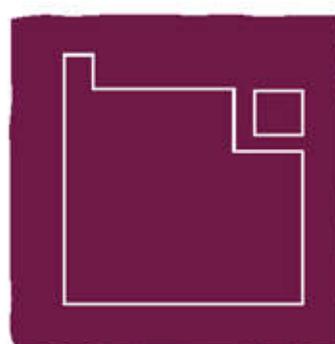
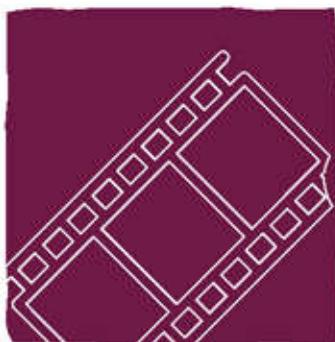


# Report on the State of Culture

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019: Facts and Figures



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# Message from the Minister

Saudi culture is experiencing a new golden age. Thanks to the active engagement of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and His Royal Highness Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister of the Council of Ministers, and Minister of Defense, a cultural renaissance is gathering pace.

Cultural institutions, and those involved in the creative industries, have been empowered to carry forward the traditions and heritage handed down through the generations of our people. The result has been the flourishing cultural sector we see around us today.

Our beloved country is experiencing a wave of renewal and reform on all fronts. Culture in its multifaceted forms, is integral to this. Vision 2030, by recognizing it as "indispensable to our quality of life," has given Saudi culture greater prominence than it has ever enjoyed before.

Over the past year (2019), we have achieved many of our goals. We did so thanks to the tireless work of the creatives, entrepreneurs, thinkers and workers from across the cultural landscape, all of whom have been our strategic partners since the establishment of the Ministry. We set up eleven new commissions to manage the various cultural sub-sectors with greater efficiency, flexibility, and autonomy. We also brought a number of cultural initiatives to fruition, enabling citizens and residents to enjoy a broader and more inclusive range



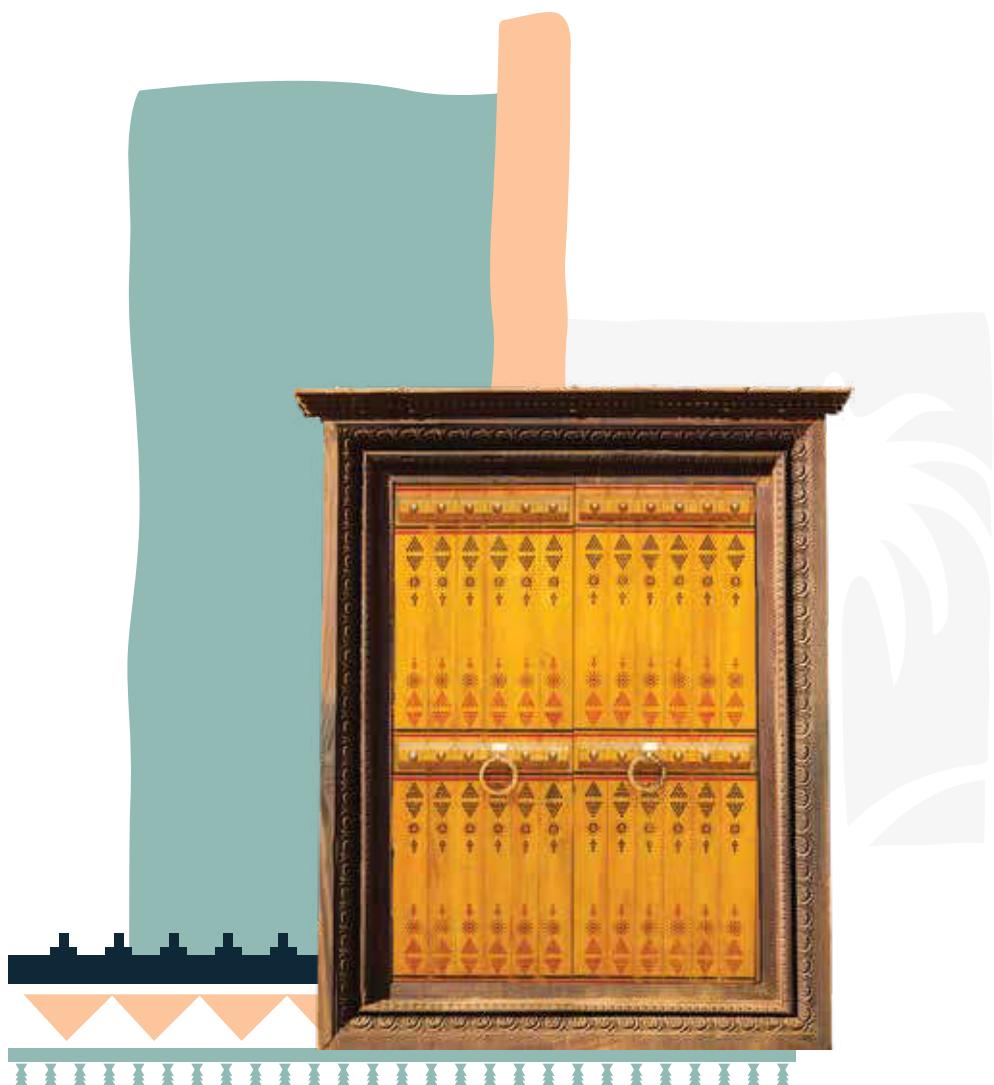
of cultural experiences. And most importantly, we empowered the very people driving this transformation forward by providing platforms for Saudi talent to reach their full potential. Much remains to be done, and with the continued support of our country's leadership and people, all our shared aspirations will be fulfilled.

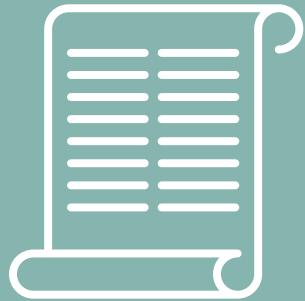
Today we present to you our **Report on the State of Culture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019: Facts and Figures**. The report documents the achievements of the past year, including resolutions met, initiatives delivered, and goals fulfilled, as well providing an overview of creative and artistic trends and patterns.

It also details the state of cultural production and its vital contribution to our economy, levels of community participation, and more. We believe in the importance of documenting this golden age of culture and in being transparent about where our ministry is headed.

We look forward to continuing this journey of innovation and creativity with you all.

**Prince Badr bin Abdullah  
bin Mohammed bin Farhan Al Saud  
Minister of Culture**





# Introduction

- **Report on the State of Culture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019: Facts and Figures**

# Introduction



---

The cultural moment currently underway in the Kingdom is part of a long history of transformations experienced by Saudi society. It stands as a testament to the richness and diversity built up by thousands of trailblazers and intellectuals. It draws from the extensive literature left by Saudi historians and writers who have chronicled key facets of our cultural history. Nevertheless, this movement still has a long way to go, as many aspects of our culture still need to be documented. Such documentation is itself a form of creativity and adds to the value of the hard work already completed by our forebears. Systematic documentation, which in many areas of Saudi culture remains absent or sporadic, is of particular importance to this initiative.

Today, we are witnessing the revitalization of cultural institutions as a result of Vision 2030, through which the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia promotes culture as an anchor of identity, a central component of the quality of life in Saudi society, and an important contributor to economic vitality. A number of factors have emerged as part of the transformation of the local cultural ecosystem, including interactions between the public sector, relevant civil-society institutions, individuals engaged in the field, and everyday members of society—citizens and residents alike. The first three pillars of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 highlight the importance of culture, describing the "vibrant society" we aspire to as one that takes pride in "the historical and cultural legacy of our Saudi, Arab, and Islamic heritage"<sup>(1)</sup> and cherishes national values and identity. A "vibrant society" builds upon culture to expand and improve the quality of life, and the creative industry has helped to reinforce the second pillar of Vision 2030, the "thriving economy." The Ministry of Culture thus espouses a vision centered on the promotion of culture: 1) as a way of life; 2) as a contributor to economic growth; and 3) as an opportunity for international exchange.

These ambitions account for the significance of this report, which intends to document, on an annual basis, the conditions and contexts of cultural activity, and the ways it is transforming. This report is more than a commemoration intended to enrich the cultural memory of future generations. Rather, it seeks to provide all those interested in cultural affairs today with an objective survey of the outcome of cultural work in general: that is, with a summation that exposes deficiencies, sheds light on new trends, and helps to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the Kingdom's citizens and residents insofar as culture relates to their daily lives.

### The First Report of its Kind

As the first initiative of its kind in the Kingdom, the Ministry of Culture herewith presents its **Report on the State of Culture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019: Facts and Figures**. This is the first edition of what will be an annual report documenting Saudi cultural achievements. It establishes a qualitative and quantitative reference point to measure and make sense of the evolution of the cultural field in the Kingdom, taking into consideration both local understandings and international standards. The report has four main objectives. The first is to document government decisions related to culture, activities of cultural institutions, events and forums, support and development initiatives, and in-

frastructure programs. It will also account for non-governmental cultural advancements made by individuals and institutions. The report is not limited to documenting new trends and patterns of cultural creation. It encompasses the data and analysis that highlights these changes, including innovation, adaptation, and adoption of cultural forms, whether local or foreign. The report also tracks the changes in the state of cultural production, the transmission and distribution of goods and practices, and the form and extent of cultural participation, whether active or passive. Each chapter of the report provides a summary assessment of the ecosystem of each sector and the economic opportunities it offers. A final chapter will present key cultural indicators.

Many parties in the cultural sector will benefit from the availability of a comprehensive perspective that includes recurrent data on the state of culture. The primary beneficiaries are public institutions dedicated to culture. This report will help these institutions to interpret the circumstances that currently bear upon cultural programs and policies, and thereby make them more effective as actors on the cultural scene and as entities working to achieve the cultural goals outlined by the Kingdom's Vision 2030. The report will also benefit those interested in culture and creativity throughout the Kingdom—like intellectuals, practitioners, and scholars—by providing them with historical context and updated data. In addition, the report will highlight Saudi cultural activity by providing a

reliable reference for those interested in Saudi culture in the Arab world and beyond, thereby expanding the horizons of cooperation and communication. The report also hopes to offer citizens a panoramic view of the local cultural scene.

### Methodology and Outline

Since culture is a fluid concept, the Ministry of Culture has tried to define it and delimit its scope in a manner compatible with local un-

derstanding. At the same time, it refers to international standards, in particular those outlined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). On this basis, the Ministry of Culture has created sixteen sub-sectors to promote Saudi culture without excluding any of its manifestations. The Ministry is responsible for developing those sectors, fostering creative talent, and preserving its heritage through constructive and strategic engagement with public and private insti-

tutions as well as individual stakeholders in the field.

This report is divided into fifteen chapters, each of which examines one sub-sector. The one exception is the section that deals with cultural and archeological sites under the larger umbrella of heritage, whether tangible or intangible. Each chapter reports on the status of its sub-sector, including the most noteworthy cultural products or activities produced over the past year. It also monitors shifts in cul-

The cultural sectors include:



tural creation and production, the state of cultural dissemination, and the level of cultural participation (i.e. the state of the "culture cycle" as defined by the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics). Since this is the first report, it also contains a historical overview of the crucial inflection points that transformed these sectors into what they are today. As a result, this first report is lengthy. In addition to the discussion of past and present trends, most sections report on measures of cultural participation, highlight important achievements and awards, and identify significant international partnerships and recognition. Finally, each chapter concludes with an overview of education, support, investment, infrastructure, and reg-

ulatory frameworks in that sub-sector — that is to say, the field's support system.

Following the sub-sector chapters is a special chapter that tracks important cultural indicators, i.e. quantitative measures of the state of culture in the Kingdom. These measures pertain to: 1) cultural production; 2) cultural dissemination; and 3) cultural participation. The data collected is for 30 Saudi cultural indicators. They are presented alongside indicators of nine other countries chosen for their influence, the success of their attempts at cultural development, and the availability of data. By tracking these indicators as accurately as possible, the report provides a

sense of the Kingdom's position with respect to the growth and development of the cultural sphere. The report integrates quantitative indicators with the qualitative narratives presented in the chapters in order to provide a precise and appropriately detailed overview of the state of culture.

### Survey of Cultural Participation and Report Data

In its approach to the state of culture, the report draws on data collected from various sources during the last quarter of 2019. Foremost among these is the Cultural Participation Survey, based on a representative sample of 3,137 people from

all over the Kingdom. The survey's goal is to provide accurate and comparable data on the extent to which the Kingdom's citizens and residents participate in various cultural sectors by measuring two dimensions of community participation: reception and engagement. The survey measures were designed according to international guidelines in order to establish standardized and comparable methods of measurement. Modifications and addenda were added as necessary to accommodate the report's needs as well as the local context.

In addition to the survey, the report relied on data and reports collected from over 50 governmental and non-governmental agencies. This data provided quantitative statistics and a record of cultural activities. To address aspects that may not have been highlighted in the reports, 83 interviews were conducted with

practitioners, experts, and officials in the various cultural sectors as an additional resource to contextualize the situation on the ground. The report also used data from published reports, primary and secondary historical sources, and some journalistic and electronic sources in order to track the year's activities and events.

This report is the first attempt to systematically collect cultural indicators. Given the scarcity of data in this sector and the lack of a centralized information source at this time, it uses the available data as extensively and accurately as possible. Considering its broad scope and its desire to provide a reliable account of the cultural sector – this report does not claim to be an exhaustive record of the vast and various elements of Saudi culture – which encompasses a legion of leaders, entrepreneurs, institutions, and

businesses. In light of space limitations and specific methodological requirements, this report cannot cover every actor and activity occurring in the Saudi cultural sector. If it succeeds in promoting cultural exchange and paving the way for future study, it will have served its purpose.

### Cultural Reality in 2019 and Future Prospects

This report covers a wide range of cultural activities, which, at first glance, may seem completely disconnected. They range from Saudi cuisine to nature reserves and from fashion shows to poetry collections. However, the chapters of the report as a whole demonstrate general patterns characteristic of today's cultural environment. The report's statistics reflect a growing and diverse public interest in cultural ex-



pression. The survey and review of cultural activities in the subsequent chapters show that cultural vocabulary and cultural practices have spread beyond the scope of elites to the public at large.

It is likely that this public interest is not merely the result of the current moment but of a longer trajectory spanning the past two decades. Young filmmakers' cinematographic experimentation at the beginning of the past decades, unique experiments by Saudi chefs during that period, and even the wave of contemporary Saudi art since 2010: what these have in common is the presence of a generation with greater courage to experiment and interact with others in spite of the limited resources available to them at the time. This openness to the other and the desire to explore new contemporary spaces has continued to

have an impact on the cultural sectors. The report places the current cultural moment in the context of a long history of Saudi creatives, and sheds light on the groundbreaking contributions of different generations in all their various circumstances.

Digitization and the internet have both played a role in creating an environment that privileges creativity and connection. Authors have found their way to the publishing world through the internet, and designers and artists have utilized digital platforms to publicize their creativity. With the spread of social media, digital spaces are no longer just channels for learning and communicating as an alternative to the limited institutional spaces of the past, but they have also become freestanding platforms for cultural exchange promoting literature, translation, and

digital-lexical activities that display their final product online. The cultural scene remains interconnected with informal collective activities outlined in the report in sectors as diverse as networks of architects, culinary clubs, reading groups, theater troupes, and more. The list continues to grow, alongside the initiatives of formal cultural institutions. Literary societies and the branches of the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA), among others, have continued to sponsor events and programs, with more institutions emerging. The chapters of this report review examples of their activities, which accompanied the visible presence of cultural practices and activities in the public sphere. The report documents a recent increase in the number of cultural events of all types—from art exhibitions to musical and theatrical performances, heritage fes-





tivals, and other specialized events. In addition, a number of prominent cultural sites have witnessed development and rehabilitation work over the past decade. These endeavors have enjoyed wide support from a number of public agencies and the engagement of the private sector, both of which have participated in the organization of cultural events.

At the same time, an increase in participation and dissemination of products and practices in a number of fields (the two elements pertinent to the culture cycle) do not automatically translate to an abundance of cultural production or excellence in creativity (the other elements in the culture cycle). Key data points measuring cultural production, such as publishing and cinematographic production statistics, remain lower than global averages, despite their recent growth. This discrepancy reflects the challenges

faced by cultural institutions, including the development of regulatory frameworks and the provision of incentives, facilities, opportunities for education and training, and clear professional pathways, all of which will be addressed in the next chapters. Certain fields that were once purely consumer-oriented, including the fashion, cuisine, culinary arts, architecture, and design sectors, are undergoing a conceptual and organizational transformation that also brings into play a cultural and creative dimension.

Infrastructure and regulatory structures have witnessed important developments over the past few years, especially in areas that predominantly rely on facilities (such as museums and libraries). A number of prominent archeological and cultural sites have benefitted from important development and rehabilitation projects, and the pace

of museum openings has also increased. New regulations have been approved in the fields of publishing, environment, antiquities, museums, and the protection of intellectual property. Public libraries are still in desperate need of both improved functionality and facilities. The excellent work undertaken by leading libraries in the field can benefit others by serving as a model for public libraries throughout the cities and governorates of the Kingdom.

Finally, the current emphasis on preserving, documenting, and celebrating heritage informs the efforts to preserve intangible elements of cultural heritage, such as handicrafts, traditional arts, spoken dialects, and tangible heritage, such as archaeological and cultural sites. This impulse comes alongside greater openness and communication with the world, as reflected in festivals and cultural events, archi-



tecture and visual arts, translation activity, and interest in global cultural production. The report also records the interaction of two trends: reimagining heritage in a contemporary manner, which goes beyond mere inventory and documentation, and expanding the impact of cultural tradition on design, culinary arts, and architecture.

### The Ministry of Culture and Restructuring the Cultural Sector

June 2nd, 2018 AD (17th of Ramadan, 1439 AH) marks the issue of Royal Decree No. A / 217. It stipulates the establishment of the Ministry of Culture as the authority for developing the Saudi cultural sector and representing Saudi culture nationally and internationally. One

of the ministry's tasks is to lead the transformation of the cultural sector in a manner consistent with the comprehensive transformation outlined in the Kingdom's Vision 2030 plan, which depends on culture as a key component of the vibrant society it seeks to build. The most important event of the past year – the launch of the Ministry of Culture's strategy on 7th March, 2019 (20th of Rajab) – laid the groundwork for the development of our cultural sector. It includes suggestions for regulatory frameworks, international exchanges, and the recognition and sponsorship of talent, as well as strategies for the preservation of Saudi heritage and culture.

One of the most prominent features of the current cultural reality explored in the subsequent chapters is related to the reorganization that

the cultural sector continues to experience. For five decades, a number of bodies – including the General Presidency for Youth Welfare, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Information – have been laying the groundwork for cultural institutions in the Kingdom. Since 2000, the Ministry of Culture and Information and the High Commission for Tourism has handled matters of cultural significance, with the assistance of many additional bodies that have made direct and indirect contributions. The establishment of the Ministry of Culture in 2019 marks the consolidation of a multitude of actors into one entity capable of developing comprehensive cultural policies for the sector. For example, the Ministry of Culture has taken on responsibility for the Jenadriyah Festival – previously under the purview of the National Guard – as well

as Literary Clubs, the Arabian Magazine, the King Fahd Cultural Center in Riyadh, and other venues across the Kingdom. In addition, the Ministry of Culture organizes book fairs and oversees a number of organizations, including the Saudi Arabian Association for Culture and Arts, the Saudi Society for Fine Arts, the Stamp Society, the Photographic Society, the Saudi Society for Cartoons and Animation, the Theater Society, the Arabic Calligraphy Society, the Saudi Publishers Association, and the Saudi Producers Association. Finally, the Ministry of Culture has also taken over responsibility for national heritage activities from of the Commission General of Tourism and National Heritage.

After the establishment of the Ministry of Culture, 11 specialized commissions were created under the purview of the Minister of Culture to manage, develop, and organize the cultural sector. Each commission is a corporate legal body and benefits from both financial and administrative independence. They are: the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission; the Fashion Commission; the Film Commission; the Heritage Commission; the Architecture and Design Commission; the Visual Arts Commission; the Museum Commission; the Theater and Performing Arts Commission; the Library Commission; the Music Commission; and the Culinary Arts Commission.

Although reorganization is still taking place, the Ministry of Culture set out to implement 27 of the initiatives announced in March 2019, including the establishment of the King Salman International Complex for the Arabic Language and the Numo Cultural Fund. This was in

addition to launching the Red Sea Film Festival, the National Theater Group, the National Music Ensemble and the National Cultural Awards. The Ministry has also prioritized education by launching a cultural scholarship program, the creation of art academies, and the introduction of art education to the primary education curriculum in cooperation with the Ministry of Education.

built structures, and prepared to launch more detailed programs specific to each commission. It is also working on the necessary infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, and educational and cultural training options to support the creative industry. Ultimately, the creatives within the industry are the agents of innovative and revitalized cultural advancements.

In the year that has passed since the establishment of the Ministry of Culture, it has drawn up plans,

(1) Document of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Vision 2030, p. 17.

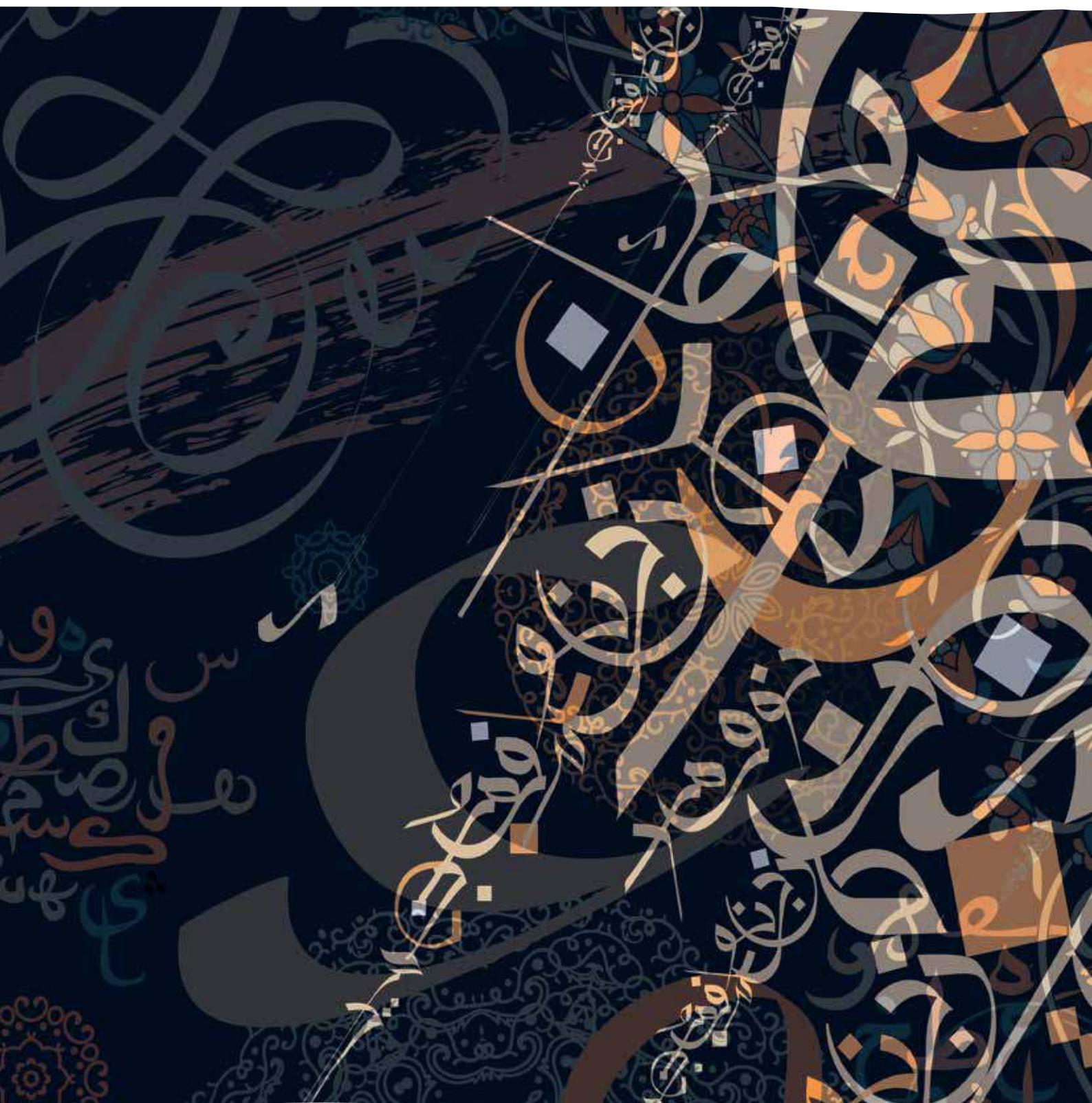






# Executive Summary

# Language





The inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula have spoken Arabic since the pre-Islamic period. It gained significance during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and it went on to become the language of learning in Islamic civilizations. Today, Arabic remains an integral part of the Kingdom's identity; within its basic laws, in its official communications, and in its administrative functions.

An extensive network of Saudi educational institutions supports the work of governmental sectors engaged in the promotion of the Arabic language. Arabic is taught in all national schools; Saudi universities also offer programs in Arabic language and literature. These programs have led to Arabic retaining a powerful presence in daily professional life, however, the programs produced a surplus of specialists in the field. Saudi universities have also founded institutes for teaching Arabic as a foreign language as well as Arabic-language associations and educational institutes for teaching Arabic abroad.

Despite the special attention afforded to the Kingdom's native language, no institution was dedicated to its promotion until the establishment of the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Center for the Arabic Language. The Center aims to promote, teach, and preserve the integrity of the Arabic language. Nevertheless, the most important institutional step is the creation of the King Salman International Complex for Arabic Language as announced by the Ministry of Culture. The Complex is still in the initial phases of development.

There are several initiatives in the Kingdom to promote the use of Arabic in conjunction with modern technologies. For example, the King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an has carried out digital processing of the Arabic text of the Qur'an and enabled the use of Arabic script with modern software. Other institutions have established computing projects to enrich Arabic culture and content and to develop Arabic corpora to facilitate quantitative analysis.

Units working within state-supported and private academic institutions support the translation movement. Saudi universities house translation units and centers, although their activity is somewhat sporadic. In recent years, online translation has also been energized by online cultural and translation platforms, in conjunction with the significant Saudi presence on social media, whether in digital humanities, translation, or content development. This activity includes lexicography, as there is now a space for interested parties to discuss and debate language-related topics such as grammar, vocabulary, and translation.

#### Key figures

**65**

Universities, institutes,  
language departments,  
associations, units,  
and centers specializing  
in Arabic

**5,463**

Books translated since  
the unification of the  
Kingdom through 2016  
as recorded by the  
Saudi Observatory on  
Translated Publications

**149**

The number  
of Arabic-  
language-related  
resolutions issued  
in the Kingdom  
through 2015

# Literature





Saudi literature draws on a vast literary heritage. The literary arena is brimming with accomplished Saudi authors recognized locally and throughout the Arab world, especially in the genre of poetry and literary fiction. In recent years, the literary scene has welcomed young authors, particularly those operating in new literary mediums. Whether the use of social media as a medium for literary publication is substituting for conventional channels has been a subject of debate. However, it has facilitated communication between author and audience and has contributed to the emergence of several talented authors who had found it difficult to publish their works through conventional channels.

Saudi poets are prominent regionally and on social media, even if the local poetry scene continues to suffer from a certain degree of contraction. Minor and intermediate literary awards have become scarce, particularly after the discontinuation of several literary clubs' awards. Literary clubs' events have seen modest attendance numbers, especially for live readings. In contrast, the creative writing courses and workshops offered by some private institutions have enjoyed higher attendance, since no such programs are offered by universities.

Literary translation has flourished, as reflected in the high level of participation in the creative translation competition held as part of the Jeddah International Book Fair. Several private and governmental bodies, including the Ministry of Culture, have held courses and workshops to develop the field. This year, Saudi novels were the most published medium in the literary sector. There has also been continued interest in short stories at a number of high-profile literary events.

Several Saudi novels and short stories have been shortlisted and longlisted for Arabic fiction awards this year. However, both audiences and critics show a noticeable lack of interest in literature outside the context of literary prizes and media attention. This may be because creative work has not been matched by corresponding activity in the field of criticism.

#### Key figures

**604**

Books published in different literary genres in a single year (1441 Hijri/2018–2019)

**161**

Published Saudi Arabian novels (the leading form of literary publication)

**3**

Saudi novelists who have won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction, the most prestigious Arabic literary award, since its launch

# Fashion Design





In the wake of structural changes within Saudi Arabia's educational institutions, the fashion sector has been transformed from a teaching specialty into an artistic and creative one. Organizational and financial obstacles have hampered local designers. They also limited their output and confined the sector to the role of consumer. In recent years, however, cultural changes have made local products and brands more prominent in daily life. New outlets, such as seasonal shows and online social-media platforms, have become available in the Kingdom, facilitating communication between designers and both domestic and international consumers.

At the same time, the Kingdom has witnessed the rise of a new generation of male and female designers who have participated in international fashion weeks and have won several national and regional prizes. Furthermore, artistic fashion trends have shifted towards displaying national identity by drawing on elements of national heritage and cultural diversity. Going beyond academic attempts to preserve and document traditional costumes, this new orientation has integrated traditional elements into modern designs and developed products inspired by traditional dress to express local identity. In this way, the fashion design sector has become a part of the wider national cultural scene.

As a part of this shift, public and civil society institutions have provided support to the fashion sector by organizing events, forums, workshops, and training programs; and welcoming designers and their brands to festivals and seasonal celebrations. They have also fostered an interest in documenting traditional attire as part of national heritage, and have supported tailors and embroiderers by marketing their products and encouraging them to participate in local and regional exhibitions. The leading provider of support is the Ministry of Culture, which has organized the Fashion Futures forum and established a Fashion Commission.

Despite the demand for local products, the sector is still reliant on imports. The transformation of the fashion design sector into an industry and an integrated ecosystem for creative work faces a variety of infrastructural obstacles, including education, training, and the availability of production lines and outlets. These challenges drive some designers and brands to seek experienced labor from abroad or to pursue production abroad in order to achieve the desired quality at a reasonable cost.

