

The Status Quo of the Sabaean Archeological Monuments and Inscriptions in Mārib Oasis-Yemen

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the current situation of the Sabaean archeological monuments in Mārib Oasis. It is conducted by using a field survey on the reality of these monuments, and the vandalism which they have been recently exposed to, such as looting, destruction, acts of distortion and neglect even though they cultural significance and extraordinary value, which are an evidence for the emergence and development of the Sabaean civilization in Mārib Oasis since the 2nd millennium BC. to the 6th century AD. These monuments is worthy of being included in the World Human Heritage list.

Undoubtedly, such acts of vandalism which triggered these archeological monuments in Mārib Oasis have harmed it and its authenticity, its historical, scientific and aesthetic standards. These archeological monuments are the most critical in the history of their civilizational and cultural process. Unless they are remedied sooner, the contents of such monuments, such as antiquities, inscriptions and architecture, will disappear, especially under the current political situation Yemen is experiencing, which led to creating an environment that causes destruction, looting and distorting the archeological and cultural heritage in Mārib and Al-Jawf governorates.

These cultural and archeological monuments are Ancient Mārib Town, the capital of Saba' kingdom, which recently had drifting, destruction and architectural innovation that damaged a number of its archeological monuments, in addition to Awām temple (Maḥram Bilqīs) which was exposed to acts of looting, tampering, neglect and destruction to its blocks and Sabaic inscriptions The northern drains of Ancient Mārib Dam was also exposed to shelling and destruction, as well as Bar'ān temple and the Ancient irrigation systems in Mārib Oasis.

This paper gives a clear image of the reality of such archeological monuments, the risks to which they are exposed, and presenting some expected suggestions towards their protection and maintenance, and recording a urgent call to the Yemeni government and all international organizations which are

concerned with the protection of the Yemeni cultural and archeological heritage for a urgent and immediate intervention to save the monuments and inscriptions of Mārib Oasis and suggesting some viable solutions for its protection.

Introduction:

Yemen has a great historical legacy which is includes many civilizational achievements and the environmental, cultural and intellectual changes which the Yemenis have experienced since the pre-history eras until the late eras AD. The ruins of settlements and the walled archeological cities, the ruins of dams and water systems, along with the results of the preliminary excavations and archeological studies which had been conducted in a number of archeological sites, all proved on the extent of the rooted Yemeni archeological heritage, its authenticity, its diversity, as well as its cultural and cognitive importance for Yemen and the Arab areas and human heritage.

It is known that, for over 1500 years before Islam Yemen has witnessed the emergence of civilizations which are rich in their cultural and social monuments, which are as important as the Ancient Near East civilizations, such as Saba', Qatabān, Ma'īn, Ḥaḍramawt and Awsān civilizations. Such civilizations had left behind many urban areas and archeological sites in the eastern valleys of Yemen and the southern, northern and western highlands. Through their monuments and inscriptions, we can understand the development of Ancient Yemeni societies, the ways of their production and their stability, identifying the history of human settling, more understanding of the geographic map of human societies in the pre-Islamic eras and the historical eras. The remains/ruins of the walled cities, luxurious temples, the archeological dams and the developed irrigation systems, all distinguish the Ancient Yemeni culture.

The Yemeni ancient monuments and inscriptions constitute a collective memory with is divergent in content and patterns, a diverse cultural history. It is not like the archeological heritage in the other areas of the world, restricted in in a specific pattern of the monuments, or culture, or use, or selective process restricted

to a historical period or specific practices by passerby, but it is rather a whole system for all the components of the archeological heritage, from the pre-history cultures and bronze and historical eras, and understanding of the Ancient Yemeni people of their surrounding environment.

These monuments and inscriptions are currently exposed to drifting, destruction, looting, neglect and trade. Most Ancient Yemeni archeological sites and towns in wādī Al-Jawf and Mārib governorate are exposed to acts of systematic unmatched looting and destruction although such monuments and towns have a historical and archeological importance as they are urban areas of the major Ancient Yemeni kingdoms, and they are the first undisputed monuments of Yemen.

This state of looting and destruction is also applied to the remaining towns and archeological monuments in the eastern valleys of Yemen, i.e. in Bayḥan valley, Marḥah valley, Ḥaḍramawt, and in the towns and capitals of the Yemeni (central and northern) highlands, such as the towns of Al-‘Awd, Ḥafar, Šuku‘, Sam‘ān (Maṣna‘at Mārīya), Baynūn, Maukal, Nā‘iṭ, Kāniṭ, Ġaymān, Maqoulah, Ḥāz, Riyām, and many other monuments and archeological towns which are of great importance. Some of the ruins of these archeological monuments are currently still present.

When the Arab Spring revolutions broke out, and the Yemeni crisis erupted in 2011, the reality of the Yemeni archeological heritage in wādī Al-Jawf and Mārib governorate has taken another dimension. Acts of random digging, looting, destruction, and neglect have increased, and the war has also increased the acts of sabotage. A number of the Yemeni archeological sites have been exposed to shelling; some of them have been within the fighting areas due to their importance and great fortification as in the Ancient Mārib town, the walled towns of Al-Jawf, and the temple of of *Imqḥ b l w l Šrwḥ* in Mārib. In addition, the archeological heritage in Yemeni museums has been exposed to shelling, and all the contents of all their ancient and Islamic monuments have been destroyed.

Unfortunately, at present, the Ancient Yemeni monuments experience a painful reality which is the most critical one in the history of their civilizational and cultural process. Although Yemen has great monuments, specifically the monuments of Saba' kingdom in Mārib oasis and wādī Al-Jawf, it does not have the willingness to manage and protect them, compared with other neighboring countries where the political leaderships have taken major steps to improve the cultural and civilizational heritage and they have given constant attention.

