

# **Investigation of the cultural heritage significance of the Rijal Alma Heritage Village**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research investigated the cultural heritage in Rijal Almaa to understand the factors that make it unique in Saudi Arabia and how the archaeological activities in this village affected the local community's values and traditions. Rijal Almaa, a nominated UNESCO's World Heritage Sites list, provides an interesting perspective into the cultural tourism sector in Saudi Arabia and the relationship between archaeology and this form of tourism. This study examined the impacts of increased tourism activities in Rijal Almaa on the local community's lifestyle and values. A literature review was critical in evaluating the information available about the research topic and critiquing this data for detailed analysis as part of this thesis. The research methodology applied in this study involved a SWOT analysis of the secondary literature used to categorize the sources based on their relevance to the research objectives. This secondary literature supplemented the data collected from a site visit, which included maps, photographs, and surveys completed by the researcher. A value-based theoretical approach was used to categorize data and identify the factors influencing and shaping critical themes associated with Rijal Almaa's cultural heritage and the impacts of archaeological activities on the site. The results from the study revealed that Rijal Almaa had 60 ancient historical buildings that formed the core of its cultural heritage. The architectural style displayed in these old buildings was unique to Rijal Almaa. This feature, combined with a study of the materials and decorations, illuminated why Saudi Arabia values the heritage site so highly. The results also showed that archaeological activities around the heritage site had significant socio-economic benefits for the local community in Rijal Almaa. However, the research revealed the necessity to ensure international visitors are aware of and comply with the local laws when visiting these sites. Tourist activities that result in vandalism or undermining the local community's traditions and values are detrimental to the inhabitants and inhibit the effectiveness of the site's heritage conservation strategies. The study recommends in-depth research into the long-term effects of cultural tourism on the heritage village's cultural, social, and economic states to implement policies that ensure the impacts remain primarily positive.

## **DECLARATION**

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: Abdullah Mohammed M Alfaifi

Date: 14/07/2023

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition
AH	Anno Hegirae or “Year of Hijrah”
AD	Anno Domini or “in the year of the Lord”
CE	Current Era
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SCTH	Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, later reformed as the Ministry of Tourism in Saudi Arabia
SHC	Saudi Heritage Commission
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
PICTURE	Proactive Management of the Impact of Cultural Tourism upon Urban Resources and Economies
GDP	Gross Domestic Product

## **SUMMARY HISTORY OF RIJAL ALMAA**

8th - 10th Century: The village is founded 45 Kilometers west of Abha.

730 AH/1329 CE: Rijal Almaa was the capital of Hilli Emirate in the reign of its governor Mousa Al-Kanani.

550 AH/1155 CE: Rijal Almaa village was a civil centre.

1238 AH/1822 AD: Saeed bin Maslat became governor of Asir freeing the province from the Ottoman rule.

1405 AH/1985 AD: Rijal Almaa Museum created upon the initiative by the province's people.

1407 AH/1987 AD: Work on Rijal Almaa Museum completed, and it is inaugurated by Prince Khaled.

1421 AH/2001 AD: Rijal Almaa Museum wins Meftaha Award for the year.

1427 AH/2006 AD: Rijal Almaa Museum wins Provincial Heritage Preservation Award for the province of Rijal Almaa.

1438 AH/2017 AD: Rijal Almaa community members restored and rehabilitated 16 castles in the village.

## CHAPTER 1:INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and Rationale

Rijal Almaa's cultural heritage represents Saudi Arabia's history and architecture. It is one of the most important cultural tourism destinations for the Kingdom, nominated to become one of UNESCO's world heritage sites (Hoque et al. 2022: 25). The Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) filed Rijal Almaa's nomination to join the UNESCO's World Heritage List was in January 2018 (Takreem Foundation 2018). This thesis research investigates how the local community, supported by governmental and non-governmental agencies, managed to conserve the village's rich cultural heritage establishing Rijal Almaa's status as the preferred cultural tourism destination in Saudi Arabia's Asir province. Rijal Almaa is an Arabic name that can be translated into English as "the brightest men" or "the men of the region"(Aramco Expert 2019). Hoque et al. (2022:30). suggest that the city was named Rijal Almaa after the tribe who lived in the area. The global standards of heritage conservation that these stakeholders could apply in Rijal Almaa's architectural heritage restoration were a crucial dimension of investigation in this research. Collaborative efforts between Rijal Almaa's local community and the external government stakeholders resulted in significant restoration efforts that propelled the village to the global cultural and archaeological limelight. This thesis research qualitatively analysed the impact of the activities associated with the archaeological activities and processes, such as the restoration and conservation of cultural heritage assets, on the village's culture, values, and traditions. The local community's efforts to maintain their cultural heritage, as shown through their determination to renovate and restore ancient forts in 2017 using traditional materials, stimulated the collaboration between the national government and local authorities to conserve the heritage site. SCTH, in cooperation with Rijal Almaa's residents, completed an extensive restoration and renovation of the village's historic buildings and sites in preparation for the application to UNESCO (Aramco Expert 2019). Saudi Arabia's nomination of Rijal Almaa to UNESCO's World Heritage Sites list highlighted the unique cultural significance of Rijal Almaa for the Kingdom. It underlined its potential to generate national revenue by expanding cultural tourism opportunities.

#### 1.1.1 Research question:

What makes Rijal Almaa unique within Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage, and how are the values and traditions of the village being conserved by the government and locals?

The motivation for this study was the growth of the ecotourism sector over the last few decades which promoted, globally, the conservation of natural and cultural heritage in many regions (Al Mohaya and Ellassai 2022: 1). The researcher noted a significant lack of publicly available peer-reviewed information, including secondary literature in public databases, on Rijal Almaa's community participation in past archaeological activities. Most of the information concerning the restoration and preservation of Rijal Almaa's cultural heritage came from news articles and interviews with primary sources during this research. This shortage of peer-reviewed information concerning Rijal Almaa's past archaeological activities highlighted the need for research on Rijal Almaa's culture, values, and traditions to redress this gap. As a result, this study focussed on improving the global public's general understanding of Rijal Almaa's restoration and conservation of its unique attractions for local and international tourists as a first step in promoting its heritage significance and potential as a tourist destination of interest to all.

#### **1.1.2 The research objectives selected for this study were.**

- To assess and understand the social, political, and economic factors that make Rijal Almaa unique in Saudi Arabia's cultural tourism industry.
- To understand the cultural significance and functions of the decorative styles in architecture, painting, and clothing, along with their importance as artefacts of the history of the village and, more broadly, the history of the whole region
- To assess cultural tourism's and heritage conservation's contributions to Rijal Almaa's values and traditions for the current population.
- To understand the impacts of increased tourism activities on the village's current and future economic outlook, values, and traditions.

This thesis research explored each of these objectives through an in-depth examination of the cultural heritage assets in Rijal Almaa, studying how the village's values and traditions changed after nomination to UNESCO's World Heritage Sites. This approach helped illuminate the unique cultural heritage that prompted the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to identify Rijal Almaa as a worthy site for cultural tourism and provided insights into the changes occurring in the heritage village as it became a centre of global focus.

#### **1.2 Brief Site Description and Context of Rijal Almaa**

Rijal Almaa's cultural heritage is dominated by the unique historical architecture the villagers pride themselves on, including the 16 fortresses restored in the village in 2017 (Jolie n.d.). The village was renowned for its unique architectural style, characterised by tall stone and

mud towers that rose above the surrounding landscape (UNESCO 2015). These towers, known as "qasabat," were used traditionally for defensive purposes, serving as lookout points to protect the village from potential threats (Zamzam 2022). Most of the historical forts and buildings are multi-storeyed, with the village boasting 60 ancient architectural structures identified as demonstrating features of cultural and historic value (Srivastava 2022). The old buildings relied on wood, clay, and stones as the primary construction materials, a culture preserved by the local community during the restoration and renovation process (Jolie n.d.).

The Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities joined the rehabilitation process for Rijal Almaa in recognition of the village's history and heritage spanning almost a millennium (Proctor 2019). The restoration efforts highlighted the village's determination to maintain its cultural identity, which supplemented the region's rich history and allowed the national government to boost its Vision 2030 agenda. The figure below shows a picture of a renovated ancient building in Rijal Almaa, showing the unique architectural heritage of the Saudi Arabian village.



**Figure 1: Historical house in Rijal Almaa (Bendakir et al. 2018: 31). Ancient towers in several districts in Rijal Almaa underwent restoration using traditional materials such as stone and wood.**

The ancient buildings in Rijal Almaa demonstrated excellent architectural design, typical in the Asir region (Wafy 2021). and were built from stones and clay, with coloured wooden windows. The height of the buildings is impressive, with some forts rising above six floors (Atlas Obscura 2022). Many of the original buildings remain in the area, with some restored and renovated as vital and treasured national heritage icons (Atlas Obscura 2022). These buildings form the bulk of the cultural heritage assets in Rijal Almaa and are primary tourist attractions identified in the village's nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage List (Arab News 2018). A striking characteristic of Rijal Almaa buildings was the beautiful design of the

internal and external walls (Wafy 2021). This architectural approach could be seen across the Asir region, but the village of Rijal Almaa shows the most sophisticated work from that time. The architecture and paintings in Rijal Almaa's buildings were an example of an approach known as "Al-Qatt Al-Asiri wall paintings," a traditional, geometric painting style unique to the village (Aramco Expert 2019). The type of buildings, design, and mix of colours and decoration styles tells a story of a culture with solid ethics, skills, and intellectual prowess. Women were responsible for painting the walls and decorating the internal design, while men did the heavy lifting in building houses (Aramco Expert 2019).

Rijal Almaa is the capital of the Rijal Almaa Governorate in southwest Saudi Arabia and is a historically significant example of beautiful and fascinating local cultural architecture (UNWTO 2021). The village developed as a hub for trading activities in the Asir region, given its prime location at the intersection between Yemen and the holy cities of Makkah and Medina in Saudi Arabia (Srivastava 2022). The historical and geographical significance of Rijal Almaa was brought to the limelight recently when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia nominated the village as one of its notable heritage sites to UNESCO.

### **1.3 Geographic and Environmental Setting**

Located 50 kilometres from Abha City in the Asir region in southwest Saudi Arabia, the small village was a crucial trading village going back 900 years (Srivastava 2022). The heritage village lies at latitude 18.21246° or 18° 12' 45" north and longitude 42.27342° or 42° 16' 24" east and covers a total area of 81,000 square kilometres (Dar Al-Omran 2017:7). Rijal Almaa borders the Red Sea to the west, Alsoudah to the east, Muhayil to the north, and Al-Darb province to the south (Dar Al-Omran 2017: 7). From a topological perspective, Rijal Almaa is surrounded by mountains from all sides, providing natural fortification for the village (Bendakir et al. 2018: 12). This mountainous topography gives the village spectacular natural beauty, supplementing its cultural and historical architecture to form a beautiful tourist destination site. The historical buildings followed the natural contours dictated by the topography, blending the village with its surroundings.

Rijal Almaa's location made the village easily accessible via several roads, with three main roads leading to the cultural site. The first road connects Abha City, through Jabal Alsoudah, to Rijal Almaa. Another route leads from Tabuk, through Taif and Abha, to Rijal Almaa, as shown in the map of Saudi Arabia below (Hoque et al. 2022:30).



**Figure 2: Rijal Almaa's location and roads (Hoque et al. 2022:30).**

Given its geographic and topographic properties, Rijal Almaa's wadis have been subject to significant investigation (Bendakir et al. 2018: 13). The human settlement patterns in Rijal Almaa corresponded to the contours of two Wadis in the village through the construction arrangements and organization of the village. The two Wadis, Wadi Al-Ous to the north of the village and Wadi Hilli (also known as Wadi Rijal Almaa), defined the main layout of the village (Bendakir et al. 2018: 13). This settlement approach satisfied several strategic criteria selected by the local community. Firstly, the village location reflected the need for security. It also facilitated access to mountain farming while also creating an urban fabric (Bendakir et al. 2018: 14). Traders from foreign and local trade centres, as well as those that came from far-off places like the east coast countries in Africa, considered Rijal Almaa a regular destination for trade (Arab News 2018). Therefore, the village's topology and geography were critical aspects of the village's culture and traditions that determined the settlement patterns and guided analysis of the site.

### **1.3.1 Population of Rijal Almaa**

The total population of Rijal Almaa village, considered a low-population-density area, was around 2,000 people living in 250 households in 2017 (Dar Al-Omran 2017:8). According to the local community, young people had migrated to other cities looking for jobs and a better life. However, like the rest of the province, the village welcomed people from different tribes and groups from areas where economic conditions had deteriorated to seek new opportunities in Rijal Almaa province. For example, in 2017, 7,135 non-Saudis moved to live in Rijal Almaa province, comprising 11 percent of the total population (Dar Al-Omran 2017:8). Currently, the people of Rijal Almaa village inhabits twelve separate neighbourhoods, each populated either by a single family or a group of related families.



#### **1.4 A brief outline of the Socio-Cultural Significance and Value of Rijal Almaa**

Rijal Almaa's cultural heritage is remarkable in Saudi Arabia's Asir province due to its unique history and architectural style, distinguishing it from other heritage sites in the Kingdom. Rijal Almaa became a prominent hub for influential scholars who actively documented events and shaped the trajectory of the emerging state (Dar Al-Omran 2017: 12). These scholars, most of whom studied under Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdul Wahab (1703 -1792) in Al-Daraia (Al-Jaber 2018, El-Shaafy 1967), documented notable social and historical events concerning the village. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdul Wahab was a key figure in the establishment of the Saudi Kingdom, having formed the crucial alliance with Muhammad bin Saud in 1744 to return the Muslim community to a religious and moral state (El-Shaafy 1967). His contributions to the history of Saudi Arabia, and the Asir region of Dari'yah A large group of Sheikh Wahab's disciples, including Sheikh Hamd bin Nasir, scholars from Dar'iyah, and others continuously spread the Wahhabi message during and after his death, and recorded significant events concerning the region at the time (Al-Rasheed 2002).

Rijal Almaa actively participated in significant conflicts throughout history, making it a unique heritage site in Saudi Arabia's historical narrative. One Turkish commander, Suleiman Pasha, acknowledged the threat posed by villagers from Rijal Almaa from the sides of the Mountains of Rabiah and Rafidah during his rule in Asir on behalf of the Ottoman Empire (UNESCO 2015). Rijal Almaa's historical significance, vibrant heritage, and active participation in various aspects of regional development, including forming the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, have cemented its place as an essential cultural and historical site in the Asir region. The figure below shows some of the weapons used by Rijal Almaa's historical inhabitants displayed in the village's museum.



