interested individuals to attend relevant workshops and orientation sessions by MoW.

4.2. CONCEPT AND PROPOSED COMPONENTS OF THE KINGDOMS INSTITUTE PLATFORM CONFERENCE ON PROMOTING DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

The UNESCO-RCU project's flagship activity, the Kingdoms Institute Conference on Promoting Documentary Heritage, was presented by Maliha Shah, representing UNESCO, after the roundtable discussion. The conference, scheduled for October 2024 in AlUla, aims to consolidate national and regional efforts toward preserving the Arab world's memory institutions. It will be a three-day event that brings together institutions working in the identification, preservation, accessibility, and promotion of documentary heritage.

The conference has two main objectives: to promote the global significance of Saudi Arabian and the Arab region's documentary heritage to stakeholders and the public and to strengthen regional networking among policymakers and memory institutions in the Arab world to engage with AlUla's documentary heritage more effectively.

The conference will feature high-level plenary sessions, research papers, an exhibition, guided tours to inscription sites in AlUla, and seminars. The conference aims to cover themes related to promoting international cooperation, challenges of decoding documentary heritage in ancient Arabic, AI in the preservation of documentary heritage, documentary heritage, and sustainable tourism, educational use of documentary heritage, safeguarding documentary heritage against threats in the Arab world in the context of armed conflicts and climate change, preventive conservation and risk management, ensuring legal preservation of documentary heritage, and combatting illicit trafficking of documentary heritage. The conference will also have an exhibition featuring Saudi Arabian documentary heritage, covering chronicles of commerce and pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, Islamic archives and rare manuscripts and Saudi Arabia's Audiovisual heritage. She presented the content and itinerary, along with the proposed themes for plenaries and seminars at the conference, and invited ideas and recommendations from the participants.



4.3. THE AIULA INSCRIPTION CORPUS PROJECT

Dr. Paul Christians, Senior Manager of Cultural Heritage Research at RCU, presented the AlUla Inscriptions Corpus Analysis Project. The central question of the project is how to approach this documentary heritage in the simultaneous contexts of research, archaeology/conservation, and development while maintaining human-centered ethics. Dr. Christians shared that there are more than 25000 inscriptions in over 10 different scripts, covering an area of 3,300 sq. km, that have been mapped under the IDIHA Survey. He emphasized that all efforts for data collection and generating technical knowledge must be rooted in a holistic sense of value, for it to have a tangible impact on society.

The objectives of the AlUla Inscriptions Corpus Analysis project include translating/interpreting ancient inscriptions, creating an accessible online database, building epigraphic expertise,

enhancing RCU knowledge through scholarly collaboration, and maintaining public engagement through capacity-building activities, conservation planning, communication and outreach, and corpus/database development. Dr. Christians also pointed out that some of the challenges in achieving these objectives include the sheer scale of the mountain inscriptions spread over a vast area, the volume of information that needs to be decoded and contextualized and finding an appropriate mode of communication for different audiences. He noted that it is also important to situate the project within the current sociocultural paradigm. Dr. Christians stated that the field of heritage sciences needs to be sufficiently developed in the local context to answer some of these questions. To this end, RCU strives to build connections among its projects to link conceptual, educational, and technical information aspects. He concluded by saying that projects like the AlUla Inscription Corpus Analysis can form hubs/resources for KSA to apply MoW's methodology and program.



4.4. REFLECTIONS ON THE DECLARATION TO SUPPORT PRESERVATION OF DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE IN THE ARAB REGION (2019) AND THE ROLE OF MEMORY OF THE WORLD COMMITTEE FOR GULF STATES AND YEMEN

Mr. Abdulmajeed Al Mahboub, Vice-Chairperson of the MoW Committee for Gulf states and Yemen, recently spoke about implementing the commitments outlined in the 'Declaration to Support Preservation of Documentary Heritage in the Arab Region & MoW Committee for the Gulf States'. This declaration was created in 2019 at the UNESCO regional conference in Doha. Mr. Al Mahboub discussed the role of the MoW Committee in fulfilling these aspirations. He reminded everyone that the declaration recognizes the threats facing the Arab region's documentary heritage, such as conflict, climate change, and neglect. All stakeholders, including librarians, archivists, conservators, curators, and collectors, must intensify their efforts to promote and protect documentary heritage.

Mr. Al Mahboub also talked about the Memory of the World Committee for the Gulf States (MOWCGS), which includes the MOWCGS Bureau and the Register Subcommittee. Both entities work closely with UNESCO GCC and Yemen office to act as an Executive Secretariat. The committee aims to support countries in the Arab region without national committees, coordinate nominations for the international register, encourage joint nominations, promote sponsorship from government agencies and the private sector, and ensure implementation and reporting of the 2015 Recommendation.