This research will shed light on the reality of the Sabaic monuments and inscriptions in Mārib Oasis. Such an oasis has Yemeni monuments and inscriptions more than any other area in Yemen, such luxurious temples, Ancient settlements, archeological dams and developed irrigation systems. They must be taken into consideration as they are inspirational to the future Yemeni generations with its various cultural and intellectual aspects, and that they are not merely stones, walls and existing columns, but rather they are concepts, culture, memory and identity, which reflect the Yemeni people's values and authenticity and connect their presence and great past. They are also a memory of the nation and its national stockpile. And their loss means the loss of the Yemeni identity and its ancient past.

The Sabaean Archeological Monuments in Mārib Oasis and their Cultural and Civilizational Importance of Saba' Kingdom:

Mārib Oasis is located at the south-west side of the Empty Quarter desert. To the north and east, it is bordered vast desert areas which lead to Ramlat Al-Sab'ataīn, and to the west are the uneven highlands, most important of which are Al-Balaq Mountains. In its topography, the oasis takes the rectangular shape which extends from the west to the east with approximate length of 20 kms, and from the north to the south with approximate length of 10 kms. wādī Ḍanah is divides Mārib Oasis into two main plains: a northern plain called Abyan and a southern plain called Yasrān, which is a division approved by the Sabaic inscriptions (ERS 2651/2; RES 3946/6) and it was

described in the Holy Qura'an as the two Edens – the right and the left.

In the ancient times, Mārib Oasis was on the incense and frankincense road which connects between the Yemeni eastern valleys and the Al-Jawf valley to the north, to which flow the western highland waters of Yemen which come from the east of Khawlān highlands, Al-Ḥada', Murad, Radā', etc. The historian Al-Hamadanī describes it, in the 10th century AD, as the dwelling of Saba' and that it is full of wonders, and in it there are the two Edens to the right of and left of the dam, and to the floods of wādī Ḍanah ends (Al-Hamadanī, Al-'Iklīl 8, 2004, pp. 73, 74; Al-Şifah, 1990, pp. 152-153).

Mārib Oasis has a great archeological importance. It takes the most prominent place among the Yemeni ancient monuments because it embraces the most important and ancient Sabaean monuments. Its monuments, with their histories and functions, are undoubtedly are the outcome of a long historical civilizational process which had been formed in the pre-history eras and continued until the historical eras. In its archeological sites, the power and culture of Saba' are reflected in construction engineering, architecture technology and the extent of settling. Mārib Oasis is the historical scene of the historical and civilizational events which were connected with mentioning the Kingdom of Saba'. Through the monuments and inscriptions of the oasis, one can trace back the political, economic and cultural development of the people of Saba', and how the Sabaeans could form a developed civilization in the second millennium BC until the 6th century A.D. That is due to their skillful control of the waters, creating developed irrigation techniques across thousands of years, developing green fields and plains in a desert area which is not appropriate for living (Hitgen, 2005, p. 39).

The monuments of the Sabaeans in Mārib Oasis are many and diverse. Little is known of these monuments so far. There are still big religious and administrative centres, several irrigation systems which have not been discovered yet because they are located down the clay deposit of the southern and northern plain

of the oasis. That is what is seen successively by the random digging activities and the rapid sprawl of the population there, as well as the contents of the new inscriptions which mentioned some religious and civil facilities, dams, and developed irrigation channels which had not been explored yet and that dated back to the Saba' mukarribs (Muhtam Mārib 1).

The Ancient irrigation systems in the Mārib Oasis are the greatest archeological evidences for the development of the irrigation engineering of the Sabaeans. Through these systems, we can study the Ancient administrative system of the waters in Mārib Oasis and its building, how to exploit and control it, how to protect it from floods, as well as defining the form of the ancient settlements in Mārib Oasis. The Ancient Mārib Dam is the most important and famous one of such water systems, not only in Mārib Oasis, but also around the Arabian Peninsula. These water systems are unique in their construction techniques, and they are a Sabaean Yemeni peculiarity which is missing in all ancient Near East civilizations. They have been built to harmonize with the dry environment which had spread in the eastern areas of Yemen. Hence, building them had required from the Sabaeans a deep knowledge of the environment and construction and a cultural accumulation since the Bronze Ages. The preliminary archeological studies by the German Archeological Institute - Şan'ā' had proved that the early irrigation systems in Mārib Oasis go back to the bronze eras. The cemeteries which were found in Al-Balaq Mountain indicate that Mārib Oasis was populated during the bronze periods. The Al-Jufaīnah valley settlement which is located in the north of the Sadd Al-Mabna is one of the early civilizational centres which indicate the beginning of establishing the Kingdom of Saba' in the end of the 2nd millennium BC.

The alluvial deposits in Mārib Oasis are of great significance. They are as an archive for the development of using the land during the Holocene Era (10000 – 3000 years BC). Through them, we can re-make the Ancient climate and the environmental changes which spread in the oasis during the Holocene Era,

which eventually led to creating the irrigation systems to keep up with the dry environmental system; and we can identify the history of constructing the Sabaean Ancient irrigation systems in the oasis by the organic residue which are found in such deposits and the early field systems. The German Archeological Institute - Şan‘ā’ has made good efforts during the last 30 years in tracing such deposits and the relevant human activities and in depicting the ancient environment of the oasis (Pietsch et al, 2010, pp. 784-799), in addition to conducting important archeological surveys represented by exploring some of the ancient temples and cemeteries and well-known irrigation systems (Eishmann & Holger, 2003, p. 22).