**Figure 3: Guns displayed in the Rijal Almaa Museum (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).**

In the early 20th century, the village of Rijal Almaa emerged as a pivotal commercial centre and gained significant importance (Aramco Expert 2019). During the political turmoil in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Rijal Almaa continued to thrive as a centre of trade and commerce, becoming one of the major markets in the Asir Province. It held a commanding position in regulating and overseeing the arms trade that passed through the strategic ports of Jizan and Al-Qunfudhah, firmly controlling the flow of weaponry and ensuring its efficient distribution (Dar Al-Omran 2017: 17).

The history of Rijal Almaa's commercial and trading activities distinguishes it from other villages in Saudi Arabia due to its pivotal role in ancient business activities in Saudi Arabia (Aramco Expert 2019). Rijal Almaa served as a bustling trading centre before the unification of the Kingdom, receiving goods through Red Sea ports and establishing a robust trade network with villages in the southern part of the country (Welcome Saudi 2023). Rijal Almaa served as a customs payment area, vital in regulating and collecting tariffs on goods re-exported from Jizan to the Hejaz region. These tariffs ensured taxation and control over the trade flow contributed to the economic stability and revenue generation of the area (Dar Al-Omran 2017: 17). This popularity and strategic location contributed to its economic prosperity (Al-Qarni 2012:178), represented by its unique architecture and other historical and cultural symbols in the village.

Rijal Almaa's historical reputation and cultural assets were crucial factors in the decision by Saudi Arabia's government to nominate the village to UNESCO's World Heritage List. White

quartz stone used to decorate the ancient stone palaces in Rijal Almaa gave the traditional buildings a beautiful and unique look, complemented by artistic inscriptions that make the village's architecture stand out among other cultural sites in Saudi Arabia (Arab News 2018). These historical buildings reflected Rijal Almaa's long cultural development over the village's history, with influences from all over the Arabian Peninsula and the Mediterranean region playing a significant part in their designs. This historical significance is one of the key cultural tourist attractions that prompted the Saudi government to nominate the site to the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites. Other culturally significant aspects of Rijal Almaa's social lifestyle include the flowery dress of the men in the region and the traditional decorative style developed by women. Rijal Almaa's traditional dress illuminated the village's traditions and values, as local young and older men dressed in flowered crowns made of carefully arranged flowers and grass (Proctor 2019). The figure (Figure 4) below shows an image of the flowery men's dressing displayed in the Rijal Almaa museum. Women's roles in Rijal Almaa were separate from men's, and these differences extended to their dressing styles, as shown in the figure (Figure 5) below. The decorations developed by women in Rijal Almaa, known as Al Qatt Al Asiri, were also recognised as intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO (Alsaidi 2018: 19). Figure 6 below shows the women's decorations in Rijal Almaa, illustrating the Al Qatt Al Asiri decoration style. This combination of socio-cultural assets made Rijal Almaa a valuable heritage asset for Saudi Arabia and the local community, contributing to the village's increasing cultural tourism and archaeological activities.



**Figure 4: This picture shows men's clothing displayed in the Rijal Almaa Museum (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).**



Figure 5: Traditional Women's clothing displayed in the Rijal Almaa Museum (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).

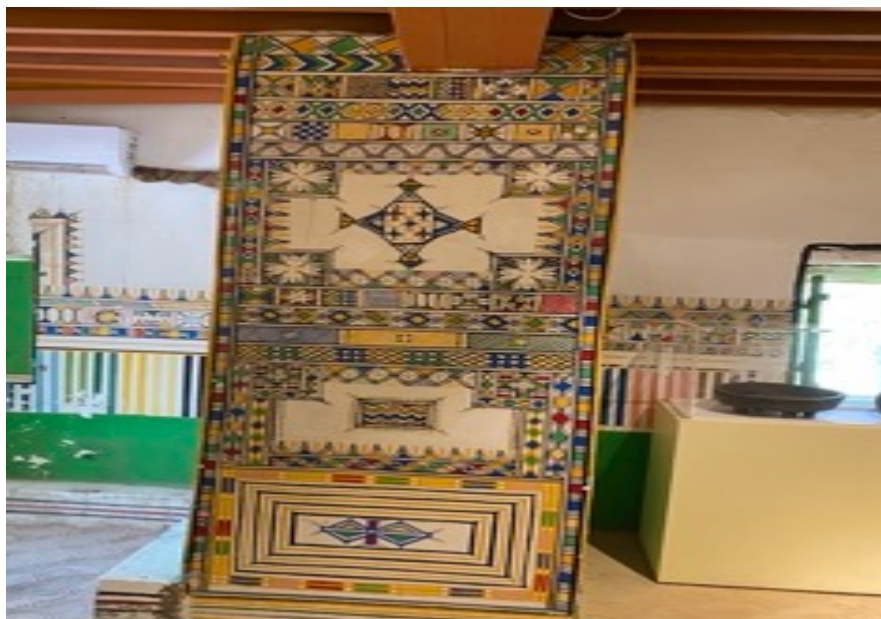


Figure 6: An example of the Al-Qatt Al-Asiri painting approach (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).

### 1.5 Chapter summary outlines

This introductory chapter outlined a crucial research question for this study and provided a glimpse into Rijal Almaa's background and values. The research question sought to investigate what made Rijal Almaa unique within Saudi Arabia's heritage. The first section identified Rijal Almaa as a crucial historical village in Saudi Arabia with significant cultural assets that provide the rationale for this study. A brief geographical and socio-cultural background offered substantial insights into the contextual environment in which the researcher operated to understand the various concepts inferred in the research. This thesis

will examine Rijal Almaa's significance to Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage by performing a qualitative study examining how the local population and the government have conserved and marketed the architectural heritage. Chapter 2 provides a literature review investigating Rijal Almaa, focusing on the objectives outlined earlier in this chapter. Chapter 3 will provide the research methodology used in this study to explore Rijal Almaa's cultural, archaeological, and tourism assets. Chapter 4 will outline the results of the qualitative research, looking at the village's traditions and values as the factors outlined above evolved. Chapter 5 discusses the inferences concerning the future trends in Rijal Almaa's traditional values and economy as the village received international attention from tourists. This study held great value because it provided the opportunity to research the area's cultural heritage by studying one of the most popular heritage sites in Saudi Arabia.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

Given this thesis' focus on Rijal Almaa's unique heritage site, this chapter reviews the literature examining the significance of the village as a heritage site in Saudi Arabia. The literature review also examines how the government and locals' archaeological exploration helps conserve the village's traditions and values. Established in 1985, the Rijal Almaa Museum is the oldest in Saudi Arabian history (Bendakir et al. 2018:77). It is considered a keystone of the village's archaeological and cultural conservation project. The Rijal Almaa Museum (Figure 7) adds significant value to the cultural heritage in Rijal Almaa, acting as a preservation hub for the village's historic assets and traditional memorabilia. The museum conducts rigorous archaeological preservation operations, preserving the village's traditional industries' products and artefacts (Bendakir et al. 2018:77). Heritage links the past, present, and future, and represents the society's cultural identity, especially in Saudi Arabia, where it forms a primary axis of Vision 2030 (Alseaidy et al. 2022: 1429). This chapter relies on primary and secondary sources of information to discuss the history and heritage of Rijal Almaa, and its role in the national tourism management goals. The literature review also critically examines the impact of archaeological and tourism activities on Rijal Almaa, and evaluates the local community and government actions to preserve the village's traditions and values.



Figure 7: The museum of the traditional village of Rijal Almaa. (DirectionsKSA 2023).

### 2.2 A Brief History of Saudi Arabia

Villages, such as Rijal Almaa, contributed to Saudi Arabia's rich history and culture through their interactions with people from various geographical areas and innovations arising from these interactions. Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula pride themselves on their ancestors'

civilizing contributions in multiple fields over the long history of the region, including mathematics, science, law, literature, and philosophy (Knauerhase 1975: 74). Many of the contributions made by Arabs to these fields formed the foundations for many disciplines in the modern sciences, including archaeology and sociology (Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University n.d). Saudi Arabia, located in the central and northern Arabian Peninsula, as shown in Figure 8 (below), is a country with a rich and fascinating history and culture. In the western highlands of Saudi Arabia lies the region of Hejaz, often referred to as the cradle of Islam, as it is home to the holiest cities of Islam: Medina and Makkah (Melman 2002: 109). These cities hold immense religious significance for Muslims worldwide and attract millions of pilgrims each year.



**Figure 8: A map of Saudi Arabia (Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University 2021).**

### **2.2.1 Early Years**

Saudi Arabia emerged from the remnants of the earliest Arabian Peninsula civilisations. According to the Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2022), climatic changes that occurred since the melting of the European ice cap around 15,000 years ago influenced the settlement patterns in the region, as population distributions corresponded with watershed areas (Al-Hathloul and Edadan 1993: 31). The early inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula underwent significant lifestyle modifications due climatic and economic changes, leading to the development of agriculture and sedentary living. The lifestyle changes that came with these modifications were the earliest cultural developments that kick-started Saudi Arabia's journey to its modern political and social state.

### **2.2.2 Trading**

The early inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula interacted with various civilisations from Greece, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Persia, Rome, China, India, and Byzantium, as they lived along crucial trade routes (Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University n.d). The interactions with other cultures contributed to the Arabs' success in trade and commerce, which was documented heavily (Al-Hathloul and Edadan 1993: 33). The influences of the extensive trade network, among other commercial activities that developed in the region, on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are visible through the culture and architecture still present in villages such as Rijal Almaa. The unique cultural heritage in Rijal Almaa, including its indigenous architecture, developed from its historical relationships with people from various regions built on extensive trade networks.

### **2.2.3 Islam**

The development of Islam saw many pilgrims visit the Arabian Peninsula regularly, and others settled in the holy cities of Medina and Makkah (Barrett 2015: 8-9). There emerged an exchange of cultures and ideas between the Arab world civilizations and the peninsula's people, including other Muslims, through the pilgrims. Eventually, the Muslim world became a centre for learning and scientific contributions (Knauerhase 1975: 74). The extensive interaction between the Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula and the rest of the world promoted the exchange of ideas and cultures among them.

### **2.2.4 Tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

In September 2019, Saudi Arabia opened its borders for tourism and started issuing tourist visas on arrival for visitors from 49 eligible countries (Hincks 2019). Rijal Almaa was chosen from more than 5,000 villages in Asir Province as a heritage village, indicating its significance for Saudi Arabia's tourism sector (Hoque et al. 2022: 26). Rijal Almaa is a heritage village located in the Asir region and is one of the best tourist villages in the Kingdom (UNWTO 2021). This review of Saudi Arabia's long history will provide sufficient background information to explore its cultural heritage. It will also illuminate how Rijal Almaa's ancient architecture is a special and unique asset for the Kingdom. The increase in tourists visiting Rijal Almaa in the recent past will also affect the lives of local citizens, necessitating a review of these changes.

The Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH), later renamed the Ministry of Tourism, was responsible for preparing the successful submission of local sites to the UNESCO World Heritage List. SCTH was the official organisation campaigning and



following up with UNESCO. However, Saudi Arabia experienced several challenges while preparing to submit the site to UNESCO. UNESCO requires all state members' commitment to apply the Operational Guidelines for implementing the World Heritage Convention for historical sites in or nominated to the World Heritage List. SCTH focused on the history of the village, its heritage status, and role in Islam, commerce, and trade, and highlighted its architecture and museum to make a case for Rijal Almaa in the application to UNESCO. SCTH cited two criteria in support of Rijal Almaa's universal value.

Criterion (v): “The Traditional Village of Rijal Almaa in Asir is an outstanding example of a deliberately preserved traditional settlement, representing a culture that has become vulnerable under irreversible change. This village, which developed mainly during the 10th century AH/8th century CE, not only represents the architectural subgroup within the Asir Region but also bears witness, for the Kingdom as a whole, to the traditional forms of rural life which were generally abolished by the agricultural revolution in the 20th century”.

Criterion (iv): “The Traditional Village of Rijal Almaa in Asir is an outstanding example of traditional human settlements that are perfectly adapted to their environment and their social and economic *raison d'être*” (UNESCO 2015).

In the authenticity statement, SCTH highlighted Rijal Almaa's role in preserving heritage, tradition, and culture in the Asir region. The community has maintained the structure and architecture of the buildings to keep the original look for the foreseeable future (UNESCO 2015). The importance of Rijal Almaa was in its cultural depth and prominence of trade and architectural arts, represented through the tall fortresses that represent expertise and beauty. Its fame was not only because of its exceptional architectural features but also its historic role in the region and the Kingdom (Saudi Tourism Guide 2023).

### **2.3 Rijal Almaa**

The background information for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provides significant insights into the history and culture of Rijal Almaa. Rijal Almaa has a rich and complex history that dates back to the 8th century. Its architecture can be distinguished from other villages in Asir province by the white frame windows used in buildings (Hoque et al. 2022: 26). Throughout its existence, Rijal Almaa has played a vital role in agriculture, trade, and cultural exchange within the region. The village also served as a centre for Islamic scholarship and education, producing notable scholars and religious figures (UNESCO 2015). As one of the oldest heritage villages in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Rijal Almaa holds great historical value. It was mentioned as the capital of the Hali emirate in 550AH (1155 AD) under the rule of Prince

Musa Al-Kanani in 730AH (1329 AD) (Al-Qarni 2012:178). This literature review section examines the observations from previous studies on Rijal Almaa's cultural heritage and archaeology's role in preserving the village's traditions and values.

### **2.3.1 The People and Community of Rijal Almaa**

Situated in the Asir region of Saudi Arabia, Rijal Almaa has been home to a resilient community that has faced and overcome numerous challenges throughout its existence (Welcome Saudi n.d). According to UNESCO records, the history of Rijal Almaa is known for the role of its people during Islamic conquests. Al-Tabari, a Muslim historian, said that around 700 men (soldiers) from Rijal Almaa, joined forces with another group from the surrounding villages and defeated the Sassanid army in 636 CE. They actively defended and protected Islamic icon cities such as Medina and Makkah. They stood firm against the Ottoman Empire rulers such as Ibrahim Pasha when he attempted to force them to accept Ottoman rules and regulations. The figures below (Figures 9 and 10) show the traditional weapons displayed in the Rijal Almaa museum, reminding visitors of the village's history.