#### Key figures

**11**

Saudi universities  
offering fashion  
design programs

**4.3%**

The portion of an  
individual's income  
spent on clothing,  
textiles, and shoes

**925**

Saudi men and  
women in fashion-  
related professions

# Film



Due to the decades-long absence of cinemas in the Kingdom and the paucity of educational programs specializing in visual production, film production in the Kingdom has remained modest. It rests mainly upon the individual efforts of amateurs. This affects the quality of production, most of which has focused on short films. Nevertheless, these amateurs have been able to make up for infrastructural weaknesses by attending film festivals outside the Kingdom and winning a number of awards. They have also attempted to build alternative platforms for local screenings through vigorous efforts to establish film festivals in several Saudi cities, which has led to film festivals gradually becoming common in the Kingdom. The most important of these is the Saudi Film Festival, which in effect has served as the Kingdom's main film platform for a number of years.

In the midst of these developments, groups of young filmmakers have emerged onto the scene, bringing with them new ideas. This culminated in the use of the digital platform YouTube, which provides an easy means of screening films and reaching audiences directly. Such productions have achieved high levels of viewership. This played a role in highlighting domestic talents who have strengthened local production, achieved a certain standard of professionalism, and established production companies specializing in digital content and dedicated to expanding film production. Some of these companies have succeeded in opening branches in other Arab countries.

Since the return of cinemas to the Kingdom, film production has increased. Interest in producing full-length feature films has grown, as has the participation of Saudi films in Arab and international film festivals. These films have received a growing number of awards from international festivals, such as the Venice International Film Festival and the Sundance Film Festival. Since the Ministry of Culture's establishment of a sub-sector for film, new organizations dedicated to developing the sector and supporting the film industry have emerged. These organizations include the Film Commission and the National Film Archive. Additionally, there are several initiatives to establish film competitions in order to cultivate domestic talent and to support improvement in production quality. These include the Red Sea International Film Festival Foundation, the Daw' Film Competition, which aims to support Saudi films through the Ministry of Culture, and the Ithra Center's Saudi Film Days Competition.

Transforming local production into a competitive film industry faces several challenges. An increase in the number and quality of academic specializations in film and visual production is needed to combat weak content and limited professionalization. Many professional specializations are absent from the Saudi labor market, which this sector requires to support its development. Despite the growth in the number of screening platforms in several regions within the Kingdom, Saudi films remain unable to reach local audiences because they are unable to compete for ticket sales. They also lack regulatory support to grant them access to commercial venues.

#### Key figures

**12**

Licensed commercial cinemas in the Kingdom

**4 million people**

Visited cinemas from the time of their opening until the end of 2019

**101**

Produced Saudi films (including full-length feature films, short films, and documentary films) in 2019

# Theater





Playwriting began in Saudi Arabia in 1932 and was soon followed by a number of individual attempts to establish Saudi theaters. Only when the Ministry of Education adopted theater as part of its program did it begin to flourish, in the 1970s and 1980s. Subsequently, theatrical production declined in the 1990s in most areas of the Kingdom, despite continued participation in Arab and regional forums. The Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts was the main patron of the local theater scene. Festivals also played an important role in stimulating theatrical production, though several important festivals have since ceased to operate.

The changes accompanying Vision 2030 have contributed to an increase in the number of domestic theatrical performances. This applies particularly to the field of commercial theater, after it gained the support of the General Entertainment Authority. This growth coincided with the participation of a limited number of private sector institutions in the field. The existence of demand for theatrical performances is reflected in 2019 data such as attendance figures and the Cultural Participation Survey.

Although there are a number of halls and theaters in which performances have been staged, one of the main challenges facing the field is the scarcity of fully equipped theaters. Most spaces are primarily seminar or lecture halls and are therefore inadequately equipped. Additionally, there is a lack of professionalization. Because Saudi universities lack specialized institutes for the arts and degree tracks in theater and most of those involved in theatrical production in the Kingdom are amateurs. Initiatives intended to respond to these challenges and develop the sector include the establishment of the Theater and Performing Arts Commission and the National Theater. Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture has added theater majors to the Cultural Scholarship Program, launched to train professional cadres in different fields.

#### Key figures

**155**

Plays presented by  
the Saudi Arabian  
Society for Culture  
and Arts and the  
General Entertainment  
Authority

**94,565**

Total attendees of  
these plays in the first  
half of 2019 alone

**300**

International awards  
won by Saudi theater  
through foreign  
participation, at  
minimum

# Music





Modern Saudi song began to take shape in the 1950s and 1960s at the hands of a generation of pioneers who had immersed themselves in different types of local music and been influenced by the broader Arab music movement. They were met with support by some early institutions, including Saudi radio and television bands and the Saudi Arabian Army Music School. Although institutional support subsequently declined, the rise of popular songs continued, spreading throughout the Arab world thanks to a number of leading artists. Simultaneously, folk songs maintained a presence in a variety of cultural milieus.

In the last few years, a number of public bodies in the Kingdom have shifted towards greater recognition of music and the vocal arts. This includes the recognition of music as a form cultural expression, in addition to its presence in social life and entertainment. Numerous international classical music evenings and international concerts have taken place in several regions. Music has become a part of public spaces.

One of the most prominent features of today's musical scene is the emergence of self-taught amateurs and independent youth bands who rely on experimentation and hold concerts in public or private spaces like cafes and restaurants. In comparison with other vocal arts, folk singing has remained resilient. It has always gained a level of official recognition and is an almost constant presence at national festivals and in social life. Expanding interest in cultural identity has also led to increased recognition of folk singing.

One of the most important challenges facing the music industry in the Kingdom, from recording and distribution to marketing, is the lack of music production companies. This results in a lack of local opportunities for artists and rising talents. The music sector in the Kingdom, as in the rest of the world, is experiencing a transformation in the modes of music production and consumption.

The high demand for recordings and live music performances indicates that there is fertile ground for creativity and investment, especially if the major challenges facing the field are addressed. These challenges include an insufficient number of theaters equipped for vocal performances and a significant shortage of studios equipped for recording and artistic production. A cadre of composers, instrumentalists, and distributors is also lacking. The most notable challenge in the field, however, is the total lack of educational infrastructure. This demonstrates the importance of the initiatives for musical education that the Ministry of Culture has announced. The availability of talent and the demand for education and consumption in the music field justifies the importance of establishing the Music Commission, an important step toward leveraging these elements on the local level.

#### Key figures

**950**

Members of folk singing groups in the Kingdom

**240 million riyals**

And more than 5.5 million listeners to music via streaming platforms in the Kingdom

## Cultural Festivals and Events





In recent years, cultural festivals in the Kingdom have made progress, in both quantity and quality. Once focused narrowly on national heritage, Saudi festivals have recently grown and diversified thanks to the involvement of several governmental institutions as well as the contributions of private-sector firms specializing in event planning and talent management.

Since the announcement of Vision 2030, the festival and events sector has gone through organizational and regulatory changes that have created opportunities for growth, development, and increased diversity. The most important national festivals have been assigned to specialized authorities and the "Saudi Seasons" program has been launched with the aim of developing domestic tourism by holding unique events and festivals connected to specific regions at particular times of the year.

Alongside the government and private sector, there has been an observable level of participation by local communities in the revival of seasonal celebrations that were no longer being observed. Furthermore, a number of civil society institutions and non-profit organizations have begun to offer cultural festivals as well as educational and arts programming for the community.

Among the many festivals are international events, which have been popular despite the high cost of organizing them, in contrast to small events that rely on the participation and direct involvement of community members for their success. Despite certain drawbacks, international festivals and events help attract investment, strengthen management capabilities, and enhance national expertise. This sector likewise contributes to job creation by charging young people with required logistical tasks.

The cultural festivals and events sector is one of the fastest growing sectors in the Kingdom and the large attendance figures indicate increased community demand. Such events have also attracted external participation and investment, which points to the necessity of developing this sector's infrastructure and auxiliary services. As festivals became more widespread throughout the Kingdom in 2019, new online platforms were created to publicize events so that prospective attendees could find them more easily. Additionally, although the number of workers in this sector is increasing, university programs, which focus on short training courses and certificate programs, remain limited.

#### Key figures

**55%**

The percentage of citizens and residents who attended at least one festival or event in the last twelve months

**350**

Total events during Eid-Alfitr Season across over 90 Saudi cities in 2019

**498185**

Visitors to the 2019 Souk Okaz Festival

# Architecture and Design





Saudi architecture has experienced numerous transformations over the years, as it has moved between the traditional and the modern, the local and the imported, and the rural and the urban. While simple building styles once prevailed, the period from the discovery of oil until the peak of the oil boom was a historical turning point, radically altering the Kingdom's architectural character. The early 1950s witnessed the introduction of a modern, imported architectural vocabulary, which might be termed the "pioneers' period," during which the first modern architectural experiments took place in the Kingdom. Beginning in the late 1970s, architects began to examine the compatibility of new styles of construction with the Saudi cultural identity. By the end of the following decade, identity and cultural reference became central questions for local architects, provoking debates between opposing camps. These attempts to find an authentic identity were limited to large, high-end projects, while minor projects, including housing, remained outside the scope of these conversations.

Despite the rapid pace of construction and development, the community of architects proceeded slowly on the path of professionalization towards becoming an industry with a cohesive identity. Additionally, the various regulatory agencies did not acknowledge architecture's cultural significance. Thus, bringing this field under the purview of the Ministry of Culture, along with the formation of the Architecture and Design Commission, is a substantial development that will hopefully provide the first comprehensive regulatory framework for architecture and its practitioners. On top of these structural developments in the sector, some cities have new Royal Commissions with programs that focus directly on the exceptional cultural and architectural value of those cities.

There have been several practical initiatives in recent years on a number of levels, including the "Humanizing Cities" initiative, as well as a push to develop new, environmentally friendly construction materials. However, these have faced some technical and financial difficulties. The field has also inspired community involvement as architecture steps out of its institutional framework through the formation of several active architectural discussion groups.

Meanwhile, Saudi urban centers have taken on a transnational character. In these "global cities," commercial centers are dominated by glass towers that make no stylistic concessions to local identity. The field faces many challenges, the most obvious of which are regulatory difficulties, the gap between education and industry, the absence of a single professional organization to represent local architects in the media and the regulatory sphere, and a lack of support for research and development.

#### Key figures

**8**

Projects in the Kingdom that have won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture

**8,912**

Saudis working as professional architectural engineers (2019)

**13**

Architecture departments and 17 interior design departments in Saudi universities

# Heritage





The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is distinguished by its rich cultural heritage, including archeological treasures from civilizations stretching back millennia, architectural forms that are as diverse as the Kingdom's wide-ranging regions, and a combination of arts and knowledge passed down from generation to generation. Since the mid-twentieth century, pioneering scholars in the fields of geography, archeology, history, and literature have helped preserve and record this heritage. In subsequent decades, their efforts have been bolstered by the work of institutions.

Initiatives to preserve Saudi heritage are actively progressing with official support. Vision 2030 sets out measures to preserve and cultivate both material and non-material heritage. These new policies provide formal support for the continuation of excavation projects as well as the preservation and restoration of historic buildings and the documentation of intangible heritage. These efforts are on the cusp of a new phase, following the Council of Ministers' decision in late 2019 to transfer all activities related to national heritage from the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage to the Ministry of Culture, followed by the establishment of the Heritage Commission.

There has been a remarkable increase in the number of civil society organizations concerned with heritage, several of which were founded in 2019. A newfound interest in previously neglected topics, like industrial heritage, has emerged. In fact, the Ministry of Culture sponsors a competition in the field of industrial heritage as well as folk heritage. Such contests not only serve to document Saudi heritage but also to help strengthen community engagement.

These initiatives, however, were not the primary force behind the increased general interest in national heritage, as the public spontaneously engaged in cultural heritage activities. The numerous and diverse cultural festivals and events that were held in 2019 were also very well attended, most notably the Jenadriyah Festival. Several of these events were held at historical and cultural sites in an effort to foster connections with the community and create spaces for diverse cultural and social activities. However, there are still some infrastructure gaps. Many sites are not equipped to welcome tourists, which is reflected in the overall number of visitors.

Cultural heritage touches identity at its core and can also present opportunities for investment. The domain of traditional crafts has taken steps toward professionalization and there has been significant progress in marketing historical sites and equipping them to receive visitors. Nevertheless, the field is in need of substantial improvements in tourism-related services.

#### Key figures

**1,985**

Recorded  
heritage sites

**5**

UNESCO World  
Heritage Sites

**7**

Elements of Saudi culture  
included on the UNESCO Lists  
of Intangible Cultural Heritage

## Visual Arts





Since the first exhibitions in the 1950s and 1960s, the Saudi art scene has produced successive generations of artists working in different styles and genres. The educational system, as well as the General Presidency for Youth Welfare, provided institutional support for art and artists for decades. Despite periods in which institutional support was less forthcoming, development has continued, with practitioners sharing their experiences and attempting to revitalize artistic expression. Individual and collective efforts by Saudi artists persisted in building a community despite a paucity of resources and support.

Throughout the past decade, the art scene has witnessed a wave of contemporary art, reinforced by Saudi non-profit organizations. These institutions have promoted avant-garde artists whose work differs from that of their predecessors in terms of practice and the range of their networks, insofar as they have garnered significant international attention. Although this wave of artistic expression has attracted varying reviews from critics, it has created a dynamic situation that could stimulate critical attention to Saudi art.

The present-day art scene is characterized by an increase in new forms and means of visual arts that shared the scene with plastic arts, which have dominated Saudi artistic production since the mid-twentieth century. Today, installations, photography, and digital arts are well represented in major exhibitions.

Currently, the number of art galleries and art-related activities, as well as the growth of public art, attest to increased engagement in the field. Public art, including murals, spontaneous graffiti on neighborhood walls, and a revival of sculpture, has become a more conspicuous feature of public space. A number of non-profit organizations have also emerged, offering professional and emerging artists resources that were previously unavailable.

The Ministry of Culture's establishment of the Visual Arts Commission has been the most significant institutional development. The commission is responsible for regulating and supporting the field. The Ministry has launched a number of initiatives in the field of art education, which has undergone structural changes over the past decade. Foremost amongst these initiatives has been the prospective establishment of art academies. Today, various forms of support, such as the residency programs that have become increasingly common, are available for Saudi artists.

#### Key figures

**255**

Art exhibitions held  
in 2019 (minimum  
estimate)

**329**

Saudi men  
and women  
working as  
gallery guides

**22.8%**

Percentage of Saudi society  
involved in producing sculpture,  
paintings, or other works of art,  
as a hobby or a profession

## Museums





Saudi museums have undergone a number of structural transformations throughout their history, which are linked to policy changes. After the establishment of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Cultural Heritage Program, interest in the museum sector increased. The program launched several projects to build and develop museums of different kinds as a way to strengthen national identity and stimulate tourism. Several initiatives by the National Transformation Program 2020 (NTP) engaged with this sector by planning new museums in different regions throughout the Kingdom as part of maintaining cultural facilities that help to improve quality of life for both citizens and residents. These policies culminated in the inclusion of the sector within those overseen by the Ministry of Culture, which established a Museum Commission dedicated to managing the sector's development and growth.

Due to an increase in the number of public museums in the last few years, every region in the Kingdom now has at least one museum. Nearly half of these are located in the Riyadh province. Licensed private museums have matched this growth, although many remain underdeveloped. Besides growing in number, museums have begun to undergo a qualitative transformation in recent years. For decades, local museums were closely associated with antiquities. Now, other types of museums, reflecting a more comprehensive understanding of what constitutes a museum, have been opened. Overall, however, the sector lacks qualified specialists, as there are no dedicated training programs, nor any museum degree tracks at Saudi universities.

One of the greatest challenges facing Saudi museums has long been the low level of public engagement and participation. A number of initiatives have sought to rectify this by transforming museums into community cultural centers. These centers hold events of various kinds, host school field trips, and offer opportunities for volunteer work. In addition, a number of historic palaces have been transformed into museums capable of hosting events and festivals. The various touristic seasons established in 2019 promoted cultural tourism, including a range of events held on museum premises, which drew in visitors by providing an attractive venue for recreational exhibitions.

#### Key figures

**303,162**

Visits to private  
museums (2018)

**130,331**

Visits to the National Museum  
of Riyadh (2019)

**84**

Public museums in  
the Kingdom

**217**

Private museums in  
the Kingdom

# Libraries





Libraries have always been a part of Saudi culture, as attested by many long-established private and endowed libraries. Soon after the Kingdom was founded, libraries were overhauled to reflect modern concepts of organization, with properly equipped buildings and specialized services. These efforts not only preserved and developed existing libraries, but also led to the opening of new libraries of various kinds throughout the Kingdom. These include the King Fahd National Library in Riyadh, which has long been considered a model for the sector both locally and internationally.

Today the library sector continues to develop its facilities, sources of information, and technical capabilities as well as programming and community engagement. This development is due in part to the work of a number of leading public libraries, which have responded to - and driven - a growing interest in reading in Saudi society. Through their various activities and initiatives, these institutions have revived the role of libraries. Yet these positive developments have been limited to those libraries enjoying continuous support and organizational independence. Meanwhile, the 84 government-funded public libraries throughout the Kingdom's cities and governorates have been challenged with severe underperformance and lack of supplies, which resulted in low numbers of visitors.

Saudi university libraries are distinguished from others in the sector by the size of their holdings and their ability to keep pace with rapid technological development. Through early experimentation with "Learning Resource Centers," public school libraries have attempted to keep pace. Overall, several projects in the sector, notably the Saudi Digital Library Project, which primarily serves university libraries, have excelled in meeting the challenges of the digital evolution. Private libraries maintained by individuals in their homes but available to the public continue to exist in many cities in the Kingdom. Yet their number has decreased, and their development is limited due to the lack of resources and specialized workers, and the need for library technologies that lie beyond the means of private individuals. Distinct from these are the endowed libraries managed by the General Presidency for Affairs of the Two Holy Mosques and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance, particularly the King Abdulaziz Complex for Endowment Libraries in Madinah, the Library of the Great Mosque of Mecca, and the Library of the Prophet's Mosque. These libraries house valuable collections that have grown over time through individual contributions from living donors as well as endowments made to ensure the proper management and preservation of private libraries after the death of their owners.

The key challenges faced by the library sector as a whole today are the digital evolution and the need for interlibrary networking, which require policies for digitization and standard criteria for cataloguing. The sector still lacks these key components despite the work undertaken by projects such as the Arab Unified Catalog and the Saudi Unified Catalog.

#### Key figures

**35%**

Percentage  
of Saudi families  
with a private  
library at home

**479,773**

Titles (books) held  
at the King Fahd  
National Library  
(as of 2019)

**2,329**

Total libraries  
in the Kingdom  
(including school,  
university, public, special,  
and national libraries)

# Natural Heritage





The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia covers a vast geographical area whose natural heritage is rich in material, scientific, and aesthetic value. It includes mountainous, marine, desert, and tropical forest environments, and its biodiversity embraces numerous species of plants and animals. The Kingdom is home to a number of endangered species. It is also a major stopover for migratory birds on their way across Asia, Europe, and Africa.

The drafting of environmental laws and regulations did not begin until the late 1980s. It was then that the Kingdom began to discover the treasures of its natural heritage, designate protected habitats for wildlife, and sign several international agreements in that regard.

However, in the last two years, government entities concerned with environmental affairs have seen major restructuring. In that context, natural heritage, due to its cultural relevance, has become one of the sectors overseen by the Ministry of Culture.

Nevertheless, development has been hampered by threats to the environment that can be addressed only by large-scale institutional partnerships across different sectors. These threats include climate change, the degradation of pastoral lands, diminishing ground cover, the shrinkage of natural habitats, and water and air pollution. Research centers, particularly those concerned with marine diversity and fisheries, are working to address these issues. Yet many of the specialties needed to supply such centers with scientific and practical expertise are not being taught at Saudi universities, especially those directly related to natural heritage and conservation.

As research and academic institutions play an ever-increasing role in preserving natural heritage, there is a growing number of community initiatives aimed at raising awareness of environmental issues. The first step in creating such awareness is to promote sustainable ecological tourism that will open up nature preserves and introduce visitors to these attractions, especially since parks are among Saudi citizens' favorite recreational destinations. Yet the absence of a strong infrastructure for ecotourism and the lack of periodic development of natural heritage sites continue to limit the role that the natural environment might play as a part of an environmentally conscious local tourism.

#### Key figures

**4.33%**

Percentage of the  
protected areas in the  
Kingdom

**26,967**

Visitors to reserves  
from 2015 to 2018

**16**

Wildlife  
reserves in  
the Kingdom

# Food and Culinary Arts





Saudi Arabian cuisine reflects the geographical and cultural diversity of the Kingdom. Although the country's diet consists largely of local grains, meats, vegetables, and fruits, the way these ingredients are prepared and combined varies in proportion to their abundance in each region of the Kingdom, which is vast in extent and diverse in its local resources. International trade has provided Saudi cuisine with new ingredients that have become a central component of everyday dishes. In addition, the various border regions of the Kingdom draw on the food culture of neighboring countries, as they share a similar climate and cultural roots.

Since recipes are seldom in writing, they have been passed down orally from one generation to another, with some contributions from cookbooks and online cooking shows. In the absence of a clear and accurate method of documentation, festivals, especially heritage festivals, have played a role in preserving and highlighting traditional dishes and establishing the identity of Saudi cuisine as one of the most important components of the country's cultural heritage.

The culinary arts sector has been developing since the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. In addition to activities undertaken by the hospitality sector, a number of non-governmental initiatives have emerged. Saudi chefs have made efforts to establish a private association and a few culinary academies. These efforts anticipate the formation of a professional milieu that will improve the way the culinary arts are perceived. The number of Saudi chefs has increased remarkably, particularly after several universities in the Kingdom started to offer culinary arts courses as part of the tourism and hospitality track. Institutes and colleges now offer diploma programs accredited by the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation, as well as a number of scholarships funded by different entities. The past two years have witnessed a major structural transformation in the food and culinary arts sector, including the formation of a Culinary Arts Commission, based on a recognition of the sector's importance as a constituent of culture.

Interest in the culinary arts as a form of culture is evident from the number of large formal events where modern versions of Saudi dishes have been served. These events include the World Economic Forum in Davos, the Indaba conference, and the cultural dinner held in conjunction with the visit of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the United States. Likewise, there have been limited attempts to modernize Saudi cuisine and enable such restaurants to offer a fine-dining experience.

#### Key figures

**54**

Male and female students sent abroad to study culinary arts

**27**

Registered Saudi executive chefs

**34.99%**

Percentage of revenue from catering and beverage services within the total operating revenue of tourist establishments in the Kingdom (in 2018)

# Books and Publishing





The history of the printing press in the Arabian Peninsula dates back to the end of the eighteenth century. With the beginning of the Saudi era, the printing press took on different forms. In addition to publicizing state notifications and directives, it also began to play a commercial role. By the middle of the twentieth century, printing had come to serve as the infrastructure for Saudi journalism and the starting point for new forms of writing, especially literary writing. Over the past few years, publishing has been one of the cultural areas most affected by new technologies: the printed book is now competing with other formats such as the e-book and the audiobook. Although Arabic language commercial applications have had limited success in supporting these formats, e-books are now commonplace in the Kingdom. In general, public interest in reading is reflected in the relatively high rates of leisure reading in recent years. Accompanying this has been the proliferation of governmental and private initiatives and programs as well as community efforts to encourage and strengthen reading by facilitating access to books in public places.

Book fairs, like the Riyadh and Jeddah international fairs, exemplify the popularity of reading. The fairs constitute the strongest link in the Saudi book and publishing chain and provide a competitive advantage in which a thriving industry can grow. Young Saudi authors and entrepreneurs are increasingly active in the domain of publishing. New forms of the mass-market book have emerged, combining simple content with visual elements and e-marketing. There has been an increase in the publication of translated books, related to a wider growth in translation activities. However, statistics show that even though publishing in the Kingdom has reached its highest levels in 1440 AH (2018–19), it is still relatively insignificant when compared to the global levels of book production.

Statistics attest to the growing number of publishing houses and the large size of the Saudi publishing market, but size does not necessarily imply that the industry is efficient. A large proportion of Saudi publications are still produced abroad. This is partly due to regulatory hurdles, but also because of factors related to the domestic market, including higher production costs and poor distribution relative to overseas publishing houses that operate more efficiently. To overcome these hurdles, especially regulatory ones, the book and publishing industry in the Kingdom is undergoing structural changes. The Ministry of Culture has taken the lead by assuming responsibility for the growth of this field. Initiatives include the establishment of a Literature, Publishing and Translation Commission tasked with supporting and regulating activity in the field. The books and publishing sector also hopes to make progress in protecting intellectual property, including the rights of authors and publishers, which are protected by the Saudi Authority for Intellectual Property.

#### Key figures

**4.5 billion riyals**

Size of the Saudi publishing industry in terms of annual sales volume (2017)

**7,687**

Books deposited in the King Fahd National Library in 1440 AH (2018–19)

**18.26%**

Percentage of books translated into Arabic out of the total number of deposited books

Chapter One

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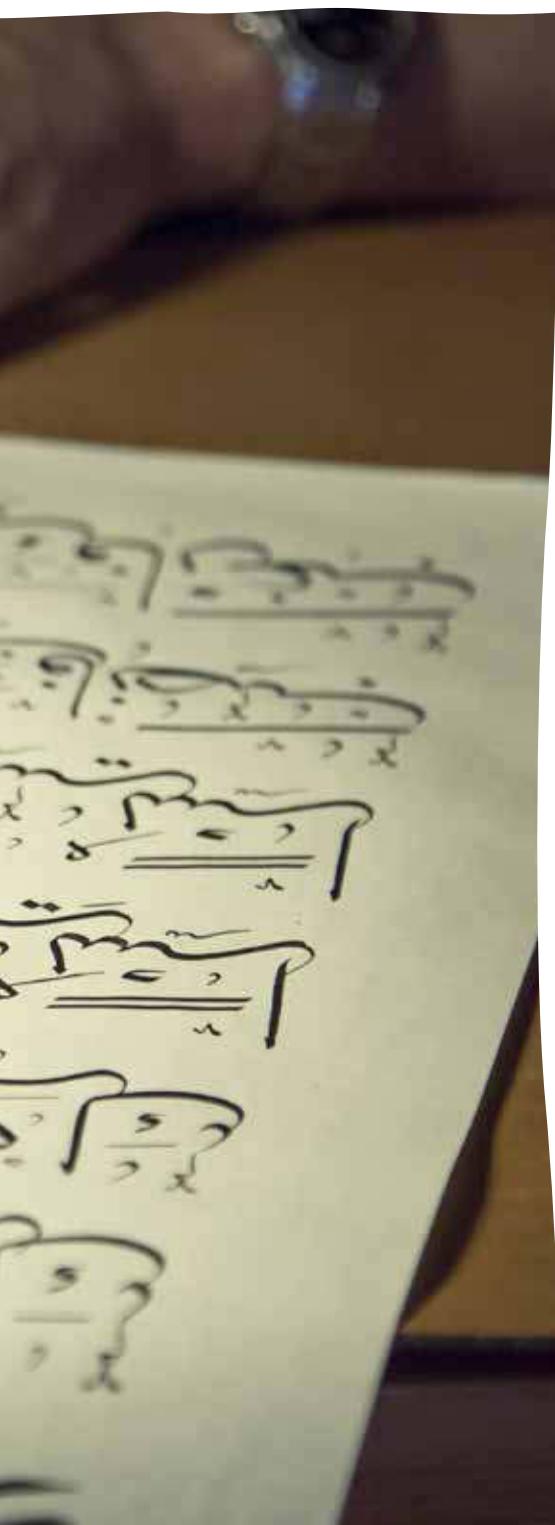


# Language

- **Stewardship of the Arabic Language in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview**
- **The Arabic Language in the Kingdom Today**
- **Arabic Language Awards**
- **Saudi Stewardship of the Arabic Language in the World**
- **Institutional Efforts Related to Arabic**

# Stewardship of the Arabic Language in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview





Arabic has been spoken by the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula since before the advent of Islam. The language went through many transformations before it reached its now-familiar form during the time of the Prophet. Its name, "Arabic," refers to the Arabs who spoke it. The formal register of the language, called Fusha in Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in English, continues to be used for scholarly and academic writing across the Islamic world. However, MSA is not the only version of the language in common usage: as with any language, various dialects have developed over time.<sup>(1)</sup> This is particularly true within the Arabian Peninsula, where, by some estimates, at least 24 different dialects are spoken today.<sup>(2)</sup>

### Institutional Support for Arabic

The Arabic language's presence in the Arabian Peninsula long predates the unification of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. Schools of all levels in the cities of Makkah and Al-Madinah taught Arabic as one of their subjects. The same was true in other cities, such as Aseer and Jazan in the south of the Peninsula, Al-Ahsa and Qatif in the east, and Ushaiqer, Al-Diriyah, and Al-Qassim in the center. Historical records from these areas reveal continuous scholarly activity that used Arabic as the language of education and scholarship.<sup>(3)</sup> With the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, one of the first decisions of the Shura Council was to adopt Arabic as the official language of the Kingdom and to preserve its classical form.<sup>(4)</sup> This concern for the language has been evident since the days of King Abdulaziz, who affirmed it by calling his new country «Arabia.» His successors have upheld this tradition. As the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz said in one of his sermons, "We all must strive to elevate ourselves to the level our country deserves. It is the land of the Two Holy Mosques, the land of the revelation, to which

every Muslim turns five times a day. It was here that the Quran was revealed to the Prophet in Arabic, and preserving this language is our privilege and burden to bear."<sup>(5)</sup>

An extensive network of Saudi educational institutions stands at the forefront of governmental efforts to promote the Arabic language. The Saudi Scientific Institute (est. 1927) was a center for scholarly knowledge of Arabic until its closure in 1961. Of equal importance are the Institute of the Great Mosque of Makkah (est. 1931) and the Institute of the Prophet's Mosque in Al-Madinah (est. 1933).<sup>(6)</sup> Universities have also been integral to the teaching and dissemination of the Arabic language, both locally and to the broader Islamic and international communities. The establishment of the Arabic Language Institute for Speakers of Other Languages at the Islamic University of Madinah in 1966 was particularly significant, as was the establishment of institutes for non-native speakers of Arabic in Saudi universities, including King Saud University, Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University, and Umm Al-Qura University. These institutes have prioritized the production of publications that advance the Arabic language. In 1999,

for example, Umm Al-Qura University began issuing the Journal of Sharia and Arabic Language, later rebranded the Journal of Linguistic Sciences and Literature (2009). The Journal of Literature, issued by King Saud University, dates back to 1989. These institutes have also prioritized translation. In 1988, King Saud University became the first Saudi university to establish a translation center, which has been publishing translations continually since 1992. From 1998 to 2012, the Literary Cultural Club in Jeddah issued a magazine called Windows (Nawafidh) specializing in translation and related fields.<sup>(7)</sup> The Institute of Public Administration and the King Abdullah Institute for Translation and Arabization have also published many translations.<sup>(8)</sup> Complement-

ing these initiatives, The Arabic Magazine, established by order of King Faisal in 1974, is a widely circulated periodical that promotes Arab culture in both academic and literary circles.<sup>(9)</sup> Beyond these efforts, non-academic institutions have also worked to make the Arabic language accessible to people outside of academia. Literary clubs, for example, offer language courses and study groups on top of their cultural programming and also publish books and magazines related to Arabic.<sup>(10)</sup>

### Community Efforts to Promote Arabic

The development of Modern Standard Arabic in the Kingdom has

benefitted from both government support and broader community efforts. Examples include prizes such as the Language and Literature category of the King Faisal International Prize (est. 1979), as well as grants from institutions like the Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Program to support Arabic within UNESCO (est. 2006).<sup>(11)</sup>

In addition to these institutional efforts, individuals concerned with the preservation and development of the Arabic language have made both theoretical and practical contributions. In 1937, Abdulquddus Al-Ansari published Al-Manhal, the first Saudi magazine addressing cultural and literary affairs. Though it sought to preserve classical Arabic, it also published articles on the local dialects.<sup>(12)</sup> Ahmed Abdel Ghafour Attar was one of the first Saudis to edit a classical manuscript on language, to translate from other languages into Arabic, and to contribute to lexicography. Hamad Al-Jassir used the platform of his magazine, Al Arab, to record his views on history, language, and literature. These writers, among others, helped to lay the foundations for the scholarly movement to support the Arabic language. They also participated in broader cultural and linguistic conversations, including the debate around formal and colloquial Arabic, the role of popular literature, and the academic debate over language books. Cultural salons hosted by leading scholars also became centers of linguistic and literary discussions. These include the Monday Salons hosted by Abdulaziz Al-Rifai and Abdul-Maqsood Khojah, Muhammad Al-Mushawwah's Tholothia series, and notable institutions such as the Hamad Al-Jassir Cultural Center, among others.