One of the greatest cultural archeological sites in Mārib Oasis, which indicates its importance and its Ancient history, is the Ancient Mārib town which is the longest cultural and political centre of Saba’ kingdom. It is the biggest and most important archeological town in Yemen. It is also the urban area of Saba’ kingdom, where the famous Royal palace called S¹lhn, in addition to the main big temples which have not been discovered yet. If excavation is implemented in Ancient Mārib town in the future, many questions on the history of Saba’ kingdom in its early ages will be answered.

In Mārib Oasis, there is Awām temple (Maḥram Bilqīs), with its exceptional universal value, and is the biggest temple in Ancient Yemen and perhaps in the Arabian Peninsula, and it was a holy place to which pilgrimage is made by Yemenis in the ancient times. It has a huge archive of Sabaean inscriptions which are about 1000 Sabaic inscription which dated back to the period between the 8th century BC and the 4th century AD. Such Sabaic inscriptions are important because they show the history of Saba’ and its relation with the Ancient Yemeni kingdoms and other kingdoms in the middle and north of the Arabian Peninsula. It also includes a large number Sabaean names of notables, families and peoples, as well as the names of the kings, leaders and areas. (Jamme, 1962; Maraqtan, 2002, pp.209-216; Maraqtan and ‘Abdallah, 2002, pp. 49-53).

Next to the temple towards the south, there is one of the most and ancient well-known Sabaic cemeteries. The German Archeological Institute - Ṣan‘ā’ has excavated there in order to identify the Sabaean burial rituals and the social status of the deceased, as well as the construction and funerary items of such cemeteries (Gerlach, 2002, pp. 41-92; Mancarella, 2016. pp. 179-194).

Furthermore, there is Bar‘ān temple (‘Arsh Bilqīs) which is dedicated for devoting Almaḡah god who had the attention and studying by the German Institute for monuments for a long time, whose building dated back to the beginning of the 1st millennium B.C. (Vogt et al, 2003; Nebes, pp. 160-164). All such archeological sites in Mārib Oasis are of great importance as they shed light on the civilizational and historical developments of Saba’ kingdom since the 2nd millennium B.C. up to the 6th century A.D. (Fig. 1).

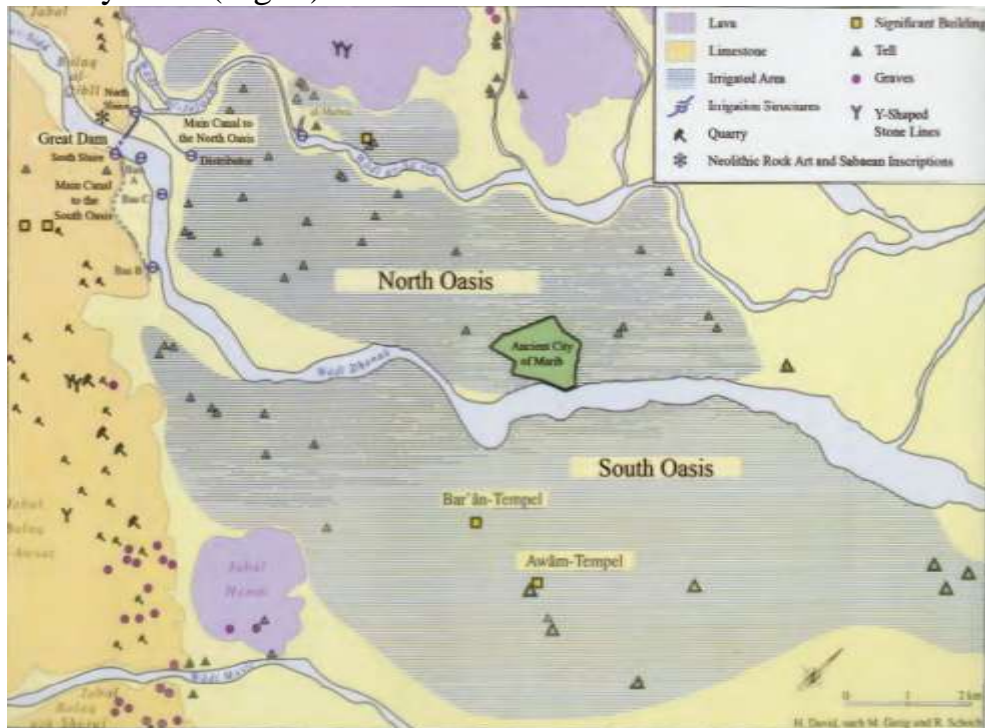


Fig. 1: Map of the archeological monuments in Mārib Oasis (Hitgen, 2005, p. 18).

The status quo of the Sabaean Monuments and Inscriptions in Mārib Oasis:

Since a long time ago, the monuments in Mārib Oasis suffer from a severe negligence, which has recently aggregated as a result of the Yemeni war and the political armed conflicts that started in 2011. That has increased the suffering of the Ancient Yemeni archeological heritage, specifically in Mārib Oasis and wādī Al-Jawf which was exposed to looting, destruction and distortion. A lot of towns and archeological sites have been used by the conflicting parties as military sites, fighting arenas, and places for storing the ammo and weapons. That is because such sites are considered fortresses, and they overlook the neighboring areas. Thus, these sites, including the Ancient Mārib town and the Ancient Mārib dam had been exposed to shelling, destruction and tams some of their greatest archeological monuments.

Perhaps the most imminent danger to the monuments of Mārib Oasis is the modern urban sprawl which was ten-fold increase, and it extends many lands of the oasis. Since 2011, and as a result of the political divide that happened in Yemen, Mārib town and oasis became one of the attracting places for both the population and investments. This has led to a major construction expansion and urban sprawl. The population of Mārib town had reached over a million inhabitants, in addition to the large internally displaced person camps extended to Al-Jafīnah area to the south and west and to Ancient Mārib town itself. This has made it difficult, in the future, to trace the oasis's environment and the Ancient settlement there, and to reconstruct the Ancient environment of the oasis, as well as studying the Ancient irrigation systems.