**Figure 9: The image above shows spears and daggers displayed in the museum (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).**



**Figure 10: Spears and other weapons displayed in the Rijal Almaa Museum (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).**

The people of Rijal Almaa are proud of their heritage, as demonstrated by their diligent efforts to restore 16 castles in the heritage village in 2017 (Hoque et al. 2022: 31). Women from the village practice a traditional form of abstract wall painting, referred to as AL-Qatt Al-Asiri to decorate their homes (Alsadi 2022: 19). Alawad et al. (2021: 91), defined heritage as values, manners, knowledge, art, intangible and tangible human activities based on accumulated community experiences. Based on this definition, the traditional practices of Rijal Almaa's inhabitants count as cultural heritage assets invaluable to Saudi Arabia's tourism prospects.

Rijal Almaa's local community adopted a colourful dress style and armed themselves with weapons, such as swords, daggers, spears, and guns (Proctor 2019). The men from the Qahtani tribe from Habbala in Asir earned the nickname "Flower Men" from their wreaths and traditional clothing, including colourful headgear (Proctor 2019). Figure 11 below shows the men from Rijal Almaa adorning their colourful attire. According to Dar Al-Omran, warriors donning their brightly coloured garments and brandishing their weapons became a powerful representation of Rijal Almaa's readiness to protect their land and community (2017: 21). The tradition of wearing flower wreaths is a common practice in the village and is believed to have health-giving properties. The architecture in Rijal Almaa reflected the colourful spirit of its residents, with decorations playing a central role in the buildings' presentation (Bendakir et al. 2018:13). The Saudi Arabian government noted the vibrancy in the village's cultural heritage and decided to highlight this component in their marketing strategy to boost

the village's tourism prospects. The Saudi Ministry of Culture created the Flower Men Festival to celebrate this traditional dress. This traditional dress and the performance of the people of Rijal Almaa during the Flower Men Festival (Proctor 2019) provide a crucial tourist attraction to the heritage village.



**Figure 11: The flower men festival of Saudi Arabia showing the men of Rijal Almaa in their traditional colourful dress (Photograph: Proctor 2019).**

### **2.3.2 Architecture in Rijal Almaa**

The architectural industry was highly developed in Rijal Almaa, dating as far back as the 10th Hijri Century (901 – 1000 CE), and the mature architectural sector formed the basis for the rich cultural heritage in the village (Arab News 2018). The village consists of 60 multiple-story ancient buildings built from natural clay, wood, and stone (Proctor 2019). The houses in the region were painted and decorated by skilled artisans with captivating artwork and colour combinations (Wafy 2021). The homes were designed and constructed from local stone around a framework of wood and clay. The existence of architectural buildings, long-standing fortifications, and homes in the region with historical significance (Zamzam 2022) indicated the high level of skill among designers and labourers responsible for these buildings (Wafy 2021). Figure 12 below shows an image of an ancient multi-storey building in Rijal Almaa with the iconic white wooden window frames characteristic of Rijal Almaa's architecture.

In modern times, these towers represent the village's cultural heritage and have been the subject of conservation and restoration by the local community. The people of Rijal Almaa made efforts to preserve their culture through architecture, an effort spurred by Saudi Arabia's government to revive city centres, old forts, and traditional palaces as part of the national heritage (Alseaidy et al. 2022: 1429). Rijal Almaa became a famous cultural and

archaeological destination in the Kingdom, winning the Prince Sultan bin Salman Award for Urban Heritage in 2007 and first place in the Arab Cities "Mudon" Award in 2017 (Saudi Arabia Immigration, 2023). Eight governmental agencies joined forces to renovate and restore the buildings in Rijal Almaa, in 2018 and prepare them for nomination to UNESCO's World Heritage List (Arab News 2018). One of the Vision 2030 strategic goals of the Saudi Arabian government was to develop heritage and historical sites to attract more tourism. In 2021, Rijal Almaa was named by UNWTO as one of the best tourism sites in the world (UNWTO 2021). Currently, tourism is one of the biggest drivers of the economy for the community of Rijal Almaa.



**Figure 12: Historical Architecture showing an ancient multi-storey building in Rijal Almaa (Photograph A. Alfaifi).**

The village consists of 16 fortresses. The most popular ones are the Fort of Al Jaber and Al Hawat, the village's highest fort. Al Elwan Fort was the largest in the village and was later transformed into a national museum (Al-Jaber 2020). Al-Sisbae, Mejjib & Hakim, and Msamr were built between 1536 AD and 1537 AD, making up some of the other significant forts in the village. The historical value of these heritage assets contributed significantly to Rijal Almaa's preference as a cultural site in Saudi Arabia over most other places in Asir. Every fort has a unique history recorded and maintained by the original families (Welcome Saudi n.d). Qasbat Al-Owus Tower (Figure 13) is an ancient historic site in Rijal Almaa covering over 26 square meters (Saudi Arabia Immigration 2023). Al Elwan Fort, the largest fort in Rijal Almaa was built and owned by the Al Elwan family. Given its structure, size, and architectural design, in 1985, it was chosen by the province to house the local museum to showcase and preserve the local history (Al-Jaber 2020). Each of these forts is a unique cultural heritage asset that makes Rijal Almaa stand out among other historical sites in Asir province.

Rijal Almaa’s architecture also provided a glimpse into the traditional lives of the local inhabitants living in the village in the past, giving the site a visual-historic atmosphere and feel. In the past, families shared multi-story buildings (Aramco Expert 2019). These buildings are interconnected to allow women easy access to each other’s homes so they can visit and socialise without needing to climb up and down six or seven storeys. Instead, women could take shortcuts going from one rooftop to another (Aramco Expert 2019). The large metal cans hanging on top of these buildings were flowers and herb pots that men used for medical purposes. The structure of the buildings, made from stones, created a defence barrier to protect the upper floors where most people lived from attack (Atlas Obscura 2022). This architectural design reflected the inhabitants' needs, providing an insight into the lifestyle of the locals adding to the historical and archaeological significance of this heritage site.



**Figure 13: The Qasabat Al-Owus Tower in Rijal Almaa. (DirectionsKSA 2023).**

### **2.3.3 Natural and Cultural Heritage Management in Rijal Almaa**

Heritage management strategies used in the restoration and conservation of Rijal Almaa’s heritage site seek to protect the natural and cultural value of specific assets as well as the overall significance of the village in Saudi Arabia’s history. The cultural heritage site planning process involved management strategies for countering increased tourist visits, individual tourists’ behaviour, and other patterns that evolve from this activity (Nemaheni 2003: 21). Rijal Almaa provided an authentic experience of the traditional Saudi Arabian culture, with many residents following traditional customs and practices (Monshi and Scott 2016). Before and during the early 2000s, heritage conservation and management practices in Saudi Arabia were complicated by operational complexities and overlapping roles of multiple governmental organisations. The SCHAT, local municipalities, and the Emirates of the region

sometimes failed to define their responsibilities and roles in projects such as Al-Khabra (Altassan 2023). In the Al-Khabra heritage restoration project, miscommunication between various government agencies and lack of adherence to the rehabilitation plan led to delays in the process (Altassan 2023: 11). However, this was not the only issue negatively impacting the submission quality to WHC. According to Humudh (2022:127), the record on the UNESCO website shows that crucial information describing the management and protection systems required for a site of this significance, including site maintenance processes, monitoring decoration, and historic building information, was missing from the document.

UNESCO assisted the Kingdom in improving the conservation and management of historic sites (Al-Tokhais 2020). SCHAT and Rijal Almaa's local community received sufficient guidelines from UNESCO on the best practices when pursuing their heritage conservation goals, stipulating the necessity for continued collaboration with the local communities. Rijal Almaa's inclusion of women in the renovation operations boosted its compliance with UNESCO's world heritage conventions, which advocate for gender equality in heritage projects (UNESCO World Heritage Convention n.d.). Compliance with UNESCO's conventions assisted the heritage villages in improving their site planning and management processes (Al-Tokhais 2020). Therefore, Rijal Almaa could incorporate international heritage site management conventions while maintaining its unique tradition by selecting roles and responsibilities that protected these values.

Rijal Almaa, like other heritage sites in Saudi Arabia under SCHAT management, experienced several effects associated with its archaeological significance and the influx of tourists from different cultural backgrounds. These changes related to increased tourism had a net positive impact on the local community's living standards (Hassan et al. 2022). The global attention from the site's nomination to UNESCO's World Heritage Sites list evolved the local community's traditions. The increase in conservation activities encouraged the traditional manufacturing industry expansion due to the market available for the local community's goods. Increased archaeological activities enhanced the education and training of local youth about the history and culture of the site (Hoque et al. 2022:35). As more young people learned about their cultural values and traditions, Rijal Almaa's community understood the changes in their society and could re-evaluate or reaffirm their values accordingly (Hassan et al. 2008: 17).

The restoration of architectural heritage and maintenance of their records allows residents to learn traditional building and conservation techniques and to make a living from them. The young people who learned the traditional construction methods during the restoration of the heritage village earned income from the site when the government offered to collaborate with the local community (Al-Tokhais 2020). Traditional decoration styles handed down from older people to the younger generation of women also revitalized the handicraft industry in the village. The increase in tourism activities in the village boosted the market for these handicrafts, drawing more tourists to the village in the process (Al-Tokhais 2020).

However, the increasing prominence of Rijal Almaa in the global arena also introduced several challenges in addition to the benefits outlined above. Tourism created a new problem that Saudi authorities and local communities must contend with as they try to balance their culture and the economic activities associated with international tourists. The research highlighted that tourists often trivialise heritage sites and the management efforts, including re-enactments and performances at the site (ICCROM 2016:18), posing a potential challenge for the residents of Rijal Almaa who are proud of their heritage and want to share it in a way that promotes respect and understanding. These tourist activities have instead undermined the preservation efforts applied by Rijal Almaa's local community to restore its traditional architectural heritage. The government prepared for these challenges by bringing all stakeholders together, conducting research to identify gaps, and determining top priorities for future growth in this sector (Visit Saudi 2023)

Saudi Arabia's management of heritage sites significantly improved, and harmful effects from tourism were minimised through the practices that developed at the heritage site. The world heritage status attained by Rijal Almaa attracted the attention of the local youth, where most learned and understood their ancient tradition and culture and provided this information readily to tourists (Hoque et al.2023: 37). This practice allowed the heritage site to develop year-long monitoring and evaluation services for free from these interested youth, preserving its traditional structures and cultural phenomena of the village. Therefore, the heritage site could enjoy a variety of evaluation and monitoring processes initiated at various levels of the government and the local community, ensuring that the most pertinent challenges receive maximum attention at the optimum time. These modern developments indicate the need for further inquiry into the effects of the changes these practices and procedures might have to the traditional lifestyle celebrated in Rijal Almaa.



## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter explored Saudi Arabia's history, briefly describing some aspects of the unique heritage assets in Rijal Almaa that make the village a significant cultural site. Rijal Almaa's location as a natural corridor, its history in the region and Kingdom, and its architectural design ensured this village had great significance in the past, which has been maintained in the present, and, with the proper management, guarantees it for the future. The incredible building structures and architectural designs moved the city from a mere village in the desert to one worthy of inclusion in the list of UNESCO's heritage sites. The traditional architectural design was discussed in detail, focusing on the type of buildings and their uses. The review also examined the natural and cultural heritage management in Rijal Almaa with a significant focus on the UNESCO nomination process and its impact on the local community. This chapter also identified the effects of archaeology on the traditions and values of the local community in Rijal Almaa. Chapter three will discuss all the methods and tools employed for data gathering and analysis conducted during this research.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This research relied on literature reviews from secondary sources and qualitative research methods such as personal observations and experience to collect and analyse the relevant data. Secondary research relies on information collected and analysed by another person or entity (Walliman 2021: 78). This study uses data from published or unpublished sources, including academic work and government reports. The literature review analysis applied the SWOT approach to identify the strengths and weaknesses in each study and explore the opportunities and threats identified in answering the critical research questions. The SWOT analysis also revealed how various stakeholders in the heritage management process interact through power and interest. Opportunities for applying modern heritage management techniques became evident after analysis of approaches taken by the Saudi Arabian government, including using modern technologies to reduce the effort required in the process. Personal observation, experience, and photos taken at the heritage site were also critical in this research (Walliman 2021: 102).

### **3.2 Data Collection and Analysis**

The current thesis collected data from several primary sources: survey maps, pictures, and previous literature to help answer the research question. An on-site visit enriched the data and interviews with Saudi Arabia's governmental officials, such as Ministry of Culture and Heritage Commission representatives, supplemented the primary observations. The researcher's personal experiences and observations provided more profound insights and a connection to the site, and as such, were a significant source of information informing this thesis (Fagan 2016: 39). The field visit offered considerable information concerning the traditions and values of the local community in Rijal Almaa. The researcher's visit to the location provided a better understanding of what the site looked like and allowed for a closer and more accurate assessment of the condition of the buildings.

Informal conversations with the people in Rijal Almaa provided a crucial information source for this thesis research. The researcher sought ethical permission to conduct a field visit and provide proof about the study during their visit to Rijal Almaa, from the University to cover the interview process before commencing the exercise. During this research, the researcher conducted a field visit to the cultural heritage site in Rijal Almaa to obtain first-hand observations on the restoration and conservation activities conducted by the local community and the Saudi government. Informal conversations with the Heritage Commission of Rijal Almaa's official at the cultural heritage site provided crucial information

on the agency's efforts in monitoring the conditions of the assets. The researcher contacted the interview respondent during the field visit by visiting their offices at the Heritage Commission in Rijal Almaa for an informal conversation and tour of the site. Most conversations with the chosen Heritage Commission official focused on the impacts of the restoration and conservation activities on Rijal Almaa's traditional values and activities, such as architecture. The researcher selected the Heritage Commission of Rijal Almaa's official because they possessed detailed knowledge of the primary activities involved in the renovation and restoration processes taking place in the village. Government officials from the Ministry of Culture were responsible for overseeing these restoration and conservation processes, and could illuminate the challenges encountered and opportunities available in Rijal Almaa's cultural heritage site.