Mr. Al Mahboub stressed the importance of preserving documentary heritage as it contributes to national identity, cultural tourism, and sustainable development. He highlighted the need for investment in infrastructure and capacity building to effectively leverage digital technologies, create favorable laws, and increase government support. He also pointed out that the Gulf states have a unique opportunity to lead in the preservation and promotion of documentary heritage in the Arab region, and the regional MoW Committee is fully committed to achieving this goal.



ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION / QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

During the Q&A session, when commenting on the plan for the conference in AlUla, Dr. Hayajneh emphasized the need to prioritize youth engagement and invite university students to enhance their understanding and awareness. Ms. Nuha Alsharif supported the idea of digital heritage and student participation and shared that a new program for master's students for digital documentary heritage is being launched by the Royal Institute of Traditional Arts. She also expressed her enthusiasm to feature in and participate in the conference. Dr. Hayajneh also suggested being mindful while referring to the themes of heritage as Arab, Arabic, or Arabian or Saudi Arabia as they have varying connotations and meanings. While providing feedback on the thematic areas, Dr. Bos recommended a special focus on Gender as key component and lens through which to conduct the conference, along with digital heritage as an important element.

While answering a question about the scope of the AlUla corpus project beyond KSA covering pilgrim routes including the Syrian and Egyptian routes, Dr. Christians shared that the research is expected to go on until 2027 and is not necessarily about gathering new data but interpreting what already exists. Regarding the utility of artificial intelligence in such projects, he said that accuracy cannot be ensured and its relevance may increase in a few years.

Dr. Munirah Almushawh emphasized the need for closer cooperation between the Cultural Archives Center and RCU. The goal is to establish a unified database for all of Saudi Arabia. Dr. Hayajneh added that in order for this to happen, standards should be defined in accordance with CAC and RCU, and there should be a unified agreement to enable smoother digitization projects and activities. He suggested having an ongoing dialogue to focus on unifying methodology.



Participants at the event discussed the importance of rock art and petroglyphs and whether they should be considered as documentary heritage. Dr. Almushawh argued that rock art is often an effective form of documentary heritage, created in a time before writing was established and serving as the only documentation of the prehistoric era. Dr. Christians highlighted the significance of rock art as cultural and historical messages for communities, giving the example of indigenous people in the US.

Dr. Hayajneh echoed this sentiment, stating that rock art has been neglected in the past but it should be given more attention as it reflects the growth and development of civilization.

During a discussion on the status of rock art as a form of documentary heritage, Dr. Bos stated that there is a debate among the scientific community. In accordance with the MoW guidelines, aesthetic quality alone is not enough to qualify for inscription in the MoW Register. The object or document must also possess and demonstrate a story. Dr. Almushawh acknowledged the fine line between rock art as a message or an item of aesthetic value but reiterated the significance of prehistoric rock art as the only form of messaging. Dr. Bos agreed with this idea but stated that there is a reluctance to include all variants of artistic and aesthetic works as documentary heritage. He added that it may be advisable to consider the World Heritage Sites Programme as a more appropriate forum for recognizing sites with rock art, however every case is different. Moreover, it is advantageous if documentary heritage comes from an area that has already been inscribed for its World Heritage status.

During the discussion, Dr. Shaheen asked if there was a plan to create a wider committee for Memory of the World (MoW) that would cover the entire Arab region. Mr. Mahboub replied that the current regional MoW committee reflects the same geographical representation as the UNESCO GCC & Yemen regional office. However, he expressed his hope for the eventual creation of MoW registers and committees in all Arab States. Dr. Shaheen urged member states to consider the creation of an easily accessible regional repository. He cited examples of the now-neglected Europeana repository and Library of Congress World Digital library. Dr. Shaheen emphasized the importance of sustainability in this regard.

Dr. Fackson Banda shared that the World Digital Library of the Library of Congress was established in partnership with UNESCO to aid memory institutions that lacked a digital presence. However, due to changes at the Library of Congress and lack of funding, it could not be continued. Many individual memory institutions concluded that they have strong independent digital footprints, making the WDL less necessary. However, there are still institutions that lack a digital presence and the WDL can be revived in a different form, but this would require member states/donors to step in and provide support.

According to Dr. Gierlichs the Qatar Library was initially very supportive of the World Digital Library (WDL), but their support eventually reduced as they built the Qatar Digital Library. This has resulted in a lot of repetition and lack of coordination between memory institutions that operate in the same region, sharing similar photographs, documents, and so on. Dr. Bos emphasized the need to compare and assess what is already available because the case of WDL demonstrates the difficulty of ensuring the long-term running of such projects.