No doubt that such increasing urban sprawl greatly threatens the greatest cultural archeological sites in Mārib Oasis as the case of Ancient Mārib town which had been exposed to looting, negligence and constructing modern buildings there, establishing military sites in the town. The Awām temple has also been exposed to urban sprawl, and the temple's monuments and inscriptions have been exposed to looting, destruction and

distortion. Such a temple and the temple of Bar'ān are open daily for visitors. That has led to obliterating, distorting and looting their monuments. But the stones of water channels located in Mārib Oasis have also been removed, and some of such channels have been backfilled such as the channels located in Yasrān Oasis.

The natural elements have also contributed in the suffering of the cultural archeological sites in Mārib Oasis. Ancient Mārib town and its dam are vulnerable to the risks of seasonal torrential rains and floods. At present, it is known that the flood of wādī Ḍanah which flows along the Ancient Mārib town has swept all southern wall and the towers which are connected to it and has even reached its southern parts. But the temples of Awām and Bar'ān, their exposure to rain, wind and sand have contributed to crumbling of some of their blocks, dropping of their lower rows of stones, and blurring its Musnad inscriptions. Undoubtedly, such factors have a lot of risks, which, in the future, may contribute to extinction and obliteration of such archeological monuments and changing them to ruins.

What follows is a review of the reality of the Sabaic monuments and inscriptions in Mārib Oasis, based on the field survey by the researcher at the end of 2021.

Ancient Mārib Town:

In the past, Mārib was the capital of the Sabaean state and the centre of its political, religious and cultural authority. The Ancient Mārib town has a special status among all the Ancient Yemeni towns. It is the biggest and oldest town in Yemen. Its area reaches 110 hectares. It is also the greatest symbol of Saba' kingdom and its progress during the 1st 1000 BC and the AD eras. The preliminary archeological studies by the German Archeological Institute - Şan'ā' indicated the importance of such a town and the size of the archeological stratified monuments, which reaches over 20 meters, in addition to its huge dwellings, palaces, temples, administrative buildings, archeological hills, as well as what remains of its stone impregnable walls (Maraqten,

2005, pp. 118-122; Ishmann and Holger, 2003, pp. 22-24; Hitgen, 2005, pp. 74-87).

However, in spite of the archeological importance of Ancient Mārib town, and its significant cultural monuments, since a long time ago, there had been acts of tampering and ransacking. Mud dwellings had been built on such monuments, some of which were still there until the present day. The stones of their religious and civil buildings had been used in construction some dwellings, such as Suleiman mosque which is located down the big archeological ruins on hill. The polished stones of their walls had been looted and used in constructing the modern dwellings outside the Ancient Mārib town. In the fifties of the past century, the Wali (governor) of 'Imām Yaḥya erected inside Ancient Mārib town a building for the government, from the stones of its temples, palaces and walls, which was known as Al-Dār Al-Nāsirah (the victorious House). As stated by 'Aḥmad Fakhrī, its construction caused the destruction of more than twenty buildings of Ancient Mārib town (Fakhrī, 1948, p. 203), and it is the building which had recently been destroyed and looted by some tribes of Mārib.

Once the Yemeni war started in 2011, the reality of Ancient Mārib town has been worse. The town had been exposed to acts of systematic looting, destruction and distortion, and modern architectural facilities were established in the northern side of the town and down the great archeological hill to the west. Based on the researcher's field visits in 2021 to Ancient Mārib town, it was observed that the town had been exposed to acts of tampering and destruction. For example, the town became an encampment for the Yemeni forces, and a number of army barracks have been built on it. Additionally, many paths have been made by modern bulldozers, which led to sweeping the upper archeological layers have been drifted and their contents of stones and stone bricks which are made of marble (Fig 2, 3). Most of such works or activities have been concentrated down the big hill to the south of Suleiman mosque, beside what was known as Al-Dār Al-Nāsirah to the south and in the eastern side of the town as well.

The northern side of Ancient Mārib town, on the right and left of the asphalted road, some inhabitants intentionally built modern dwellings on vast areas, some of which have been removed by the local authority in Mārib. These architectural facilities have caused many distortions on the surface of the site, and such removal led to drifting some archeological stratified monuments of the site (Fig. 4, 5).

The environmental factor represented by torrential rains and floods that caused by the high flow of wādī Ḍanah last year, contributed in erosion and destruction of huge parts of the southern and eastern wall of Mārib town, and causing deep canyons in the southern and eastern sides of the town, which led to destroying huge parts of the southern wall and sweeping the archeological layers and the contents of the Sabaean buildings and pottery which spread along such parts (Fig. 6, 7).



Fig. 2: drifting the area located down the big hill, south Suleiman mosque in Ancient Mārib town by modern bulldozers (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).



Fig. 3: a model of random drifting exposed to Ancient Mārib town as a result of establishing the army barracks and military barriers (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).



Fig. 4: construction modern facilities in Ancient Mārib town and random digging (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).