Photos taken at the site were critical for reviewing the data collected from the heritage site and helped refine the results outlined in this research. Pictures captured a moment and instantly communicated the essence about the people, place, and objects to the researcher. Generally, images conveyed messages that were difficult to describe or communicate verbally or in writing (Pedersen 2009: 85-87) and could provide means for verification where conflicting observations in secondary data arise. The pictures informed this thesis research on Rijal Almaa's life, events, decor, and architecture. For example, the images of the museum's collections and site architecture revealed information about life in Rijal Almaa in the past. These pictures were helpful in this research's investigation into the relationship between traditional architecture and the lifestyle in the village. Maps found in the Ministry archive were a critical source of information in this thesis research, including geographical, topological, climatic, and other maps (Coetzee et al. 2021: 2).

The study also involved an in-depth review of secondary sources investigating various aspects of Rijal Almaa, including the region's culture, architecture, and history, to supplement the primary data collected from the sources outlined above. Most secondary sources used in this study came from online databases, such as Google Scholar, unpublished reports from the Ministry of Culture, news articles, and government websites in Saudi Arabia. Fortunately, the Saudi Arabian government collects and publishes lots of data, which makes them a valuable secondary source of information (Smith and Albaum 2005: 90). Academic literature from other secondary sources, such as online databases, was an essential source of information for this thesis analysis (Fagan 2016: 23). Most of the relevant published and unpublished studies, student theses, reports, planning and development studies, government reports, and internet sources provided evidence and facts related to

Rijal Alma's cultural heritage and archaeological tourism activities. The reviewed literature was in English and Arabic languages.

### **3.3 Material Analysis and Diagnostic Studies**

The materials utilised in this research were varied and diverse, including primary and secondary sources of information, necessitating an analytical approach that could synthesize all this information qualitatively into a coherent work of literature. The analysis began with a SWOT analysis of Rijal Alma's cultural heritage using data from the primary and secondary sources. SWOT analysis, meaning the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Benzaghta et al. 2021: 55), was a fundamental research tool for understanding the heritage conservation and management in Rijal Alma. The collected information from the various sources were sorted into different categories related to the past and present life of Rijal Almaa. The analytical categories included socio-cultural and historical factors. The material analysis also focussed on analysing the ancient architectural styles and their heritage value in present-day Rijal Almaa'. The researcher used the value-based concepts approach to illuminate the significance of Rijal Almaa's heritage and value within Saudi Arabia's tourism sector.

#### **3.3.1 Community Participation Conservation**

The field trip allowed the researcher to interact with multiple stakeholders in the heritage village and explore various topics concerning the conservation of culture and traditions. Grace and Ayodeji (2012: 1) argue that effective community participation in preserving and managing heritage sites is necessary for the sustainability of cultural heritage sites. Utilisation of traditional building materials Rijal Almaa's cultural appeal in the Asir region of Saudi Arabia arose from the local community's dedication to using these local materials and traditional lifestyles. The field visit and the literature review revealed significant information concerning the building materials and techniques utilised in Rijal Almaa. These materials showed the traditional values of the local community, which has maintained these buildings from ancient times to the modern day.

#### **3.3.2 Restoration of Heritage Buildings**

The data collected was crucial in showing the local community's dedication to maintaining its heritage and identity, reinforcing the idea that Rijal Almaa is a uniquely authentic cultural site. Technically, cultural heritage includes complex structures that require careful preservation, which is time-consuming and labour-intensive (Radnic et al. 2020: 2). The field

trip revealed significant information and details concerning the restoration of heritage buildings. The SWOT analysis of the secondary sources helped categorise this data historically and thematically, providing a glimpse of the impact of heritage restoration processes in Rijal Almaa. The research also evaluated the assessment process conducted by stakeholders in Rijal Almaa before its nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites list. Following a deep assessment, solutions were developed to restore and strengthen each building and fortress's structure, shape, and size.

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations and Community Engagement**

Several ethical considerations arose from the study's approach utilising field visits, informal interviews, and conversations with local community members to supplement the secondary literature review. The first ethical consideration was the confidentiality of the information collected in the field study, including personal details of the participants who contributed to the study through informal conversations (Humudh 2022:90). As mentioned earlier, the researcher sought ethical permission from Flinders University to conduct the informal interviews during the field trip. The data collected from primary sources in the village concerning local engagement in heritage management and conservation underwent significant analysis to ensure data confidentiality and integrity remained intact throughout the study. The researcher captured the details concerning the local community's role in the heritage preservation process, highlighting these contributions clearly to ensure they receive the recognition they deserve. This study also acknowledged the local community participants' rights to withdraw any information they provided to the researcher at any given time (Humudh 2022:92).

The local community in Rijal Almaa should be considered equal partners, given their essential role in preserving and managing cultural heritage, as elaborated by the primary and secondary sources reviewed during the research. Local communities actively participated in the assessment, planning, and implementation of any conservation treatment techniques that the committee chose. Developing a statement of shared principles between all stakeholders involved in conserving a heritage site would ensure clarity and set ethical standards for any joint effort. The codes may include trust, transparency, and mutual respect. Overall, the community has a stake in the ownership and management of the heritage site, knowledge or information shared. That shared ownership implies the government or the tourism authority responsible for the place should adhere to ethical principles such as respect for community knowledge, sharing data and information with the community, involving the community, etc. (University of Memphis 2023). All relationships

and interactions between government agencies, communities, and individuals should be transparent and conducted through dialogue, negotiation, and consultation.

Historical and emotional connection to the place meant that the local community in Rijal Almaa naturally possessed the skills and knowledge essential to maintaining the heritage values of this village. According to Alzamil et al. (2023: 316-318), the local community played the primary role in restoring Rijal Almaa heritage buildings since the campaign started as a community initiative and later attracted the Ministry of Tourism and other governmental bodies. The men contributed their skills and knowledge, and women decorated the houses and displayed beautiful art on the walls. The community played a crucial role in preserving intangible culture as well. They were motivated by their pride, deep connection to the village, and potential economic benefits that could ensure the community's prosperity while preserving traditional values. The 2015 Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO set twelve ethical principles to serve the development of moral codes and tools for local and sectoral conditions. These principles emphasised the primary role of the communities, groups, and other stakeholders in safeguarding their intangible cultural heritage and the practices, skills, and knowledge related to their culture.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter examined the research methodology applied in this study, including a SWOT analysis of literature concerning the heritage site and a value-based concepts analysis approach for prioritising relevant data. The data collection process involved in this research was multi-pronged, with data coming from observations and photos taken during a field trip supplemented by information from secondary sources. Based on the values-based criteria, several factors emerged as crucial dimensions necessary for understanding the unique cultural heritage of Rijal Almaa and the impacts of the tourism activities associated with its world heritage site status. The management of the Rijal Almaa cultural heritage is centred on strong relationships and local community engagement. Chapter 4 presents the study's results, such as heritage inventory at Rijal Almaa, site descriptions, site mapping, and documentation.

## CHAPTER 4:RESULTS

### 4.1 Introduction

The results of the qualitative data analysis conducted by the researcher in this study helped outline the opportunities and challenges facing Rijal Almaa's cultural heritage village. Deeper analysis showed how cultural heritage conservation affected Rijal Alma's values and practices using critical values-based concepts. This chapter outlines the research results, including the heritage inventory in Rijal Almaa, site description, conservation strategies, community participation, evaluation and monitoring plan, and impact assessment and assessment of tourist and archaeological activities. These results focus on the value of each concept in conserving Rijal Almaa's culture and traditions from the local community's perspective and aligning with Saudi Arabia's government's agenda. The results will also explore the qualitative value of the value-based concept in understanding the cultural tourism activities in Rijal Almaa, and their impacts on the heritage village.

### 4.2 Heritage Inventory of the Heritage Places at Rijal Almaa

Rijal Almaa consists of 60 multiple-story ancient buildings in six historical districts, as shown in the map (Figure 14) below. Two buildings are watching towers at narrow points at both ends of the valley. The six districts containing these ancient architectural structures are Al-Khadaha, Al-Shabia, Al-Nasub, Al-Darah, Manazer, and Al-Naqia, according to Bendakir et al. (2017). Al-Khadaha district is located on the eastern side of the village where a group of historic high tower-houses are found on a steep slope overlooking the valley, as shown in Figure 15 below. Al-Shabia district is located north of Al-Khadaha, where few historical houses are found. Houses in Al-Khadaha and Al-Shabia are built in multi-story buildings. (Figure 15). Al-Darah and Al-Nusub districts housed historic buildings that are in a bad state. The two-storey and three-storey houses in Al-Darah and Al-Nusub districts (Figure 16) are smaller than those found in the fort's towers of Al-Khadaha and Al-Shabia and are often grouped in a row. Manazer district has a few historic houses scattered in hamlets (Figure 17) along the district, and they are mostly severely affected by rain or landslide in the area. Hoque et al. (2017: 32) noted that Rijal Almaa's cultural heritage differs from other sites in Asir province because it represents a category of the region's culture with 1,300-year-old architectural structures. Table 2 below shows the most valuable cultural heritage areas in Rijal Almaa, based on ancient architectural sites and the current condition of the buildings (according to the date of the site visit in 2023). Table 1 also summarizes the types of structures found in each district.

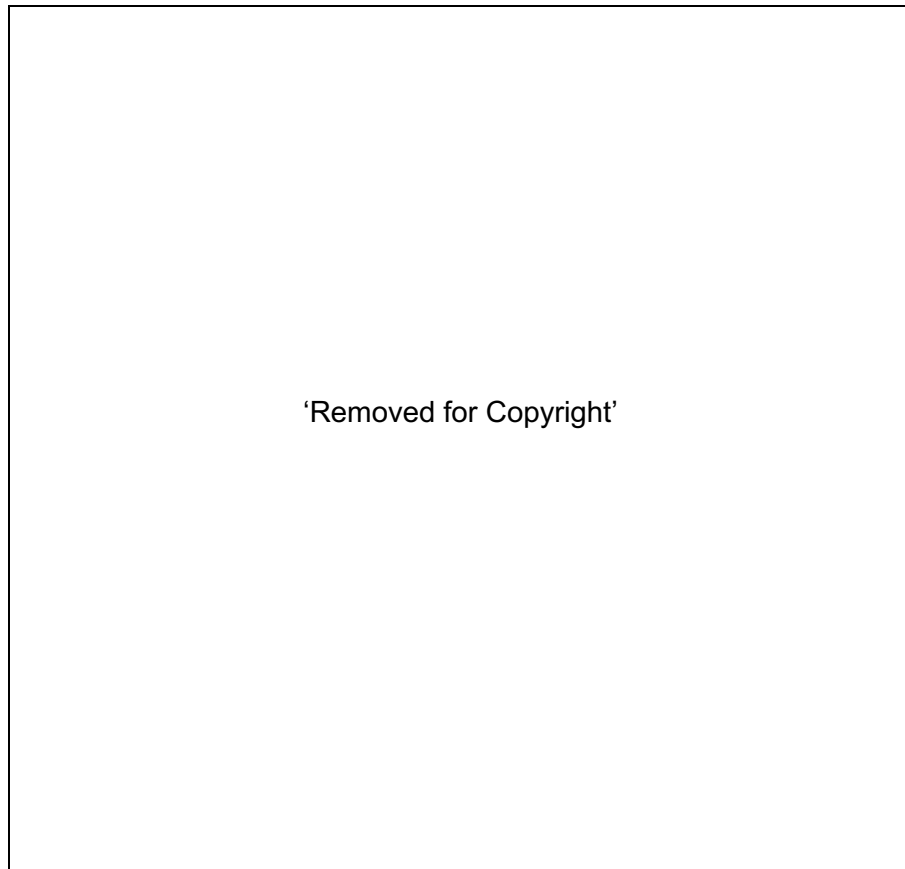
**Table 1: The table below shows the districts in Rijal Almaa, the condition of most ancient buildings in each district, and the district's dominant antique building type/size (Bendakir et al. 2018 and information from the researcher's personal observations).**

District	Condition of heritage assets	Building types
Al-Khadaha	Buildings were recently renovated and restored.	Tower houses clustered around an empty terraced area.
Al-Shabia	Buildings were recently renovated and restored.	Tower houses (4-5 storeys) built using local schist stone and decorated with quartz.
Al-Nusub	Buildings in an advanced ruined state	Small/ medium height buildings rising to 15 metres, with shared walls (terraced houses) forming an 'urban façade.'
Al-Darah	Buildings in an advanced ruined state	2/3-storey houses grouped in rows
Manazer	Buildings severely collapsed	Modest 2/3-storey buildings entangled together and scattered over the mountain flank.
Al-Naqila	Partly ruined	2/3-storey buildings

According to the data gathered during my interview with the Heritage Commission of Rijal Almaa's official, SCHAT sought the services of architectural consultants, such as Dar Al Omran, to conduct a building-by-building inspection mapping the decay process in the heritage assets. The inspection process also catalogued the significant threats facing the run-down architectures, along with the authorities responsible for facilitating the renovation process, in several districts such as Manazer (Bendakir et al. 2018: 76). The inspection process was in preparation for future conservation and restoration of heritage assets in Rijal Almaa. This examination process provided SCHAT with an in-depth comprehension of the construction process, combination of threats, and quality of original materials for the next phase of the heritage site's reconstruction (Bendakir et al. 2018: 76). Severely damaged buildings, such as those shown in Figure 17 indicated the necessity for additional efforts to



restore the heritage village to its ancient state. Renovated old buildings formed the core of Rijal Almaa's tourist attractions as seen in districts such as Al-Khadaha and Al-Shabia as shown in Figure 15.



**Figure 14: Rijal Almaa districts (Bendakir et al. 2018:23). The historic districts with the richest cultural heritage assets are highlighted in red.**



**Figure 15: Historical houses in Al-Shabia (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).**



**Figure 16: Historical houses in Al-Darah and Al-Nusub (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).**



**Figure 17: Ancient buildings (2-3 floors) in Manazer (Bendakir et al. 2018: 32). Many ancient buildings in this district are in severe ruin.**

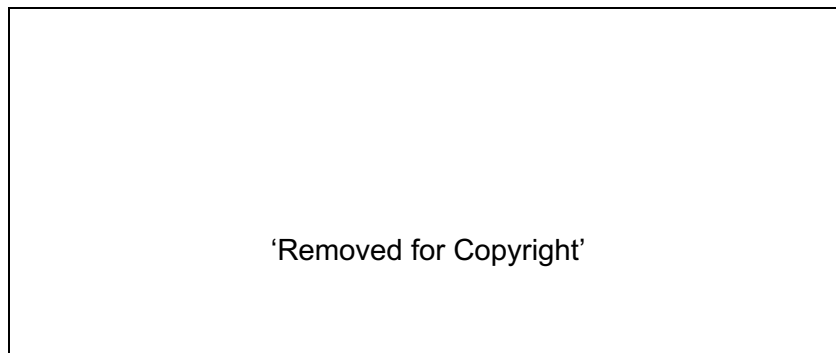
#### **4.2.1 The Museum**

To save the heritage of the area, the Saudi leadership in cooperation with the residents and organisations turned the most significant fort, Al Ewan Fort, into a world-class museum to be visited by tourists worldwide (UNESCO 2015). The men in Rijal Almaa collected old items such as silver and jewellery donated by villagers to be displayed in the museum. Women utilised their traditional skills inherited from their predecessors (Alsaidi 2022: 23), and contributed to the decoration and painting of walls. The Rijal Almaa museum is the oldest in Saudi Arabia's history to be established by the locals and has exhibited the local history in over 2800 display events (Welcome Saudi 2023). Once the renovation was completed, the museum gained popularity as a domestic and gradually as a world tourist destination. The museum is divided into 20 sections, displaying over 500 kilograms of ancient local jewellery

representing Rijal Almaa's golden days and Asir region's history. In a YouTube video<sup>1</sup>, a resident speaks about the museum's history and shows its main contents.