CLOSING

During his closing remarks, Mr. Yasser Arafa expressed his gratitude towards UNESCO, RCU, and the Cultural Archiving Center for organizing a successful consultation. He assured that the National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science would continue to provide all necessary support for future interventions. Mr. Arafa concluded his speech with an optimistic outlook toward the meeting's outcomes, aiming to encourage exchange and cooperation in preserving documentary heritage across different sectors.

Dr. Fackson Banda, the Chief of the Unit for Documentary Heritage at UNESCO, expressed his appreciation for the support shown by national institutions in the region towards the UNESCO-RCU project. He also commended the commitment to establishing a National MoW committee and potentially a Register in Saudi Arabia under the Ministry of Culture. Dr. Banda emphasized the importance of the strategic partnership between the Memory of the World Programme and the National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science, as it provides a framework for coordination with various stakeholders, including the MoC and RCU. He thanked all stakeholders for their participation and input, which reassured him that the project is moving in the right direction. Mr. José Ignacio Revilla, who serves as an Advisor for UNESCO and for Cultural and Scientific Diplomacy programs at RCU, expressed his gratitude to all the participants. He emphasized the importance of heritage in shaping societal norms and stressed the need for collaborative efforts by heritage professionals to safeguard and maintain documentary heritage.

Mr. Abdullah Nasif, a community representative, and expert from AlUla who also consults with RCU, emphasized that the AlUla project has the potential to comprehensively showcase all aspects of documentary heritage, not just pre-Islamic and Islamic inscriptions, but also historic records and traditions associated with Hajj. He expressed his appreciation to the organizers for successfully holding the event.



CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The consultation had diverse attendees, including artists, archaeologists, heritage specialists, lawyers, architects, and people from the private sector. The consultation met its purposes of raising awareness about the Memory of the World (MoW) Programme, supporting a Saudi Arabian national MoW committee and register, and advocating for a Kingdoms Institute platform for the preservation of documentary heritage. The following recommendations were made based on the feedback shared by experts during the roundtable discussions.



IDENTIFICATION OF DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

It is critical to identify and select items of documentary heritage to preserve and raise awareness of Saudi Arabian culture and history. Failure to do so would result in the loss of invaluable cultural treasures. While the RCU-UNESCO partnership focuses on mountain inscriptions in AlUla, Saudi Arabia boasts rich collections of manuscripts, photographs, correspondences, and recordings of oral literature and history that are yet to be identified. Collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and the Cultural Archive Center presents an excellent opportunity to uncover more items of documentary heritage of national, regional, and global significance. To achieve this, it is recommended to collect all available information on the country's documentary heritage into a centralized database system, allowing easy access by local stakeholders and specialists. The upcoming UNESCO survey must be leveraged to its fullest potential to contribute to this effort.



ACCESSIBILITY OF DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

As part of the heritage inventory conducted by the Cultural Archive Center, it is proposed to create and implement an efficient database that categorizes all existing information related to documentary heritage. This initiative can be considered as a continuation of the process of identifying significant items of documentary heritage. The system should offer advanced research capabilities and enable detailed storage of digitized items. Additionally, it should provide different levels of access to its users, such as external experts, based on their specific requirements. In this regard RCU and MoC representatives suggested a unified approach to record and document the ongoing digitization and preservation efforts. As a next step, further coordination is suggested to develop necessary protocols and standards between RCU and CAC.



ADVOCACY FOR SAFEGUARDING AND AWARENESS RAISING OF DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

The Royal Commission for AlUla is currently focused on identifying, preserving, and making accessible the documentary heritage of AlUla and Saudi Arabia. However, it would be best if a national MoW Committee linked to the Ministry of Culture took charge of this initiative at the country level. This committee should operate within a specific legal framework, allowing it to collaborate with other national committees on equal grounds. It should also have the autonomy to engage in a wider range of activities and include members from other heritage institutions and disciplines. Meanwhile, the MoW Secretariat, Regional Committees, and other relevant multilateral organizations such as ICCROM should facilitate activities for awareness raising, knowledge exchange, and stakeholder mobilization. In this regard, the conference in AlUla next year will be an excellent opportunity which should be utilized. It was proposed and agreed to form a scientific committee to provide input in the planning and design of the conference.