## Key Figures for 2019

# 180

Published books by King Abdullah International Center for Arabic Language Service since its inception through 2019.



# 720

Translated books by the Translation Center at King Saud University since its inception through 2019, 95% of which were translated into English and 2% into French.

# 35

As of 2019, there were 35 bachelor's degree programs in disciplines directly related to Arabic language and literature offered by 26 Saudi universities.

# 23

Centers, units and institutes specializing in translation at Saudi universities.

# 4

Linguistic societies at universities across the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

# 10



Institutes for teaching Arabic to non-native speakers inside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. There are also five additional institutes and colleges that teach Arabic to non-native speakers outside the Kingdom.

# 5

Research chairs in the field of Arabic language at Saudi Universities.

# 7



Saudi scientific research chairs in the field of Arabic language and Islamic studies outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

# The Arabic Language in the Kingdom Today

## Increased institutional efforts to support the Arabic language

When His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman launched the Vision 2030 initiative, he acknowledged Arabic as an integral part of the Saudi identity: "We are proud of our Saudi, Arab, and Islamic cultural and historical heritage, and we recognize the importance of preserving all three to promote national unity and authentic Arab and Islamic values."<sup>(13)</sup> The institutional activities centered around stewardship of the Arabic language in recent years come as a natural outgrowth of the significance of Arabic to Saudi identity.

The number of government institutions focused on the promotion of the language has grown remarkably of late. Today, there are approximately 65 colleges, institutes, language departments, associations, and specialized centers working towards this goal.<sup>(14)</sup> The number of Arabic language institutes for non-native speakers has likewise increased. For example, in 2010, the Arabic Language Institute for Speakers of Other Languages was established at King Abdulaziz University; in 2011, the Arabic Language Teaching Unit for Non-Native Speakers was established at Qassim University; in 2012, The Institute for Teaching Arabic to Speakers of Other Languages was established at Princess Nourah University;<sup>(15)</sup> and on top of all these efforts, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia joined the Kingdom of Morocco in designating December 18 as UNESCO's World Arabic Language Day in 2012.<sup>(16)</sup>





Despite the special attention that has been paid to Arabic, Saudi Arabia differs from Egypt, the Levant, and Iraq in having no official language institute or academy. Over the last decade, the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Arabic Language has partially filled this gap. The center aims to preserve the integrity of the Arabic language, promote its dissemination and teaching, and support linguistic research and related studies. To date, the center has published more than 180 books.<sup>(17)</sup> It also issues three journals on Arabic linguistics and language policy and a journal on teaching Arabic as a foreign language, as well as maintaining three databases on these topics.<sup>(18)</sup> However, the most important institutional initiative to address this gap was the Ministry of Culture's March 2019 announcement of the King Salman International Complex for the Arabic Language. Although this project is still in its beginning stages, the initiative intends to influence the development and preservation of the Arabic language both locally and abroad, building on the many efforts that preceded it.

### Arabic and Technology

Continuous technological development over the past two decades has encouraged the adoption of new technologies in various fields. This is most visible in the services offered by Saudi authorities, ministries, and sectors in Arabic and other languages. For example, the King Fahd Glorious Quran Printing Complex pioneered the use of Arabic text-processing technology in

the Quran digitization project that began in 2002. The complex has also leveraged technology to build digital databases of the Quran and create software to streamline the digitization of Arabic text.<sup>(19)</sup>

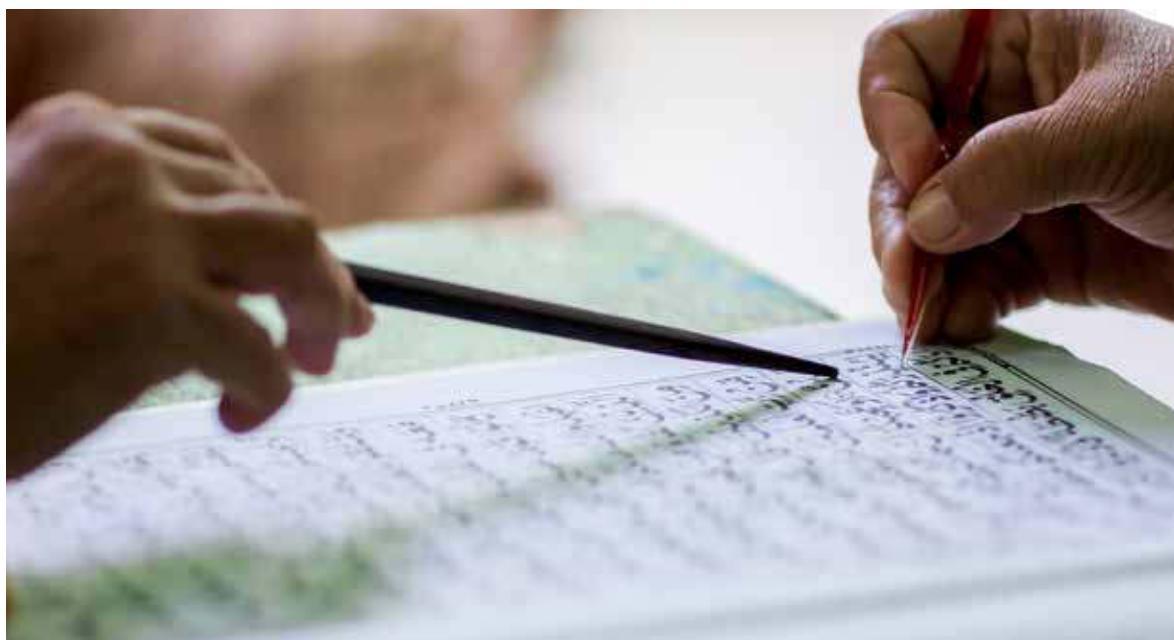
Various other projects contribute to Arabic cultural content creation and support research in the language. These include the King Abdulaziz Public Library's Unified Arab Index Project, which contains approximately 2,100,000 records, making the largest Arabic bibliographic database.<sup>(20)</sup> The Saudi Digital Library Project, which focuses on Arabic academic studies and e-books, is considered one of the most important digital references for scientific dissertations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and across the Arab world.<sup>(21)</sup> Technological advances have also allowed institutions to create Arabic language corpora that include various linguistic registers for the benefit of scholars. These corpora enable researchers and others interested in the language to per-

form quantitative analyses, learn about literary and linguistic topics, build dictionaries that account for the development of the language, and study local dialects—all in Arabic.<sup>(22)</sup> The Arabic language corpus of the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (est. 2012) is one of the largest of these corpora today and contains more than one billion words (1,182,515,633 at time of writing), drawn from texts written in either classical Arabic or MSA.<sup>(23)</sup> Other corpora include the King Saud University Corpus of Classical Arabic.<sup>(24)</sup>

### Translation

The Saudi translation movement is supported by both governmental and private academic institutions (see Table 1-1).<sup>(25)</sup> Saudi universities contain translation centers and departments, but their activity is sporadic.<sup>(26)</sup> The translation center at King Saud University is one of the most active in the field, having

issued nearly 720 books in various subjects. Of those books, 95% are translated from English, 2% are translated from French, and the remaining 3% are translated from other languages, including Italian, Spanish, German, Russian, Chinese, and Persian.<sup>(27)</sup> In 2016, King Saud University launched a program called the Observatory to document translation activities throughout the Kingdom. According to the Observatory, between 1932 and 2016, only 5,463 books were translated into Arabic in the Kingdom. This undertaking was quite modest compared to the translation activities both globally and in the Arab region. For example, the National Center for Translation and Publishing in Egypt (est. 1996) has translated over 3,000 books from over 35 languages since its inception, according to their official website; and the Kalima Project for Translation, an initiative of the Department of Culture and Tourism of Abu Dhabi, has set the ambitious goal of translating 10,000 books.<sup>(28)</sup>



Two bookstores, Jarir and Obeikan, are the leading private translation houses of books on various topics, with 3,017 translations as of 2014.<sup>(29)</sup> Online translation activities have also been growing in recent years on platforms such as Mana and Syaq. The Hekma platform holds

the exclusive rights to translate the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy into Arabic.<sup>(30)</sup> These platforms have prompted many Saudi youth interested in translation to take part in the translation of Western literary works, scientific books, YouTube videos, and TED talks.<sup>(31)</sup>



**Table 1-1:** List of translation centers, departments and institutes in Saudi universities<sup>(32)</sup>

No.	Center / Department	Parent Institution
1.	Translation Center	King Saud University
2.	Scientific Publishing Center	King Abdulaziz University
3.	Translation Unit, Center for Social and Humanities Research	King Abdulaziz University
4.	King Abdullah Institute for Translation and Arabization	Al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University
5.	Deanship of Scientific Research	Al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University
6.	Arabic Language and Literature Research Center	Umm Al-Qura University
7.	Journal of Language Sciences and Literature	Umm Al-Qura University
8.	Translation, Authorship and Publication Center	King Faisal University
9.	Translation and Arabization Unit, Scientific Publications Center	Taibah University
10.	Translation Committee, English Language Institute	Jazan University
11.	The Permanent Committee for Scientific Research	Jouf University
12.	Translation Unit, English Language Center	University of Tabuk
13.	Center for Sharia, Educational and Humanities Research	Najran University
14.	Research and Studies Center	Institute of Public Administration
15.	Scientific Translation Program, Deanship of Scientific Research	Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University
16.	Publishing and Translation Unit, Center for Promising Research in Social Research and Women's Studies	Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University
17.	Center for Scientific Publications	Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University
18.	Support Program for Authoring Books and Translation, Deanship of Scientific Research	Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University
19.	Authoring, Translation and Publishing Management	Shaqra University
20.	Center for Publishing and Translation	Majmaah University
21.	Translation Center	Saudi Electronic University
22.	Department of Languages and Translation	King Fahd Security College
23.	Translation and Authoring Center	Prince Sultan University

Thanks to the determined efforts of the Ministry of Culture over the past two years, the Tarjim Translation Initiative was announced in March 2019, and the Literature, Publishing and Translation Commission was launched in February 2020 under the leadership of Saudi writer Mohammed Hasan Alwan.<sup>(33)</sup>

### Online Community Activity

Non-governmental online initiatives have not been limited to translation: a number of platforms address other aspects of Arabic language and literature. Among the podcasts that have emerged on these topics are Alsun, which focuses on the Arabic language, and Asmar, which

explores both language and literature. These and other podcasts are recorded in MSA and thereby contribute to Arabic-language content creation. They reflect the increased Saudi presence on social media in the fields of language and translation, as discussed above, and in new linguistic and cultural content development.

Arabic linguistics has also received its share of attention, as social media has provided a platform to study and debate questions of grammar, lexicography, and translation. The development of online linguistic councils is among the most important achievements of the past few years. The Kingdom has two active councils that work in tandem:



1. Academy of the Arabic Language on the World Wide Web (est. 2012 in Makkah)

This was the first online Arabic language platform, founded by a group of prominent Arabic professors.<sup>(34)</sup> The academy has an online presence on Facebook and Twitter (140,000 followers), where it answers a large number of questions from followers related to the Arabic language. From its inception through September 2019, the platform issued over 2,000 linguistic rulings.<sup>(35)</sup> This is in addition to its published books and a magazine that comes out three times a year, with 21 issues thus far. The academy also holds lectures with guest speakers from Saudi Arabia and abroad.<sup>(36)</sup>

2. The Virtual Arabic Language Academy (est. 2012)

This platform was established a few months after the Academy of the Arabic Language on the World Wide Web. Its main goal is to preserve the Arabic language and its dialects and to compare both local and non-local dialects to classical Arabic. The academy also provides a repository of Arabized terms on its popular Twitter account (118,000 followers), including the Arabic words for "hashtag" and "retweet."<sup>(37)</sup> This academy has published one book to date, *The Omissions of Dictionaries* (*Fawa'it al-Ma'ajim*), by Abdul-Razzaq Al-Saadi, in which the author calls attention to the historic dialects of the Arabian Peninsula and calls for the documentation of dialects that were excluded from old Arabic dictionaries.

These two councils have made an incredible impact on the Arabic lan-

guage by bringing the discussion of the language out of the ivory tower to a platform where linguists and the general public can both participate.

### Controversy Over Colloquial Dialects

Historically, there has been tension between scholars of classical and colloquial Arabic, which frequently has resulted in the neglect of dialects. This is due, in part, to the fact that at the beginning of the last century, some orientalists, as well as Arabs, not only documented colloquial dialects but also called for the replacement of classical Arabic. Although this replacement effort was ultimately unsuccessful,<sup>(38)</sup> the resulting controversy left an indelible mark on the field and meant that few linguists at that time chose to focus on recording contemporary dialects.

With the emergence of Arab universities, the tension between the classicists and the pro-colloquial linguists has intensified, even as the study of local dialects remains neglected.<sup>(39)</sup> In fact, the Kingdom's first dissertations on contemporary dialects were not written until 1979, when researcher Muhammad bin Batel Al-Harbi wrote his dissertation on the spoken dialect of Hotat Bani Tamim.<sup>(40)</sup> This dearth of attention still impacts the study of dialects in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia today, despite the availability of technologies to record, monitor and analyze language. Today, no Saudi universities offer courses on local dialects at the undergraduate or graduate levels, except modern linguistics classes which occasionally include the study of spoken dialects.<sup>(41)</sup> The same is true for oral colloquial poetry.<sup>(42)</sup>



Saudi scholars of Arabic were also influenced by the language debates in Egypt and the Levant. Even though they themselves did not have direct contact with the West, a number of writers weighed in on the controversy, including Ahmed Attar and Abdullah Abdul Jabbar.<sup>(43)</sup> In recent times, as the controversy has abated, some Saudi linguists have called for increased attention to colloquial dialects. Perhaps the most important scholar on the topic of preserving vernacular Arabic and searching for its origins is Muhammad bin Nasser Al-Aboudi, who has authored more than 35 books dealing with the linguistic heritage of Saudi Arabia. His dictionary is considered the authority on the classical origins of common words and the development of spoken Arabic over the centuries. This work, which he took up in part to combat his contemporaries' disdain for all things modern, is arguably the most important work to come out of the Kingdom on this topic.<sup>(44)</sup> Al-Aboudi stresses that the purpose of his dictionary is not to replace written Arabic with vernacular terms, but rather to highlight the connection between

spoken dialects and their classical origins.<sup>(45)</sup> On the institutional level, a group of scholars established the Association for Dialects and Folklore at King Saud University in 1968. Its activities resumed in 2006 after a period of inactivity beginning in 1984.<sup>(46)</sup> Despite the belief that the dialects of the Arabian Peninsula are closest to classical Arabic and that many of the words in common parlance can be traced back to classical origins, particularly when considered phonetically,<sup>(47)</sup> specialists in Arabic dialects disagree on which contemporary Arabic dialects are closest to their classical roots.<sup>(48)</sup>

As of 2017, only 5.7% of linguistic work in Saudi Arabia has focused on the spoken language,<sup>(49)</sup> despite calls for the study of dialects on various platforms, such as Suleiman Al-Darsouni's blog and the Twitter activity of the Academy of the Arabic Language on the World Wide Web. Scholars of the dialects look forward to serious scientific movement aimed at codifying and documenting Arabic's oral heritage and benefiting from the latest technical developments.

# Arabic Language Awards

There are several Saudi awards in the fields of Arabic language, literature, and translation, including the King Faisal International Prize, the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Award for Translation, the Souk Okaz Poetry Competition, and the Arabic Language Service Center competition for spoken Arabic. There are awards celebrating creative writing in MSA and honoring authors, such as the Muhammad Al-Thubaiti Prize; awards with an international scope, such as the Dr. Abdul Mohsen Al-Qahtani Prize for novels; and additional awards for poetry, such as the Mohammed Hasan Faki Award.<sup>(50)</sup>



### The King Faisal Prize

Established in 1979 and awarded annually ever since, the King Faisal Prize is considered one of the most prestigious international Arabic language awards. Most recently, in 2019, it was awarded to Professor Abdelali Oudrhiri of Morocco and Professor Mahmoud Fahmy Hegazi of Egypt.<sup>(51)</sup>



### The King Abdullah International Award for Translation

Established in 2006 and awarded continuously for eight years before a hiatus that lasted until 2019, this award is subdivided into five categories: (1) translations by institutions; (2) translations into Arabic in the natural sciences; (3) translations into Arabic in the humanities; (4) translations from Arabic in the humanities; and (5) translations by individuals.<sup>(52)</sup>

In 2019, the award for translations by institutions went to the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research; the award for translations

into Arabic in the natural sciences went to Haitham Ghaleb Al-Nahhi, Hussein Mohamed Hussein, and Nasser Muhammad Omar; the awards for translation into Arabic in the humanities went to Hisham Ibrahim Abdullah Salman Al-Khalifa and Saad bin Nasser Al-Hussein; and Abdulaziz Hamdi Abdulaziz Al-Najjar, Mohammed Khair Al-Biqai, and Muhammad Talaat Ahmed Al-Shayeb each won awards for individual translations.<sup>(53)</sup>

An additional individual prize was awarded that year to the Vice Dean for Development and Quality at the

Arabic Language Teaching Institute at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, Dr. Badriyya bint Barak Alonazi , who received the International Arab Organization for Education, Culture and Science (ALESCO) Award for linguistic and lexical studies for her book Towards Building a Collocations Dictionary in Modern Arabic Dictionaries in Light of Language Corpora.<sup>(54)</sup>

Recently, the Ministry of Culture announced the National Culture Awards initiative, which will grant 14 awards to cultural institutions, innovators and youth leaders in the Ministry's cultural sub-sectors, including translation. Registration for these awards opens in 2020.<sup>(55)</sup> In addition, in 2019, the King Abdulaziz Public Library, in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, announced the Prince Muhammed bin Salman Award for Cultural Co-operation between Saudi Arabia and China. This award includes prizes for translations between Chinese and Arabic and to support the field of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language.<sup>(56)</sup>



# Saudi Stewardship of the Arabic Language in the World

Official Saudi Arabian efforts to promote the Arabic language abroad in 2019 include the following actions.

- The Center for Research and Knowledge Communication (CRIK) signed an expanded Memorandum of Understanding with the Beijing University of Foreign Studies to promote student exchanges, faculty exchanges, cooperation in Arabic- and Chinese-language publishing, exchanges of academic materials, and joint seminars and conferences. This memorandum has a term of five years and is renewable.<sup>(57)</sup>
- Saudi Arabia's diplomats and ambassadors celebrated World Arabic Language Day with the theme "The Arabic Language and Artificial Intelligence." One such celebration was held by the Saudi Cultural Mission in Rabat in collaboration with the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO).<sup>(58)</sup>
- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also organized activities for World Arabic Language Day with the support of the Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud Foundation.<sup>(59)</sup> In addition to these activities, UNESCO organized the first forum for heads of departments of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language in Europe, also with the support of the Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud Foundation.<sup>(60)</sup>





- Other efforts on the part of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Arabic Language include the following:
  - The 2019 opening of the Arab Studies Center at Baku Eurasia University in Baku, Azerbaijan, to help train Arabic teachers in Kazakhstan.<sup>(61)</sup>
  - The ratification of a framework for cooperation with the King Fahd Cultural Center in Sarajevo to establish a working group in the University of Sarajevo Philosophy department for the teaching of Arabic and related activities.<sup>(62)</sup>
  - The organization of Brazil's Arabic Language Month in October 2019 with the support of the Embassy of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in Brazil, the Islamic Call Center for Latin America, and specialists from the Islamic University. Events included language activities, seminars, lectures, and cultural exhibitions.<sup>(63)</sup>

Finally, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was admitted to the Executive Council of UNESCO for a four-year term (2019-2023), enabling the Kingdom to contribute to global cultural decisions, especially with regard to Arab and Islamic culture.<sup>(64)</sup>

## Institutional Efforts Related to Arabic



## Regulatory Frameworks

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has made Arabic an essential part of its identity. It uses Arabic for basic administrative functions, in official statements, and in the work of government departments. Numerous institutions in the fields of the judiciary, labor, commerce, education, and media have regulations requiring the use of Arabic, in addition to other regulations specifically emphasizing the importance of correct Arabic usage. As of 2015, 149 relevant decisions regarding usage of the Arabic language have been issued in the Kingdom.<sup>(65)</sup> These decisions are consistent with the Saudi Basic Law, of which the first article of the Basic Law of Governance stipulates that "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic State. Its religion is Islam. Its constitution is Almighty God's Book,

The Holy Qur'an, and the Sunna (Traditions) of the Prophet (PBUH). Arabic is the language of the Kingdom. The City of Riyadh is the capital."<sup>(66)</sup> Hence, the Arabic language enjoys legal protection that guarantees its presence in all facets of public life. This legislation generally provide space for the use of foreign languages in addition to Arabic by permitting the translation of regulations and contracts—provided that the legal authenticity of the Arabic text is preserved if there is a dispute in the translation. The law also allows exceptions to the royal decree of 1414 AH, which made Arabic the language of education in universities, by ensuring that some elements of higher education may be taught in a language other than Arabic if it is deemed "necessary to teach in another language by decision of the competent university council."<sup>(67)</sup>

## Educational Institutions

In addition to the Arabic language courses included in primary and secondary school curricula, 26 Saudi universities offer 35 bachelor's degree programs in fields related to Arabic.<sup>(68)</sup> These programs affirm the importance of Arabic in scholarly life and produce more than a sufficient number of specialists. As Table 1-2 shows, this field is unlikely to suffer a shortfall in terms of research and education. It is expected that the Ministry of Culture's recent memorandum of cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the General Organization for Vocational and Technical Training will further strengthen this interest in Arabic. The memorandum includes provisions for extra-curricular activities in Arabic as well as for the expansion of academic specializations across the sixteen sub-sectors of culture, including the Arabic language.

**Table 1-2:** List of Saudi universities offering bachelor's degree programs in Arabic<sup>(69)</sup>

No.	University	Primary Language of Instruction	Departments / Programs Taught in Arabic
1.	Umm Al-Qura University	Arabic	Literature; Rhetoric and Criticism; Arabic Graduate Studies; Grammar; Linguistics; Applied Linguistics; Arabic for Non-Native Speakers
2.	Islamic University of Madinah	Arabic	Linguistics; Rhetoric and Criticism; Arabic for Non-Native Speakers
3.	Al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University	Arabic	Literature; Rhetoric and Criticism; Islamic Literature; Grammar and Linguistic Jurisprudence; Institute for Teaching the Arabic Language
4.	King Saud University	Arabic	Arabic Language and Literature; Institute of Arabic Linguistics
5.	King Abdulaziz University	Arabic	Arabic Language and Literature; Arabic for Non-Native Speakers
6.	King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals	Arabic and English	Arabic and Islamic Studies
7.	King Faisal University	Arabic	Arabic Language
8.	King Khalid University	Arabic	Arabic Language and Literature

No.	University	Primary Language of Instruction	Departments / Programs Taught in Arabic
9.	Qassim University	Arabic	Arabic Language and Literature; Literary Studies; Linguistics; Arabic for Non-Native Speakers
10.	Taibah University	Arabic	Arabic Language
11.	Taif University	Arabic	Arabic Language
12.	University of Hail	Arabic	Rhetoric and Criticism; Arabic Language and Literature; Grammar
13.	Jazan University	Arabic	Literary Studies and Critique; Grammatical Studies; Arabic Language and Literature
14.	Jouf University	Arabic	College of Literature
15.	Albaha University	Arabic	Arabic Language
16.	University of Tabuk	Arabic	Arabic Language Department
17.	Najran University	Arabic	Arabic Language
18.	Northern Border University	Arabic	Arabic Language and Literature; Literary Studies and Criticism; Grammar
19.	Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University	Arabic	Arabic Language and Literature; Arabic for Non-Native Speakers
20.	Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University	Arabic	Arabic Language Department
21.	Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University	Arabic	Arabic Language and Literature
22.	Shaqra University	Arabic	Arabic Language and Literature
23.	Majmaah University	Arabic	Arabic Language
24.	Saudi Electronic University	Arabic	Department of Humanities (Arabic Language Division); Arabic for Non-Native Speakers
25.	Jeddah University	Arabic	College of Arts and Science (Khulais Governorate, Al Kamil Governorate)
26.	University of Bisha	Arabic	Arabic Language



In addition to these programs, there are institutes in Saudi universities for teaching Arabic to non-native speakers. About half of these institutes were opened in the last decade alone. These institutes help open the Kingdom to visitors who arrive for purposes other than the Hajj and Umrah; they represent an investment in the Kingdom's position as a competitive destination for non-native speakers to learn Arabic. According to the Ministry of Education, as of 2018, these institutes had graduated 95 students. These institutes are presented in Table 1-3.

**Table 1-3:** List of institutes for teaching Arabic to non-native speakers in KSA<sup>(70)</sup>

No.	Name of Institute	Affiliated Institution	Year Founded
1.	Arabic Language Institute for Non-Native Speakers	Islamic University of Madinah	1966
2.	Arabic Linguistics Institute	King Saud University	1974
3.	Institute of Arabic Language for Non-Native Speakers	Umm Al-Qura University	1981
4.	Arabic Language Teaching Institute	Al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University	1984
5.	The Arabic Language Institute for Speakers of Other Languages	King Abdulaziz University	2010
6.	Arabic Language Teaching Institute for Non-Arabic Speakers	Princess Nourah University	2010
7.	Arabic Language for Non-Native Speakers	Saudi Electronic University	2014
8.	Center of Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers	Majmaah University	2015
9.	Institute of Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers	Qassim University	2016
10.	The Arabic Language Institute for Speakers of Other Languages	King Faisal University	2018

Educational institutes established by Al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University to teach Arabic language abroad can be found in Table 1-4.<sup>(71)</sup>

**Table 1-4:** List of institutes teaching Arabic to non-native speakers outside KSA

No.	Name of the Institute	Country	Year Founded
1.	Institute of Islamic and Arabic Sciences	Mauritania	1979
2.	Institute of Islamic and Arabic Sciences	Indonesia	1980
3.	The Islamic Institute	Djibouti	1981
4.	The Arab Islamic Institute *	Japan	1982
5.	Institute for teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers	Maldives	2016

\* (Note: Supervision of this institute was transferred to the Ministry of Culture in 2019.)

Language societies are important for their ability to create a network of linguists, enable joint research activities, and connect these contributions to relevant governmental

and non-governmental entities. As language societies in the Kingdom are a new phenomenon, most are affiliated with university departments, unlike many language soci-

ties in other countries. The list of current language societies can be found in Table 1-5.

**Table 1-5:** List of university language societies in KSA<sup>(72)</sup>

No.	Society	Affiliated Institute	Year Founded	Activities
1.	Saudi Association for Dialects and Folklore <sup>(73)</sup>	King Saud University	1968	Studying oral history and spoken dialects in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
2.	Saudi Society for the Arabic Language	Al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University	2001	Promoting linguistic research, scholarship, translation and seminars
3.	Saudi Association for Languages and Translation	Al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University	2003	Developing and promoting scientific thought in the fields of linguistics and translation
4.	Saudi Scientific Association for Teaching Arabic	Islamic University of Madinah	2012	Teaching Arabic to non-native speakers

### Competencies and Qualifications

According to the Ministry of Education, 8,652 students graduated from Arabic language departments in 2018. Of these, 1,983 were male and 6,669 female. These figures in-

clude students of Arabic and related fields, including literature, rhetoric, and criticism. These graduates have found employment mostly in primary and university education. However, the Ministry of Labor does not provide data on some professions, such

as proofreading, in which these graduates would also be likely to work. In the same year, 481 students graduated with specializations in translation. As of 2019, there were 1,823 qualified Saudi translators, with a detailed breakdown provided in Table 1-6.

**Table 1-6:** Number of graduates from translation programs at Saudi universities (2017–2019)

Position Title	2017			2018			2019		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Language Specialist	246	301	547	260	326	586	229	276	505
Translator	851	1,049	1,900	847	1,016	1,893	777	1,046	1,823
Interpreter	107	154	261	75	125	200	78	115	193



## Arabic Language Research

As mentioned above, the Kingdom provides substantial support for research into the Arabic language. A list of endowed positions can be found in Tables 1-7 and 1-8.