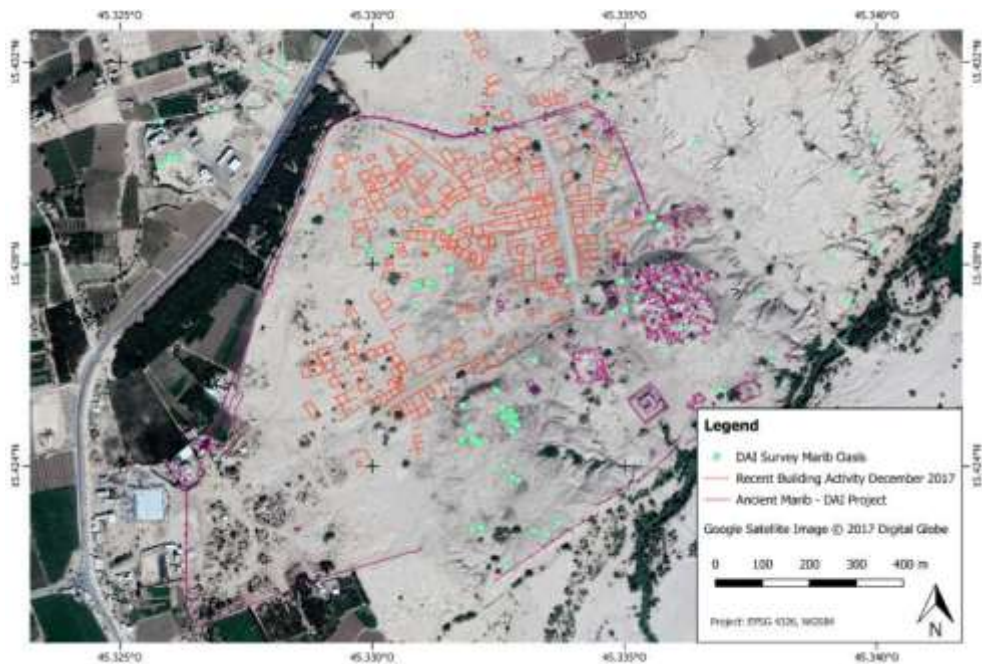


Fig. 5: an aerial photo of Ancient Mārib town showing the size of modern new constructions in the town during the period 2012-1017 (Schoeneberg, 2018, p. 7).



Fig. 6: collapse of the southern wall of Ancient Mārib town and the construction structures related to it and their exposure to destruction as a result of frequent torrential rains and floods of wādī Danah (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).



Fig. 7: the situation of the southern walls of Mārib town, which were eroded by rain waters and the floods of wādī Ḍanah (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).

Awām Temple (Maḥram Bilqīs):

Awām temple is one of the monuments of the great Mārib Oasis, which has its cultural, social and religious features. It is located in the south of Ancient Mārib town, 4 kms far on the southern bank of wādī Ḍanah (Fig. 1). It is the main temple of Saba' peoples and the Ḥajj destination and their spiritual attachment. It was built for devoting their national god named Almaḡah, the idol of the moon to the Sabaean, which is mentioned in the inscriptions in the format: *ʾmqh b ʾ ʾwm* (Ir 10 = ZI 15) and in another late format: *ʾmqh Ṭhwn b ʾ ʾwm* (CIH 407/6).

The archeological heritage of Awām temple shows the creativity of the Ancient Yemenis at the intellectual, cognitive, religious and financial levels. The temple clearly demonstrates the Sabaean values and beauty, and the aspects of collective creation and their cultural practices for 2000 years before Islam. Among the greatest aspects of such a creation are the Musnad inscriptions, which are about 1000 Musnad inscriptions engraved

on stones of marble, alabaster, mica and bronze. They are deemed to be one the most important documents about the history of Ancient Yemen in general, and the history of Saba' kingdom in particular. With regard to architecture and construction technology, we can say that Awām temple is one of the unique Sabaean exploits, and in such a temple, the art of the Sabaean Ancient construction is embodied at its best. However, despite the great archeological and historical importance of Awām temple, and the secrets it holds about the kingdom of Saba'. The monuments and inscriptions are currently exposed to acts of looting, destruction, tampering and willful neglect, to the extent that some of its Musnad inscriptions were stolen and trafficked to outside Yemen and breaking some of them, specifically the Musnad inscriptions located in columns foyer and the walls of the temple's hall (Fig. 8, 12), including the inscriptions located in the northern annex building (al-Hajj, 2021, pp. 42-97).



Fig. 8: Acts of tampering of Sabaic inscriptions erected in the south-east of the hall of the columns' foyer in Awām temple. They had been destroyed, dropped from their place, and broken, and some inscriptions had been looted (M. al-Hajj, 2021).



Fig. 9: a photo of the Sabaic inscriptions erected on the south-east of the foyer columns before breaking and looting them (AFSM Achieve. Maraqten, 2005, p. 360).



Fig. 10: the situation of Musnad inscriptions erected on the north-west of foyer columns , which have been recently destroyed and looted (by al-Ḥajj, 2021).



Fig. 11: the Musnad inscriptions erected on the north-west foyer columns during the excavation by the AFSM before being destroyed and looted (Maraqten, 2005, p. 361).

Additionally, there have been writings and paints on the columns of the temple and the walls of its internal halls, throwing the empty cans on its stone corridors, digging and cracking the brick facades and stone tiles for exploring minerals that the visitors believe exist (Fig. 11). The public and the monuments thieves were permitted to enter and exit its internal halls for taking photos and theft.



Fig. 12: Acts of tampering to the front of the internal walls of the front area foyer columns , through expanding and deepening the holes on which the votive plaques were hung, and doing other holes beside them in search of minerals (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).

Perhaps the most notable infringements that the Awām temple has recently been exposed to were the destruction of the gate of king ‘Alhān Nahfān, king of Saba’ and ḍu-Raydān located in the northern annex building and stealing its inscriptions which were on the sides of the gate and that were inscribed with Musnad script on two alabaster plaques which were found in 2004 (Fig. 13, 14). The content of such two inscriptions commemorate the victories of king ‘Alhān Nahfān and his son Šā‘ir’ Awtar on the Ḥimyar crowds and their king T’rān Yuhan‘im ḍu-Raydān and the other political coalitions in the end of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd century AD.