INCREASING REPRESENTATION OF INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE ARAB REGION ON THE MOW INTERNATIONAL REGISTER

The international status and historical influence of the Arab region in the fields of science, culture, politics, economy, and literature are recognized and well substantiated by documents. These documents can only be evaluated and included in the Memory of the World (MoW) register if they meet the necessary requirements and are submitted for consideration. In order to facilitate this process, it is important to establish National MoW Committees in all Arab States, and to provide them with the necessary training and resources to prepare nominations. Additionally, it is recommended that there be greater collaboration between regional and international experts and that the regional MoW Committees take an active role in this process and share resources where possible. The upcoming conference is expected to provide a platform for Arab member states to demonstrate their commitment and take concrete actions towards preserving their cultural heritage.



FORMATION & COMPOSITION OF A NATIONAL MEMORY OF THE WORLD COMMITTEE FOR SAUDI ARABIA

A national MoW committee responsible for the preservation of a country's heritage has no specific format or makeup. However, it should represent the diverse culture, groups, genders, and expertise of the nation. UNESCO MoW programme has clear guidelines and model terms of reference¹ to guide this process. The committee's members may include independent experts from other heritage institutions or those who are self-employed. The Chair of the committee must always be one of the independent experts. Additionally, the committee may have observers such as a representative from the Ministry of Culture and the National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science. To ensure fair representation, the selection of independent experts is based on equal representation of regions within the country, disciplines, and gender. It is highly recommended to initiate a formal process for identifying proposed members under the auspices of the National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science and Ministry of Culture.

1- <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378417>



RELEVANCE OF A NATIONAL MOW REGISTER TO INCREASE GLOBAL AWARENESS OF SAUDI ARABIAN HERITAGE

The formation of a national committee and register is a significant step towards increasing nominations on the international Memory of the World (MoW) register. Creating a National Register for the Memory of World program is essential. It allows for the nomination and inscription of significant documents, regardless of their material, period, or type, that are important to the country or region but may not meet the criteria for the International Register. The National Register can help identify materials for nomination to the International Register. By having a wide range of essential documents in the National Register, it becomes easier to identify which materials have "world significance," which is a major criterion for successful inscription into the International Register of the MoW. Additionally, such a register helps quickly identify essential documents in cases of natural or man-made disasters, allowing for immediate rescue and safe preservation.



CAPITALIZING ON EXISTING REGIONAL MOW COMMITTEES

The sub-regional MoW committee recently established for the GCC is a significant initiative. It is highly recommended to expand this committee to cover the entire Arab region. Additionally, it is advisable to contact MOWCAP² and MOWLAC³, the regional committees with extensive experience in organizing and policy matters, as well as practical activities like setting up a regional register and MoW Knowledge Centers. These committees offer a valuable platform for exchanging best practices in safeguarding documentary heritage and discussing new developments in the MoW program, such as preserving digital documents or utilizing Artificial Intelligence. The KIP conference in AlUla in 2024 will provide an excellent opportunity to discuss and prioritize the potential activities of a permanent MoW committee for the whole Arab region.



NEED FOR MORE INCLUSIVE MAPPING AND INVOLVEMENT OF KEY MEMORY INSTITUTIONS

During the event, some significant actors from memory institutions and experts in the field of arts, culture, and heritage were absent. Notably, the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (ITHRA) in Dhahran, the King Fahd National Library, and Saudi Digital Library (SDL) were missing. To ensure that such events are inclusive, UNESCO will collaborate with the National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science to ensure adequate representation in future events. It is also suggested that more private institutions and collectors should be engaged in future consultations. UNESCO will soon conduct a survey and mapping of memory institutions in KSA, which will help build an extensive and comprehensive database of relevant actors.

2- the Memory of the World Committee for Asia and the Pacific

3- the Memory of the World Regional Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean



A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE CULTURE SECTOR IN KSA TO REALIZE THE FULL POTENTIAL OF THE PROJECT

The Ministry of Culture in Saudi Arabia has established several commissions focused on developing different sub-sectors such as literature, publishing, translation, fashion, film, heritage, architecture, design, visual arts, museums, theater, performing arts, libraries, music, and culinary arts. In addition to that, there are also newly formed specific agencies such as the RCU spearheading many localized heritage initiatives in specific geographical area. As part of the ongoing restructuring and streamlining of the cultural sector in Saudi Arabia, it is important for UNESCO to keep abreast of changes in the sector and the connections between relevant national entities, including the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU), to ensure that project activities align with the national framework of action.