**Table 1-7:** List of research chairs for Arabic language and literature in Saudi universities

No.	Position Name	Affiliated Institution	Activities
1.	Abdulaziz Almani Chair for the Studies of Arabic Language and Literature	King Saud University	Arabic language and literature studies, heritage studies
2.	Saudi Literature Chair	King Saud University	Saudi literature studies
3.	Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Tuwaijri Chair for Humanities	Al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University	Humanities studies, including Arabic studies
4.	The Center of Revival of Heritage of Arabic Sciences, Islamic Heritage Revival Research Center	Umm Al-Qura University	Studies of Arabic literature, grammar, Classical Arabic, and rhetoric and literary criticism
5.	Arabic Language Teaching Chair for Non-Native Speakers	King Saud University	Teaching Arabic to non-native speakers

**Table 1-8:** List of research chairs for Arabic language and literature outside KSA<sup>(74)</sup>

No.	Position Name	Affiliated Institution	Country	Year Established	Activities
1.	King Faisal Chair of Islamic Thought and Culture	University of Southern California	United States of America	1976	Arab and Islamic studies
2.	King Abdulaziz Endowed Chair in Islamic Studies	University of California, Santa Barbara	United States of America	1984	Islamic studies
3.	King Fahd Center for Middle Eastern Studies	University of Arkansas	United States of America	Mid-1990s <sup>(75)</sup>	Arab and Islamic studies, Arabic translation
4.	King Fahd Chair	Harvard University	United States of America	1993	Islamic and legal studies
5.	King Fahd Chair of Islamic Studies	University of London	England	1995	Islamic studies
6.	Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz Chair	Moscow University	Russia	1996	Islamic Studies
7.	King Abdulaziz Research Chair for Islamic Studies	University of Bologna	Italy	1998	Arab and Islamic historical studies

**Endnote:**

- (1) Ignacio Ferrando, "History of Arabic," in The Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics, eds. Lutz Edzard and Rudolf de Jong, November 7, 2019.
- (2) Suleiman Al-Darsouni, A Dictionary of Spoken Dialects in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, (Riyadh, 1434 AH), 16-17.
- (3) A number of researchers have written about the scientific movement in the Arabian Peninsula, including Ahmed Al-Bassam, The Scientific Life in the Middle of the Arabian Peninsula; Abdullah Abdul Jabbar, Literary Currents in the Heart of the Arabian Peninsula; Bakri Sheikh Amin, The Literary Movement in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; Khalid bin Saad Al-Jarian, "The Efforts of Al-Ahsa Scholars in the Syntactic and Morphological Lesson," in The Journal of the Arabic Language Academy (online); Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Mansour Aba Al-Hussein, The Scholarly Movement in Ashkar in the Past and Present; and Abdullah Abu Dahesh, The Writers in the Two Holy Mosques and their Environs.
- (4) "Arabic Language Resolutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Orders, Decisions, Regulations, Regulations and Circulars," Riyadh, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Center for Arabic Language Service, 2015, 8.
- (5) Abdullah Al-Washmi, "King Salman and the Arabic Language Reflect on His Majesty's Speeches and Words," Saudi Efforts in Serving the Arabic Language: Policies and Initiatives (Riyadh: King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for the Service of the Arabic Language, 2017), 15.
- (6) The General Presidency of the Two Holy Mosques Affairs website.
- (7) According to the publications provided by the president of the Literary Club of Jeddah, Dr. Abdullah bin Awael.
- (8) See Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University, "King Abdullah Institute for Translation and Arabization," <<https://units.imamu.edu.sa/colleges/kaiftaa/Pages/default.aspx>>.
- (9) See «About the Magazine,» The Arabic Magazine (online),<<http://www.arabicmagazine.com/Arabic/AboutUs.aspx>>.
- (10) Abdullah bin Salah Al-Falah, "The Kingdom's Efforts to Spread Heritage," Saudi Efforts in Serving the Arabic Language: Policies and Initiatives (Riyadh: King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Center for the Service of the Arabic Language, 2017), 323-325.
- (11) «Prince Sultan's Program for Arabic Language, UNESCO,» International Council for the Arabic Language.
- (12) Nabil Abdul Rahman Al-Muhaish, "Al-Manhal Magazine and its Role in the Path of Culture," Al-Aqiq Cultural Forum, First Session; Abdul Quddus Al-Ansari and his Scientific and Cultural Contributions (Al-Madinah: Al-Madinah Club, 2007), 83-92.
- (13) Vision 2030, Vision 2030, 16 (online), <<https://vision2030.gov.sa/>>.
- (14) According to the calculations of the King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Center for the Service of the Arabic Language, these numbers may be out of date. See King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for the Service of the Arabic Language, "Building Rule 1," <<https://benaa.kaica.org.sa/index-c/Arabic/p-1/p-7>>.
- (15) Ahmad Al-Subaihi, Hassan Al-Awaji, "Institutions of Teaching Arabic Language for Speakers of Other Languages a Historical Study," in Saudi Efforts in Serving Arabic Language for Speakers of Other Languages, ed. Ibrahim Al-Debian (Riyadh: King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Arabic Language, 2018), 117-194.
- (16) The decision to establish was issued in 2012. See UNESCO, «Resolutions Adopted by the Council at its Ninetieth Session, November 19, 2012, <[https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000218189\\_ara](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000218189_ara)>.
- (17) King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Arabic Language, «The Center's Electronic Publications,» <<https://kaica.org.sa/site/page/89>>.
- (18) King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Arabic Language, "With publications exceeding 180 books and magazines: The Arabic Language Service Center launches the new phase of its publications on the Arabic language in the world and concludes the delegates' course," April 8, 2019, <[https://kaica.org.sa/site/show\\_news/567](https://kaica.org.sa/site/show_news/567)>.
- (19) King Fahd Complex for the printing of the Noble Qur'an (online), «The Complex and Information Technology,» <<https://quran-complex.gov.sa/techquran/>>.
- (20) King Abdulaziz Public Library, «The Unified Arab Index,» December 11, 2018, <<http://www.kapl.org.sa/PageDetails/Details/10774>>.
- (21) The Saudi Digital Library SDL (online), <<https://portal.sdl.edu.sa/arabic/>>.
- (22) King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Arabic Language, "Arabic language blogs, their construction and methods of benefiting from them," ed. Saleh bin Fahd Al-Usaimi (Riyadh: King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Arabic Language, 2015), 19.
- (23) Linguistic Blog of King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, <<https://corpus.kacst.edu.sa/about.jsp>>.
- (24) King Saud University Corpus of Classical Arabic, <<https://mahaalrabiah.wordpress.com/2019/11/2>>.
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- (28) Saudi Observatory for Translation, <<https://sotp-marsad.com/ar>>.
- (29) Fayed bin Ali Al-Shehri, "The Saudi Observatory in Translation," Saudi efforts in translation from and into Arabic, ed. Malik bin Muhammad Al-Wada'i, (Riyadh: King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Arabic Language, 2019), 171-173.
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- (43) Ibrahim Al-Debian, 276.
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Chapter Two

# 2





# Literature

- Literature in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview
- Saudi Literature Today
- Literary Prizes
- Saudi Literature in the World
- 2019 Cultural Participation Survey
- Infrastructure and Investment

# Literature in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview

The emergence of Saudi literature was a natural continuation of the Arabian Peninsula's literary tradition. Soon after the establishment of the Saudi state in the early twentieth century, Saudi literature was born.<sup>(1)</sup>

The Najdi poet Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Uthaymin, who brought about a renaissance in poetic style, was a prominent pioneer.<sup>(2)</sup> During the same period, literary figures emerged in Al-Ahsa and Qatif in the eastern part of the country. The beginning of the Saudi era in the Hijaz (1925) was characterized by widespread production and circulation of texts due to the emergence of a modern literary movement, the availability of printing technology (the first printing press had opened in Makkah in 1883), and the influence of broader Arab literary movements on Saudi writers. These trends led to the 1344 AH publication of the first book in the history of the Kingdom, Mohammed bin Suroor Sabban's Literature of the Hijaz. The following year, the Hijazi Library, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's first publishing house, published a book titled The Exhibition (Al-Ma'rad). That same year (1345 AH), Muhammad Hassan Awwad published Avowed Thoughts (Khawatir Musarrahah), making him the first Saudi writer to produce an independent literary work.<sup>(3)</sup> In this period, the dominant literary form was classical poetry. Poets wrote in a variety of genres and used prose as well as verse to examine social and political issues.





### The Press and Radio as Literary Media

Printed books were not the only literary medium to develop in the Kingdom: the press, too, became a rich space for literature. The newspaper Umm Al-Qura was first issued in December 1924. It was soon followed by a total of thirty-three newspapers and magazines, which were established between 1924 and 1946, when the Law of Press Establishments was issued.<sup>(4)</sup>

Numerous authors prominent in the history of the Kingdom involved themselves in writing and publishing these magazines and newspapers. The oldest cultural journal in the Kingdom is Al-Manhal, which was founded in 1937. In 1953, Al-Yamamah Magazine became the first print periodical to be issued in Riyadh. At the time, it was one of the most important advocates for Saudi and Arabic literature.

Radio also served as a platform for literary activities. Since its establishment in Jeddah on July 28, 1949, Saudi Radio has collaborated with literary figures to produce many programs on poetry and other forms of literature.<sup>(5)</sup> Soon, other radio stations followed.

### The Emergence of Literary Institutions

The renaissance in Saudi literature gained momentum from the expansion of education, starting with the founding of religious and civil schools and continuing with the establishment of the Ministry of Edu-

cation. In 1957, Riyadh University (later renamed King Saud University) was founded. Its College of Arts was its first faculty and the first department of arts in the Kingdom. Three years later, the General Presidency for Girls' Education was established. The expansion of education, the growth of the Saudi literary movement, and an increase in the number of writers inspired some writers to look for further institutional spaces to support the production of literature, art, and culture. Their calls for support led to the founding of the Saudi Arabian Society for Arts on December 13, 1973, after a number of intellectuals and writers met with the General President of Youth Welfare. Later renamed the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA), this organization has since its inception offered a variety of events and activities, including committees dedicated to intellectuals and artists in general, as well as to particular literary trends. Today, the SASCA has sixteen branches throughout the Kingdom, and many prominent writers and intellectuals sit on their boards of directors.

In 1975, two years after the founding of the SASCA, literary clubs were established in Riyadh, Jeddah, Taif, Makkah, Al-Madinah, and Jazan.<sup>(6)</sup> To date, sixteen literary clubs have been established across the Kingdom.

These literary clubs host numerous activities and events, including lectures, seminars, and discussions, in addition to issuing various publications. These activities make them some of the most important institutional advocates of literature in

the Kingdom. The clubs have also held many forums and festivals, which have played an important role in Saudi literary history.<sup>(7)</sup> The clubs further help to highlight literary talents and pave the way for writers and thinkers to meet one another and exchange ideas. They have also drawn attention to the role of writers and writing in raising awareness and advancing society.

### Renewal of Poetry

The flourishing of newspapers and magazines, cultural salons, and literary clubs, as well as the influence of Arab and Western literature, all produced favorable conditions for modern literary writing to emerge in the late 1960s when a new generation of poets appeared. The renewal of poetry had already begun, but during this stage, poets not only adopt new rhyme schemes, but began to alter the structure of the poetic line.<sup>(8)</sup> Their work also began to address individual, national, patriotic, and human aspects of identity.<sup>(9)</sup>

During this period, poets such as Abdullah Al-Faysal, Hasan Al-Qurasi, and Saad Al-Bawardi turned to Romantic poetry. Some were also influenced by Symbolism. Dissatisfied with traditional meters, they introduced formal innovations such as free verse and eventually prose poetry. Along with changes in form came changes in content, leading to the emergence of modern poetry in the 1970s. Later poets, including Muhammad Al-Ali, Ghazi Al-Gosaibi, Ali Al-Dumaini, Ahmad Al-Salih, Saad Al-Hamidin, and Hasan Al-Sabi, abandoned traditionalism and romanticism in both form and content. In addition to symbolism, their poems were char-

acterized by their novel language and nontraditional form.

In the late 1970s, and even more so in the 1980s, a Modernist movement appeared, as poets grappled with questions of identity. Their preoccupation with issues relating to "the Other" did not prevent them from addressing highly specific local topics, however. Regional differences waned, as there were little noticeable differences between a poet from Al-Ahsa and one from Taif, or between a poet from Jazan and one from Riyadh. Among the most prominent poets of this period are Mohammed Al-Thubaiti, Muhammad Jabr Al-Harbi, Abdulla Al-Saikhan, and Fawziyya Abu Khalid. Modernism extended beyond poetry to other literary forms, including criticism, which was as influential as creative writing. Yet the new literary movement faced fierce opposition from traditionalists who embraced traditional poetic forms and content and from a wave of Islamic literature produced by a number of poets, novelists, and short-story writers.

### The Short Story and the Novel

Short story writing has been closely linked to newspapers, going back to the Kingdom's very first papers. In addition, "Al-Manhal" magazine, which was owned by Sheikh Abdul-quddus Al-Ansari, took the first serious, concrete steps in this area. Since its first issue in 1937, Al-Manhal has paid special attention to the short story, devoting a special column to it in each monthly issue.<sup>(10)</sup> However, these short stories did not receive much attention, as they remained artistically limited. Some researchers note that the short story developed

artistically in the early 1970s thanks to those writers whose pushback against traditional styles of thirty years' standing brought about an aesthetic transformation.<sup>(11)</sup>

Similarly, it took Saudi novels decades after their emergence in the 1930s to gain momentum, which they did in the 1980s. According to one source, "This stage in the development of the novel, as well as the stage which followed it, witnessed the beginning of an increase in novelistic production, diversification of the subject matter of novels, and the development of novelistic techniques."<sup>(12)</sup> One particularly prominent writer from this period is Abdulaziz Mashri, who wrote short stories before turning to novels. He produced five novels between 1986 and 1997. The largest transformation of the Saudi novel occurred in the 1990s when women's participation in the field increased. This boom in the Saudi novel coincided with the genre's growing popularity in the Arab world and beyond.

### Developments in Children's Literature

Children's literature first appeared in Saudi Arabia in 1959 when Tahir Zamakhshari published the first issue of Al-Rawda, a children's magazine. Many writers, including Abd Al-Ghani Qusti, Ibrahim Allaf, Ahmad Al-Sibai, Aziz Diya', and Haya Anbar, contributed to the emergence of children's literature. In 1963, newspapers, including Al-Madina, Al-Bilad, Al-Jazirah, Al-Riyadh, and Okaz, began to dedicate pages to works for children. In 1977 came Hasan Magazine, edited by Yaqub Muhammad Ishaq, one of the pioneers of Saudi children's literature. A vari-



ety of serials and story collections emerged afterward, including contributions from a number of groundbreaking writers, among them Abd Al-Karim Al-Juhayman, Abd Al-Rahman Al-Muraykhi, Hani Al-Fayruzi, Hani Al-Madani, and Abdul Rahman Ruwaissheed. Several private publishing houses and institutions then emerged to promote children's literature in the Kingdom, as did a number of promising authors who subsequently achieved success across the Arab world. One such author is Arwa Khamis, who received the Arabic Children's Book Award at the Sharjah Cultural Festival in 2006.<sup>(13)</sup>

### Community-Based Literary Salons

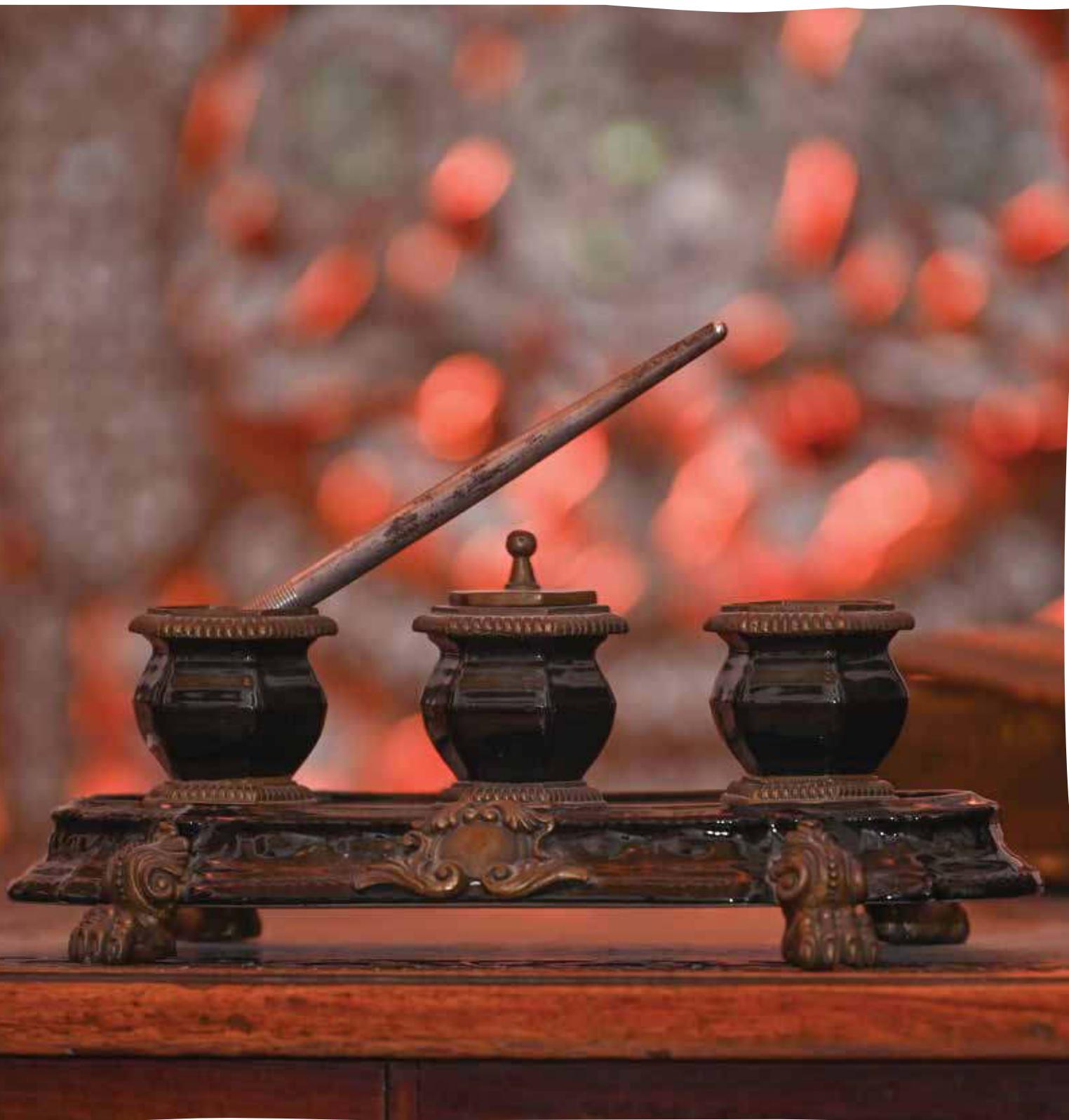
Literature was not limited to institutional spaces. In the 1960s, before the emergence of literary clubs,

popular community-based literary salons and gatherings became centers for literary activity. These salons flourished in various Saudi cities and became an established part of the literary milieu. Abd Al-Aziz Rifa'i's Thursday Salon, which began in 1962, was the first literary salon with regular meetings.<sup>(14)</sup> These salons hold open discussions on various literary topics and celebrate writers. Some salons publish specialized books or magazines or record their meetings in order to document or publish them on various platforms. Some of the most famous of these salons are Abdul Maqsoud Khojah's Monday Salon in Jeddah (est. 1983), Al-Jasseir's Thursday Salon in Riyadh (est. 1984), Al-Sharari's Salon in Jawaf (est. 1986), Al-Mubarak's Sunday Salon in Al-Ahsa (est. 1991), Abu Malha's Monday Salon in Abha (est. 2000), The Monday Gathering in Qatif (est. 2002), Tanomah Mon-

day Salon in Tanomah (est. 2002), Al-Sayf Forum in Hail (est. 2003), Al-Ruhayli Monday Salon in Madinah (est. 2003), and dozens of others in different cities and regions.<sup>(15)</sup>

This popular engagement demonstrates that literature is a part of the very fabric of society, not merely a product of institutional action. Literature is, at its core, an interactive endeavor produced by a creator in conversation with the writings and contributions of other writers; this cannot be reduced to the work of institutions. Literary institutions can only provide organization, facilitate the creative process, provide spaces for writers, and encourage their work. Also active in literary associations today are poets who write in the colloquial dialect. Although the report will not go into detail about their work here, more information can be found in other chapters.

# Saudi Literature Today



## New Literary Media

Social media sites act as platforms that not only allow self-publishing but also facilitate interactions between authors and readers, allowing writers to reach a wider audience more quickly. Today, social media has become a new space for literary circulation in two ways. First, new authors have utilized social media to reach their audience directly, without the mediation of traditional institutions. This is particularly true of short-story writers and poets who compose short poems or record audiovisual clips and upload them to different platforms, leading to a resurgence of oral poetry, albeit in a new form. The popularity of these posts has helped to bring their authors to the attention of traditional institutions and publishing houses, which have then attempted to host them or publish their work.<sup>(16)</sup> Second, a number of established authors have also utilized social media in the same ways, some of them attaining widespread popularity and attracting large audiences.

At the same time, the social-media phenomenon has raised concerns about literary content, as it has meant that writers need to prioritize brevity and crowd-pleasing. Furthermore, the short lifespan of literary works on social media raises questions about the preservation of literary heritage. No archiving of the wave of blogs and online literary forums at the beginning of the millennium ever took place, despite the amount of literary and cultural activity that they sparked at the time. Although it might have been possible, if difficult, to comprehensively document the state of literature in the past, it is impossible to monitor all the literary activity in these new

media, especially since they rely on innovation and individual efforts.

Another new literary medium is the podcast dedicated to interviews with writers. Podcasts are, to an extent, the descendants of television and radio talk shows, but one whose contemporary relevance and ease of use have contributed to the global rise of the phenomenon. The first Saudi podcast dedicated to literature is Mustafa Al-Hajj's Lawha, which began broadcasting in July 2019. It was followed by Asmar, hosted by Abdullah Al-Anzi. On average, each episode reaches fifty thousand listeners.<sup>(17)</sup> By the end of 2019, these podcasts had hosted 25 writers across different literary genres and styles. It is expected that these podcasts and others like them will contribute to enriching Saudi Arabia's corpus of literary audio files, especially since they focus on local works.

## The Visibility of Poetry

Saudi poets are not only highly visible on social media sites, but they also feature heavily in various forums and poetry competitions (for further information, see the section titled "Saudi Literature's Global Reception"). In contrast to Saudi poetry's widespread presence abroad, domestic platforms for poetry are largely limited to readings, which take place throughout the year and attract mainly an elite audience. The absence of domestic poetry prizes, which used to be awarded by branches of literary clubs, and the discontinuation of the House of Poetry Festival, which the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts held in Dammam three times (in 2015, 2016, and 2017), may have contributed to a downturn in the field.



Poetry criticism is also in decline after a flourishing in the 1980s. In terms of form, classical poetry is currently experiencing a resurgence after a period in which it was neglected in favor of other forms, such as free verse and prose poetry.

Many cultural institutions celebrate international events, such as World Arabic Language Day or World Poetry Day, by staging readings. Perhaps the most prominent of these was the Prince Badr bin Abdul Mohsin Poetry Night held by the MiSK foundation at UNESCO on World Poetry Day. The General Entertainment Authority has also held many readings for poets who write in the colloquial dialect. These events have been widely attended, indicating that there is an audience for this literary genre and that it is marketable. Literary clubs, which also hold forums on criticism, are the most frequent sponsors of readings for young local poets and established poets alike.

## The Continuity of the Novel

Saudi novels continue to be published at a higher rate than works in other literary genres. For example, 164 novels were published in 2018-

2019 alone.<sup>(18)</sup> Novels that win or are nominated for literary prizes receive the most attention. It is rare for local literary works to receive much attention otherwise. For example, the novel *Voyage of the Cranes in the Cities of Agate* by Omaima Al-Khamis won the 2018 Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature and was longlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2019. As a result, the Makkah Literary Club held a meeting on the novel in October 2019, and the Saudi Literature Chair held a conference at King Saud University to discuss the novel in March of the same year. The Narrative Spaces Association, a subsidiary of the Makkah Literary Club, held a meeting on Aziz Mohammed's novel *The Critical Case of "K"* after it was shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction, as did the SASCA in Al-Ahsa, on April 22, 2019. Similarly, when Khulaif Al Ghalib's novel *The Bedouin Journey Plot* made the longlist for Sheikh Zayed Book Award in the Youth Authors category, the novel received significant attention, especially since it was the author's first work. Consequently, these prizes can be considered intangible capital for the authors who are nominated for them.

In addition to the novel, its predecessor, the short story, continues to attract institutional and critical attention. Throughout the year, short story evenings appear on the cultural programs of literary clubs and some branches of the SASCA. One of these is the House of Narrative Festival, which was launched by the SASCA's Dammam branch in February 2018 and held again in February 2019.

In November, the Ministry of Culture held a writer's retreat in Unaizah. It offered discussion sessions and writing workshops to ten Saudi and Arab short

story writers to allow participants to share their expertise.<sup>(19)</sup>

### Developments in Literary Translation

In December 2019, the Cultural Committee announced that 44 people had won the Creative Translation Competition at the Jeddah Book Fair. This large number of winners reflects the vitality of literary translation in the Kingdom, which is home to several publishing houses specializing in literary translation. The Ministry of Culture also offered a four-day workshop that began on Sunday, November 24, in Riyadh, to provide systematic training in literary translation. In January 2019, the Literary Club of Hail held a meeting on the role of translation in cultural development.

This year, literary translations into Arabic were accompanied by the translation of Saudi literary works into other languages. Thirty-three works of literature were translated into English, the largest annual number to date.<sup>(20)</sup> The Center for Research and Knowledge Networking also translated a number of literary works into South and Central Asian languages. These included Hamid Damanhuri's *The Price of Sacrifice* and Hamza Bgary's *The Sheltered Quarter*, which were translated into Uzbek; and Ibrahim Al-Humaidan's *A Tear in the Cloak of Night* (*Thuqb fi Rida' al-Layl*), and Abdulrahman Al-Sha'ir's *Sweat and Mud ('Araq wa-Tin)*, which were translated into Chinese. With the exception of these few works, Saudi literary works are only translated into other languages when they have won an esteemed international prize, as have the novels of Abdo Khal, Raja'a Alem, and Mohammed Hasan Alwan;

when they have received media attention, like Rajaa Al-Sanea's novel *Girls of Riyadh*; or when the author has made an effort to have his or her work translated.

### Community Organizations and Forums

There are some community forums and organizations that support different kinds of literary activity, especially by the young authors. These efforts are generally informal and offer amateurs opportunities to discuss their work and that of their predecessors. The Ibn Al-Muqarrab Literary Forum in Dammam held seven Literary Evenings in 2019, while Novel House, which was founded in Riyadh by a group of novelists and critics, held a workshop dedicated to "The Art of the Science Fiction Novel," led by Khalid Al-Huqail, and the first of its kind. In Jeddah, the Craftsmen's Project (Arbab Alheraf) conducts cultural and artistic events in various fields on an almost daily basis. It also hosts literary figures and holds periodic lectures and discussion groups, in addition to reviewing books and establishing book clubs.

In keeping with longstanding tradition, several new cafés aim to provide a free space for writers and creatives and a platform for publicity, where writers can hold book signings or other events. These cafés also act as small libraries and always offer books for reading or purchase. As part of this trend, a Book Market (Qaysariat Al-Kitab) opened in April 2019 in the Qasr Al-Hukm area of central Riyadh. It consists of four publishing houses, a library, and two cafés for reading. It aims to support cultural and literary activities throughout the year.<sup>(21)</sup>

Private actors have also worked to address the shortage of specialized courses on creative writing and literary content production, including workshops on how to write novels, short stories, and poetry. Educational institutions have not devoted sufficient attention to these areas, although there is a demand for them, and skills in creative content production have recently become more marketable. New initiatives to meet the demand include field training offered by the Sidanah Center in Jeddah, as well as lectures on the topic at the Riyadh Literary Club, although these are modestly attended in contrast to the club's workshops.<sup>(22)</sup> The SASCA is also tackling this issue by offering courses and workshops for a fee, the proceeds from which have become an important source of its revenue.<sup>(23)</sup>

### Literary Events

The deep historical roots of Souk Okaz, which can be traced back to before 500 CE, render it a literary event with great cultural significance. It was revived in a festival of the same name in 2007. The festival's organizers sought to make use of its historical

and touristic value and to preserve its literary nature, starting with a revival of the Hanging Odes (Mu'allaqat). Actors were hired to play the role of the poets who composed them and to read their poems in different areas of the market. The festival's organizers also arranged poetry evenings and meetings for writers and critics from around Saudi Arabia and the Arab world. The festival also hosts the Okaz Poet Competition, which was particularly competitive in 2019 after the prize's value was raised to one million SAR for the first prize winner, prompting dozens of poets from around the Arab world to participate.

In recent years, book fairs in the Kingdom have played an influential role in revitalizing the literary field, especially since they are usually accompanied by lectures, poetry readings, and workshops. The Riyadh International Book Fair was held in March 2019. The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) oversaw the cultural program, which included 62 seminars, lectures, and poetry readings, in addition to 13 meetings which took place during cultural café events. The task of overseeing book fairs was subsequently transferred to the

Ministry of Culture, beginning with the Jeddah International Book Fair, which was held in December 2019. The schedule of events for that fair demonstrates the attention paid to literary translation. Six lectures and workshops were held on the topic, in addition to the Creative Translation Competition. The cultural program also included events on methods which have only recently entered the Saudi literary field, such as workshops titled "How to Draw Your Story Using Manga Techniques" and "How to Read Comic Books."<sup>(24)</sup>

### Literature and Ministry of Culture Initiatives

It is clear that the most important development from an organizational perspective is the establishment of the Ministry of Culture in June 2018 as the authority responsible for developing the cultural sector in Saudi Arabia and as the cultural representative of the Kingdom both domestically and abroad. In May 2019, the Ministry established the Literature, Publishing & Translation Commission in recognition of the close connections between these three fields. This commission is entrusted with all matters pertaining to literary activity, publishing, and related professions in Saudi Arabia. It is also tasked with translating important works into Arabic and exporting Saudi literature around the world.<sup>(25)</sup> The Ministry launched its literary activities in November 2019 with the three workshops mentioned above. These workshops focused on literary translation, philosophy, and science fiction and were held in Riyadh, Khobar, and Jeddah. The Ministry also held a writer's retreat, as mentioned above in the section on the development of the short story.