#### 4.3 Location and Topography

Rijal Almaa, a 900-year-old village, is in a quiet valley at a pivotal location between the Red Sea and the inland plateau in the southwest of Saudi Arabia in the Asir region. The area marked in red on the map (Figure 18) below shows the village's location in a valley close to the Red Sea. The steep topography and landscape in Rijal Almaa have created an environment for agricultural terraces and other uses. The heritage buildings are located between the slopes of the mountains along the valley. The village was characterised as a Wadi (Valley) settlement system, with terrace farming. The figure below (Figure 19) demonstrates the original conditions of the village.



**Figure 18: Location of Rijal Almaa (Bendakir et al. 2018: 6).**

The figure below shows Rijal Almaa's original plan and its use of topography for various functional activities and forms.



**Figure 19: Rijal Almaa's original condition (Bendakir et al. 2018: 20).**

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<sup>1</sup> To access the video, click here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgbJd4tkWp8>

#### **4.4 Historical Overview**

Rijal Almaa's history primarily contributes to its nomination to UNESCO's world heritage sites list, tracing back 1,300 years. Besides their courageous role in defending Islam and their community, Rijal Almaa played an essential role as a trade centre. It was known for its diverse market as part of a trade network where the tribe had a turn to host a market to sell products amongst multiple other tribes. In the current era, it has become an important tourist destination for local and international visitors. Before the conservation project, the local community's management of the heritage sites was the responsibility.

#### **4.5 Description of the Property**

To understand the value of the cultural heritage available for tourism activities in Saudi Arabia, and the allure derived from the cultural tourism opportunities available in the village, it was necessary to examine the heritage property from various value-based dimensions. From a temporal and developmental perspective, the traditional construction style provided significant insights into the craftsmanship that evolved in Rijal Almaa, with the authentic and unique style symbolising the ancient architectural industry. Function and aesthetics were crucial elements of the architectural design of the buildings that make up the heritage site, and the overall layout reflects functionality and easy movement and usage of the area. The first two floors were dedicated to livestock and storage. The living rooms, bedrooms, and kitchens were higher on the third floor. The building's units were built in tower style to form a unified living space (see figure 20) that incorporated a defensive line against attackers. Also, the proximity of houses and accessibility to one another in clusters with shared walls and entrances reflects close relationships and extended families (Dar Al-Omran 2017:10). The windows are painted in warm and natural colours that were popular in the Asir region and reflects the surrounding environment (Bendakir et al. 2018). From inside, the women decorated their houses with paintings on the walls known as Al-Qatt arts, as shown in figure 21 below (Alsaïdi 2022:19).

The village also maintains the property in traditional form and style, creating authentic cultural monuments that carry the artistic spirit of the ancient settlers in the village forward. Figures 20 and 21, shown below, illustrate the creative approach displayed by Rijal Almaa's ancient architecture. Natural clay and stone materials were crucial in old buildings (Feiglstorfer and Ottner 2022: 378). In historical buildings, compacted clay was a good material for use as mortar between stones or fortifying historic buildings. However, its physical characteristics, which allowed it to absorb and store humidity or to shrink in dry conditions, affected the ancient buildings (Elert and Rodriguez-Navarro 2022: 1). The

durability of the stone kept the buildings standing for hundreds of years. By studying architectural styles in Rijal Almaa that utilised stone and clay, and the processes involved, the researcher gained insights into the artistic approach used by traditional craftspeople in the village (Fistos et al. 2022: 1). The restoration efforts adhered to the government regulations that necessitated the use of traditional materials in cultural heritage sites. However, the heritage site had persevered for centuries, with locals using traditional materials to maintain the structural identity of the architecture.



**Figure 20: Renovated ancient buildings in Rijal Almaa (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).**



**Figure 21: Rijal Almaa's traditional decoration style is applied by women in restoring the ancient buildings' interiors (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).**

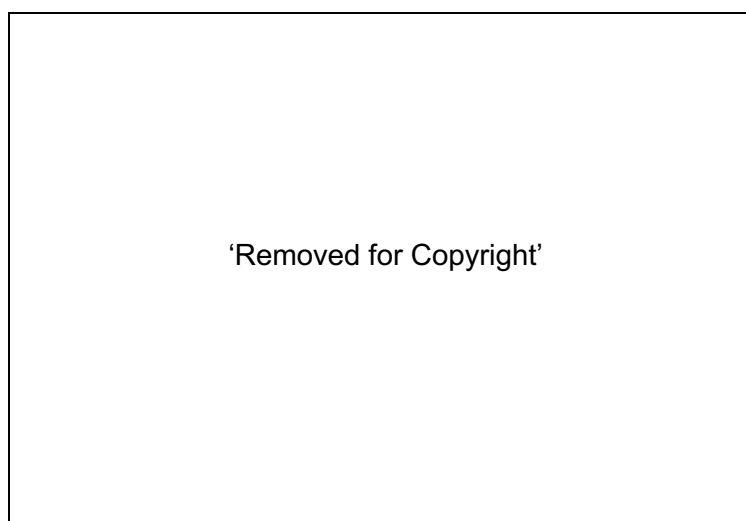
#### **4.6 Socio-cultural Significance**

An archaeological analysis of the historical buildings in the village revealed that the village was designed and built in a way that reflects the social and humanitarian significance of family unity and sharing of resources. The local community understood and prided itself on its rich historical heritage that had moulded its culture and exemplified its traditions for

modern times. The type of buildings, how they are built, and the museum's existence reflect its cultural value. The museum's opening in the centre of the village showcases the local culture and exhibits tools and materials which reflect past life (UNESCO 2015). From a cultural viewpoint, Rijal Almaa's archaeological and tourism activities contributed to the revival of the village's economic vibrancy (see Figure 22), with its traditions forming the core of its attractions. The researcher noted the massive potential for the development of its cultural standing on the global stage, with its museum presenting opportunities for several events and functions annually (Hoque et al. 2017: 36). However, Hoque et al. (2017: 36) also indicated the necessity to guard against the tourists' tendencies to offend or disregard the morals of the local communities.



**Figure 22: Reconstructed roads in Rijal Almaa, easing access to crucial cultural heritage properties in the village (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).**



**Figure 23: The centre of the heritage site with a circular parking lot that also serves as the village's gathering place during social events (Bendakir et al. 2018: 36).**

From the social perspective, the archaeological and tourism activities spurred the construction of community venues, as shown in Figure 22 and Figure 23 above, to enhance community integration and cooperation. For example, a recent venue constructed in Rijal Almaa's village square hosts community events and accommodates guests in the heritage village. The venue's exterior façade borrows from the traditional architectural design, shape, and materials, utilising quartz and stones as decorations. Older women in the village also sought to teach young girls and women the traditional embroidery arts, as shown in figures 24, 25, and 26, mirroring traditional patterns known as Al-Qatt Al-Asiri. This transfer of traditional techniques became necessary for the village after the surge in renovation and restoration activities associated with Rijal Almaa's cultural heritage. The architectural renovations boosted the village's aesthetics and brought the traditional buildings and forts back to life, contributing to Rijal Almaa's unique identity that appeals to local and foreign visitors.



**Figure 24: The interior and exterior design of the building established to host local community events in Rijal Almaa (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).**

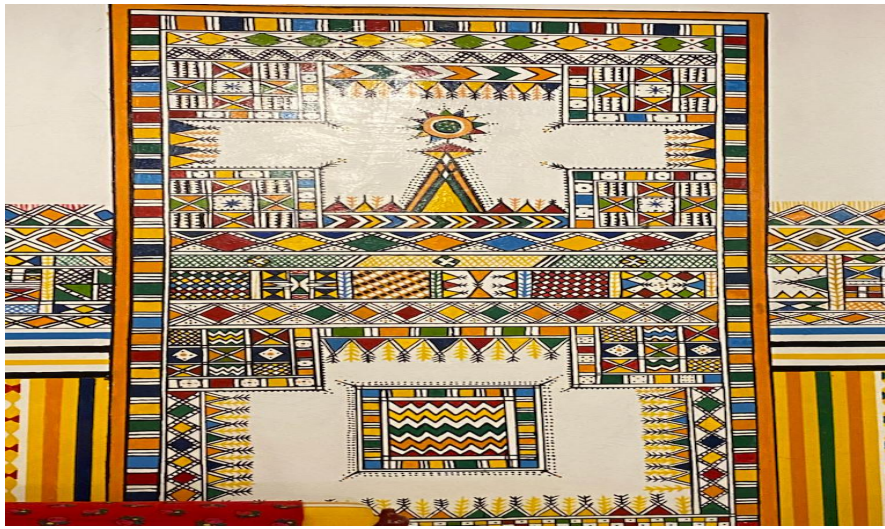


Figure 25: Elderly women in the village trained the young girls the art of AL-Qatt Al-Asiri following the restoration and preservation activities in the heritage site (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).



Figure 26: The painting, displayed at the entrance of the community events house, showcases the names of women artists who painted Al-Qatt Al-Asiri in the building in 2018 (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).

4.6.1 Value-Based Concepts

Value-based concepts are “enduring beliefs that a specific mode of conduct or end-stage of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse” (Seo & Gao 2014: 3). Value-based heritage conservation concepts aim to retain the cultural, historical, spiritual, and social values in balance with the past, present, and future (Torre 2005: 5). Value-based approach became popular in many places such as the United Kingdom, often sitting equally or even surpassing the traditional or conventional heritage evaluation approaches (Myers et al. 2019). The recognition of value-based technique arose from the complexities of conserving heritage sites in several countries in North America and was transcribed in Australia’s ICOMOS Burra Charter (McClelland 2018). This approach allowed the researcher to explore stakeholders' perspectives of Rijal Almaa, to provide insight into their own perceptions of the place and why they valued it. Through these perspectives, the



researcher could explore the diverse dimensions of heritage value to demonstrate its significance as a cultural heritage site.

#### **4.6.2 Review of Conservation Treatments and Techniques**

The values-based data analysis approach also considered conservation treatments and techniques as valuable concepts for the cultural heritage restoration and maintenance activities in Rijal Almaa. Several conservations and treatment techniques were typically used in cultural heritage management. All conservation methods aim to look after the heritage place and retain its historical architecture and cultural significance. Kabila Faris Hmood, in her book “Urban and architectural heritage conservation,” published in 2019, provided several methods and policies for conservation used in this research of Rijal Almaa. According to Hmood (2019: 4), there are a range of effective conservation methods used in the conservation of architectural and urban heritage sites, including:

**Consolidation:** “The process of making something stronger refers to the stabilisation of weakened areas” (Pathak et al. 2021: 6682). Consolidation is essential to recover parts of a historical building affected by degradation. For effective consolidation of a heritage building, this degradation should be studied to determine its causes and the extent to which they relate to environmental factors, deformations and displacements, and overloads (EuroSurvey 2022). At Rijal Almaa this approach was used to strengthen ancient buildings affected significantly by the natural elements, such as water damage and collapsed walls (Bendakir et al. 2017).

**Reproduction:** “The process of reproducing the exact geometry and details of a damaged assembly by new construction” (Pathak et al. 2021: 6682). It includes reproducing the damaged part of the heritage site, featuring its original shape as much as possible. For example, restoring ancient architecture in Rijal Almaa involved reproducing the buildings with minor changes to their external forms and characteristics (Bendakir et al. 2017).

**Reconstruction:** “Reconstructs disappeared or non-surviving sections of an assembly” (Pathak et al. 2021: 6682). In Rijal Almaa, the interior section of the ancient buildings underwent significant reconstruction due to inadequate construction materials and techniques required to reproduce the original styles (Bendakir et al. 2017). Therefore, this reconstruction process severely affected the authenticity and integrity of the heritage buildings as faithful representations of the village’s history.

Preservation: Includes maintaining the site's fabric in its existing condition and minimising more deterioration. In other words, it prevents the building from destruction and keeps the structure as is. It places additional requirements on heritage management authorities regarding materials and methods used to preserve the place (Anfinson 2018: 17). Preserving means not only preserving the physical structure but also culture, traditions, arts, etc. Rijal Almaa's residents prioritised preservation techniques and efforts to ensure buildings with structural problems do not collapse. The village's ancient buildings faced a high risk of collapse from neglect and water damage to the roofs, necessitating immediate preservation measures to protect the remaining heritage assets (Bendakir et al. 2017).

Deterioration prevention: "Addresses unique problems in preserving heritage and its identity effectively" (Pathak et al. 2021: 6682). Deterioration in historic buildings can be associated with poor design and materials, corrosion and incompatibility of secondary materials, ground settlement, and moisture or changes in weather. Even with proper maintenance and assessments, environmental exposure makes heritage sites vulnerable over time.

Rehabilitation: Usually, it is done to maintain the site's economic viability. Rehabilitation may include multiple activities, such as remodelling, modification, rebuilding, and retrofitting. Rehabilitation helps preserve the site's original features. For example, Rijal Almaa's reconstruction of ancient architectural buildings was an attempt to rehabilitate the deteriorating heritage assets by repairing damages (Bendakir et al. 2017). The remodelling and modification of the interior decorations also contributed to the rehabilitation of the architectural heritage, despite the decrease in historical authenticity.