Fig. 13: the gate of king ‘Alhān Nahfān, king of Saba’ and ḍu-Raydān before being destroyed, and the two Musnad inscriptions located on the sides of its western entry (AFSM Achieve. Yūsuf ‘Abdallah).



Fig. 14: the gate of king ‘Alhān Nahfān, king of Saba’ and ḍu-Raydān after being destroyed, and after stealing the two Musnad inscriptions located on the its western entry (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).

The gate of king ‘Amdān Bayyin Yuhaqbiḍ, king of Saba’ and ḍu-Raydān located to the north-west of the gate of king ‘Alhān Nahfān was exposed to some looting and destruction activities represented by stealing the bronze horse’s column and the adjoining column which is also made of bronze - their fate has not been known yet. The thieves of monuments also deliberately stole parts of the two eaves of the stone ibex, especially the back parts of the two eaves. The thieves also deliberately destroyed the front part of the eaves which is located on the right of the gate (Fig. 15, 16).

At present, the gate of ‘Amdān Bayyin Yuhaqbiḍ, king of Saba’ and ḍu-Raydān, is exposed to collapse at any time because of crumble and fall of its lower facades, and as a result of deliberately destroying it. It has been moved while being stolen and cracking its upper eaves with basalt stones - which were also used for extending the empty place behind the gate to fall it. In addition, the long inscription which is located before the right

side of the gate of ‘Amdān Bayyin Yuhaqbiḍ has been deliberately and aggressively destroyed.



Fig. 15: the right side of the gate of king ‘Amdān Bayyin Yuhaqbiḍ after being destroyed and looting a part of its upper eaves and the horse’s bronze item and the column beside it (M. al-Hajj, 2021).



Fig. 16: the situation of the ramshackle gate of king ‘Amdān Bayyin Yuhaqbiḍ, and on its upper eaves appears the used stones in breaking it and expanding the empty place behind it (M. al-Hajj, 2021).

The Cemetery of Awām Temple:

Awām temple's cemetery, which is located to its south, is considered to be one the unique Sabaic cemeteries in both construction and design. The depth of some of these cemeteries reaches over 7 meters. Its history dates back to the first millennium BC. It was built with the engraved and well-polished limestone. On its walls there are inscriptions that mention the names of the deceased of those priests, traders and the public who were buried in such a cemetery, in addition to photos of their faces and the area of the graves they owned. The German mission for monuments found important funerary items which show religious and faith-based aspects practiced by the Sabaeans in the ancient times just as the inhabitants of the ancient near east inhabitants (Iris, 2002, p. 41-92; Clara, 2016, pp. 179-194).

Recently, these cemeteries have been exposed to looting, destruction and random digging because the people there think that they are places of the Sabaic burials and treasures. Hence, recently, some of the tombs, which were excavated by the German Archeological Mission, were recently dug up (Fig, 17, 18). The growth of the Al-'Arāk trees (*salvadora persica*) beside such tower tombs caused loose to the walls and bases of the building of such tombs.

One of the risks that were observed about the cemeteries of Awām temple was the construction of modern dwellings along the southern side of the cemeteries, which were extending towards the iron fence to the north and west sides where the stone cemeteries are directly located. That would cause a high risk to such cemeteries. In the future, their stones may be exposed to looting and constructing on them, which will lead to loss of such cemeteries and their contents of archeological layers and components.



Fig. 17: he acts of digging up and looting which affected the cemetery of Awām temple (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).



Fig 18: a photo of the same cemetery before the acts of digging up and looting, after finishing the archeological excavations by the German Institute for monuments (Gerlach, 2002, Tafel 12: 2).

The Bar'ān Temple (Bilqīs Throne):

It is one of the important Sabaic archeological sites located among the fields of the southern Mārib Oasis. The German Archeological Institute - Şan'ā' has made great efforts in the whole exploration of the Bar'ān temple and supporting it in that period. Recently, the temple was deliberately damaged as a result of the neglect to which it was exposed because it is open daily to visitors and saboteurs. Among the damages to the temple was the growing of trees in its front yard and on its blocks (Fig. 19). The temple's six columns and its stones located in platform and around the front yard were distorted by visitors from the public who purposefully recorded their memories on the columns of the temple, on its wall plaques and its rows of stone in an ethical way (Fig. 20). In addition, the visitors had dropped the stone altars located in the front yard of the temple, and they threw the waste and cans on the different parts of the temple.

Moreover, the stone marble seats surrounding the temple's yard have been broken and distorted, which are considered to be one of the most important archeological components of the temple (Fig. 21). The natural factor played a role in damaging some of the blocks of Bar'ān temple due to lack of a department for observing and tackling such damages. Some of the architectural units of the temple had dropped – such as the falling down in the ground of platform located behind the six stone columns from which water is leaking to the lower bases of the platform. That would threaten its falling down in the future (Fig. 22). If the damage still exists, it may reach the stone terrace which carries the six columns of temple. They may crack and be loose, which thus needs a rapid tackling.

The stairs of the stone big ladder which lead to the columns' platform started to crumble because of the natural elements and the daily ascending and descending of visitors on such stairs causes their friction and motion.

Still, among the damages observed about Bar'ān temple is the storing of large gas locomotives beside its western walls, which are about 20 meters far from its walls (Fig. 23). Their existence

undoubtedly causes a great risk to the building of Bar'ān temple and its contents of monuments and inscriptions, as they may explode at any time due to the situations of the current was in Yemen, especially Mārib. Therefore, such locomotives must be moved to far places.