The Ministry's website has also announced various cultural initiatives, some of which pertain to literature and literary professionals. These include publishing literary journals and granting cultural sabbaticals, which aim to grant creatives time to complete a work in a particular field, be it narrative, criticism, or some other form.<sup>(26)</sup>

In an unprecedented move, the Ministry launched the Cultural Scholarship Program, which provides support for Literature majors working on bachelor's, master's or doctoral degrees. The program's goal is the comprehensive development of Saudi culture. Through education, it aims to create and develop a national cadre of specialists in literary and artistic fields, to train them and develop their expertise in the Saudi cultural sector, and to meet growing demand in the job market.<sup>(27)</sup>

### Literary Publishing

The following survey of literary publication was compiled by Khalid Al-Yusif based on information gathered from the Deposit and Registration Department of the King Fahad National Library, from visits to different libraries, and from communicating with local publishing houses. Al-Yusif also reached out to other researchers and authors and gathered information from newspapers, magazines, and publications on the internet. The result is an important survey of quantitative trends in literary publication in different fields. The novel remains the predominant literary form, as mentioned above. It is followed by articles and literary texts, volumes of poetry, and collections of short stories.

**Table 2-1: Bibliography of literary publications (2018-2019)<sup>(28)</sup>**

Field	Number of Publications
Arabic Literature	6
Translated Arabic Literature	1
Arabic Literature—Bibliographies	2
Arabic Literature—History and Criticism	24
Arabic Literature—Biographies	5
Arabic Literature—Biographies—History and Criticism	2
Arabic Literature—Travelogues	2
Arabic Literature—Travelogues—History and Criticism	1
Arabic Literature—Memoirs and Diaries	1
Arabic Literature—Translated Memoirs and Diaries	2
Arabic Literature—Translated Articles	1
Arabic Literature—Essays	149
Arabic Literature—Translated Essays	3
Literary History and Criticism	1
Novels	161
Translated Novels	12
Novels—History and Criticism	13
Arabic Poetry	103
Translated Arabic Poetry	10
Translated Arabic Poetry Anthologies	1
Arabic Poetry—History and Criticism	25
Short Story Collections	70
Short Story Anthologies	2
Short Stories for Children	1
Translated Short Stories	2
Short Stories—History and Criticism	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>604</b>

## The Achievements of Saudi Writers in 2019



### Rashid bin Humaid Culture & Sciences Award



Abdullah Ali Khudayr



Habib Ali Maatouk



Abd Al-Majid Al-Musa



Muhammad Rabee Alghamdi

- Abdullah bin Ali Khudayr won first place in the Eloquent Poetry category.
- Habib Ali Maatouk won first place in the Vertical Poetry category.

- Abd Al-Majid Al-Musa won second place in the Vertical Poetry category.
- Muhammad Rabee Alghamdi won first place in the Short Story category.



Sultan Al-Sabhan  
won first place in the  
Prince of Poets competition.



### Sheikh Zayed Book Award



Aziz Mohammed

### International Prize for Arabic Fiction



Omaima Al-Khamis

- Aziz Mohammed was shortlisted for his novel The Critical Case of "K".
- Omaima Al-Khamis was longlisted for her novel Voyage of the Cranes over the Agate Cities.



Wafaa Al Harbi was  
shortlisted for the  
Al-Multaqa Prize for the  
Arabic Short Story for her  
collection Burning the Loaf.

- Amal Al Faran was shortlisted in the Literature category for her novel Divers of the Empty Quarter
- Khulaif Al Ghalib was longlisted in the Young Author category for his novel The Bedouin Journey Plot
- Manal Al-Mohimeed was longlisted in the Young Author category for her study "Dialogue in Abu Hayyan Al-Tawhidi Literature: A Study in the Characteristics of Communication Interaction"
- Eyad Hakami was longlisted in the Young Author category for his collection I Don't Know Strangers...I Know Their Sorrows.



Amal Al Faran



Khulaif Al Ghalib



Manal Al-Mohimeed



Eyad Hakami

# Literary Prizes

## The King Faisal Prize

Since its inception in 1979, this prize has been recognized as especially prestigious. It recognizes individuals or institutions who have contributed to the enrichment of human

thought in the prize's categories. In 2019, Professor Abdelali Oudriri of the Kingdom of Morocco and Professor Mahmoud Fahmy Hegazi of the Arab Republic of Egypt won awards in the category of Arabic Language and Literature.

## The King Abdulaziz Prize for Writers

This prize was founded in 2013 by the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives. It is awarded to researchers and specialists



who have authored, researched, or translated books in the various prize categories. In 2019, the prize for books on Saudi literature was awarded to Dr. Ahmed Al-Tehani for his book Poetry in Aseer, 1351-1430 AH.

### The Ministry of Media Prize for Writers

The Ministry of Media announced the winners of its Prize for Writers in 2019 at the opening of the Riyadh International Book Fair. The prize is subdivided into five categories, two of which pertain to literature:

- Maqbul Al-Alawi received the Narrative Award for his novel Van Gogh's Flowers.
- Hasan Al-Salhabi won the Poetry Award for his poetry collection Hidden in The Shadows Between Lamps (Al-Makhbu' fi Khadd al-Qanadil).

The Ministry of Media also presented the Media Excellence Award, which is awarded on National Day. The award's categories include articles and patriotic poems. Iman Al-Shamri won the Article Award, and Abdullah Al-Zahrani won the Patriotic Poem Award.

### Okaz Poet

The Souk Okaz Award is one of the most important awards for Arabic poetry, especially after the modifications to the prize's system for choosing winners, which was previously based on rankings assigned by the Organizing Committee. The 2019 winners were Muhammad Ibrahim Yaqub (first), the Yemeni Abdullah Ubayd (second) and Shtiwi Al-Ghithi (third).



In 2019, the first edition of the Abdullah Al-Faisal Prize for Arabic Poetry was held by the Academy of Arabic Poetry at Taif University. In the Classical Arabic Poetry category, first prize was awarded to Muhammad Abdul Bari from Sudan. In the Dramatic Poetry category, Muhammad Ahmad Khadr from Egypt won the first prize. In Sung Poetry, Karim Al-Iraqi from Iraq received the first prize.

It is worth noting the paucity of local prizes that celebrate creatives. This is especially true of small and moderately sized prizes, which became especially rare after literary clubs and other private actors stopped awarding prizes.

Apart from these awards, a number of people who have contributed to enriching the Saudi cultural and literary scene have been honored throughout the year:

- In February 2019, the story writer Jarallah Al-Hamid was honored at the Narrative Festival, which was held by the SASCA in Dammam.
- In March 2019, the SASCA launched a week of "Recognition 1" events at Society branches in different regions of the Kingdom to honor literary figures. The hon-



orees included the scholars Abd Al-Karim Al-Juhayman, Sulayman Muhammad Al-Faifi, Abdulrahman Al-Daraan, Ahmad bin Salih Al-Tami, Ali Hamid Al-Thaqfi, the poet Saad bin Jadlan, the novelist Eid Al-Nasir, the short story writer Saud Al-Jarad, and the critic Muajib Al-Zahrani.

- In May 2019, King Salman awarded the poet Prince Badr bin Abdul Muhsin the Order of King Abdulaziz Sash.
- In July 2019, the Literary Club in Taif honored the scholar Ali bin Hassan Al-Abadi.
- In November 2019, the Literary Club in Riyadh held an event to honor Dr. Abdulaziz Alsebail.
- In December 2019, Abdel Fattah Abou Madian, Dr. Hashim Abu Hashim, and the writer Mashaal Al-Sudayri were honored at the Jeddah International Book Fair.

## Saudi Literature in the World



## The International Prize for Arabic Fiction

This prize is regarded as one of the most important prizes for Arabic novels. This prize was launched in Abu Dhabi in 2007 and is supported by the Department of Culture and Tourism and the Booker Prize Foundation. The participation of the Booker Prize Foundation has led many to view the International Prize for Arabic Fiction as the Arabic version of the Man Booker prize. A number of Saudi authors have been awarded this prize. The first was Abdo Khal in 2010, for his novel *Throwing Sparks*. In 2011, Raja'a Alem won for her novel *The Dove's Necklace*. In 2017, Mohammed Hasan Alwan won with his novel *A Small Death*.

In 2019, Omaima Al-Khamis's novel *Voyage of the Cranes in the Cities of Agate* was longlisted for the prize, while Aziz Mohammed's novel *The Critical Case of "K"* was shortlisted.

## Sheikh Zayed Book Award

This prize is highly regarded in its field, and comes with a significant cash award.

In the Literature category in the 2019-2020 edition of the award, Amal Al Faran's novel *Divers of the Empty Quarter* was shortlisted.

In the Young Authors category, the following authors were longlisted:

- Khulaif Al Ghalib for his novel *The Bedouin Journey Plot*
- Manal Al-Mohimeed for her study *Dialogue in Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi Literature: A Study in the Characteristics of Communication Interaction*



- Eyad Hakami for his poetry collection *I Don't Know Strangers...I Know Their Sorrows*

In the category of Children's Literature, Dalia Toonsi's book *Island of Leaves* was longlisted.

## Al-Multaqa Prize for the Arabic Short Story

This prize is significant because it is dedicated to the short story genre, which is generally excluded from other literary competitions in the Arab world. In the 4th edition of the prize in 2019, Wafaa Al Harbi's short story collection *Burning the Loaf* was shortlisted.

## Rashid bin Humaid Culture & Sciences Award

This award, established in 1983, is sponsored by Sheikh Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuaimi, the ruler of the emirate of Ajman. It is awarded annually to those who have

made contributions to cultural and developmental fields. In 2019:

- Muhammad Rabiaa Al-Ghamdi won first prize in the Short Story category.
- Habibi Ali Maatuq won first prize in the Classical Arabic Poetry category.
- Abd Al-Majid Al-Musa won second prize in the same category.
- Abdullah bin Ali Khudayr won first prize in the category of Modern Poetry in Classical Arabic.

## Prince of Poets

The prize winners are determined by a committee of judges as well as votes from the audience. Although this may compromise the objectivity of the results, the competition has been well-received by established poets in the Arab world and has brought attention to little-known names in poetry. A number of Saudi poets have won the competition, among them Haydar Al-Abdullah in 2015, Eyad Hakami in 2016, and most recently Sultan Al-Sabhan in 2019.

# 2019 Cultural Participation Survey

Community engagement is an important part of the literary sector due to the interactive and dialectical relationship between author and audience. The 2019 Cultural Participation Survey, which gathered data in the fourth quarter of 2019, measures the attendance rates of poetry readings in the Kingdom.

These survey results demonstrate that this type of evening event attracts only a small segment of society. Only 5.3% responded that they had attended a poetry reading at least once. This sparse atten-

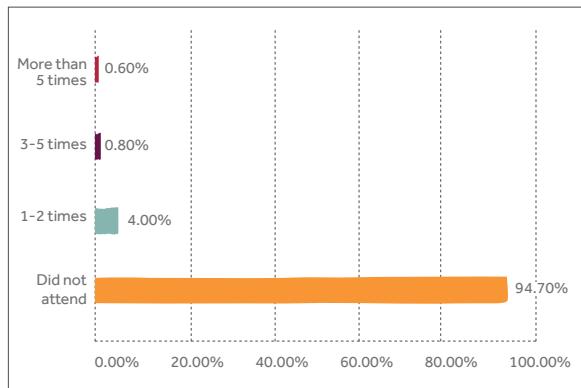
dance may be linked to the fact that these events are considered elite. This rate is similar to that of other countries like the United States of America (7.0%) and South Korea (8.90%) (See Figure 2-2).<sup>(29)</sup> The rate of attendance varies by gender: the number who attended at least once is 7.1% for males and 3.2% for females. This raises the question of whether there are barriers to women's participation in literary events. Separate seating for women, which is still practiced in some areas, may be one such barrier. The seating designated for women may be in-

adequate and is sometimes located in separate halls, away from the main event.

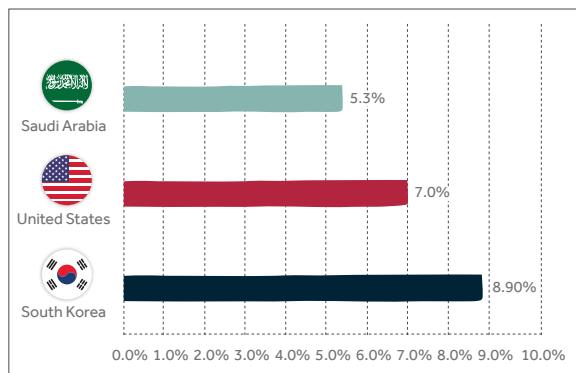
Figure 2-3 demonstrates the strong correlation between attendance and educational level. Of those who completed secondary education or less, 3.66% attended poetry readings at least once in the last twelve months, while those who have received a bachelor's degree attended at the higher rate of 5.60%. For those who have completed a master's or a doctorate, the figure rises to 7.97%.



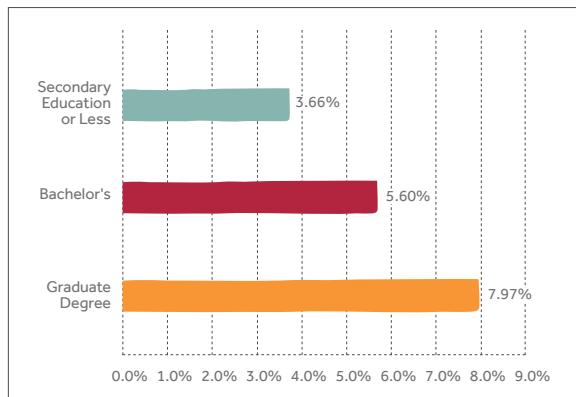
**Figure 2-1: Attendance rates at poetry readings in KSA (past 12 months)**



**Figure 2-2: Percentage of population attending poetry/literary readings at least once in the past 12 months by country<sup>(30)</sup>**



**Figure 2-3: Percentage of citizens who have attended poetry evenings in the past 12 months by educational level**



# Infrastructure and Investment

## Employment in the Literary Field

It is not an easy task to determine the exact number of people employed in the literary field. According to statistics collected by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development in 2019, only 365 Saudi workers listed their profession as "literary writer." Only 4 listed their title as "literary critic" and none listed their titles as "proofreader."<sup>(31)</sup> These numbers

do not reflect the actual state of the field but rather the fact that individuals working in these fields either hold multiple jobs or work as freelancers. Bahr Platform, which provides a platform for Saudi workers to seek freelance work as editors or proofreaders, has 3,631 users registered under the "Creative Writing" category alone.<sup>(32)</sup> The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development statistics also exclude those who work in the public education and higher education sec-

tors. Furthermore, literary writing, regardless of genre, is seldom pursued as a profession.

Preparing students of literature for the job market is mainly the task of universities and institutes. Most universities have Arabic language programs and programs specializing in different types of criticism.

Below is a list of Arabic language and literature programs for 2019:<sup>(33)</sup>

**Table 2-2: List of Arabic language and literature programs (2019)**

University	Number of Arabic Language and Literature Programs	Number of Programs Specializing in Literature (Arabic Literature, Rhetoric, Criticism, Literary Studies)
Umm Al-Qura University	8	3
Islamic University	1	1
Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University	1	1
King Saud University	6	4
King Abdulaziz University	4	4
King Faisal University	5	3
King Khalid University	2	1
Qassim University	3	2
Taibah University	2	-
Taif University	3	2
Jazan University	3	2
Hail University	2	-
Jouf University	1	-
University of Tabuk	3	2
Najran University	1	-
Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University	5	4
Northern Border University	3	2
Shaqra University	2	1
Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University	1	-

University	Number of Arabic Language and Literature Programs	Number of Programs Specializing in Literature (Arabic Literature, Rhetoric, Criticism, Literary Studies)
Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University	1	-
Jeddah University	3	2
University of Bisha	2	-
University of Hafr Al Batin	2	-
Arab Open University	2	2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>25</b>

In 2019, a total of 8,652 students graduated from Saudi universities with majors in Arabic language or literature. Of those, 1,983 were male, and 6,669 were female. In addition, 327 students (male and female) studied literature and linguistics abroad. These numbers indicate that there is not a direct relationship between graduating with these majors and working in the literature field, which is also true of students graduating with majors in grammar, morphology, and the Arabic language. The study of other literatures, with the exception of English literature, is also lacking. There are, however, indicators that some of these majors may allow students to pursue tracks in foreign literatures, such as French. Yet there are no creative writing programs. The number of graduates outside Arabic language programs who majored in literature alone was 2,910, of whom 751 were male, and 2,159 female.

### The Market for Literary Publications

Between 2018-2019, 603 books were published in different literary fields. Many Saudi writers participated in regional and international events, in-

cluding forums, festivals and evening events. They also received recognition that paved the way for global distribution of their work.

Of book fairs in the Kingdom, the Riyadh International Book Fair is the largest, both in terms of the number of participating publishing houses and in terms of domestic and international sales. In 2019, more than 1 million people attended the fair, the largest number since its inception.<sup>(34)</sup> The Jeddah International Book Fair in December 2019 was attended by a robust 441,369 people. These numbers reflect the strength of the publishing market in the Kingdom and the important role that the literature and poetry sectors can play in strengthening the national economy.

### Active Institutions in the Sector

The Ministry of Culture aims to strengthen the presence of literature in society, starting with education. It strives to establish academies and institutes and to set up programs to develop and refine creative writing skills and to improve Saudi literary output. The Ministry also works to make literature a part

of public education programs at all educational stages, beginning with children's stories in elementary schools. The Ministry aims to make literature a part of the daily life of Saudi citizens and residents.

To achieve this goal, the Ministry is working towards improving the quality of literary works themselves. These efforts begin with supporting writers in all stages of their literary development, including education, training, publication, and distribution. Finally, the Ministry works to disseminate literature in an innovative and modern way that is easily accessible, while also drawing attention to less popular literary genres, such as comic books. As Saudi writers increasingly participate in international festivals and events, and Saudi literature is translated into different languages, Saudi literature is primed to take its place on the world stage.

In accordance with the royal decree that established the Ministry of Culture, literary clubs began to work under the auspices of the Ministry, which took on the task of coordinating and supervising active literary institutions, most importantly the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts.

**Endnote:**

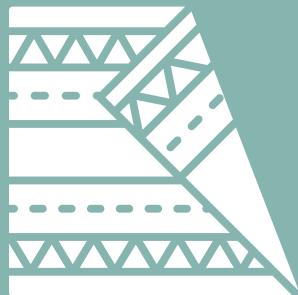
- (1) Bakri Shaykh Amin, *The Literary Movement in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Dar El IIm LilMalayin, 1984), 202.
- (2) Abdullah bin Idris, *Studies from the First Conference for Saudi Writers: Poetry in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, (Umm Al-Qura University, 2000), 649.
- (3) Omar Al-Tayyib Al-Sasi, *Overview of the History of Saudi Literature*, (Dar Jeddah lil-Nashr, 1405 AH), 74.
- (4) Bakri Shaykh Amin, *The Literary Movement in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, (Dar El IIm LilMalayin, 1984), 124.
- (5) Bakri Shaykh Amin, *The Literary Movement in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, (Dar El IIm LilMalayin, 1984), 124.
- (6) *The Literary Clubs in Brief: the Riyadh Literary Club* (Riyadh: Riyadh Literary Club, 1985), 5.
- (7) The literary clubs issue reports periodically on their activities which researchers and interested parties can refer to for further information.
- (8) Abdullah Al-Ghathami, *The Story of Modernity* (Casablanca: Arab Cultural Center, 2004), 86.
- (9) Saad Al-Bazei, *The Controversy of Renewal* (Riyadh: Publications of the Ministry of Media, Cultural Scene Series, 2009), 107.
- (10) Mansur Al-Hazmi, *The Art of the Story in Modern Saudi Literature* (Riyadh: Ibn Sina lil-Nashr, 2001), 35.
- (11) Khalid Al-Yusif, *The Wonder of the Text* (Riyadh: Kitab Al-Faysal, 2017), 8.
- (12) Hasan Al-Naimi, *The Saudi Novel-Its State and Transformations* (Publications of the Ministry of Media, the Cultural Scene Series, 2009), 28.
- (13) Huda Al-Amudi and Thuraya Batarji, *A Guide for Writers and Illustrators of Children's Literature in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Jeddah: Dar Kadi wa Ramadi, 2007), 28.
- (14) Abd Al-Maqṣud Khawja, *Literary Forums and Clubs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Jeddah: Monday Salon Writers Series, 2009), 17.
- (15) For more information about literary salons, see "Literary Salons" by Dr. Ahmad Al-Khani and "Literary Forums and Clubs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" by Abd Al-Maqṣud Muhammad Said Khawja.
- (16) Interview with Amal Al-Harbi, a writer and novelist who is active on social media, Jeddah, September 15, 2019.
- (17) Interview with Abdullah Al-Anzi, Creator and Host of Asmar Program, Riyadh, November 21, 2019.
- (18) Khalid Al-Yusif, *Literary Authorship and Publication Activity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1440 AH/2018-2019 CE, Northern Border Literary Club with the Institute for Arab Diffusion in Beirut* (forthcoming).
- (19) "The Ministry of Culture Organizes Literary Workshops...and a Writers' Retreat," Ministry of Culture, <<https://www.moc.gov.sa/ar/news/5261>>.
- (20) Khalid Al-Yusif, *Literary Authorship and Publication Activity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1440 AH/2018-2019 CE, Northern Border Literary Club with the Institute for Arab Diffusion in Beirut* (forthcoming).
- (21) "Thaqafi: Prince Faisal bin Bandar Opens 'Qayasrat Al-Kitab' in the Qasr Al-Hukm Area," Saudi Press Agency, April 23, 2019.
- (22) Interview with Salih Al-Mahmoud, President of the Riyadh Literary Club, Riyadh, November 6, 2019.
- (23) Interview with Abd Al-Aziz Ismail, President of the Board of Directors of SASCA, Riyadh, October 8, 2019.
- (24) "Thaqafi: Jeddah Authors' Program Combines Literary Debate and Knowledge Enrichment," Saudi Press Agency, December 14, 2019.
- (25) Interview with Mohammed Hasan Alwan, President of the Literary, Publication, and Translation Sector in the Ministry of Culture, Riyadh, October 6, 2019.
- (26) "Al-Khudairi: Cultural Sabbatical Aims to Support Creatives," Al-Yaum News, July 29, 2019.
- (27) HRH the Minister of Culture Announces the Launch of the First Program to Revitalize Culture in the Kingdom," Ministry of Culture, <<https://www.moc.gov.sa/sar/news/6563>>.
- (28) Khalid Al-Yusif, *Literary Authorship and Publication Activity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1440 AH/2018-2019 CE, Northern Border Literary Club with the Institute for Arab Diffusion in Beirut* (forthcoming).
- (29) The question on the surveys for the two countries mentioned included both "literary and poetry" evenings.
- (30) National Endowment for Arts (US, 2017) and Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (South Korea, 2018).
- (31) The Ministry of Labor.
- (32) Bahr Platform (online), <<https://bahr.910ths.sa/>>.
- (33) The Ministry of Education.
- (34) "Report: Riyadh International Bookfair Attracts More than a Million Visitors Annually," Saudi Press Agency, March 9, 2019.



Chapter Three

# 3





# Fashion

- **Fashion in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview**
- **Fashion in Saudi Arabia Today**
- **Saudi Fashion in the World**
- **2019 Cultural Participation Survey**
- **Infrastructure and Investment**

# Fashion in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview





Of all the cultural changes that accompanied the modernization of Saudi society, the rapid change of traditional fashion is one of the most salient. This change was particularly noticeable as it happened seemingly all at once, with one set of social customs disappearing and new ones taking their place.<sup>(1)</sup> Traditional clothing, jewelry, accessories, and styles of decoration and embellishment have all varied from one region to another in the Kingdom. The isolation of certain areas led to the development of unique styles of dress, as is the case with the central and southern regions and the fashion of the tribes in the western region of the Hejaz. Fashion in the borderlands has blended with that of neighboring regions due to the expansion of the tribes themselves or of specific families that inhabit those areas, as is the case in the northern and eastern regions. Global trade has also had an obvious impact on fashion in the Eastern Province and the southern city of Jazan.<sup>(2)</sup>

In spite of the diverse social, economic, and cultural factors present in the Kingdom, the fundamental components of fashion share a similar aesthetic. This does not, however, preclude differences in nomenclature, design, and fabric based on geography, social class, or profession.<sup>(3)</sup>

### Documenting Traditional Fashion in the Kingdom

Traditional dress has receded from daily life and become limited to specific occasions as people have developed modern fashion sensibilities. This has inspired a number of academic efforts by specialists in fashion to document traditional Saudi garb across the Kingdom through research, books, and workshops. Among these works are *The Traditional Heritage of Women's Clothing in Najd* by Laila Al-Bassam and *The Traditional Culture of Men's Clothing in Western Saudi Arabia* by Laila Abdul-Ghaffar Al-Fadda, in addition to descriptive accounts and doctoral theses on the subject.

National festivals have also contributed to the preservation of traditional fashion in the collective consciousness of the Saudi people. For example, the National Festival of Culture and Heritage has dedicated

an exhibit to popular fashion since its inception in 1985, and the Women's Committee for Festivals has displayed traditional dress from different regions within the kingdom.<sup>(4)</sup> Besides local efforts to document traditional fashion, some foreign works have also attempted to document the clothing of the Arabian Peninsula. Some examples include *The Art of Arabian Costume: A Saudi Arabian Profile* by Heather Colyer Ross (1981) and *Traditional Crafts of Saudi Arabia* by John Topham (1982), the latter of which includes an entire chapter on Arab clothing. Such works, however, represent individual academic efforts, as broader investigations have not historically received support, as evidenced by a lack of reading materials on the subject and of systematic documentation of the development of Saudi fashion at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first. This period was dominated by global consumerism

in the face of weak domestic fashion production due to limited government support for local designers and poor infrastructure. These conditions were also reflected in the education sector, which did not offer specialized study in fashion until the beginning of the twenty-first century.

### Fashion Education in Saudi Arabia

Fashion first entered Saudi education in 1970, with a set of curricula at the College of Home Economics at women's schools. These schools taught patterns, embroidery, and weaving, but specializations in clothing and textiles were only offered at the graduate level. At the same time, the first signs of interest in traditional fashion and its preservation became part of the

curriculum for girls' schools published by the central administration in Riyadh.

For a long time, studying fashion remained a female specialization within this educational framework. In 2007, the most important change in fashion studies and its related fields took place when a royal decree was issued to attach girls' and teachers' colleges to universities based on geographic location under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education. Additionally, a royal decree was issued to establish the first university for girls in Riyadh under the auspices of the ministry.<sup>(5)</sup> After its establishment in 2007, the university launched a project to restructure education for women in Riyadh by including new specializations. The home economics school and the technical training school were accordingly separated into two

humanities colleges: the College of Home Economics and the College of Art and Design. That same year, the university changed its name to Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University.<sup>(6)</sup> Afterwards, in 2011, the Department of Clothing and Fabric was transferred from the College of Home Economics to the College of Art and Design to become the Department of Fashion Design and Textiles.<sup>(7)</sup>

This trend toward moving fashion from home economics colleges to design colleges prevailed at a number of universities. For example, at King Abdulaziz University, the Department of Clothing and Textiles previously fell under the Faculty of Home Economics before it was transferred to the College of Art and Design in 2009.<sup>(8)</sup> This trend marked the transformation of fashion from a home economics specialty to a



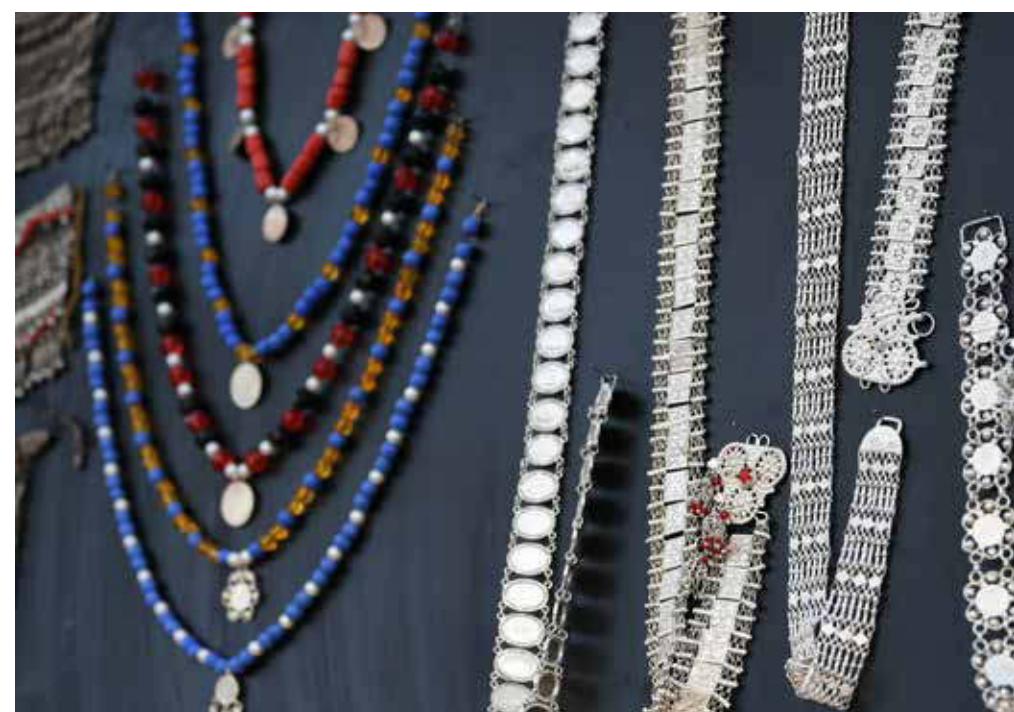
creative artistic discipline at various universities across the Kingdom.

Beyond the scope of university education, the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation established specialized accredited academies in tandem with the Ministry of Education to provide professional certification programs in the design industry for jewelry, fashion products, graphics, and more. Female students can complete their bachelor's degree at any accredited educational institution, such as Heriot-Watt University Dubai.<sup>(9)</sup> In addition to design, these institutes and academies train young women who hope to work in the fashion industry, offering programs that focus on the practical elements of production, implementation, and marketing, as well as sewing, embroidery, cutting, and clothing and product design, among other skills. Among these establishments are the Future Institute for Women, founded in Jeddah in 1991; the Nafisa Shams Academy of Arts and Crafts, one of Abdul-Lateef Jameel's social initiatives carried out through Bab Rizq Jameel, founded in 2006;<sup>(10)</sup> the Arts and Skills Institute in Riyadh, founded in 2007;<sup>(11)</sup> and the Raffles Design Institute, which entered the Saudi market by establishing a branch in 2013 and started its work the following year.<sup>(12)</sup> These private academies and institutes have trained students and equipped them with the skills required to meet the demands of the labor market.<sup>(13)</sup>

### The Local Fashion Industry: Stumbling Forward

Active fashion professionals and talented graduates alike have run up against hurdles that prevented the

sector from expanding and fulfilling its potential. For a long time, the Kingdom's fashion sector remained confined to consumption. Indeed, the importation of all articles of clothing now dwarfs local markets. Between 2014 and 2018, the material value of Saudi imports of textiles and fabric products reached 98,850,000 SAR whereas exports during the same time period were valued at less than 11,000,000 SAR.<sup>(14)</sup> In the past, organizational and financial hurdles, such as poor funding, high production costs, and difficulties in obtaining permits, have affected the output of local designers by driving up the price of their products while lowering their quality.<sup>(15)</sup> The exceptions are women's abayas and men's Thobes, which have been controlled by local producers and which are now high-quality goods.<sup>(16)</sup> These exceptions directly reflect the existence of strong connections to the local market and ongoing demand.