FUTURE NOMINATIONS FROM THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

When considering suitable documents for a nomination to the International Register, it is essential to take a broad approach in terms of material, period, and subject matter. Some significant suggestions include Islamic manuscripts found in Saudi Arabia's collections, materials related to all aspects of the Hajj (religious, organizational, travel, and health issues), as well as materials related to the Haram al-Sharif in Mecca (architectural documents, early photographic documentation, and development or enlargement of the holy site). For instance, an excellent example would be a milestone from the 2nd century AH / 8th CE from the Darb Zubaida (hajj route from Iraq to Mecca) that indicates the distance of 62 Barid (which is 1240 km) from Kufa. This artifact is currently preserved in the National Museum in Riyadh. While the identification of documentary heritage and formation of a MoW Committee is imperative in the long run, these suggestions endorsed in the consultation can serve as a starting point to encourage future nominations from Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the successful Jabal Ikmah nomination can serve as an inspiration to demonstrate the links between Memory of the World and other UNESCO heritage programs.

The Memory of the World (MoW) Programme posits that the documentary heritage of each UNESCO Member State is a reflection of its identity and history. This heritage not only highlights the unique position of each nation in the world's history but also demonstrates the connections between different nations, cultures, peoples, and generations. The recently held multistakeholder consultation exemplified this aspect.

ANNEX - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Title	Organization
Fackson Banda	Chief of DHE	UNESCO
Salah Khaled	Director of UNESCO GCC and Yemen / UNESCO representative	UNESCO
Maliha Shah	Project Officer	UNESCO
Anissa Harfouche	Programme Officer	UNESCO
Yahia Dabbous	Consultant	UNESCO
Maria Njeim	Consultant	UNESCO
José Ignacio Gallego Revilla	Advisor for UNESCO and Cultural and Scientific Diplomacy Programs	RCU
Giorgia Cesaro	Program manager culture	RCU
Saeed Alsharari	Admin Assistant	RCU
Paul Christians	Cultural Heritage Research Senior Manager	RCU
Yasser Arafa	Director of CI sector	National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science
Dr. Johannes Joseph Maria Bos	Chair Memory of the World Register Sub-Committee	UNESCO MoW
Dr. Joachim Gierlichs	Curatorial and Collection Consultant	UNESCO MoW
Dr. Humaid Al Nofali	Member National MoW Committee Oman	MoW Oman
Prof. Sherif Kamel Mahmoud Shaheen	Head MoW Committee Egypt	MoW Egypt
Abdulmajeed Al Mahboub	Member GCC and Yemen MoW committee	MoW Regional GCC
Abdullah Al-Nasif	Local Community representative	RCU

Name	Title	Organization
Dr. Raed Alsufyani	General Manager of the Cultural Research & Studies General Department	MoC
Dr. Hani Hayajneh	Advisor	MoC
Dr. Khaled Alsumait	Senior consultant (Cultural Archive Center - Ministry of Culture)	MoC
Dr. Mohammed Bay	Senior consultant	MoC
Rola Alghair	Director	National Museum
Dr. Munirah Mushawh	Archaeology Survey Manager	RCU
Dr. Assel Sayer Ragi Aljaied	Heritage Archives Senior specialist	MoC Invitees
Dr. Tahani Ibrahim Ali Almahmood	Evaluation & Compliance Manager, Culture	RCU
Dr. Khoulod Mohammed Albugami	Assistant Professor	Princess Noura University
Dr. Riyadh Mobark Abdullah Ashmeel	Lecturer	Texas A&M University
Dr. Sultan Bader Almutery	Assistant Professor	King Saud University
Dr. Salma Mohammed B. Hosawi	Associate Professor	King Saud University
Dr. Saleh Dhaifallah Alamri	Associate Professor	King Saud University
Dr. Fahdah Salman OFAISSAN		French research and studies center
Dr. Lujain Yousif Abdulkareem Mirza	Associate Professor	Princess Noura University
Dr. Mohammed Mashary Alnaim	Associate Professor	Hael University
Mousaed Rahael Munadi Alanazi	Supervisor of unit of discovery and analysis of petroleum locations	ARAMCO
Nuha Hashim AlSharif	Director of research department	Royal Institute of Traditional Arts
Basmah bin Nweshir	Senior Content Specialist	MoC
Jood Althukair	Research Project Specialist	MoC

Name	Title	Organization
Rawan AlQadi	Heritage Archives Specialist	MoC
Feras aloumi	Advisor	MoC
Lujain Alymani	Researcher	MoC
Najd Almousa	Research Project Lead	MoC
Amal Bin Musaybih	Senior officer for research and development	Saudi heritage preservation society
Ziad AI-Issa	Senior officer for research and development	Saudi heritage preservation society
Luluh Al Khalaf		National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science
Rehaf Gassas	Executive director	Saudi heritage preservation society
Leyla Al Helabi		National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science