Fig. 19; the growth of trees in the yard of Bar'ān temple and the acts of tampering to its stone altars located in the front yard and falling out some of them on the ground, and throwing the remnants beside it (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).

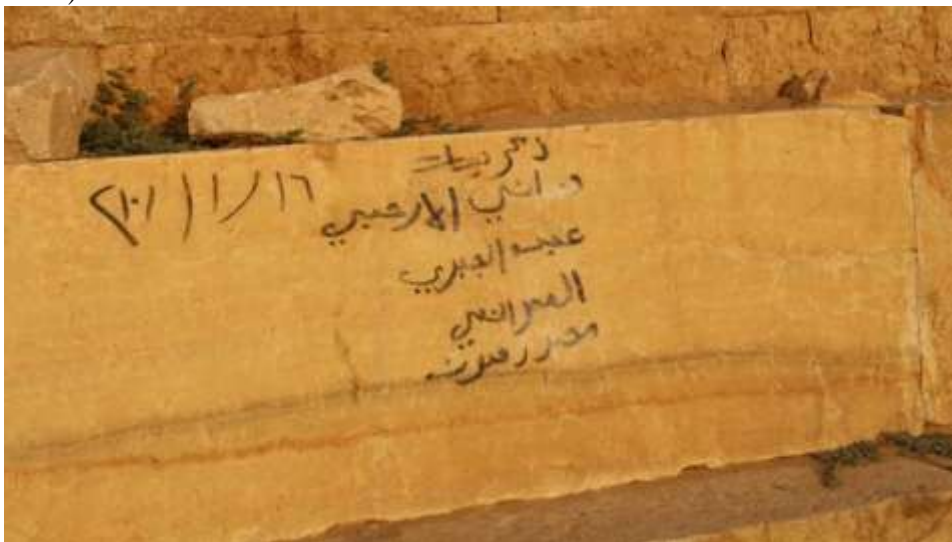


Fig. 20: distortion of Bar'ān temple by writing memories on its columns, walls and its archeological components (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).



Fig. 21: breaking the marble seats surrounding the front yard of Bar'ān temple (M. al-Hajj, 2021).



Fig. 22: collapse of the ground of platform in Bar'ān temple, which is located behind the platform of the six columns, and its collecting of rain waters, which may lead to loose of the temple's walls and the platform of the columns in the future (M. al-Hajj, 2021).



Fig. 23: storing the gas locomotives beside Bar'ān temple which causes severe risk to the survival of the temple in case such locomotives are exposed to explosion (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).

Ancient Mārib Dam and Ancient Irrigation Systems in Mārib Oasis

Ancient Mārib dam and the related irrigation systems are a wonder of the Sabaic architectural art in Mārib Oasis. It is one of the most important and most popular water systems in the Arabian Peninsula. The dam has had a plentiful part of the activities of the German Archeological Institute - Ṣan'ā' in the research fields and in the fields of maintenance and restoration in order to preserve such a significant architectural site and to activate it in terms of tourism.

However, unfortunately is that the northern sluice of Ancient Mārib dam recently has severe damages as a result of being exposed to shelling, which led to destructing vast parts of its western and eastern walls and their internal paddings located in the water outlet (Fig. 24). Such destruction has reached the lower rows of stone which are built on the rock to the west (Fig. 25). what was left of those walls became vulnerable to falling as a result of the separation of the stones of its lower rows.

At present, the stones of the northern sluice and the fallen inscriptions spread on the right and left sides of the channel, and they are vulnerable to looting (Fig. 26). There must be immediate action for reconstructing what has been devastated of the northern sluice of Mārib dam. If that is not possible, there must preservation of the stones and inscriptions which fell off the dam before being looted and being used for constructing modern facilities and the adjoining army barracks.

With regard to Al-Jufaīnah dam, during the field visits, it was observed that some of its lower walls had fallen down as a result of the invasive acts. Some of the stone facades of water outlet had been removed, and the walls of the outlet fell out (Fig 27). By searching about the situation of the other channels in Mārib Oasis, specifically in Ḥadiad area, some of them have been exposed to acts of tampering and destruction, removing their stones, and backfilling some channels (Fig. 28, 29).



Fig. 24: the upper part of the northern sluice of Ancient Mārib dam after being exposed to shelling (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).



Fig. 25: the western side of the northern sluice of Mārib dam after being exposed to shelling (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).



Fig. 26: the inscriptions that fell down from the walls of the northern sluice of Ancient Mārib dam after being exposed to shelling (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).



Fig. 27: Al-Mabna dam (Al-Jaufainah) after the lower stones of its drainage channel had been removed (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).



Fig. 28: one of the diversion dams in Ḥadiad area in Mārib Oasis after being exposed to looting and destruction (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).



Fig. 28: the acts of digging and destruction of the diversion dam located in Ḥadiad area in Mārib Oasis (M. al-Ḥajj, 2021).

The Hopeful Steps towards Protection and Attention in the Sabaic Monuments and Inscriptions in Mārib Oasis:

After reviewing the situation of the Sabaic monuments and inscriptions in Mārib Oasis and the acts of looting, destruction, obliteration and distortion, we can say that such monuments have physical and symbolic values and symbols, as well as the diversity and density of their archeological cultural contents in terms of architecture, language and art. They are vital as a cultural heritage and collective memory, which is the concern of all Yemenis and humans.

Undoubtedly, the current infringements have a great impact on the vital Sabaic cultural monuments in Mārib Oasis. They caused damages to such sites, which are hard to be maintained. In fact, the situation of the Sabaean monuments in Mārib Oasis is at a fork in the road which is unclear. The current situations which Yemen experiences will make these sites lose their cultural identity and collective memory.