# Fashion in Saudi Arabia Today

Since the launch of Vision 2030, the establishment of the Ministry of Culture, which considers fashion one of its 16 cultural sectors, and the rise of a new generation of acclaimed young designers, the fashion sector has witnessed remarkable developments across its industries, educational institutions, and creative practices. These developments suggest a future in which the fashion sector can develop its economic and cultural presence. Furthermore, the increased interest in traditional fashion, both from the state and from civil society organizations, and the competence of educational institutions to meet the demands of the market should soon provide more opportunities for designers and those working in the field.

## Women's Abayas and the Changing Times

The black abaya has always been a fixture of women's fashion in the Kingdom, being the garment customarily worn outside of the home. Over time, the abaya has changed considerably in accordance with changes in the geographic environment, religious traditions, and social conditions. With the passage of time, the black abaya has used new materials and taken on new colors, patterns, and shapes, provoking social and religious backlash. In the last five years, however, alternatives to the black abaya have found both social and official acceptance, which has reinvigorated the abaya market and diversified women's reasons for wearing it. For example, it is no longer worn solely for the purpose of modesty, but for practicality and as a symbol of class and elegance as well.

A study published in 2018 suggests that 70% of women in the Kingdom own between 2 and 4 abayas and about 62.7% of them rely on the off-the-shelf abayas.<sup>(17)</sup> These factors have contributed to the increasing demand for new abaya designs, whether by designers working in this sector or by entrepreneurs breaking into the space. A second study, pub-

lished in the International Journal for Entrepreneurship, surveyed 80 startup projects by Saudi women and found that 17 of these projects were in the fashion and abaya industry.<sup>(18)</sup> A number of local designs by Saudi designers specializing in the abaya that have won regional prizes, among them Haal Inc., which received the Award for Saudi Talents from Vogue Saudi Talent Scouting in 2016.

## Institutional Stewardship of Traditional Fashion

Recently, traditional Saudi fashion has not only attracted the attention of scholars seeking to preserve, document and study it, but also that of civil society organizations and professional designers invested in culture and heritage. Their efforts have expanded to include recording the heritage of traditional clothing in its original form, developing it, and reimagining its components in accordance with the needs and sensibilities of modern society.<sup>(19)</sup> This is accompanied by an artisanal interest in preserving the crafts of garment-weaving and embroidery. Other methods of documentation have also arisen, including the exhibition of folk costumes in public and





private museums and wearing them on national occasions and holidays.

Institutional efforts dedicated to preserving traditional fashion have also arisen over the last five years, as seen in the initiatives undertaken by different educational institutions and civil society organizations. One such initiative is "Tazahbi," undertaken by the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society. Established on June 6th, 2010, it was held for two consecutive years (2017 and 2018) at the King Abdulaziz Historical Center and brought together students of traditional fashion, designers, experts, trademark holders, and other interested parties. The initiative also honored pioneers of traditional fashion, with the goal of generating interest in heritage while also benefitting from it. Additionally, the initiative has taken inventory of and documented traditional fashion for the Our Heritage initiative, which supports the registration of these elements in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list. The Society endeavors to preserve the Hassawi cloak within the handicrafts category by 2021.<sup>(20)</sup>

In 2019, the Saudi Handicrafts program (Baree) also documented 728 items of embroidery and traditional fashion, 428 items of traditional Bedouin embroidery and fabric, 284 pieces of jewelry and accessories, and five traditional men's cloaks.<sup>(21)</sup> This program seeks to market and invest in traditional handicrafts by giving artisans the opportunity to participate in exhibits held in different regions within the Kingdom. Baree has also cataloged the associations interested in traditional Saudi

fashion to qualify for participation in an exhibition in Sydney to be held in 2020.<sup>(22)</sup> Since 2015, Baree has been interested in training artisans in the field of traditional fashion, textiles, and weaving. Since its incep-

tion in 2018, the program has held nine training sessions specifically dedicated to weaving textiles and traditional cloaks, sewing, screen printing, sewing leather, and more, distributed among centers of craft-

manship across the Kingdom. To date, 147 artisans of both genders have participated in these trainings, some of which were co-sponsored by other organizations.

**Table 3-1:** Training sessions held by Baree for traditional fashion and sewing

Session Name	Location	Year	Number of Trainees
Sewing and Hand Embroidery	Jana Center in Dammam	2015	16
Professional Sewing	Al-Madinah	2016	11
The Sewing and Embroidery Industry	Al-Madinah	2016	15
Knitting Textiles and Cloaks	Al-Qassim	2016	20
Cloak Textiles and Sewing Leather Goods	The Creative Handicrafts Center in Al-Madinah	2017 2018	25
Sewing, Traditional Embroidery, and Screen Printing	The Creative Handicrafts Center in Yanbu	2017 2018	19
Weaving Cloaks with Cotton Threads	The Creative Handicrafts Center in Al-Madinah	2018	8
Embroidering Cloaks	The Creative Handicrafts Centers in Al-Ahsa	2018	13
Sewing and Embroidery Workshop	Undertaken with the participation of the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism	2018	20



## The Market and Traditional Fashion: Preserving Tradition by Blending it with the Modern

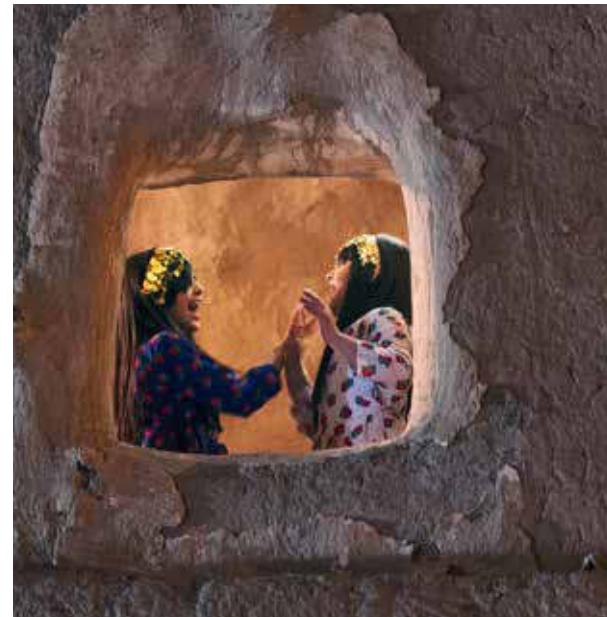
Some parties interested in are using traditional fabrics, images, and patterns in modern designs to raising the profile of traditional fashion and increase its commercial appeal. In the last few years, there has been an increase in popular fashions inspired by traditional dress modified to meet the needs and sensibilities of modern society. Combining elements of traditional fashion with modern designs has created something new, which is both unique and aesthetically pleasing. The Multi-Purpose Women's Cooperative Association in Al-Qassim (Herfa) and designers Areej bint Turki, Laila Albassam, Naeema Al-Shehail, and Nawaf ibn Saud ibn Nasser have launched a joint project to use artisans' products in their designs. First developed and trademarked in 2015, under the name Handicrafts by Naeema, later Ayadina, the project offers designs inspired by the national traditional heritage from various regions of the Kingdom.<sup>(23)</sup> Some designers working in the field have also confirmed that seasonal collections frequently feature designs inspired by the abaya or clothing that features elements of traditional fashion.<sup>(24)</sup> The Saudi designer Muhammad Khoja, who owns the "Hindamme" label, displayed his Al-Ula collection at the Winter at Tantora Festival in 2019 to celebrate Nabatean civilization with its colors and images.<sup>(25)</sup>

The integration of traditional heritage elements into women's fashion has met with an increasingly warm reception and growing demand. Women's jalabiyas, some featuring

traditional fabrics or embroidery for women of all ages, are worn on social events during the month of Ramadan and on national holidays and occasions such as festivals and Saudi National Day. Additionally, the colors, clothes, images, and hems of women's abayas have been influenced by traditional fashion but ultimately reimagined. However, the same cannot be said for men's outfits such as the thobe, which has met greater social resistance to change.<sup>(26)</sup> Across the Arabian Peninsula, the thobe shares the same basic elements, though it differs in shape from country to country. The Saudi thobe, however, has not changed considerably, and changes to it have met with greater social resistance.<sup>(27)</sup> This poses a challenge to men's clothing brand designers in the Kingdom, who note the lack of demand for changes to the basic character or formality of the thobe. In general, thobes are designed in the same manner: with the traditional striped pattern or with Arabic calligraphy.<sup>(28)</sup>

## Fashion Design: From an Educational Field to a Creative Art

Over the last decade, a qualitative change has occurred in the fashion industry as fashion instruction has evolved from an educational field to a creative, artistic one. This has been reflected structurally in educational institutions, where fashion instruction has moved from home economics programs at local universities to colleges of design.<sup>(29)</sup> Accordingly, the Colleges of Design and Home Economics at Taif University merged to become the College of Design and Applied Arts, under which the Department of Fashion



Design was established in 2019.<sup>(30)</sup> The fashion program at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah was one of the first programs to undergo this transformation in 2009.<sup>(31)</sup>

This shift has resulted in the study of fashion becoming more specialized, more in-depth, and more closely connected to innovative practices and market conditions. An apt illustration is the implementation of training programs that hold annual exhibitions and conferences designed to help trainees enter the workforce and benefit from networking with professionals and investors. These include the Design and Fashion Conference at Taif University and the annual Graduation Projects Expo at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University. These conferences offer workshops, specialized symposia, lectures, fashion exhibitions, and student design projects. Furthermore, they platforms for innovative works to be viewed by professionals in the field and prospective investors seeking new opportunities.<sup>(32)</sup>

**Table 3-2:** Educational institutions with fashion programs

College or University	City	College	Department/ Program	Type
Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University	Riyadh	College of Arts and Design	Fashion and Textile Design	Public
Northern Borders University	Arar	College of Home Economics	Clothing and Textiles	Public
King Abdulaziz University	Jeddah	College of Arts and Design	Fashion, Clothing, and Textile Design	Public
Qassim University	Buraydah	College of Design	Fashion, Clothing, and Textile Design	Public
University of Tabuk	Tabuk	College of Arts and Design	Department of Fashion Design and Textiles	Public
Taif University	Taif	Design and Applied Arts	Fashion Design and Textiles	Public
Jeddah University	Jeddah	College of Arts and Design	Fashion Design	Public
Umm Al-Qura University	Makkah	College of Design	Fashion Design/ Pattern Design and Sewing/ Textiles	Public
Taibah University	Al-Madinah	College of Family Sciences Arts	Clothing Design and Ornamentation	Public
Dar Al-Hekma University	Jeddah	College of Design and Architecture	Fashion Design	Private
Jeddah International College	Jeddah	Department of Design	Fashion Design	Private <sup>(33)</sup>

**Table 3-2:** Selected institutions that offer fashion programs

Institution Name	City	Fashion-Related Specialization	Year Established	Type
Selected institutions that offer fashion programs				
Future Institute for Women	Jeddah	Fashion Design, with a Concentration in Clothing Design and Tailoring	1991	Private
Nafisa Shams Academy	Jeddah	Sewing and Fashion Design, with a Concentration in Clothing Design and Execution	2006	Private
Arts and Skills Institute	Riyadh	Certificate of Fashion Design	2007	Private
Joud Women's Charitable Society	Dammam	Tailoring and Sewing	2012 <sup>(34)</sup>	Private
Thaqif Girl Society Institute for Women	Taif	Tailoring and Sewing	2013	Private
Raffles Design Institute in the Middle East	Riyadh	Fashion Design/ Fashion Marketing and Administration/ Jewelry Design	2013	Private
Committee for Local Social Development Institute in Northern Al-Ardiyah	Al-Ardiyat Governorate / Makkah	Fundamentals and Principles of Design and Sewing	2013	Private

This conceptual and structural transformation of the field has corresponded with the emergence of online design platforms on social media that put fashion designers in direct contact with their audiences. These popular platforms allow those working in fashion to market their products and develop their skills despite the dearth of infrastructure and support services. Designers, artists, beauticians, stylists and other interested parties use these free, innovative networks to display their work. Online platforms have also made the community aware of local clothing, jewelry, accessories, and abayas, which people can shop for interactively. These platforms also serve to inspire interest in fashion on the part of young people, especially due to the efforts of Saudi designers to display and market their work in an innovative way.

### **Young Designers, Consumers, and Self-Expression**

A considerable number of young consumers are drawn to fashion that includes traditional elements. Young designers' renewed efforts to incorporate traditional ideas and elements into modern designs strengthens the connection between globalism and national identity without sacrificing the latter.<sup>(35)</sup> The Abadia Foundation attributes the demand for such designs to dissatisfaction with global one-style-fits-all fashions, as young consumers search for a distinctive style that expresses their own identity.

This trend among young consumers corresponds to the work of a generation of young designers whose creativity is bound up with the expres-

sion of their national and cultural identity. They have achieved prominence despite a lack of previous commercial experience in marketing locally-inspired designs and the invisibility of cultural diversity in local and international markets. Such designers thus have an opportunity to play a role in the development of the national cultural scene across its various sub-sectors.<sup>(36)</sup>

This change in artistic expression has structural causes, related to the kinds of opportunities available to designers from different generations. The new generation of designers has embarked on a path distinct from that of their predecessors, who were forced to leave the Kingdom to study design or to work in the field. The experience and expertise of older designers developed in an international context, without Saudi government support or societal acceptance. In contrast, new designers have been active at a time of investment in national talent by different cultural and governmental sectors.

### **Fashion as a Cultural Field Under the Ministry of Culture**

Formal celebration of the fashion industry within the Kingdom began in April 2018 with the Riyadh inauguration of "Arab Fashion Week," which hosted local, regional, and international designers. Several fashion exhibitions were organized over the course of the four-day event. With the establishment of the Ministry of Culture the same year, the fashion industry became one of the 16 cultural fields that the ministry sought to expand and support. The Ministry's strategy includes the es-

tablishment of a special entity for the fashion sector which was inaugurated in March 2019. This official institution has conferred meaningful support for the ongoing efforts to expand the field, whether through the Ministry of Culture or other parties such as the General Entertainment Authority. Two professional events were held with the participation of local, regional, and international supporters during Riyadh Season: the Conference on the Future of Fashion, organized by the Ministry of Culture, held from November 4-6, 2019, and the "I Am an Arab Woman" exhibit, organized by the General Entertainment Authority, held from November 10-15.

The Future of Fashion Conference grappled with a problem that has hindered the development of the fashion industry and discouraged local and international investment: lack of awareness of the field, its importance, and its reach within the Kingdom. The conference focused on the idea of fashion as an industry in which many parties play roles as important as that of the designers who develop new ideas. The event was attended by local and foreign designers with a strong international following. The event provided a venue for a wide range of interested parties to gather in one place under government sponsorship, and in so doing encouraged them to network in the interest of the national fashion industry. Additionally, the conference provided a limited glimpse of what the industry must do to achieve its goals. These include the economic goal of becoming a source of national revenue and the cultural goal of supporting innovation and promoting local talents as cultural ambassadors of the Kingdom.

# Saudi Fashion in the World

For many years, Saudi designers have been able to build global reputations and fanbases abroad through their participation in fashion weeks, competitions, and exhibitions in cities such as London, Paris, and Dubai. The first Saudi designer to take part in an international fashion week was Adnan Akbar, who showed his work

at Milan Fashion Week in 1982.<sup>(37)</sup> He was followed by Yahya Al Bishri, who participated in Paris Fashion Week in 1990 and who designed the dress worn by Princess Diana when she visited the Kingdom the same year.<sup>(38)</sup> Also well known are Saudi designers who have settled abroad, such as Mohamed Ashi, owner of Ashi

Studio, who previously worked for Elie Saab Fashion House in Beirut and later Givenchy Fashion House, before establishing his own label in 2007. The presence of Saudi designers has grown both regionally and internationally, earning them invitations to Fashion Weeks around the world.

**Table 3-3:** Selected Fashion Week events that have seen Saudi participation

Designer/Label	Category	Event	Year
Adnan Akbar	Haute couture Evening and Wedding Dresses for Women	Milan Fashion Week	1982
Yahya Al Bishri	Men's, Women's, and Children's Clothing	Paris Fashion Week	1990
Turki Jadallah	Haute couture Evening and Wedding Dresses for Women	London Fashion Week <sup>(39)</sup>	2013
Abadia	Luxury Modern and Traditional Clothing	Paris Fashion Week	2016, 2017, 2018
Mohammed Ashi	Haute couture Evening Dresses	Paris Fashion Week	2017 <sup>(40)</sup>
ArAm by Arwa Alammari	Women's Clothing	Dubai Fashion Week	2018
Omaima Azouz	Women's Clothing	The Spanish-Arab Fashion Festival	2018



Meanwhile Layla Albassam has won numerous local prizes for her research in documenting traditional clothing in the Kingdom. In 2012 she received the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Award for Research on the History of the Arabian Peninsula, and in 2019 the Order of King Khalid, Third Class. In 2013, the researcher Tahani Al-Ajaji received the Award for Cultural Innovation from the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) for a work entitled "Recording Ornamentation Styles in the Najd Desert in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Using Video Art."

Table 3-4 includes selected prizes awarded to Saudis in the field of fashion design.

**Table 3-4:** Local and regional awards in the field of fashion

Individual	Label/Project	Won	Year
Adnan Akbar	Adnan Akbar Brand	Triumph Grand Prize of European Excellence from the Comité de l'Excellence Européenne <sup>(41)</sup>	1988
Yousef Akbar	Yousef Akbar Brand	FLAIR Best Tailoring and Designer of the Year; TAFE Eveningwear Award; The Design Institute of Australia Graduate of the Year Award <sup>(42)</sup>	2013
Reem Al-Kanhal	RK Design	Best Fashion Designer, Arab Women of the Year <sup>(43)</sup> Awards in the Kingdom	2015
Noura Al-Damer	Chador, Inc., for Traditional Clothing and Abayas	Vogue Saudi Talent Scouting <sup>(44)</sup>	2016
Nouf Hakeem and Mariam Bin Mahfouz	Haal Inc. Trademark for Abayas	Vogue Saudi Talent Scouting <sup>(45)</sup>	2016
Omaima Azouz	Omaima Azouz Brand	Honorary Medal for Best Gulf Designer from the Spanish Ministry of Tourism	2017
Nora Al-Shaikh	Nora Al-Shaikh Brand	Forbes Prize for Leaders Inspiring a Kingdom	2014
Hatem Al-Akeel	Toby Brand	Best Regional Fashion Designer from Esquire Awards <sup>(46)</sup>	2018
Arwa Al-Banawi	Arwa Al-Banawi Brand	Best Regional Fashion Designer from Grazia Style Awards, 2019 <sup>(47)</sup>	2019

Due to increasing interest in the fashion world from magazines devoted to the topic, Grazia held a competition called Grazia Style Awards KSA 2018, where a number of Saudi fashion designers and models were nominated for different prizes.<sup>(48)</sup> These include: "Emerging Talent," won by Alanoud Badr; "Digital Talent," won by Saudi model Taleeda Tamer; and, in the category of "Art and Culture," Saudi jewelry designer Nadine Attar won "Local Designer of the Year."<sup>(49)</sup>

Additionally, Vogue Fashion Experience: Jeddah was held in Jeddah to promote young Saudi designers in April 2016. Of ten nominees, two--Noura Al-Damer's Chador, Inc., as well as Nouf Hakeem and

Mariam bin Mahfouz's Haal, Inc.--won awards.<sup>(50)</sup> Furthermore, international labels have became interested in collaborating on design, modeling, and advertising projects with Saudis involved in the fashion industry. In 2017, designer Arwa Al-Banawi collaborated with Adidas in to produce a line called "P.E."<sup>(51)</sup> In the field of modeling, Taleeda Tamer became the first Saudi woman ever to participate in Paris Fashion Week, wearing a line by Italian designer Antonio Grimaldi in July 2018.<sup>(52)</sup>

### 2019 and New Horizons

In May 2019, the role of Saudi designers on the national cultural scene became even more visible

when Saudi designer Arwa Al-Banawi led the first Saudi women's soccer team to the World Cup in Copenhagen, Denmark. The women's team wore jerseys bearing the slogan "We are a Kingdom" to underscore the cultural diversity of Saudi Arabia. The team also included participants from different regions.<sup>(53)</sup>

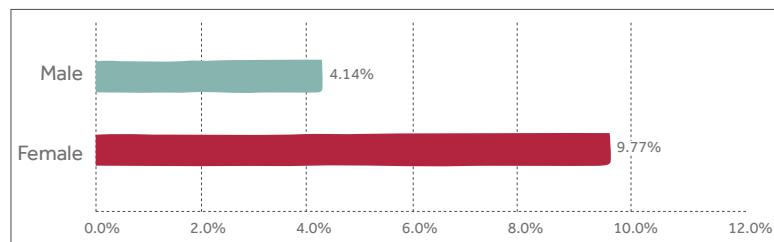
Additionally, Adabia, Inc., collaborated with the Saudi Sports for All Federation to design soccer jerseys for these young women. The design represented the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the Global Goals World Cup held on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.<sup>(54)</sup>

# 2019 Cultural Participation Survey

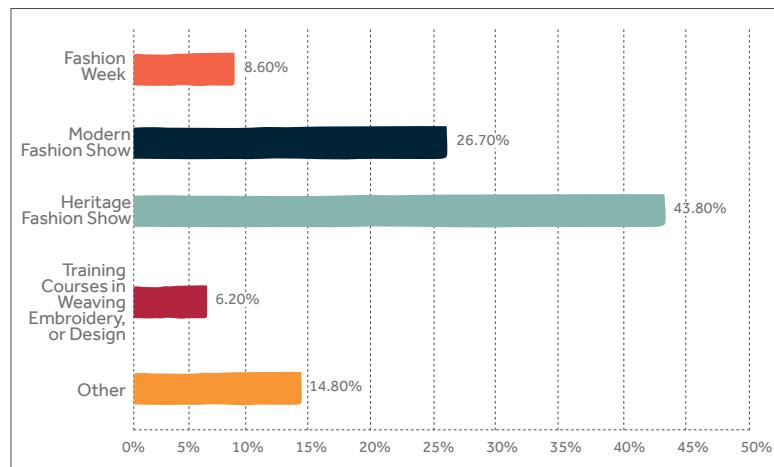
The 2019 Cultural Participation Survey found that approximately 6.69% of Saudi adults have attended events in the fashion industry over the last 12 months. This statistic demonstrates that there is a reasonable amount of interest in the field, despite its niche contents and the limited number of these events. It also indicates a strong connection between gender and participation: women have an almost 10% participation rate, while less than 5% of men have attended fashion-related events.

As for the types of activities, community participation is highest at traditional fashion exhibitions (43% of attendance), while events for sewing, embroidery, and design had significantly lower attendance (6.2% of attendance). This suggests that consumer interest in fashion is far greater than manufacturer interest.

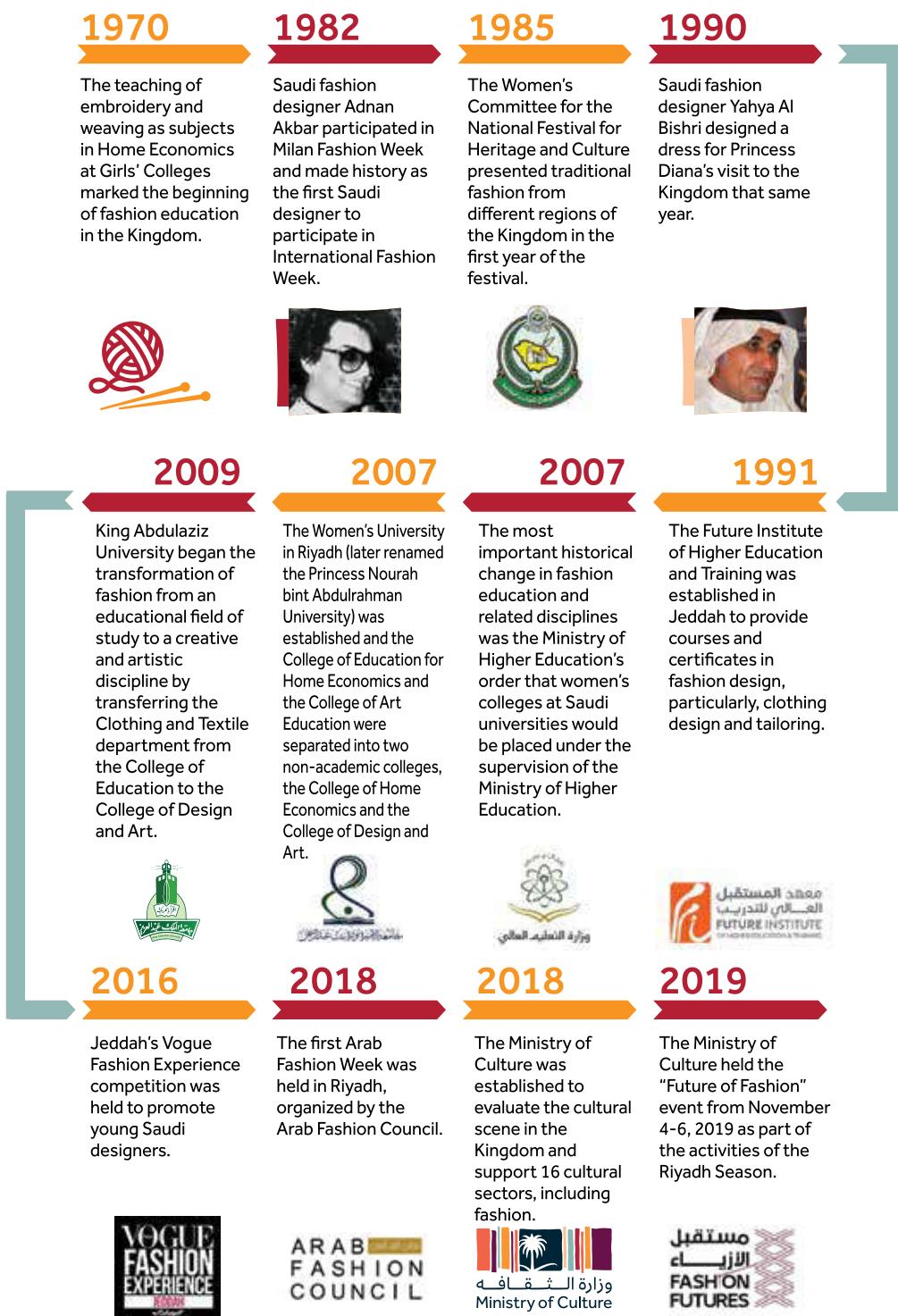
**Figure 3-1: Fashion event attendance in KSA (past 12 months), by gender**



**Figure 3-2: Distribution of attendees at fashion events by type of activity**



## Key Moments for Saudi Fashion



## Infrastructure and Investment

Clothing, fabrics, and shoes are among the Arabia main expenditures of Saudi individuals and families, whether citizens or residents. Monthly expenditures on these items by individuals average 108

SAR, which amounts to 4.3% of the average individual monthly income. Average monthly expenditures on the same items by families total approximately 492 SAR, or about 3.8% of cumulative family income.<sup>(55)</sup>

Demand for opportunities to establish a strong local fashion industry has increased. To lay the groundwork for innovative cultural projects, local production focuses on traditional clothing design (in particular, the thobe and the abaya), but infrastructure is still in need of considerable development. Saudis working in this field today are limited to buying and selling imported products, given the weak market for local designs of clothing and jewelry for men, women, and children.

**Table 3-5:** Average individual and family expenditures on textiles and clothing<sup>(56)</sup>

Year	Value	Percentage
<b>Average Individual Monthly Expenditures</b>		
2018	108	4.3%
2013	125	5.6%
2007	N/A	N/A

Year	Value	Percentage
<b>Average Family Monthly Expenditures</b>		
2018	492	3.8%
2013	649	5.6%
2007	689	6.7%



**Table 3-6:** Saudi exports and imports of textiles and derived products<sup>(57)</sup>

Year	Exports	Imports	Percentage of KSA Imports <sup>(58)</sup>
<b>Material Value of Saudi Fabric Exports and Imports and Their Products</b>			
2014	2.338 Million SAR	20.229 Million SAR	-
2015	2.259 Million SAR	21.627 Million SAR	-
2016	1.892 Million SAR	20.049 Million SAR	3.8%
2017	2.053 Million SAR	18.830 Million SAR	3.7%
2018	2.082 Million SAR	18.115 Million SAR	3.5%
Total	10.569 Million SAR	98.850 Million SAR	-

With the appearance of the first entrepreneurial designer and small and medium enterprises focusing on the creative dimension of the industry, the growing fashion sector needs to connect these players in an integrated ecosystem, which the Kingdom currently lacks. The state of the sector's infrastructure and its challenges will be reviewed in the following section.

### Education, the Market, and Handicrafts

The number of Saudis who work in fashion-related professions is between 899 and 925 women and 26 men (1.7% percent of the total workforce). In Table 3-8, it is apparent that most of these employees work in production, primarily in general tailoring and men's tailor-

ing. Conversely, the documents do not indicate any Saudi citizen on the creative side of the field, such as fashion design, compared to 1,271 non-Saudis. This does not mean that Saudi designers are absent from creative roles, but rather, that their work in the industry is based primarily on freelance or online commerce platforms instead of contracts with large brands.