Restoration: it refers to efforts made by all stakeholders to return the existing shape of the heritage place to its earlier known state by restoring existing components without including or adding new building materials (Radnic et al. 2020: 2). Saudi Vision 2030 has promoted and prioritises conservation of heritage sites across the Kingdom. The residents of Rijal Almaa in cooperation with governmental bodies and other stakeholders, have restored the historical buildings and returned the original fabric of the village (Bendakir et al. 2017).

This research's data analysis process emphasized these aspects of Rijal Alma's heritage site conservation in determining the conservation techniques' contributions to Rijal Almaa's values and traditions for the current population.

#### **4.6.3 Material Analysis and Diagnostic Studies**

The values-based concepts criterion for analysing the cultural heritage aspects that make Rijal Almaa valuable in Saudi Arabia's cultural tourism agenda revealed that the use of traditional architectural materials in the village's reconstruction and reproduction made it stand out. Stones were the primary material for buildings in Rijal Almaa, and most of the heritage buildings were built from a stone called "of Alsiwan" stone (Figure 27). This building stone is locally sourced in the mountains surrounding the village and was a focus for inquiry on the interrelations between architecture, culture, and nature. Two kinds of stones are predominantly found in the area (Figure 27 and Figure 28 below). Almaarw Stone (Figure 27) is located in Wadi Alteeq in Rijal Almaa village. It is a bright white stone, giving the ancient buildings their iconic white windows. The ancient villagers in Rijal Almaa also used naturally-coloured stones mined from the earth, and additional colours were added to give it a natural look, matching the environment around it (Dar Al-Omran 2017). These stones also contributed significantly to Rijal Almaa's unique architectural approach encompassing colour and expression. For example, the patterns shown in Figure 28 below decorating a wall in an ancient building in Rijal Almaa represent the outcomes of using the Almaarw stone for construction and decoration.



**Figure 27: White quartz stone (Almaarw) from Rijal Almaa area (Photograph: A. Alfaifi).**



**Figure 28: Close-up look at the stones on the buildings. Source: (Hoque et al. 2022).**

#### **4.6.4 Conservation Treatments and Techniques**

The conservation of Rijal Almaa village as a heritage site, aimed at preserving the cultural assets, and economic hub is managed through a comprehensive developmental plan, which includes restoring and rehabilitating deteriorated historical buildings and turning them into

tourist attractions. This plan was initiated by the local community, who won the Mudon Award for their architectural heritage, but accelerated after the Ministry of Tourism, formerly SCHT, took over the management of the process (Hoque et al. 2023:31). According to Dar Al-Omran's (2017: 38) assessment report, these changes have enhanced the architectural appeal of building in the village through restored forts and towers using traditional materials., particularly in the Al-Khadaha and Al-Shabia districts where the heritage buildings have gone through large-scale restoration work under the leadership of the local community. Several infrastructural advancements directly resulted from the increase in archaeological and tourism activities. For instance, in cooperation with the local community, the authorities established a circular esplanade (Figures 23 and 29) that could host folklore activities and act as public parking when there were no activities. A traditional terrace was designed as a restaurant with a seating area on the roof. Other notable changes to the village's aesthetics and infrastructure followed the cultural heritage management and conservation activities per the project plan.



**Figure 29: Circular esplanade area in Rijal Almaa (Photograph: A. Alfaiji).**

#### **4.6.5 Preservation Strategies and Long-term Management Plans**

The long-term preservation and management plan relies on extensive collaboration between the local community and responsible authorities. It synthesizes the historical and cultural significance of the site with the conservation policy to restore the site for the sustainability and longevity of the village for decades to come. It includes all the conservation methods: restoration, rehabilitation, and preservation. Some modern adaptations were required, but preservation strategies employed preventive methods to avoid more building deterioration; stabilisation of structures where needed while minimising changes to the building designs

and materials (Dar Al-Omran 2017: 123). These preventive methods included roof propping, water shoring, and buttressing (Bendakir et al. 2018: 77). This conservation approach correlates with the local community's traditional approach to restoring and conserving its cultural heritage. The research indicated that the preservation techniques fulfilled all UNSECO guidelines for heritage site management and preservation (UNESCO 2015).

#### **4.6.6 Effectiveness of Conservation and Monitoring Programs**

The results from the SWOT analysis showed that status indicators for effective conservation and monitoring processes, such as assessing the conditions of the architectural assets and conservation challenges' resolutions, were relevant in determining the effects of cultural tourism and the heritage management process on Rijal Almaa. These indicators help set a mechanism to identify and deal with adverse effects resulting from developmental projects.

Effective monitoring programs are essential in conserving and preserving a world heritage site for decades. The World Heritage Committee has developed the following indicators for periodic reporting: state of conservation, management effectiveness, governance mechanism, availability of resources, capacity development, and implementation of World Heritage Committee policies (UNESCO n. d). The information collected and analysed includes monitoring the condition of its state, significance value, and dissemination of such information to relevant stakeholders. The World Heritage Centre and operational guidelines provide instructions and guidance on monitoring and reporting on the state of the site (Australian Government n.d). The use of relevant indicators, including the value-based factors outlined in the previous section, is a standard method to monitor the sustainability of cultural heritage programs. In September 2019, the Saudi Heritage Commission launched a national online platform for tracking the performance of tourism activities and providing statistics about visitors, accommodation capacities, and other relevant data (Hassan 2019).

### **4.7 Community Participation and Education**

#### **4.7.1 Stakeholder Analysis and Participation**

The involvement of the local community in the official heritage site conservation and maintenance process added value to the site because they are part of the site's culture, past, present, and future. Their participation was crucial at every stage of the planning, implementation, and evaluation (Alzamil et al. 2023: 304). Men volunteered, working with professionals in the restoration of the village along with support from many governmental bodies, and researchers. Women contributed to the decoration of the houses by painting the

walls in what is known as Al Qatt art. The colours were extracted from natural materials, and the painting themselves depict the natural environments around the houses (Alawad and Alsobahi 2021: 92). The involvement of older women in the training of young girls in the traditional embroidery and decorative arts enhanced the respect and interaction between different generations in the village, promoting the preservation of the ancient arts and ensuring that they pass to future generations, strengthening the village's culture and traditions. The local community was crucial in providing data concerning the conservation of cultural heritage in Rijal Almaa. It's a bottom-up approach that has become a worldwide phenomenon and has been used more than other techniques in recent decades.

Using the power-interest grid for main stakeholder groups: the community, governmental (SCTH and other governmental agencies), and non-governmental organisations (local and national), this research grouped the stakeholders into four categories as shown in the power-interest grid below (Figure 30). Edward Freeman (1984) developed the matrix for mapping and analysing stakeholders involved in a project based on their power and interest in a framework called the power-interest grid (Chigona et al. 2009). This power-interest grid illuminated the stakeholder's position relative to others in the restoration and conservation project for the heritage site. The governmental agencies represented by SCTH and others were the most essential stakeholder groups. They could be placed in the top right quadrant, where they should be managed carefully, kept informed, and happy with conservation progress. The community could be classified as low power, compared to SCTH, with a high interest in preserving and conserving their heritage. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) had low power and could be split into two groups based on their interests. This analysis of power and interest was crucial for illustrating the beneficiaries and cost-bearers in the heritage management and conservation process in Rijal Almaa, justifying the observations outlined below.



**Figure 30: Power-Interest Grid stakeholder analysis (Chigona et al. 2009).**

#### **4.7.2 Public Outreach and Education**

Rijal Almaa's power-interest analysis revealed a significant need for public outreach and education to increase the power wielded by the local community in decision-making, given their high-interest levels in their cultural tourism activities. Awareness and appreciation of local heritage values and significance is the critical success factor for sustainable conservation. Rijal Almaa is facing its initial global challenges as an emerging cultural tourism destination, requiring significant guidance and learning. An informed and educated community can make wise decisions to protect and preserve its history (Azman et al. 2010: 504). Educating the public, including children, about the importance of and methods used to maintain historical heritage places may ease the challenges of conserving these places and help achieve long-term sustainability. Azman et al. (2010: 509) found that education and communication activities should be organised and offered by relevant authorities or volunteers to make an impact on the people and recruit them to support conservation initiatives.

#### **4.7.3 Capacity Building and Empowerment**

The Ministry of Tourism collaborated closely with the local community to identify the best strategies for restoring and renovating cultural heritage monuments to boost the local community's power over the cultural heritage in the village. This collaboration also adhered to world heritage standards outlined by UNESCO (2015). The UNESCO heritage capacity building strategy, published in 2001, was shifted from direct training to capacity building for the sustainability of cultural and heritage sites. The Applied College at Rijal Almaa offered educational and training services not directly related to conservation but helpful for upgrading the community capacities in areas such as computer applications, science, measurement, and evaluation (Applied College n.d). The increase in tourism activities in Rijal Almaa also resulted in several changes in the local community's manufacturing and skills to capitalize on the increasing business opportunities. Tribal markets that developed during the ancient times up-scaled to those dominated by government and civil organizations as the heritage village grew (UNESCO 2015). These changes in the local community's attitudes toward modern markets and production systems reflected the village's empowerment levels as an entrepreneurial spirit replaced ancient traditions.

#### **4.8 Evaluation and Monitoring**

In their community participation study, Al Zamil et al. (2023) mentioned that the government, local and regional NGOs, the private sector, and the residents contributed to the evaluation

and monitoring process in various capacities. Conservation and management of a heritage site require ongoing monitoring of the external and internal conditions and reporting by those responsible for its rehabilitation and restoration. Part of the Ministry of Tourism's regional office's work was to conduct ongoing evaluations and monitoring activities involving more people, including experts in the monitoring and evaluation process of Rijal Almaa. The Ministry of Tourism organised field visits for delegations from Saudi universities and colleges and other experts seeking their opinion and feedback on the status of heritage buildings (Warrier 2019). The local community played an essential and direct role in the evaluation and monitoring of the village all year long as they live close to the heritage buildings and benefit immensely from the economic activities associated with the assets. Some people own part or an entire building, providing local incentives to continue showcasing their history (Alzamil et al. 2023: 15). The residents monitor the services and facilities and report back to the Ministry's office in the Asir region to ensure necessary maintenance and enhancement work is done.

#### **4.9 Heritage Impact Assessment and Evaluation**

Several heritage management methods applied in Rijal Almaa, including sustainable restoration approaches to the conservation of heritage buildings and a community-led preservation plan, provided significant insights into the cultural heritage conservation plan (Humudh 2022:4). This heritage management approach valued the preservation of traditional aspects of Rijal Almaa's culture portrayed by the architectural tourist attractions in the village. Modern tools for analysing the condition and materials of the heritage assets, including 3D scanning and modelling, align perfectly with this approach and could help improve this heritage management process (Kamani 2020). The heritage management plan also included aspects from the "live heritage sites program," which highlighted the local community's role in the conservation and management of the heritage site (Humudh 2022:73). This plan acknowledges the central role of the community in cultural heritage. It capitalises on this centrality to illuminate significant dimensions for management planning and focus.

Restoration using local technology and techniques and employing locals to do the work was a cornerstone of this approach. The restoration of ancient buildings in Rijal Almaa involved faithful architectural reconstructions where materials and expertise were available to maintain the site's authenticity and integrity (Bendakir et al. 2017). However, some aspects of the reconstruction process, such as interior decorations, failed to meet these reproduction standards. Nonetheless, the efforts by the local community were significant enough to attract



interest from the government, resulting in the nomination of the site for inclusion to UNESCO's World Heritage List. The ICOMOS Charter calls for better care of the heritage sites' attributes, setting, and usage, and prioritises the use of local expertise (Government of South Australia n.d). According to the values-based approach, residents can add value to the cultural heritage of a place by showing interest in the site's significance. This approach can then form the basis of a framework to develop conservation plans and strategies. Therefore, this research examined the concepts indicating artistic traditions and practices carried on from previous generations in Rijal Almaa.

The Heritage Conservation Plan utilised in Rijal Almaa endeavoured to leave as little impact on the assets as possible to ensure the traditional elements were preserved in the architecture. The conservation plan was built around a balance between restoring heritage buildings and maintaining their historical significance. Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) are essential components of the sustainable development of heritage sites. HIA has been developed to analyse and identify any significant impacts of interventions on heritage sites. A typical HIA includes a clear outline of the proposed restoration, an assessment of their effects on the heritage buildings, and any other risks that might occur during the restoration process. For example, all building materials used in the restoration reflect originality and did not change the overall look of the buildings. Also, all recommended conservation work was minimal and only implemented to repair collapsed structures, avoid any further collapses, and reduce the risk of decay. The recommended treatment respected the authenticity of the heritage site by using the same traditional techniques and the same stones and clay from surrounding nature. This approach ensured the ancient buildings retained their unique, authentic structures, making the site a valuable asset for Saudi Arabia's cultural tourism. Minimising impacts on the heritage buildings and ensuring their originality helped Rijal Almaa meet UNESCO's requirements as a World Heritage site.

#### **4.10 Monitoring and Adaptive Management at Rijal Almaa**

According to Bullen and Love (2011: 411), the decision to adapt and reuse historic buildings is a complex set of considerations, including, among others, the condition of the building and its architectural status. Conservation projects are necessary for preserving the buildings and retaining their social and historical significance. The restoration projects in Rijal Almaa protected and maintained the historical buildings and increased their value as a regional tourist heritage site. Most structurally sound buildings in good condition were restored to serve new and modern functions, such as hotels and museums. The façade of these

buildings were restored and renovated while their original characteristics were preserved and maintained. However, most of the heritage buildings in Rijal Almaa are ancient structures that are yet to be restored and have become unstable and partially or wholly damaged over time. The state of these ancient buildings necessitated an adaptive approach to heritage management in Rijal Almaa, where constant monitoring and evaluation provide crucial data to the responsible stakeholders. These monitoring and evaluation practices, conducted on each ancient building in the heritage site, provided the reference for future renovation work where priorities were assigned based on the buildings' conditions (Bendakir et al. 2018: 72).

#### **4.10.1 Cultural Tourism**

Another dimension of the value-based analysis used in this thesis research focused on cultural tourism activities in Rijal Almaa and their effects on the culture and economy of the region. This research relied on data from various sources concerning the different dimensions of cultural tourism, such as its role in the maintenance and conservation of heritage sites and its impact on local communities. For instance, to preserve and sustain cultural sites, the PICTURE project (Proactive Management of the Impact of Cultural Tourism upon Urban Resources and Economies) initiated and developed a framework to enhance the sustainability of the heritage sites. The PICTURE project conducted a survey of 56 European towns to develop a strategic governance framework for tourism in small and medium-sized cities (Teller et al. 2005). "This framework helped to establish, evaluate, and benchmark integrated tourism policies at the local level to maximise the benefits of tourism upon the conservation and enhancement of built heritage diversity and urban quality of life." (CORDIS 2007).