To avoid the loss of such monuments and inscriptions, as they are a main component of the national identity, and they indicate the Yemeni human creativity, some solutions and measures are presented here – that, due to the current human and cultural crisis which Yemen experiences, the concerned bodies must work together for solutions and measures in reality. Preserving the Sabaic archeological monuments in Mārib Oasis from looting, destruction, loss and obliteration is inevitable. The primary rapid precautionary steps are as follows:

- That the Yemeni government and its concerned bodies shall preserve, protect and maintain the Yemeni archeological cultural heritage in Mārib Oasis. That is because the Yemeni government and its concerned authorities are the primary responsible for such protection.
- The Yemeni government, represented by the Ministry of Culture and the General Organization of Antiquities and Museums must make real efforts, in collaboration with the concerned scientific and international organizations, institutions and centres, strive to preserve the monuments, for immediate intervention in saving the Sabaic monuments and inscriptions in Mārib Oasis, preserving the remaining ones, and addressing the UNESCO and ALECSO to help in protecting such monuments and inscription as they are among the important cultural properties, which need protection, especially during the military conflicts and dispute.
- The Sabaic archeological monuments in Mārib Oasis and Širwaḥ plain are to be included in the endangered World Human Heritage List. That is because these monuments have exceptional universal values, which distinguish them from the other archeological monuments, and because they currently experience a painful reality that makes them go the way of dinosaur.
- Establishing a management of Antiquities in Mārib town, which is capable of playing its vital role in protecting and

maintaining the archeological sites. Such a management will aim at adopting a vision and a sound strategy to develop and protect the archeological sector in Mārib governorate, promote awareness about the importance of monuments among the Mārib town inhabitants and the necessity for preserving them as they have human and cultural values, and make the financial, administrative and security efforts for achieving that.

- Closing the Awām and Barʿān temples for public and private visitors, preventing entering them in any way, fully re-fencing them with iron fences, and appointing permanent governmental guarding.
- Immediate launching of supporting and restoring the archeological monuments which have damages and fall out inside the Awām temple before they are loss forever – such as the gate of king ‘Amdān Bayyin Yuhaqbiḍ, king of Saba’ and ḍu-Raydān which fall out, and re-building and restoring the gate of king ‘Alhān Nahfān, king of Saba’ and ḍu-Raydān, which was recently destroyed, as well as removing the writings and paints found on the temple’s columns and outside walls and its internal halls.
- Adopting a urgent project for protecting the Sabaic inscriptions which exist in Awām temple, specifically the inscriptions in the foyer of the columns and the related architectural facilities, from acts of looting, destruction and obliterating, those inscriptions which had collapsed are to be returned to their original places, finding a safe place for the remaining ones, restoring the inscriptions that were destroyed and blurred. It is better to fence the places of these inscriptions with barriers to preventing reaching them as they are one of the most important archeological components in Awām temple through coordinating with the American Foundation for the Study of Man.

- Preserving the remaining monuments of Ancient Mārib town and emptying them from the military units and modern facilities which are constructed on them, and searching for the effective solutions which can protect its southern fence from drifting and collapsing as a result of the seasonal floods of wādī Ḍanah.
- Rapid reconstruction and restoring of the destroyed walls of the northern drainage channel of Ancient Mārib dam and supporting them, and guaranteeing that there will be no looting of its collapsing stones and using them as a quarry.
- Rehabilitating the Mārib Museum's building which was recently built by the Tobacco Company, which is located next to Belquis Hotel, and its existence will contribute in preserving, documenting, recording and exhibiting the monuments of Mārib oasis. It will also contribute in preserving the important antiquities and inscriptions which are at risk of loss and damage in Awām temple and in the other monuments of Mārib governorate.
- The necessity for neutralizing the archeological sites in Mārib governorate and other places from shelling and destruction and not using such archeological sites as military facilities or places for storing the ammo so that they will not become military targets. Therefore, the researcher calls the international organizations which are concerned with preserving the archeological monuments and sites to pressure the conflicting political forces to neutralization such archeological sites.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, we can say that to prevent the cultural monuments of Saba' kingdom in Mārib Oasis from the acts of tampering, destruction and looting is a crucial issue, because we cannot write on the history of civilization of Saba' in a scientific and accurate way without preserving the monuments and their

archeological stock. In addition, there are many aspects and issues of Saba' civilization that have not been known yet. We can respond to all that through the archeological research on their historical roots and the stages of their cultural development in Mārib Oasis, as well as the eminent archeological monuments, the most important of which are the Ancient Mārib town and Awām temple.

Therefore, the researcher appeals to the Yemeni government with its different bodies, and the local and international agencies and institutions which are concerned with the monuments, culture and arts, to rapid action to protect the archeological cultural monuments in Mārib Oasis, to take the effective solutions and measures for maintaining it. To restore what had been looted from them, to reconsider about its long negligence regarding the reality of such archeological monuments and their exposure to looting, destruction, loss, tams and trading. This is also an urgent call to all the Arab and foreign organizations and the social and cultural institutes which are vested in the protection of the cultural heritage, to participate in saving the Yemeni cultural archeological heritage and to interact with concerned bodies in Yemen and abroad for finding effective solutions for combatting the trafficking of the Ancient Yemeni monuments to the exhibit hall in Arab and foreign countries.

Acknowledgements:

The author would like to express his deep gratitude to the German Archeological Institute (DAI) for financing this research. I wish to extend my special thanks to Dr. Iris Gerlach, the director of the German Archeological Institute - Ṣan'ā' Branch, for her following up during the stages of conducting this research and her positive comments. My deep gratitude to Professor Norbert Nebes, Jena University for his support and encouragement.

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