**Table 3-7:** Department of Labor statistics for the fashion industry (2019)

Profession	Saudi			Non-Saudi			Overall
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Tailoring - Suits				166	9	175	175
Tailoring -Pants				53	4	57	57
General Tailoring	18	626	644	13,392	602	13,994	14,638
Men's Tailoring	8	226	234	18,403	16	18,419	16,653
Tailoring - Traditional Clothing				87	5	92	92
Women's Tailoring				8,539	5,727	14,266	14,266
Custom Arab Clothing				1,952	111	2,063	2,063
Producers of Clothing Samples				11	1	12	12
Fashion Design				855	416	1,271	1,271
Fashion Detailing		47	47	1,386	352	1,738	1,785
Totals	26	899	925	44,844	7,243	52,087	53,012

Despite these low percentages, the growing number of educational programs and fashion design colleges have produced new cohorts of Saudis ready to enter the field (459 graduates during the 2018 academic year).<sup>(59)</sup> However, some working in the field have noted that current students, as well as university graduates, have little expertise due to the lack of prior opportunities to gain experience in factories, production lines, or fashion houses.<sup>(60)</sup> This pushes local brands and designers to base their operations out of countries that provide their workforce with greater experience, an exodus exacerbated by the rising cost of local fashion production. Due, furthermore, to the limited scope of fashion and production training facilities in Saudi Arabia, brands and designers may feel compelled to train employees at internal academies and institutions, or abroad.<sup>(61)</sup>

### Designers and Production Lines

Fashion production suffers from a lack of factories or production lines that permit designers to operate continuously and produce desired sizes and quantities at reasonable prices. The dearth of these facilities leads to an over-reliance on tailors' shops or few existing factories owned by brands such as Lomar and Abadia, which encourages outsourcing production in order to achieve the appropriate quality at a reasonable price.<sup>(62)</sup> Those working in the field must also contend with a multitude of problems including a shortage of textiles and raw materials of sufficient quality;<sup>(63)</sup> a lack of reliable suppliers; rising costs of trustworthy suppliers; difficulty in finding samples; and an absence of laboratories and technologies required to work with raw materi-

als used in the production of luxury jewelry.<sup>(64)</sup> It is also worth noting that the local market is focused on retail. According to the Ministry of Commerce, there are currently 765 operations and registered organizations in the fashion trade sector, including clothing, fabrics, perfumes, cosmetics, accessories, and more. These are usually based in major cities such as Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam, and Al-Abha, with little presence in other regions.<sup>(65)</sup>

The retail market relies on imports from abroad. As of 2019, there is a large gap between Saudi imports and exports of textiles and related products. According to the General Authority for Statistics, a survey of industrial textile and clothing establishments by size from 2017 to 2018 yielded the following results:

**Table 3-8: Industrial activity<sup>(66)</sup>**

Economic Activity	Year	Extremely small (fewer than 5 users)	Small (6-49)	Medium (50-249)	Large (250+)	Overall
Production of Textiles	2017	2,015	280	78	18	2,391
	2018	2,050	285	80	18	2,433

Economic Activity	Year	Extremely small (fewer than 5 users)	Small (6-49)	Medium (50-249)	Large (250+)	Overall
Production of Clothing	2017	30,701	2,137	99	32	32,960
	2018	31,214	2,173	101	23	33,511



## Designer Exhibitions and Outlets

Designers endeavor to participate in permanent and seasonal exhibitions and bazaars to display their works publicly, but they face the challenge of rising costs for exhibitions or permanent spaces, even at charitable bazaars. Additionally, the rising cost of marketing and advertising has hindered the growth of some entrepreneurial projects.<sup>(67)</sup> Industry workers note that opportunities, such as pop-up stores or concept stores that take a portion of sales in exchange for permanent or temporary exhibition spaces, are rare.<sup>(68)</sup> Moving forward, local fash-

ion competitions could be held to help designers get exposure, raise awareness of local fashion production, give designers an opportunity to develop their skills and highlight their abilities, and increase the visibility of fashion overall. Some limited and individual efforts in this vein have already begun. For example, the Committee of Fashion Design at Jeddah Chamber, under the supervision of five Saudi designers, traveled to Cairo to participate in a fashion competition in 2017.<sup>(69)</sup> Additionally, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University holds an annual exhibition for the Department of Fashion Design attended by interested parties and investors

looking for skilled employees. This is in addition to holding competitions for fashion and accessories with the collaboration of Saudi clothing and textile companies.<sup>(70)</sup>

Demand for virtual marketing continues to grow as an alternative for designers, merchants, and consumers. A study carried out by the Jeddah Chamber found that 47% of people buy shoes, clothing, and accessories both on the internet and at traditional markets. The study also found that 13.5% of them buy clothing monthly, while another 15.8% buy shoes monthly; conversely, 52% prefer traditional shopping only.<sup>(71)</sup>



**Endnote:**

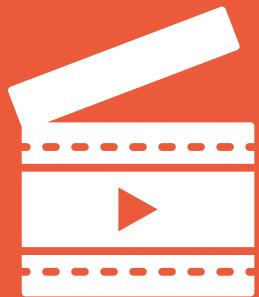
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Chapter Four

# 4





# Films

- **Film: Historical Overview**
- **Saudi Film Today**
- **Awards and Achievements**
- **Saudi Film in the World**
- **2019 Cultural Participation Survey**
- **Infrastructure and Investment**

## Film: Historical Overview

The decades-long absence of movie theaters in the Kingdom might give the impression that cinema culture was also absent until the opening of movie theatres in 2018. However, different kinds of cinemas were widely available until they disappeared from the Kingdom. The earliest were located in residential compounds built for employees of Aramco (then called the Arabian American Oil Company) in Dhahran in the 1930s.<sup>(1)</sup> In the early 1950s, ahwash (courtyard) cinemas—that is, screenings in open spaces surrounded by houses—emerged in several Saudi cities. Each such cinema came to be known by the name of its owner.<sup>(2)</sup> In addition, a number of Saudi athletic clubs contained movie theatres, a practice which continued until the end of the 1970s. These cinemas were for men only.<sup>(3)</sup>





### State Television Channels

The launch of Saudi state broadcasting in 1965 made television a platform for films.<sup>(4)</sup> Films such as Sa'ad Al-Fraih's *Remorse* (*Ta'nib al-Dameer*, 1966), considered the first Saudi film, were widely shown on so-called TV Nights.<sup>(5)</sup> During this period, as TV stations opened in Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam, the production of dramas began. Soon after, a group of pioneering actors, including Sa'ad Khidr, Mohammed Al-Mfarrah, Mohammed Hamza, Lutfi Zaini, and Mohammad Al-Ali, participated in the production of television drama series.<sup>(6)</sup> These actors relied on their unique skills and work ethic to write and produce drama series despite the lack of professional resources. The first actors in the Kingdom began their careers in the 1970s and 1980s in university theaters or athletic clubs, which were under the auspices of the General Presidency of Youth Welfare (GPYW), before moving onto the theaters of the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA).<sup>(7)</sup>

Television production expanded in the 1980s when a number of artists

and investors opened private production companies.<sup>(8)</sup> Lutfi Zaini, for example, opened a company in Tunisia, while Mohammed Hamza opened one in Jeddah. These companies collaborated with Tunisia, Lebanon, and Egypt to produce Saudi works. This period also saw the opening of ARA International, a production company owned by Waleed Al-Ibrahim, in Riyadh, as well as Al-Salim, a production company owned by Mohammad Al-Ali, which produced classic dramas for television.

### Early Film Production

Prior to the launch of Saudi state television, film production in the Kingdom was limited. It began in 1950 when Aramco produced a film entitled *The Fly* (*Al-Thubab*) to raise health awareness. Because the lead, Dr. Hassan Al-Ghanim, was a Saudi, historians and critics consider it the first Saudi film. It was shot in the city of Al-Qatif, with contributions from a Hollywood production team.<sup>(9)</sup>

According to several critics, the first Saudi film to be officially produced in the Kingdom and to participate in

an international festival was Assassination of a City (Iqliiyah Madinah) (1976). It was directed and produced by groundbreaking Saudi filmmaker Abdullah Al-Muhaisen. The Kingdom's first Hollywood film, Island of Allah, was produced and directed by Richard Lyford in 1956, with the participation of a number of local actors.<sup>(10)</sup> Most local film production was carried out by Al-Muhaisen's private production company until the early 1990s, as he was at that time "the only director" in the Kingdom.<sup>(11)</sup> Then, Saudi feature film production ceased until the beginning of the new millennium.

Saudi producers and directors nevertheless continued to do pioneering work in the Arab world. Fouad Bakhsh, for example, produced the Egyptian film And Love Remains (Wa Yabqa Al-Hub) in 1987, starring Farid Shawqi and Suhair Ramzi.<sup>(12)</sup> Another trailblazer, Muhammad Fawzi Al-Qazzaz, produced approximately 14 feature films.<sup>(13)</sup>

### From Local Dramas to the Introduction of Global Film

In 1993, Saudi television began airing the series Tash Ma Tash, a satirical sketch comedy show that ran for eighteen seasons and dealt with various issues that Saudis face in their daily lives. It aired during Ramadan, when viewership is highest, and became the best known Saudi series.<sup>(14)</sup> Although VCRs became more common and shops selling videotapes spread throughout the Kingdom in the 1980s and 1990s, there were still no movie theatres, leading Saudi Arabia to become one of the largest consumers of videotapes in the world.<sup>(15)</sup> The lack of cinemas also led to demand for local films, like Travel Companions (Rifaqat Darb) and Humood and Muhayeed, which starred Nasser Al Qasabi and Abdullah Al-Sadhan and were aired as TV Nights in the 1980s.<sup>(16)</sup> Additionally, Saudi audiences became increasingly familiar with global film and television pro-

duction, particularly after the advent of satellite channels, which began to gradually enter Saudi homes in the mid-1990s.

As soon as the internet became available to the general public in 1999, Saudi engagement with the film industry increased.<sup>(17)</sup> Hani Al-Sultan's online forum Cinemac (founded in 2000) attracted thousands of members from different regions of the kingdom. Many went on to play key roles in the development of cinema and television as critics, writers, or directors after writing for the cultural supplements of official newspapers.<sup>(18)</sup>

### The Return of Production

Saudi film production returned in the early 2000s, although it began slowly and until recently was limited to short films. Among the few platforms for screening Saudi films at that time were festivals held in the United Arab Emirates. Nevertheless, there was a wave of short films produced mainly by amateurs beginning in 2003. Although a number of them won prizes at several Gulf and Arab film festivals, they were, naturally, both technically weak and artistically deficient: screenplays were poor and casts had limited acting ability. Feature film production began in 2006 when two films were produced in the Kingdom. The first, Shadows of Silence (Thilal Al-Samt), marked the return of the established director Abdullah Al-Muhaisen to the scene. It competed in several international festivals and was screened at the King Fahd Cultural Center in Riyadh at the Saudi Intellectuals Forum in 2011.<sup>(19)</sup> The second film, What's Up? (Keef Al-Haal), was a significant milestone, as it was the



first Saudi film to be screened commercially. It was produced by Rotana and filmed in the UAE.<sup>(20)</sup> In 2007, Rotana produced another feature film, Menahi, which was based on a Saudi comedy series of the same name. It was the first Saudi film to be officially screened in the Kingdom in three cities in 2008 before the screening was discontinued. However, the film was well received by the Saudi audiences.<sup>(21)</sup>

### From Critics to Filmmakers: Film Festivals

Due to the absence of screening platforms within the Kingdom, ambitious filmmakers, who were growing in number, could have their work screened only at festivals. Film festivals were introduced to the Kingdom when the director of the Eastern Province Literary Club, the poet Ahmed Al-Mulla, decided to hold film screenings at the club's headquarters in Dammam in 2005, provoking some controversy. In 2008, at Al-Mulla's suggestion, a film festival was launched in Dammam under the name Saudi Film Competition, with refrained from using the word "cinema" in its name.<sup>(22)</sup> The acceptance standards were low as the competition's primary goal was to "attract a large number of novice filmmakers and lower barriers to entry."<sup>(23)</sup>

In 2006, the Jeddah Festival for Film Screenings was launched under the administration of film director Mamduh Salim. Eight short films from Saudi Arabia along with additional films from the Gulf participated in the festival.<sup>(24)</sup> At first, the festival only screened films, but in its second year, it became a competition with prizes for different film categories in order to provide a competitive atmo-



sphere for filmmakers.<sup>(25)</sup> Due to the popularity of the Dammam event, a third edition of the Jeddah Festival was held that same year, 2008, under the name Jeddah Film Festival. This name change made the festival's goal clear, resulting in a higher attendance rate than the previous two years and a larger number of participants, with 46 films. Nevertheless, the fourth edition of the festival was cancelled.<sup>(26)</sup> In the years that followed, film festivals and competitions were suspended in the Kingdom. This lasted until 2015 when the Saudi Film Competition returned with a new name, the Saudi Film Festival. It is now held annually.<sup>(27)</sup>

Television festivals and competitions began in 2012 when Rotana Media Group organized the first Festival of Saudi Film, which stopped after its second edition the following year.<sup>(28)</sup> Rotana also provided platforms for screening the winning films.<sup>(29)</sup> The first official program to fund Saudi films was Through Saudi Eyes, which was launched on

MBC.<sup>(30)</sup> The program aims to support Saudi talent and to make up for the absence of film festivals in the Kingdom.<sup>(31)</sup> 30 short films, directed by fifteen young Saudi directors, were selected for screening on the channel.<sup>(32)</sup>

### Youth Involvement

In the midst of these developments, a new group of young actors with new ideas and aspirations began to be featured on television. In 2008, the first season of the series 37 Degrees (37 Darajah), directed by Sameer Arif, was aired on MBC, featuring a number of young novice actors. Although these inexperienced actors ultimately made the series "artistically unsuccessful," it paved the way for the expansion of youth participation in the industry.<sup>(33)</sup>

Youth participation reached its peak when independent production on the digital platform YouTube began. The popularity of this platform

reflected the extent of Saudi youth interest in and passion for filmmaking. Youth production on YouTube coincided with the global spread of digital streaming platforms like Netflix and Hulu. In 2010, a group of young amateurs produced short comedy videoclips, which garnered a high number of views in a short time. One such video, "Thursday Cheesecake" (Cheesecake Al-Khamis), produced by Alaa Yoosef Faden and Ali Al-Kalthami, parodied a TV commercial. Within days it had been viewed thousands of times on YouTube. Another popular comedy clip was "The Last Suhur" (Alsuhoor Alakheer), produced by Abdul Majeed Al-Kenani and directed by Bader Al-Homoud in the Eastern Province. That same year, the first Saudi YouTube channel was founded under the name "Sah" ("Correct") in Riyadh through the collaboration between Mohammed Bazaid, Tariq Al-Husayni, Hazim Al-Jaryan, Hossam El-Helwa, and Nawaf Al-Mehana; it was funded and supported by the famous Abu Nawaf Network and BAB International Corporation.<sup>(34)</sup>

The fact that YouTube is free and easy to use made it a readily available option for Saudi directors seeking to screen their not-for-profit and amateur works. YouTube allowed them to reach Saudi audiences directly, despite the absence of domestic screening platforms. In 2011, Al-Homoud and Al-Kenani wrote the screenplay Monopoly, which Al-Homoud also directed. The film received a million views in one week.<sup>(35)</sup> Its subject—the housing crisis and idle lands in the Kingdom, treated satirically—inspired thousands of reactions] on social media and in newspapers. In 2012, the film won the prizes for Best Documentary Film and Best Director at the Festival of Saudi Film, which was held by Rotana.<sup>(36)</sup>

In 2010, Anmar Fatahaldeen founded a Jeddah digital content production company called Utturn, which became a leading producer of special content on YouTube. In 2011, Ali Al-Kalthami and Alaa Yoosef Faden founded Telfaz11 in Riyadh to support creative content production. Its programs include Keep

it to yourself! (La Yekthar!) and The Crocodile (Al-Timsah). In 2012, Abdul Majeed Al-Kenani founded SceenTV, a digital content production company in Dammam. It produced several programs, including Logaimat, hosted by Al-Kenani.<sup>(37)</sup> In 2011, Malik Nejer created a channel to screen the animated program Masameer in Riyadh, before becoming a founder of Lumink Studio, which produced Masameer and other programs. In 2015, the team behind Lumink founded Myrkott Animation Studio.<sup>(38)</sup> Programs on these companies' channels have logged millions of views and encouraged local companies to advertise on YouTube.

### Beginnings of Global Recognition

The rise of digital production coincided with a steady increase in film production. In the landmark year of 2012, Saudi film gained international recognition with the release of director Haifaa Al-Mansour's Wadjda, which featured a Saudi cast and showcased Saudi identity. The film won three prizes at the Venice International Film Festival, making it the first Saudi feature to win a prize at this festival<sup>(39)</sup> and to be screened commercially internationally.<sup>(40)</sup> It was also nominated for a British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) award in the Best Foreign Film category,<sup>(41)</sup> and was nominated in the preliminary round for an Oscar in 2013, making it the first Saudi film to gain such extensive global recognition.<sup>(42)</sup> In 2013, the short film Woman (Hurmah), directed by Ahd Kamel, participated in the official competition for short films at the Berlin Film Festival, making it the first Saudi film to participate in this festival.<sup>(43)</sup>

## Key Figures for 2019

# 101

Saudi films produced according to the General Commission for Audiovisual Media, 20 of which were long films, 66 of which were short films, and 15 were documentaries.

# 9

## Winners

The number of Saudi films that won international awards, while approximately 15 others were nominated.

# 12

Commercial cinemas in the Kingdom, of which eight (8) are in Riyadh, one (1) is in Dammam, two (2) are in Jeddah, and one (1) is in Jazan. There has been a total of 4 million visitors since the cinemas were opened.

# 340

The total entries in the fifth Saudi Film Festival, of which 89 were nominated in the unproduced screenplays category, 37 were nominated in the Feature Film competitions, and 18 were nominated in other categories.

# 1000

Works of fiction were entered in the second year of the Ithra Center's Saudi Film Days competition, of which 8 won awards.



"The Book of Sun," directed by Faris Godus and produced by Sohayb Godus, and "Forty Years and One Night," directed by Mohammed Alholayyl and produced by Abdulrahman Khawji, won and split this prize.

# 40

## Million Saudi Riyal

The Ministry of Culture held a competition to support local film production with a prize of up to 40 million Saudi riyals per project called the Tamheed Fund. The Red Sea International Film Festival Foundation hosted the competition.



# Saudi Film Today

## From Amateur Efforts to a Semi-Professional Industry

Various Saudi films have helped local production progress to new stages. Mahmoud Sabbagh's 2016 feature film Barakah Meets Barakah (Barakah Yukabil Barakah), produced by Al-Housh Productions, was screened at Arab and international festivals and became the first Saudi feature to be shown at the Berlin Film Festival. It received a number of prizes at other festivals,

and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences accepted SASCA's nomination of the film for the Oscars in the Best Foreign Film category.<sup>(44)</sup> In October 2017, Sabbagh announced a deal granting Netflix the exclusive right to screen the film worldwide (except in the Middle East) for ten years, making it the first Saudi film to be disseminated on the platform.<sup>(45)</sup> Meanwhile, Ayman Tariq Jamal directed Bilal (2016), which depicts the illustrious Companion of the Prophet. This

"graphic film"<sup>(46)</sup> was a joint Saudi-Emirati production whose global animation technology was the work of an international team. The film was shown in commercial venues in 32 countries<sup>(47)</sup> and was nominated in the preliminary round for the Oscars that same year.<sup>(48)</sup> In 2017, it was screened in the Kingdom as part of Hakaya MiSK Festival and at the King Fahd Cultural Center in Riyadh.<sup>(49)</sup> In 2019, it was shown in Riyadh and Jeddah cinemas (after they opened) for one week.<sup>(50)</sup>



## Development and Support Efforts

Some sporadic efforts have been made to support growing local production, which is largely of an amateur nature. Since its founding in 2015, the MiSK Foundation, a philanthropic organization, has played a major role in supporting the industry by creating new platforms for film screenings, including the Shoof Forum<sup>(51)</sup> and the Hakaya MiSK Festival, and spotlighting actors in the field.

In 2016, the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra), which is under the purview of Saudi Aramco, launched Saudi Film Days, which held a competition for professional directors, both male and female, and granted the winning films financial support for production. In addition, winning scripts were provided with consultations and artistic workshops, as well as support to participate in festivals and events, both locally and abroad. The Ithra Center then produced the ten winning films (nine short films and one short narrative film) and nominated seven of them (six films and one documentary) to participate in a major two-day event in Los Angeles, California. The event included screenings of the films for American critics, stars, and directors. The filmmakers also toured Hollywood production companies such as Warner Bros and Paramount Studios. As part of the Kingdom's official international cultural tours, the films were shown throughout the following year (2017), at international festivals in Britain and the United States, and within Saudi Arabia.<sup>(52)</sup>



## Platforms for Supporting Films

Some digital content production companies like Telfaz11 support Saudi independent films by buying screening rights. In 2016, short films, including Atwa, directed by Abdulaziz Alshlahei,<sup>(53)</sup> Detective (Dabet Mabaheth),<sup>(54)</sup> directed by Dawood Al-Shuail, and Men's Barbershop (Salon Rijal),<sup>(55)</sup> directed by Mishal Al-Hulail, appeared on YouTube, as did the short film Aayesh, which was directed and produced by Abdullah Al-Eyaf and starred Ibrahim Al-Hsawi.<sup>(56)</sup> This film and its star won a number of local and international prizes.

A number of filmmakers, including Ali Al-Kalthami, the founder of Telfaz11, began their careers on YouTube. His 2017 film Wasati, produced by Ithra, won the prizes for Best Foreign Film and Best Director

at the Williamsburg Film Festival in the United States.<sup>(57)</sup> Ali Al-Saumayin directed the YouTube series My Burger (Burger\_Te, 2014). His 2017 film I Can't Kiss Myself won the prizes for Best Feature Film and Best Actor in the Short Film Competition at the King Fahd Cultural Center in Riyadh in 2018,<sup>(58)</sup> as well as the prize for Best Cinematography at the Saudi Film Festival in 2017.<sup>(59)</sup> Two brothers, Faris and Sohayb Godus, directed the comedy film Depressing Scene (Wa min Ka'abat Almanthar), which participated in Saudi Film Days in 2016.<sup>(60)</sup> Abdulrahman Sandokji directs documentary films, of which one, Ice (Jaleed), won the Short Film Competition Prize and the Jury Prize at the Saudi Film Festival in 2017.<sup>(61)</sup> His Alzheimer's and The Cave (Alkahf) both appeared in 2019. Director and screenwriter Meshal Aljaser also began his career with Telfaz11 and has been uploading his

short films to the channel "Folaim Ya Gholaim" since 2012.<sup>(62)</sup> After receiving millions of views, his work moved beyond YouTube. For example, his short film Is Sumiyati Going to Hell? (Sumiyati Btedkhul Alnar?), produced by Ithra, participated in Saudi Film Days.<sup>(63)</sup> It won the prize for Best Foreign Film in the Student Films category at the Los Angeles Independent Film Festival<sup>(64)</sup> and was screened at Cannes Film Festival in 2018, along with eight other Saudi films.<sup>(65)</sup>

### Ministry of Culture: Visual Content Becomes A Cultural Sector and Cinema Returns

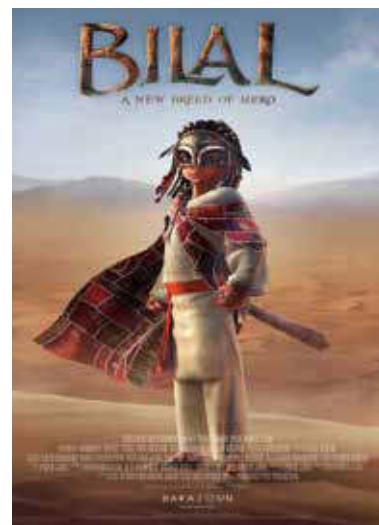
Profound changes have taken place in the film sector since the launch of Vision 2030, which views culture as a part of citizens' daily lives, an economic resource, and a sector for investment. Since the General Authority for Culture was founded in 2016, the film sector has undergone a significant transformation and has

continued to develop. The Authority oversaw the Saudi Film Council, which was established in March 2018 to develop local production and creative content.<sup>(66)</sup> After it participated in the Cannes Film Festival that same year (the Kingdom's first official participation in the festival), the Council announced that it was launching a local grants program to promote local filmmaking by supporting Saudi films in the production and post-production phases. It also announced the International Partnerships Program to build talent in the Kingdom by cooperating with the global film community.<sup>(67)</sup>

The Ministry of Media's announcement that it would allow licenses to be issued for movie theatres in December 2017 was a key turning point.<sup>(68)</sup> On April 18, 2018, the first cinema was opened in the King Abdullah Financial District in Riyadh after Saudi Entertainment Ventures reached a deal with the American company AMC to operate its cinemas in the Kingdom.<sup>(69)</sup> Then, com-

mercial cinemas were opened in Riyadh and other cities.

The Ministry of Culture was established in June 2018 and tasked with cultural affairs in the Kingdom.<sup>(70)</sup> It oversees 16 cultural sectors, including film, which is one of the pillars of culture. The Ministry launched a number of initiatives to support this sector, including the Red Sea International Film Festival and the Daw'





Competition. The Ministry also established the National Film Archive with Ahmed Al-Mulla as its director and founded the Film Commission in early 2020.

The increase in government support in this sector has also affected television production. In 2018, with the founding of the new SBC channel, Saudi Television launched an initiative to support local production by screening four award-winning films every Friday evening for a month.<sup>(71)</sup> Saudi Television featured youth who had risen to fame on social media alongside television stars in series such as *We're in a Tough Situation* (*Haletna Halah*) starring Khalid Al-Farraj, *No Filter* (*Bedoon Filter*) starring Abdullah Al-Sadhan, and *Share Chat* starring Hassan Assiri, Fayez Al-Malki, and Rashid al-Shamrani. This support, however, brought to light certain tensions between traditional television and youth production that reduced the quality of the content.<sup>(72)</sup>

Digital production continues to be centered around YouTube. Despite the popularity of Netflix, Saudi presence on the platform is limited to the film *Barakah Meets Barakah*, Saudi actress and director Ahd Kamil's acting role in the British series *Collateral*, and the American film *Nappily Ever After*, directed by Haifaa Al-Mansour and produced by Netflix.<sup>(73)</sup> However, there are signs that on-demand streaming platforms are growing in the Kingdom. MBC Group, for example, has founded a platform called *Shahid*, the first of its kind in the Arab world, which is building a digital collection of local productions and aims to roll out original Saudi films and series. Additionally, the Saudi Telecom Company offers *Jawwy TV*, a service which allows users to view television programs on demand.<sup>(74)</sup>

Gradual development of film production, especially of feature films, has continued. Haifaa Al-Mansour has made several international ap-

pearances, including winning the IWC Filmmaker Award for the animated film *Miss Camel* (*Malikat Jamal Alibil*) in 2017.<sup>(75)</sup> She also directed a Hollywood film titled *Mary Shelley* in 2018.<sup>(76)</sup> That year, a number of feature films were produced, including *Amra* and *the Second Marriage* (*Amra Wa Al'urs Althani*), directed by Mahmoud Sabbagh, which premiered at the London British Film Institute Festival and participated in the Cairo International Film Festival.<sup>(77)</sup> Abdulmohsen Aldhabaan's film *Last Visit* and Abdulaziz Alshlahei's *Zero Distance* also came out that year and were produced with the support of the Ithra Center as part of the Saudi Film Days Competition.<sup>(78)</sup>

### Film Production in 2019

101 Saudi films were produced in 2019, and have been classified by the General Commission for Audiovisual Media into three categories, shown in Table 4-1.

**Table 4-1:** Numbers and types of Saudi films, classified by the General Commission for Audiovisual Media

Film Type	Number
Feature Films	20
Short Films	66
Documentary Films	15

This increase in feature film production is the result of government support for cinema, which has transformed local production. For example, the Saudi Film Council funded Haifaa Al-Mansour's *The Perfect Candidate* (*Almurashaha Almithaliya*), which was filmed inside the Kingdom, and took part in several international competitions.<sup>(79)</sup> Shahad Ameen directed a feature film titled *Scales* (*Sayidat Al Bahr*), which won Arab and in-

ternational prizes,<sup>(80)</sup> while Raed Alsemari's short film *Dunya's Day* (*Alduya Haflah*), filmed at a private farm in Riyadh Province, won the Short Film Jury Prize at Sundance Film Festival in the United States in January 2019.<sup>(81)</sup> These achievements all took place at the international level.

Despite the opening of cinemas, few domestic Saudi film screenings have taken place. There are

a few exceptions, like Abdulelah Alqurashi's *Roll'em*, which was the first Saudi film to be screened at VOX commercial cinemas in Jeddah and Riyadh.<sup>(82)</sup> However, the company operating the cinemas stopped showing the film after only a week due to "a lack of demand";<sup>(83)</sup> the film was then shown abroad only. The film *Born A King* (*Wulida Malikan*) was subsequently screened at the Ithra Center in September for three days that coincided with National Day celebrations. Then, it ran for months at VOX Cinemas' locations throughout the Kingdom.<sup>(84)</sup> The film tells the story of King Faisal bin Abdulaziz's visit to Britain in 1919. It was produced collaboratively by contributors from the Kingdom, England, and Spain. Bader Al-Samari wrote the screenplay, and Andrés Gomez was the producer; it was filmed in both



Riyadh and London with the participation of 80 Saudis.<sup>(85)</sup>

Digital content production companies, which sprung up in the early days of Saudi YouTube, have recently become groundbreaking production companies in the Kingdom and across the Middle East. For example, Telefaz11 opened an office in Dubai Media City in the United Arab Emirates in September 2019, allowing the company to expand commercially and attract a more diverse clientele.<sup>(86)</sup> Myrkott also announced that it was producing its first animated film, *Masameer*, which was shown in January 2020 in Saudi theatres.<sup>(87)</sup>

Saudi television producers have continued to focus on the Ramadan season. SBC screened drama series like *Penetration* (*Ikhtirak*), which starred top actors from the Gulf and elsewhere in the Arab world,<sup>(88)</sup> and *Let's Drive* (*Yalla Nsoog*), a comedy series which discussed the decision to allow women to drive. Sohayb and Faris Godus directed and wrote episodes for the series *Another Planet* (*Kawkab Aakhar*).<sup>(89)</sup> As for private channels, the most prominent work produced was the series *The Storm*, which was shown on MBC for two seasons (in 2018 and 2019) and marked the return of long drama series to television screens. The series depicted social life in the Kingdom since the 1970s, including the oil boom and the Great Mosque seizure of 1979.