The value-based approach considered cultural tourism a crucial dimension in studying the cultural heritage in Rijal Almaa because it specified the types of processes and outcomes expected at the site. Cultural tourism has been advocated and promoted as an economic niche sector. According to Merwe (2016: 117), several countries in Africa, including South Africa, place great emphasis on the growth of cultural tourism due to its economic development potential and employment opportunities. Despite this official acknowledgment, Merwe (2016: 117) argues that the South African National Department of Tourism failed to promote the national heritage assets due to poor governance. Therefore, understanding how cultural tourism worked in various regions globally was critical in evaluating Rijal Almaa's response to its new status as a world heritage site. Excellent!

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the research results to investigate the cultural factors that made Rijal Almaa a valuable asset in Saudi Arabia's tourism sector and evaluate the impacts of archaeology and tourism on the village and its people. The results also indicated that Rijal Almaa's local community benefited significantly from a rise in its status as a world heritage site. The restoration project balanced the preservation of structures and social and historical significance while maintaining the authority of the place. This balancing act maintained the authenticity of traditional heritage assets, making the village a unique cultural and historical support for Saudi Arabia. The next chapter discusses and evaluates heritage management and conservation policies and assesses site conditions.

## **CHAPTER 5:DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This section synthesises the key findings from the results proving that Rijal Almaa is a unique heritage asset for Saudi Arabia, where the conservation of the village's traditions and values by the government, residents, and local authorities provides substantial benefits in several ways. The first subsection will evaluate how the government and local communities manage heritage assets and conserve local history through strategic policies, preserving the cultural heritage in Rijal Almaa. The second section of this chapter will evaluate how archaeological activities in the village promote the values and traditions of the local community. The final thesis section will examine the impacts of these archaeological activities on the practices and policies employed in Rijal Almaa, and evaluate the effects of tourism on the community. The site assessment documentation and the critical evaluation of the strategic guidelines will provide suitable premises for the conclusion and recommendations from this research.

### **5.2 Evaluation of Heritage Management and Conservation Policies**

The conservation policies applied at the Rijal Almaa heritage site considered historical information and traditional techniques ubiquitous in the local community. This heritage management and conservation approach allowed the local community to increase its knowledge concerning its history and traditions. The heritage management and conservation policies implemented in Rijal Almaa benefit from a robust set of government-managed data from the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) and other government agencies. (Smith and Albaum 2005: 21). In collaboration with local communities, the regional and local authorities relied on this data abundance to craft strong conservation policies for their and their country's benefit. As the heritage site became more noticeable on the world stage after its nomination to the world heritage sites list, tourism activities escalated, introducing new challenges and opportunities for the village. These strengths and challenges necessitated new legal and institutional frameworks to enhance the positive outcomes and mitigate the shortcomings of the increase in archaeological and tourism activities.

The researcher observed several notable strengths and weaknesses while analysing Rijal Almaa's heritage management and conservation. The guidelines governing the participation of local communities in the conservation and restoration encouraged collaboration between the various stakeholders, creating a conducive atmosphere for the village's socioeconomic development. This collaboration between the local community and the national authority was a key strength because it contributed to the crucial growth of the village's reputation locally

and globally. The collaboration demonstrated Rijal Almaa's unique bond to its traditions and culture, illuminating the unique heritage available for the Saudi Arabian government to utilise for its cultural tourism agenda. Social relationships between different generations in the village also strengthened as information transfer became a core part of the heritage preservation process. The development of stronger inter-generational bonds due to archaeological and cultural heritage preservation activities illustrated the role of training and education systems, whether formal or informal, in society (Hoque et al.2023: 39). It also provided a glimpse into the transformative nature of social interactions in fulfilling the innate human need for connection and social identity, given the number of young people engaged in the process.

The strength of the institutional and legal framework adopted in Rijal Almaa is its focus on inclusivity and value orientation over all other considerations. Rijal Almaa's restoration process involved various stakeholders at various levels, with a critical emphasis on local community. Both men and women contributed to the renovation and conservation efforts, with young people showing significant interest in the history and culture of their village (Hoque et al.2023: 37). Although men and women played different roles in the restoration process, according to the village's traditional practices, the overall outcomes of the project showed enhanced social integration and cohesion between various demographics. Saudi Arabia's government was also keen on more than the tourism benefits provided by the restored heritage sites in King Salmaan Charter that aimed to preserve all their cultural and historical uses for the benefit of future generations (Bullen and Love 2011). These visions meshed perfectly with the adopted legal framework, providing a conducive atmosphere where the government and local community benefited from their ongoing collaboration.

One challenge facing the regulations and guidelines in the conservation and restoration of the heritage sites in Rijal Almaa was the difficulty in identifying the optimum strategies for preserving the social and historical significance of the renovated structures, identifying the best methods to preserve this historical and traditional significance for most of the damaged buildings under renovation required expertise from various fields, including architecture and archaeology. However, the government and local community collaboration helped alleviate the complex challenge in Rijal Almaa. Nonetheless, there were lapses in these strategies, especially when they conflicted with other priorities for the project, including tourism and environmental conservation considerations. Therefore, aligning these strategies to the UNESCO standards and principles could help manage this challenge to ensure the best outcome for all stakeholders.

The success model adopted in Rijal Almaa to ensure the project overcomes the challenges associated with collaborative initiatives relied on a prioritization strategy based on the value produced by each process. The value-based approach to success modelling captured the projected outcome for each activity and determined if it benefited the entire process (Seo & Gao 2014: 3). This approach provides a flexible strategy for planning for success in collaborative projects with diverse power-interest relationships. Stakeholders could provide their value assessments for various components and functions in the project, and a deliberative process could give the consensus necessary to consolidate an action plan.

Another weakness of the legal framework in Rijal Almaa, and in the entire tourism industry in Saudi Arabia, was the lack of mechanisms to reduce the cost of local tourism. This analysis revealed that local tourism in the country suffered from high economic costs, with one researcher noting that a trip to a local cultural site could cost as much as a trip abroad (Hoque et al.2023: 37). These high costs hindered the development of local tourism, despite the great efforts applied by national and local organisations in promoting the cultural heritage properties.

### **5.2.1 Alignment with UNESCO standards and principles**

Rijal Almaa's nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage list contributed significantly to its rise to the global stage in the tourism industry, thanks to the collaboration between SCHAT, regional and local NGOs, and the local community. This research examined how Rijal Almaa's heritage management and conservation efforts align with the UNESCO standards and principles for world heritage sites to illuminate their current state. Rijal Almaa complied with the UNESCO standards and policies for world heritage sites in various ways. They include prioritising local communities in the conservation and heritage management process, promoting sustainable development of the site, maintaining extensive documentation for reconstruction purposes, and raising awareness of the importance of world heritage conservation (UNESCO World Heritage Convention n.d). Other UNESCO standards and principles also provided the basis for most operations conducted by the Rijal Almaa reconstruction project, enabling the project to proceed efficiently with significant success.

### **5.2.2 Alignment with international best practices**

Rijal Almaa had a strong tradition of maintaining its ancient buildings before its nomination to UNESCO's world heritage sites list, and the government's involvement boosted these

activities and provided guidelines for aligning them with international best practices. This analysis examined how Rijal Almaa aligned with these standards and principles, including the strong collaboration between the government and local communities and meticulously documenting the site's history and culture. The strong government support for the heritage restoration and conservation efforts encompassed diverse interactions with local authorities and communities, resulting in a comprehensive plan for Rijal Almaa's renovation. International best practices in conserving heritage properties contain many standards and guidelines, most of which comply with international regulatory bodies such as UNESCO. This effort and the documentation provided to the international institutions allowed the heritage site to receive the recognition it deserved on the global stage and highlighted Saudi Arabia's unique cultural heritage spanning almost a millennium.

### **5.3 Assessment of Site Condition and Documentation**

The ancient village of Rijal Almaa consists of six historical districts with 60 ancient multi-story buildings constituting its heritage precinct. These buildings include a mosque, a museum, and other old buildings, which sustained severe water damage from exposure to rains over long periods and need urgent repair. The museum is the village's most iconic tourist attraction feature and was renovated to retain its aesthetic appearance and restore its stability (Bendakir et al. 2018). With the museum playing a central role in Rijal Almaa's tourism activities, the other ancient buildings also came into focus locally and internationally. This data collection forms a rich foundation for developing the Rijal Almaa heritage database, making it more accessible to the local community and the rest of the world.

The site visit revealed the sizeable ancient fortifications that contributed to the village's unique cultural heritage, reminiscent of the wars Rijal Almaa's ancient inhabitants fought. Rijal Almaa maintains intensive records of the village's history, culture, social events, and geographical data, including maps and climate information (Coetzee et al. 2021; 2). Given its location and topography, Rijal Almaa boasts a long history of social, political, and economic activities, distinguishing itself from other villages in Asir province. The village was a financial hub since ancient times, with traders and scholars noting its sizeable settlement as early as the 12th century (Bendakir et al. 2018: 6). The geographic location of the village on the trade routes leading to the Red Sea provided it with a rich economic, where architecture and art flourished. This combination of factors contributed significantly to its nomination as a world heritage centre.

SCHT is the primary institution responsible for monitoring and assessing tourism and heritage properties and financing and providing technical support to these sites. The coordinated effort between SCHAT and the local community in monitoring the conditions in Rijal Almaa resulted in a well-structured assessment system with constant feedback and improvement. Under King Salmaan Charter and Prince Mohammed bin Salmaan, the government ensures that the community and organisations responsible implement these recommendations by providing financial support (Warrier 2019). Rijal Almaa also enjoys the protection of the local community, especially from village residents living near the heritage site, who regularly monitor the site to ensure it remains in good condition. The evaluation practices involving the government agencies and the local community increased their attachment to the heritage site and reconnected them with their rich history and culture.

The documentation of Rijal Almaa's heritage and the reconstruction process provided valuable tools for ensuring renovations remained historically authentic. Each information source contributed to the strategies and operations selected for reconstructing and conserving the heritage site, making it worthy of its global renown. This documentation cemented Rijal Almaa's unique position as a cultural heritage site in Saudi Arabia. It was a factor in the decision by the government to select the village to represent the country as one of its valuable cultural tourist attractions.

This analysis surveyed maps stored in ministry archives and gained important information about Rijal Almaa's mountainous geography and terrace farming culture accompanying this terrain. Historical documentation analysis revealed the village's deep historical background, dating back to 636 C.E. when its people joined neighbouring villages and defeated the Sassanid Army. The information gained from the maps and the ministry archives, including the sociocultural promotion of the family unit through historical and cultural documents, provided the context for the architectural knowledge collected from Rijal Almaa. This knowledge reinforced the local community's traditions and provided the background story to add colour to the built heritage that forms the focus of the tourist attractions in the village.

### **5.3.1 Critical Analysis of Conservation and Preservation Strategies**

Sustainability played a central role in determining the strategies and processes implemented in the Rijal Almaa heritage site's renovation and rehabilitation, in line with UNESCO's principles. According to UNESCO, governments and other stakeholders must preserve heritage properties by providing sufficient information and education (UNESCO World Heritage Convention n.d.). This analysis revealed that the local community in Rijal Almaa



maintained the traditional crafts in architecture, relying on natural materials such as clay and stones, restoring the site to its traditional appearance with minimal environmental impacts. For example, the stones and wood used in the ancient buildings restoration process came from local suppliers, reducing transportation costs and effects. These resources also relied on traditional extraction means, minimizing the need for fossil fuels. This approach was possible through the use of traditional materials that also incorporated a cultural connection to the restoration process. The renovation strategy applied in Rijal Almaa illuminated the village's rich history while maintaining its authentic feel and look (Fistos et al. 2022). Clay and stones required existing local expertise to prepare and use in the renovation, ensuring local artisans could receive employment on the site. The tradition of renovating ancient buildings and forts using traditional materials already existed in Rijal Almaa, making the village a cultural gem for Saudi Arabia. The village people maintained the old buildings using traditional methods over centuries, allowing some of the architecture to reach modern times in reasonably good condition.

The conservation policies responsible for most of the effects observed in the data analysed during this research included continuous supervision and monitoring of the internal and external condition of the heritage site by different authorities, regular analysis of the impacts of the heritage site by several sources, and cultivating discipline in the implementation of the restoration and conservation plan. The conservation policies applied in Rijal Almaa significantly affected the local community, including increased historical interest among the locals, enhanced economic activities in the village, and better social interactions between the different generations sharing skills and techniques. Training activities involving the elderly artisans and young apprentices became common as the old craftspeople shared their knowledge with the younger generations.

The conservation policy guidelines form the core of the preservation strategy and long-term management plan for Rijal Almaa, incorporating the village's cultural and historical significance to ensure sustainability and longevity. These guidelines and the long-term plan provide a clear roadmap for continued renovation, restoration, and preservation strategies to secure the site's future. The contributions from the residents in the restoration and preservation of Rijal Almaa included labour from both women and men, reflecting the traditional techniques of the village (Alawad and Alsobahi 2021: 92). The preserved heritage assets enhanced the overall aesthetic appeal of the village and attracted global tourists, introducing new economic opportunities to the village. The long-term management plan ensured the local community remained engaged in the cultural heritage conservation

process, ensuring the village's traditions and culture were preserved for the benefit of future generations.

The research showed that Mohammed bin Salman (the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia) invested 50 billion Saudi riyals in the Asir region (Warrier, 2019), demonstrating a significant personal and national commitment to this and other heritage sites. These investments aimed to drive substantial development and improvements for the tourist sites located on the mountain peaks of Asir (Aseer Development Authority 2021). Rijal Almaa's well-documented plan for the restoration and preservation of the heritage properties was a vital component of the project's objective to maintain the site's historical significance and restore the local community's cultural heritage. Given its bottom-up origin, Rijal Almaa's heritage project had the stability necessary to maintain a healthy working environment for numerous stakeholders, as mentioned earlier. This collaboration led to the development of a comprehensive heritage management and preservation plan considering the project's economic, historical, social, and environmental aspects. Excellent

The local community in Rijal Almaa evaluated and complied with conservation and rehabilitation policies and strategies outlined by the government, especially the people living close to the heritage sites in the village (Alzamil et al. 2023: 15). However, this attention also introduced challenges when the various government interests conflicted, necessitating compromises in the heritage management and reconstruction process. The local community's dedication invited the attention of Saudi Arabia's national government, which introduced overarching interests in the heritage management process, increasing its significance on the national stage. There were notable challenges in ensuring the local community participated in critical decisions during the conservation process, as discussed in the section below. These challenges necessitated a review of the power and interest relationships between the government and the locals to ensure future collaborations meet the needs of each stakeholder.

