



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



The Protection of the
Underwater Cultural Heritage

CLT/CIH/MCO/2010/RP/173
12 November 2010
Original: English

JORDAN

National Report on underwater cultural heritage

Report made in the UNESCO Regional Meeting in Istanbul

25 -27 October, 2010

*Jordan is a State Party of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection
of the Underwater Cultural Heritage*

On 02.09.2009 Jordan ratified and became a member of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, 02/03/2010 is the date to start the implementation.

The six months period was the time to look closely at the convention to specify the actions needed to be fully implemented, the outcomes are:

- The legislations should be revised, since our laws and regulations regarding this issue are poor.
- A gap analysis should be done as soon as possible to study the gaps between what we have and what's the requirement of the convention.

The future steps:

- Regulate and authorize activities directed at underwater cultural heritage.
- Form a national committee to be in charge of the future steps.
- Train a national team of archaeologists on diving and the underwater survey.
- A full survey (field and references) is needed to locate the Underwater Cultural Heritage sites, since we have a lack in the studies and work.
- A public awareness will be raised concerning the value and the significant of the underwater cultural heritage.

What is needed from the UNESCO?

- The training of the National Team.
- Experts to help in the survey.
- The coordination with the surrounded countries

The situation of the archaeology in Jordan

Jordan has been an inhabited settlement since thousands of years profiting from its strategic location at the junction of trading routes between Asia, Africa, and Europe.

The country has an access at the Red and Dead sea, some historical sites are based close to the sea shores, the following information will give a brief introduction about these sites:

Aqaba History and Sites

Aqaba's history dates back to the 4th millennium BC. The name of Aqaba was given to the port city in the 14th century when it was ruled by the Mamluk Sultan based in Egypt. Previously, it

was known as Ayla, a name which archaeologists and historians have often interpreted as the twin version of Eilat.



Tell Al-Khalifeh, inside the Jordanian-Eilat border, some 3 km north of modern Aqaba, was initially identified with Ezion Geber, mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, But recent excavations indicate that the site was found after the 8th century BC and served commercial and industrial purposes: for smelting copper and as a halting place for caravans.

During the 1st century BC, the Nabataeans, who raised livestock and pirated merchant ships in the Red Sea, inhabited Ayla. Around 106 AD, the Romans used the town as one of their main trading stations en route to the sea. Ayla came under Islamic rule in 630 AD, when the spread of Islam from Hejaz reached the peoples of the Red Sea. During this time, the port was known as the "Door to Palestine".

Just prior to Islam the Ghassanid Phylarchs (a tribe from western Arabia) controlled Ayla on behalf of Byzantium, and its bishop at Ayla attended the Council of Nicaea in 325. Excavations initiated in 1994 by a team from North Carolina State University, located the Nabataean-Roman town of Ayla 2 km from Tell Al-Khalifeh, in the Circular area of modern Aqaba. the ancient port city of Roman & Byzantine Ayla offers the potential to provide important new evidence about trade in the roman economy .in particular it could illuminate the nature and extent of the roman empire's long distance international trade with its eastern neighbours.

The walled city of Ayla was constructed during the early days of the Islamic era, a rare example of early Islamic urbanization policy. Its layout is marked by axial streets leading to 4 gates and intersecting in the middle, where a tetrapylon (4 interconnecting arches) was set up, thus recalling the plan of Roman legionary camps. Unearthed in the mid-1980s by an American-Jordanian archaeological team are the remains of Islamic Ayla, located along the main waterfront road, near the hotel district. The archaeological excavations indicated the people were living inside and outside the walls of the city. The markets, gates and the commercial stores were revealed. The artifacts found in the site indicated a commercial contact with Avicina as well as ports in the Indian Ocean and the Far East;

Islamic Ayla benefited from the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and continued to prosper until the end of the 12th Century when the city suffered from a series of earthquakes, Bedouin raids, and Crusader attacks. During the 12th century, Crusaders wrested Ayla from Muslims and built a castle on Pharaoh's Island. When Saladin captured Aqaba in 1182 AD, the castle became known as Saladin's Castle.

The Aqaba Fort was rebuilt in 1587 AD under one of the last Sultans of the Mamluk era and has been substantially altered several times since then. The Hashemite Coat of Arms was placed above the main doorway during the Great Arab Revolt of World War I. Running around the first bay of the passageway is a band of Arabic inscription which gives the name of the Mamluk Sultan, Qansweh El-Ghuri (1501-1516 AD), responsible for building the fort.

By the beginning of the 16th century Aqaba had been ruled by the Ottoman Empire. The city declined in status and for about 400 years remained a simple fishing village of little significance. During World War I, Ottoman forces withdrew from the town after the Arab Army of Sharif Hussein bin Ali, the Hashemite Leader of the Great Arab Revolt, attacked them in 1917. T. E. Lawrence, popularly known as Lawrence of Arabia, took part in this campaign.

Dead Sea

The Dead Sea bordering Jordan to the east, and Palestine to the west, the Jordanian lands extended over 50 KM, The Dead Sea surface and shores are 422 metres (1,385 ft) below sea level the lowest elevation on the earth's surface on dry land. The Dead Sea is 378 m (1,240 ft) deep, the deepest hypersaline lake in the world. This salinity makes for a harsh environment where animals cannot flourish, hence its name.

The December 1957 edition of National Geographic magazine contained these statements on the subject: The mount of Sodom, a barren wasteland, rises sharply above the Dead Sea. No one has ever found the destroyed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but scholars believe that they stood in the Vale of Siddim across from these cliffs. Possibly flood waters of the Dead Sea engulfed them following an earthquake

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Note: So far no submerged heritage site been detected in Jordan, since no excavations or surveys have been conducted.

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