## **5.4 Community Participation and Education Analysis**

### **5.4.1 Analysis of the effectiveness of stakeholder analysis and participation**

The priority given to local communities in the Rijal Almaa heritage conservation and management process fulfils one of UNESCO's primary objectives in the World Heritage Convention. The principle behind this convention encourages building strong communities through their participation in the heritage conservation process (UNESCO World Heritage

Convention n.d.). The collaboration between the SCHAT and the local community in Rijal Almaa provided sufficient grounds for the commission to successfully request consideration for the village among UNESCO's world heritage sites.

Saudi Arabia's government support for the Rijal Almaa heritage site renovation, including the King Salmaan Charter concerned with restoring and highlighting cultural heritage sites, ensured that the project had several stakeholders (Hoque et al.2023: 39). There was careful consideration to ensure conservation and restoration activity would prevent further damage to old buildings in the heritage site This work was undertaken following the guidelines from government experts in the Regional SCHAT Office in Asir. A formal framework for restoring the heritage site based on the King Salmaan Charter provided the necessary structures for integrating all the stakeholders into the project with minimal friction and optimised efficiency. This charter provided the vision for all stakeholders in the project towards creating an architectural environment inspired by cultural and environmental heritage (Architecture and Design Commission n.d.). The charter document also provided the architectural identity of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Architecture and Design Commission n.d.), giving the stakeholders in the Rijal Almaa heritage project guidelines for resolving architectural challenges. All these interactions required clear and consistent communication between the government and the local community. The communication structure between the residents and the government agencies involved mixed modes, with collaborative operations necessitating two-way interactions and policy decisions assuming a top-down system (UNESCO 2015). Therefore, the archaeological activities promoted a close relationship between Rijal Almaa's local community and the government, introducing significant benefits and recognition for the heritage village.

The heritage quality of Rijal Almaa has sky-rocketed recently thanks to the collaboration between these local communities and the national authorities to world-class standards. This analysis evaluated the effectiveness of reconstructing Rijal Almaa's heritage properties and the legal framework applied in this process. The results indicated that Rijal Almaa was empowered by the rich array of investors and their collaboration in managing and preserving the heritage site. The partnership resulted from the restoration plan and strategy adopted in Rijal Almaa, along with the dedication shown by the local community to protect their cultural heritage.

#### **5.4.2 Opportunities and challenges for engagement**

There are several opportunities and challenges for engagement in the management and conservation of Rijal Almaa. The heritage restoration and management framework applied in Rijal Almaa's heritage conservation had several strengths and weaknesses that reflected the values-based concepts underpinning most of the work on the historic village. The management framework prioritised community engagement as a crucial factor in conserving Rijal Almaa's cultural heritage. This research analysis also revealed that the government stores vast collections of data from Rijal Almaa and other historical places in Saudi Arabia, providing extensive background resources for heritage reconstruction (Smith and Albaum 2005: 90). This information pool, along with expertise from the NGOs and the government, provided a basis for the legal framework adopted in the reconstruction and conservation process. One of the challenges facing the cultural tourism sector in Saudi Arabia is reducing the costs for local tourists who wish to visit the site. This challenge was resolved at least in part by government agencies capitalising on information collected through the collaborative relationships being created with the local community that provided rich documentation and information about the sites and their history and traditions. Other challenges associated with increased tourism activities in the village provided opportunities for the government to examine the cultural, economic, and environmental changes occurring and provide mitigation solutions to protect the village's culture and values.

The challenges for engagement between the local community and the government included the power imbalance between the stakeholders during crucial decision-making processes. Rijal Almaa's local community was critical in managing and conserving heritage assets for centuries before the government's involvement. Given their interest level in the project, they should have more power in the decision-making processes. The conflict between the government's interests concerning the economic advantages of cultural tourism and the local community's traditions and values impacted by tourism activities should also receive significant attention. These challenges make the heritage management and conservation process an important source of debate among the local community and the government, providing more opportunities for enhancing collaboration.

As a nomination to UNESCO's world heritage sites list, Rijal Almaa came into the global limelight, increasing the range and magnitude of the economic activities in the village. Rijal Almaa's cultural heritage assets could be the economic boost the local community requires to capitalise on the increased tourism activities. Infrastructural benefits, such as the

construction of roads for easy access to the heritage site, and the parking lot constructed at the centre of the village, enhanced the quality of life for the people in the village by easing logistic concerns while at the same time providing a central venue for activities like markets. Given the economic roots of the local community, the increased tourist activities have provided additional opportunities to improve their livelihoods.

### **5.5 Implications for Practice and Policy**

The method applied in this research, based on Hmood's (2019: 4) technique and the national mechanisms for evaluating heritage sites, revealed a wide array of assets, such as historic buildings, the museum, and other cultural and historical sites under the management of the government in Saudi Arabia. This research showed that Rijal Almaa's historical and cultural information was sufficient to apply Hmood's (2019: 4) method for the overall management of the heritage site, accounting for the observed effect it had in the recent past at the national level. However, the analysis also revealed a shortcoming in the country's management of local tourism despite the superb control of the heritage sites. Rijal Almaa's heritage management system must find appropriate mechanisms to ensure the site is affordable for local and international tourists, considering this has been identified as a weakness through the SWOT Analysis.

This analysis produced several insights that could enhance Rijal Almaa's conservation and preservation strategies, including expanding its monitoring and assessment capabilities, lowering its costs for local tourists, and finding means to renovate the structures in poor condition. The discussion highlights the weaknesses in Rijal Almaa's legal and management frameworks to illuminate opportunities that made the heritage restoration process successful and streamlined. Enhancing the monitoring and assessment capabilities for the site will provide critical information to improve the long-term plan utilised by the Ministry of Tourism and the local community to maintain the heritage assets. The continued collaboration between the government and the local community provided opportunities to enhance the conservation approach taken in the heritage site, as knowledge and skills flow from older people to the younger generations. Young people, increasingly interested in Rijal Almaa's culture and history in the heritage village, will play an increasing role in articulating and implementing the management and conservation process, easing the collaboration between the government and the locals.

## **5.6 Contributions and Limitations**

The results showed that the heritage management strategy in Rijal Almaa relied on the successful collaboration between the local communities and the different levels of authorities in Saudi Arabia, including the national government authorities. This research evaluated the impacts of the boost in tourism on the village's social, economic, cultural, and environmental future to enhance the knowledge and information available for future research. The power-interest evaluation of the various stakeholders in this management process revealed a complete ecosystem responsible for the meteoric rise of the historic village to the global cultural stage.

The primary limitation of this study was the need for more synthesised information concerning the conservation policies and heritage management data in the ministry archives, which necessitated long periods of graphical data analysis and consolidation. However, this process also allowed the researcher to find unique connections between various data sources that were not apparent at the onset. For example, the extensive analysis revealed the need for a centralised online database to synthesise the archived data concerning the history, culture, and social life in Rijal Almaa at different periods. Future researchers may analyse the information sources and site documentation formats used for the Rijal Almaa heritage asset and design the database model for synthesising this data.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Summary of Findings and Contributions

This discussion focused on the unique cultural heritage of Rijal Almaa in Saudi Arabia, with particular attention on the impact of archaeological activities on the village's traditions and values. The village boasted a unique cultural heritage represented by the ancient architecture that distinguishes Rijal Almaa from other villages in Asir. The results and inferences indicated the impact of the collaboration between the local community in Rijal Almaa and the national government in preserving this heritage and the rich historical knowledge concerning the village stored by Saudi Arabia's government. The collaboration between the local community and the government on restoring Rijal Almaa led to a long-term development plan, which had numerous benefits for all stakeholders.

The local community benefitted from increased economic opportunities and cultural tourism activities. It also received several social benefits from the growth of tourism and its status as a world heritage site, including enhanced communication between various generations involved in the project and increased interest in the village's culture and history among the youth. On the other hand, the government boosted the nation's overall image and protected its citizens' culture and history. Analysing Rijal Almaa's culture was critical for understanding the conservation policies adopted in managing and preserving the heritage site. The architectural style, encompassing the use of stone and clay for multistorey buildings, illuminated the ingenuity of the Rijal Almaa society and attracted numerous tourists to the site. However, given their delicate nature and historical significance, the national government and local populations needed to conserve these buildings, necessitating comprehensive rules and guidelines that enhanced stakeholder collaboration.

This analysis also examines the conservation treatment and techniques applied in Rijal Almaa to renovate and conserve heritage properties, including infrastructural developments like the circular esplanade that controls the traffic at the site. This circular esplanade resulted from an extensive collaboration between the local community and the authorities, who were the primary stakeholders interested in the organised traffic flow at the heritage site. The heritage assets require careful preservation to ensure future generations enjoy them in the same condition as the current generation. This analysis also highlighted the critical role of collaboration in the successful monitoring and evaluation operations in the heritage site, ensuring that the properties maintain their pristine condition all year round.

A careful analysis of the correlation between power and interest in the management and preservation of Rijal Almaa indicated significant differences between the primary stakeholders in the undertaking. The matrix mapping technique, developed by Edward Freeman (1984), showed four primary categories of stakeholders, each with a unique combination of power and interest in the project. The government, including its agencies and SCHAT, had the highest power and interest, while the local community had the lowest power in this classification. A careful observation of the matrix showed that the amount of interest in non-governmental organisations varied as the amount of power in the project increased. This chart was crucial for understanding the differences in behaviour and interaction between these groups observed during the research.

Rijal Almaa's local community engaged in rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes for its renovation and conservation efforts to ensure all stakeholders fulfil their interests. The government engaged technical experts from academic institutions and other sectors to assess and provide feedback on the condition of the heritage site regularly. The Ministry of Tourism plays a critical role in ensuring the evaluation and monitoring of the Rijal Almaa heritage site progresses smoothly and promptly. As a world-class heritage site, Rijal Almaa's local population must maintain it for future generations and the benefit of its citizens. The following section explores the possible implications and future directions based on the findings and inferences outlined in the previous sections.

## **6.2 Implications and Future Directions**

Based on the findings summarised above, it was evident that Rijal Almaa plays a crucial and unique role in the growth of Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage, providing a glimpse into the traditions and history of the country for almost a millennium. This research aimed to elaborate on the history of Saudi Arabia and how Rijal Almaa fits into this narrative, evaluate the archaeological significance of the village, and explore the consequences of attracting more tourists and archaeologists to the village. This history provides context for other historical and social events in Saudi Arabia and attracts numerous tourists curious to understand this diverse culture.

The monumental architecture in Rijal Almaa provides realism to the curious historical enthusiasts who flock to the village to view the stone and clay multistorey buildings with white windows. The local government has endeavoured to ensure local moral standards prevail throughout the year, despite the increased tourist activities, with the local community's pride in their traditions necessitating this social outlook. An in-depth analysis



of the legal and institutional frameworks revealed the crucial necessity for tracking social, economic, and environmental effects associated with the cultural heritage preservation process and tourism in Rijal Almaa, to anticipate future issues related to these activities.

The study revealed that the local community played a critical role in developing the heritage site and should be equal partners with the government in this project. However, this analysis revealed that the government possessed the most power and interest in this arrangement, leaving the local community with little power despite their enormous interest. The government should reconsider its perspective on local tourism and provide economical accommodations to boost this sector and benefit heritage sites like Rijal Almaa and its local community. The study also showed the need for enhancing the local tourism sector in Saudi Arabia, given the high cost of visiting heritage sites, including Rijal Almaa. These recommendations provide an opportunity for the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia to spread out into fields such as cultural tourism, like in most other countries.

Another implication from this study was that evaluation and monitoring could benefit from expansion by incorporating assistance from local youth to boost the efforts of governmental organisations and NGOs. This study revealed the significant role associated with regular and standard monitoring and evaluation of the heritage site. However, this evaluation could be subject to biases given the similarities in the groups recruited to provide feedback on the project. Fresh input from the local community and young people interested in the history and culture of Rijal Almaa could help increase the amount of information available during decision-making by the heritage management team. Regular site visits for the young people living around the heritage site and subsequent feedback reviews could provide a starting point for this policy to enhance the amount of information available during evaluation.

There are a couple of future directions this research could take following this analysis, including a deeper exploration of the architecture and archaeology of Rijal Almaa to illuminate the origins and motivations for the materials used and an investigation into the cultural impact of the increase in tourism on Rijal Almaa. The first direction would allow researchers to understand how and why Rijal Almaa chose the architectural and cultural forms portrayed in the modern heritage site, leading to a richer understanding of the traditional society in Saudi Arabia. This research could open up avenues for further exploration of Saudi Arabian sociocultural connections with neighbouring communities and boost the literature volume and quality concerning the heritage village.

On the other hand, evaluating the environmental and cultural impacts of the tourism explosion in Rijal Almaa would help explain the changes experienced in the village since its induction into the global heritage sector. Tourism often encompasses positive and negative aspects, and a critical evaluation of these outcomes in Rijal Almaa would help Saudi Arabia's government counter the negative impacts. The relationship between the local community and Saudi Arabia's government after the development of Rijal Almaa's heritage properties rose to a different level, given the project's success. The recommended study would explore how this close relationship could affect other areas of society in Rijal Almaa in the future.

In conclusion, this study evaluated Rijal Almaa's heritage assets and explored the archaeological potential of the village to highlight its benefit to Saudi Arabia's government and economy. The analysis also provided crucial information on the impacts of tourism on various aspects of the historic village, including its culture and environment. The research showed that Rijal Almaa boasts a long history, enriched with a proud culture and innovative architecture. The significance of archaeological activities in Rijal Almaa was evaluated based on their impacts on the local community's values and traditions. The study revealed significant benefits associated with the village's cultural heritage management and conservation efforts through socioeconomic activities and the promotion of knowledge transfer to younger generations. These shortcomings included the limitations to local tourism due to economic costs and the potential adverse environmental impacts of increased tourism in Rijal Almaa. Nonetheless, it was evident that the government and local community in Rijal Almaa hold significant interest in the success of the heritage site, ensuring that it continues to prosper locally and internationally.

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