### Growth of Independent Movie Theatres

Two initiatives were launched in the Kingdom in 2019 to strengthen cinema culture in the Kingdom and

by screening art films (rather than commercial films) as well as international films of various styles. These initiatives created Art Houses or cinemas that select films for screening based upon their artistic rather than their commercial value. The first was Historic Jeddah's Al-housh Cinema, an outdoor cinema in an open square that UNESCO has classified a World Heritage Site. Its site on Al-Dhahab Street, which can accommodate 80 viewers, shows films each night throughout Jeddah Season.<sup>(90)</sup> The second initiative, Al Seema, launched in December, is also located in Jeddah. Although the project is still in its early experimental stages, it will include screenings of films, cartoons, and plays.<sup>(91)</sup> Another key addition to the local cinema scene is the Ithra Center movie theatre, which holds daily screenings of Saudi shorts and features that have not yet had a chance to compete commercially.<sup>(92)</sup>

### Festivals and Competitions

Since the revival of film festivals that began with the launch of the second edition of the Saudi Film Competition in 2015,<sup>(93)</sup> local film festivals have become popular thanks to individual efforts throughout the Kingdom. Film festivals have taken place not only in Dammam and Riyadh (where the Short Film Competition, administered by the director Khalid Al-Baz in King Fahd Cultural Center was held in 2016)<sup>(94)</sup> but also in Dumat Al-Jandal Province in the north, where the Abu Ajram Cultural Center launched the Abu Ajram Film Competition in 2017,<sup>(95)</sup> and in Abha, where the Abha Short Film Festival was launched that same year. The

festival lasted three days and was overseen by the Abha branch of the SASCA.<sup>(96)</sup> This branch also organized a Short Social Film Festival in 2018 at the SASCA branch.<sup>(97)</sup> The most prominent festivals of 2019 include:

#### 1. The Saudi Film Festival

This is the new name of the Saudi Film Competition. The SASCA branch in Dammam relaunched it in 2015, beginning with its second edition. SASCA held the third edition in 2016 with the cooperation of the Ithra Center. The festival, in effect, serves as the Kingdom's main film screening platform.

In 2019, the fifth edition of the festival was held in the newly-constructed Ithra Theatre. Ithra also participated in organizing and funding the festival. This year's edition introduced changes, including raising the acceptance standards for participating films. An international team, including Saudi writer and director Hana Al-Omair, was involved in setting the criteria. The festival also devoted attention to cinema and the Saudi novel, organizing a workshop and a seminar on this topic in order to allow screenwriters to develop their skills and "to build a solid literary, philosophical, and intellectual culture" for film projects.<sup>(98)</sup>

#### 2. The General Entertainment Authority (GEA) Challenge

A new competition entered the scene when the General Entertainment Authority launched the GEA Challenge in February–October 2019. Participants from several entertainment fields are eligible for the Challenge, including filmmakers. The other categories are diverse, ranging from acting to cinema makeup.<sup>(99)</sup>

# Awards and Achievements



## Saudi Film Days Competition

In 2018, the second edition of the Saudi Film Days Competition was launched.<sup>(100)</sup> It included nearly one thousand screenplays, eight of which were chosen for production in 2019.<sup>(101)</sup>

**Table 4-2:** List of winning films from the Saudi Film Days competition in 2019

Director	Film	Category
Abdulrahman Sandokji	The Cave	Documentary Film
Abduljalil Al-Nasser	Fifty Thousand Photographs	Short Film
Abdulaziz Alshlahei	Zero Distance	Feature Film
Abdulmohsen Aldhabaan	Last Visit	Feature Film
Deyaa Youssef	Son of Sidra	Short Film
Hossam el-Helwa	Relationship	Short Film
Mohammed Alhamoud	Goin' South	Short Film
Fahad Alestaa	Color of the Soul	Short Film

## 2019 Saudi Film Festival

There were 154 films and 186 screenplays, or 340 works total, entered in this year's contest. Of these, 89 screenplays were nominated for participation in the unproduced screen-

play competition, and 37 films were nominated for the film competition, in addition to 18 films nominated in other categories. The winners, listed below, received the Golden Palm Prize in addition to cash awards.<sup>(102)</sup>

**Table 4-3:** List of prize-winning films at the 2019 Saudi Film Festival

Category	Prize	Film	Director
Feature Film Competition	Special Jury Prize	Son of Sidra	Deyaa Youssef
	Golden Palm Prize for Best Actor	Osama Al-Qass in the film Swan Song	Hana Al-Omair
	Golden Palm Prize for Best Actress	Zara Albalushi in the film Curtain	Mohamed Al-Salman
	Golden Palm Prize for Best Director	Relationship	Hossam el-Helwa
	Golden Palm Prize for Best Feature Film	Zero Distance	Abdulaziz Alshlahei

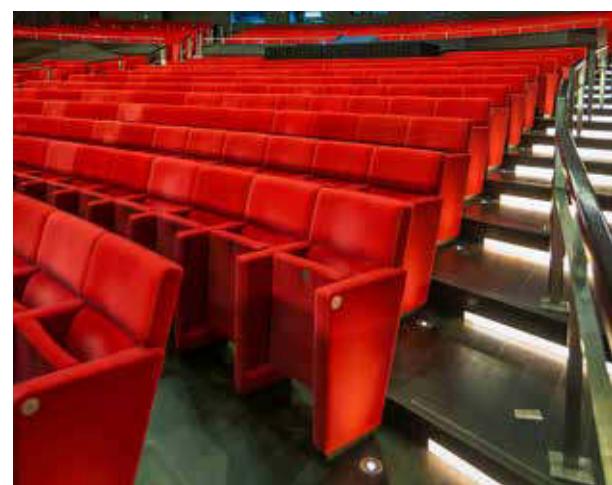
Category	Prize	Film	Director
Student Film Competition	Golden Palm Prize for Best Produced Screenplay	I'm Death	Yaser Hammad
	Golden Palm Prize for Best Actor	Rashed Al-Warthan in the film Burning	Ali Al-Husayn
	Special Jury Prize	Sadeya Left Sultan	Jawahir Al-Aamiri
	Golden Palm Prize for Best Director	Burning	Ali Al-Husayn
	Golden Palm Prize for Best Film	Burning	Ali Al-Husayn
Documentary Film Competition	Golden Palm Prize for Best Production Design	Black	Muhammad Al-Saffar
	Golden Palm Prize for Best Subject	Abu Nasir	Hassan Al-Jirani
	Golden Palm Prize for Best Cinematography	Ploughs	Ahmad Eid
	Special Jury Prize	Mihlaiel	Moath Alofi
	Golden Palm Prize for Best Film	The Cave	Abdulrahman Sandokji
Unproduced Screenplays Competition	Golden Palm Prize for Best First Screenplay	Three Zero	Al-Bandari Al-Baqmi
	Golden Palm Award for Best Second Screenplay	A Writer Forever	Abd Al-Aziz Al-Issa
	Golden Palm Prize for Best Third Screenplay	The Gazelle and The Squirrel	Hawra Al-Dahan
Special Festival Prizes	Golden Palm Prize for Best Film Poster	Red Velvet	Abd Al-Aziz Al-Tuwayjri
	Golden Palm Prize for Best Film about a Saudi City	Mihlaiel	Moath Alofi

### GEA Challenge

The winners in each field received prizes that provided training and financial resources to develop participating talents.<sup>(103)</sup>

**Table 4-4:** List of GEA Challenge winners

Winner	Category	City
Abdulrahman Sandokji	Short Film and Documentary	Riyadh
Faysal Al-Ghanim	Acting	Riyadh
Yara Al-Dayel	Cinema Makeup	Riyadh
Riyad Al-Dusari	Saudi Cartoon	Riyadh
Faysal Buhashi	Comedy Script	Dammam



# Saudi Film in the World

In 2019, films produced by Ithra Center were screened in various countries.<sup>(104)</sup>

**Table 4-5:** List of Ithra film screening locations (2019)

Film	Screening Location
Zero Distance	Al-Ain Film Festival (UAE); New York University Abu Dhabi (UAE); Sharjah International Film Festival for Children and Youth (UAE); Arab Film Festival in Amman (AFFA) (Jordan); Alexandria Film Festival (Egypt)
The Cave	Bridges Initiative event (South Korea)
Last Visit	Karlovy Vary International Film Festival Official Competition of the 68 <sup>th</sup> International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg (Germany)
Fifty Thousand Photographs	Sharjah International Film Festival for Children and Youth (UAE); Bridges Initiative event (South Korea); Beirut International Film Festival (Lebanon)

Many Saudi films won international prizes, the most prominent of which are listed in Table 4-6.

**Table 4-6:** List of Saudi films that won or were nominated for international prizes

Film	Director	Category	Prize	Nomination
Scales	Shahad Ameen	Feature Film	Verona Film Club Award, Venice International Film Festival <sup>(105)</sup> Bronze Tanit, Official Competition of the International Festival of Carthage Best Asian Feature Film, Singapore International Film Festival <sup>(106)</sup>	
Dunya's Day	Raed Alsemari	Feature Film	Jury Award, Sundance Film Festival	
The Perfect Candidate	Haifaa Al-Mansour	Feature Film		Venice International Film Festival <sup>(107)</sup> Toronto International Film Festival <sup>(108)</sup> London Film Festival <sup>(109)</sup>
Social Molds Manual	Raghad Al-Barqi	Short Animated Film		Competed in the Graduation Short Film Category at Annecy International Animation Film Festival <sup>(110)</sup>
Zero Distance	Abdulaziz Alshlahei	Feature Film	Best Artistic Achievement, Nour El-Sherif Competition for Arabic Feature Films at Alexandria Film Festival <sup>(111)</sup>	Nominated for the Golden Falcon Feature Film Prize at Al-Ain Film Festival <sup>(112)</sup>

Film	Director	Category	Prize	Nomination
Roll'em	Abdullah Alqurashi	Feature Film	Golden Gulf Falcon Prize for Best Feature Film at Al-Ain Film Festival <sup>(113)</sup>	
Lost Thekra	Almuhanad Alkadam	Feature Film	Won three prizes, including Best Film at CKF International Film Festival <sup>(114)</sup>	Nominated for 8 international festivals <sup>(115)</sup>
Swan Song	Hana Al-Omair	Feature Film		Nominated for the Official Competition of the Sharm El-Sheikh Asian Film Festival and Göteborg Arab Film Festival in Sweden <sup>(116)</sup>
Last Visit	Abdul-mohsen Aldhabaan	Feature Film	Critics' Choice Award at Marrakech International Film Festival <sup>(117)</sup>	Competed in the Official Competition of the 68 <sup>th</sup> International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg in Germany
Arabian Alien	Meshal Al-Jaser	Feature Film		Nominated for the Official Competition of Sundance Film Festival in 2020 <sup>(118)</sup>
Goin' South	Mohammed Alhamoud	Short Film		Nominated for the Official Competition of the 2020 Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival <sup>(119)</sup>
Hind's Case	Dina Naji	Short Film	Golden Falcon Prize for Best Short Film at Al-Ain Film Festival <sup>(120)</sup>	
Last Circus Days	Mahmoud Al-Sharqawi	Feature Film	Golden Falcon Prize for Best Actor, Mahmud Al-Sharqawi, at Al-Ain Film Festival <sup>(121)</sup>	
Rules of the Game	Fahmi Farahat	Short Film	Jury's Certificate of Appreciation, Al-Ain Film Festival <sup>(122)</sup>	
One, Two, Three	Faisal Abdullah	Short Film		Competed for Best Short Film Prize at Al-Ain Film Festival <sup>(123)</sup>
Coexistence	Musab Almuammar	Short Film		Competed for Best Short Film Prize at Al-Ain Film Festival <sup>(124)</sup>
Burning	Ali Al-Husayn	Short Film		Competed for Best Short Film Prize at Al-Ain Film Festival <sup>(125)</sup>
Sadeya Left Sultan	Jawahir Al-Aamiri	Short Film		Competed for Best Short Film Prize at Al-Ain Film Festival <sup>(126)</sup>
Lollipop	Hanaa Saleh Al-Fassi	Short Film		Competed for Best Short Film Prize at Al-Ain Film Festival <sup>(127)</sup>
Samel	Mansour Al-Badrani	Short Film		Competed for Best Short Film Prize at Al-Ain Film Festival <sup>(128)</sup>
Attempt	Yaqub Al-Marzuki	Short Film		Competed for Best Short Film Prize at Al-Ain Film Festival <sup>(129)</sup>

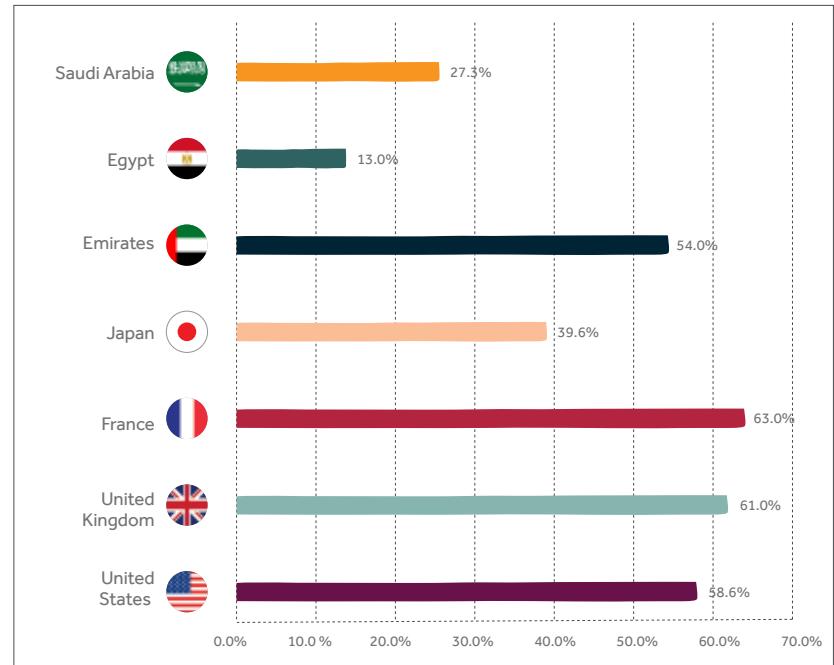
# 2019 Cultural Participation Survey

The Cultural Participation Survey collected data on the popularity of different film viewing platforms in the last quarter of 2019. A representative sample of 3,137 people from all regions of the Kingdom was surveyed. According to the survey, 50.6% of the population (53.2% of males and 47.4% of females) watch Saudi productions on YouTube.

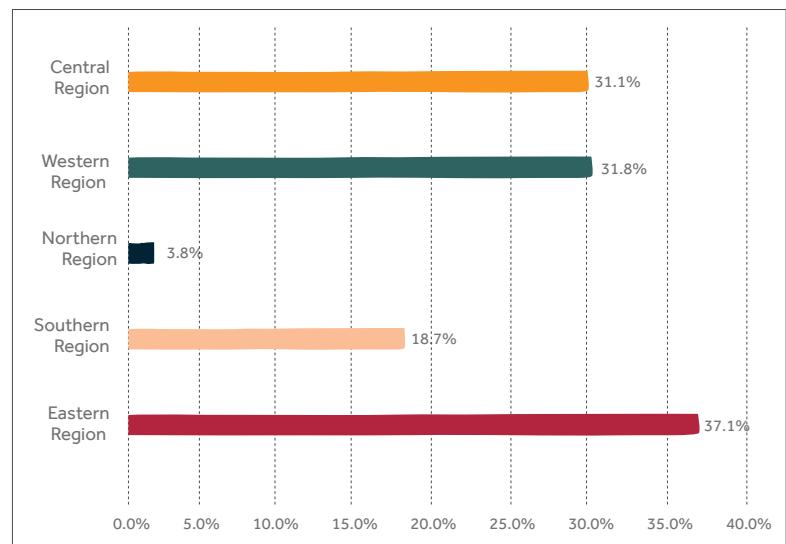
Of those surveyed, 27.3% reported going to a movie theatre at least once in the past 12 months. This percentage is lower than the global average (see Figure 4-1) because cinemas have only recently opened, they are few in number, and they are only available in a few cities. As shown in Figure 4-2, the percentage of cinemagoers more than doubles in the Eastern, Western, and Central regions, where cinemas are available. It is also worth noting that women go to the cinema at a higher rate than men (see Figure 4-3).



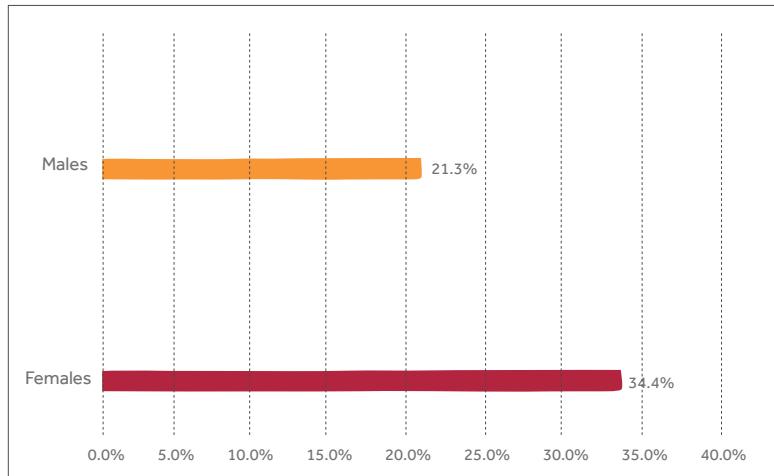
**Figure 4-1:** Proportion of population that went to a movie theatre (past 12 months), by country<sup>(130)</sup>



**Figure 4-2:** Proportion of Saudi population that went to a movie theatre (past 12 months), by region

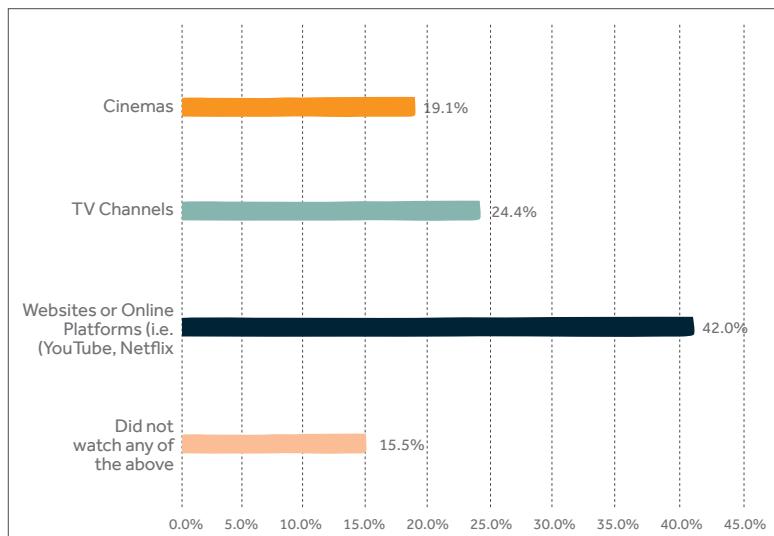


**Figure 4-3: Proportion of population that went to a movie theatre (past 12 months), by gender**



Digital platforms were the most popular for film viewing (42%), followed by television (24.4%) and, finally, movie theatres (19.1%).

**Figure 4-4: Favorite platform for viewing among adults in KSA**



# Infrastructure and Investment

Most of the new policies concerned with developing and supporting visual media production infrastructure have focused on the film sector, with little emphasis on television production. Institutionally, the film sector remains poorly organized and continues to rely primarily on individual efforts. Consequently, visual media production has continued to focus on short films and YouTube videos. Yet these will not help the Kingdom's film industry to advance, as the international film industry focuses on feature films. This emphasis on short films and YouTube will also do little to prepare Saudi film to compete commercially. In 2019, the Saudi director and actor Mahmoud Al-Sharqawi won the award for Best Actor at the most recent Al-Ain Film Festival for his feature film Last Circus Days (Aakher Ayyam Alsirk), which he also wrote.<sup>(131)</sup> Yet the Festival's Jury required him to remove the film from YouTube, the online platform that initially screened it, in order to be eligible for the prize.<sup>(132)</sup>

## Facilities

In a step forward for the field of entertainment investment, the Public Investment Fund launched Saudi Entertainment Ventures (previously known as the Development and Investment Entertainment Company)<sup>(133)</sup> in 2018 with 10 billion SAR in capital to invest in the entertainment sector. Cinema is one of the company's entertainment sectors. It has contracted AMC, the first company to receive licenses to op-





erate movie theatres in the Kingdom.<sup>(134)</sup> The General Commission for Audiovisual Media works to clear the way for films and grant licenses to cinemas.<sup>(135)</sup>

Facilities related to film include:

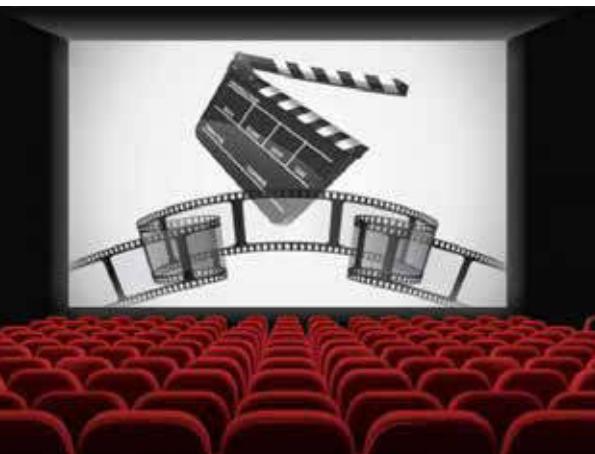
### 1. Movie Theatres

The Quality of Life Program is one of the Saudi Vision 2030 programs dedicated to improving the quality of life for individuals and families in Saudi Arabia. It aims to open more than 45 movie theatres in differ-

ent areas of the Kingdom by 2020.<sup>(136)</sup> Between the opening of theatres in 2018 and the end of 2019, however, only 12 commercial movie theatres had been licensed by the General Commission for Audiovisual Media. They are detailed in Table 4-7.<sup>(137)</sup>

**Table 4-7:** List of commercial movie theatres licensed by the General Commission for Audiovisual Media (through end of 2019)

Operator	City	Location	Number of Screens	Number of Seats
VOX	Riyadh	Riyadh Park	4	324
VOX	Riyadh	Riyadh Front	18	1,427
VOX	Riyadh	The Roof	8	558
VOX	Riyadh	Kingdom Tower	8	228
VOX	Riyadh	Al Qasr Mall	15	1,265
AMC	Riyadh	King Abdullah Financial District	1	625
AMC	Riyadh	Panorama Mall	10	801
muvi	Riyadh	Al-Hamra Mall	6	1,070
VOX	Dammam	West Avenue Mall	6	911
VOX	Jeddah	Red Sea Mall	12	1,496
muvi	Jeddah	Mall of Arabia	15	2,107
Empire	Jazan	Al-Rashid Mall	10	728
Total			12	113
				11,540



Since cinemas have opened, they have seen more than 4 million visitors.<sup>(138)</sup> There are no statistics for non-commercial cinemas in the Kingdom, whether permanent or temporary.

## 2. Studios

There are no film studios in the Kingdom. However, work is underway to establish a Media City at the King Abdullah Financial District in Riyadh. It will come into operation in

two phases. The first will target local talent and content makers, while the second will involve building a complete media area for producers from outside the Kingdom.

## Work Force

Classifications of specialties in visual media production according to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development are listed in Table 4-8.<sup>(139)</sup>

**Table 4-8: List of professional specialties in visual media and number of registered (Ministry of Labor)**

Specialty	Total Number of Saudi Employees	Total Number of Employees
Lighting Technician	21	286
Makeup Artist	698	2,406
Set Technician	173	20,494
Sound Technician	54	512
Advertising Designer	0	2,938
Studio Camera Operator	0	1,346
Television Camera Operator	88	409
Costume Supervisor (Theater or Studio)	100	107
Media Programs Organizer	539	691
TV Camera Operator	8	33
Film Camera Operator	32	87
Film Production Specialist	28	120
Script or Screenplay Writer	158	163
Film, Radio, or Television Director	3	122
Actor	302	310
Art Critic	3	3

The classifications make no distinction between subcategories of these media professions, such as different types of critics, actors, directors, or screenwriters. They also do not differentiate between types of media (cinema, radio, or television) except in the case of camera operators for different platforms, which are listed separately. Furthermore, when compared to the range of specialties in this sector internationally, many professional specialties, including film editor, technical director, artistic director, and multimedia designer, are missing. These numbers also do not reflect the actual number of workers in the visual production field, as most workers in this sector, irrespective of the medium, are amateurs who do not consider this work to be their primary profession.

### Education and Training

Most media departments in Saudi universities specialize in journalism rather than in visual media or production. As this sector has opened

up, the market has begun calling for more specialized qualifications as well as an increase in the number and quality of majors in this field. Universities with departments that offer degrees in visual and digital media under different names include Al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, King Saud University, King Abdulaziz University, King Khalid University in Abha, Effat University in Jeddah, and Saudi Electronic University, in addition to Prince Ahmed bin Salman Media Academy's Applied Institute, which offers a certificate in technical media production and other training courses. In late 2019, the Ministry of Culture announced the launch of its Cultural Scholarship Program, which includes majors in film and visual production. This will allow more students to major in these fields and develop local film production.<sup>(140)</sup>

To organize the workshops which were offered by its different branches, SASCA launched Thaqqif in October 2018. Thaqqif is an institute for arts and culture training<sup>(141)</sup> that

offers, among other programs, technical courses on visual production in Riyadh, Jeddah, and the Eastern Province. To date, they have served 180 participants.<sup>(142)</sup>

### Support and Investment

YouTube's popularity among Saudis reflects its success in compensating for the absence of other platforms. According to statistics published by Google, YouTube's parent company, the Kingdom was the world's top country in terms of the number of views on YouTube in 2012. That year, 90 million videos were viewed in the Kingdom per day.<sup>(143)</sup> Since then, the Kingdom has remained one of the largest national markets in the world for YouTube. The annual average growth in the use of social media sites (including YouTube) is 32%, which is higher than the global average (13%).<sup>(144)</sup> By the end of 2018, 89% of the Saudi population had become Internet users, creating high demand for digital production;<sup>(145)</sup> invest-



ment in this field looks promising. In 2016, Forbes Middle East magazine named Telfaz11 as the third best up-and-coming company in the Kingdom. The company is privately funded, with 2015 ad revenues of \$5.2 million and an average of 6.5 million views per month.<sup>(146)</sup>

In 2018, STV Fund invested \$9 million in Telfaz11, prompting a significant transformation in the digital production field. STV Fund is an independent investment fund founded by Saudi Telecom Company (STC), which invests in technical and digital ventures. This deal was the largest and first of its kind in the digital visual media field in the Kingdom.<sup>(147)</sup> This kind of investment is expected to facilitate the development of digital media and prepare it to expand to other production types.

Regarding cinema, Saudi films still face many obstacles at the local box office in the Kingdom. Ticket revenues from foreign and Saudi commercial films are both taxed at a rate of 30%, even though foreign films receive much higher revenues, and 60% of revenues go to the distributor. Left with only a slim profit margin. Saudi filmmakers find it difficult to show their work in cinemas, especially for an extended period, as was the case with the film Roll'em.<sup>(148)</sup> To tackle such difficulties, a number of initiatives have been launched by the Ministry of Culture to support local films and encourage visual production,

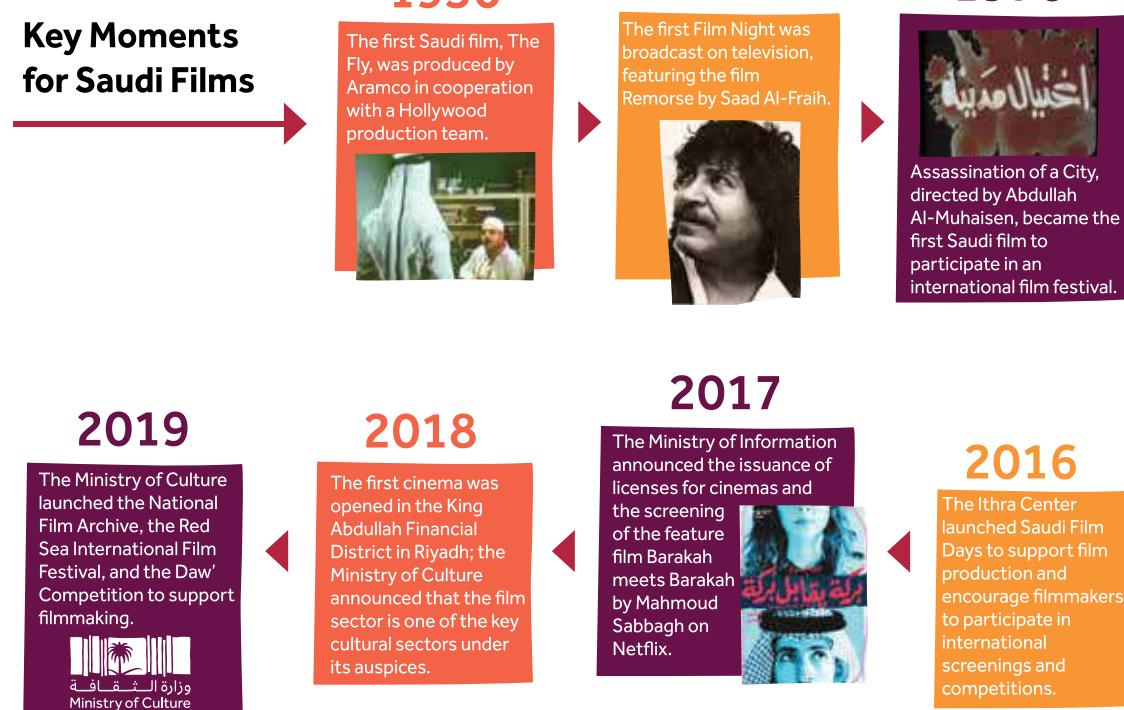
Competition, which is intended to support local film production. It provides 40 million SAR to support feature, documentary, short, and animated films. In addition to financial support, the Competition offers workshops on developing screenplays and logistical support. It facilitates participation in local and international festivals and events and supports the completion of film productions, giving grant priority to participants who have also obtained financial support from other parties.<sup>(149)</sup> It has also devoted a category to graduation projects from students who are majoring in film abroad.

### 1. Daw' Film Competition

On September 29, 2019, the Ministry of Culture launched the Daw'

### 2. Nomow Cultural Fund

The Nomow Cultural Fund, announced by the Ministry of Culture,



is an initiative to fund creative projects that involve visual media production. It is intended to develop the quality of local production and removing obstacles that have limited artistic activity in this sector for decades.

### 3. The Red Sea International Film Festival Foundation

The first of its kind in the Kingdom, the foundation is a non-profit, non-governmental organization intended to support the film industry. Its primary goal is to support Saudi feature film projects and facilitate local and international distribution.<sup>(150)</sup> It also works to stimulate cinematic production in the Kingdom by offering competitions, film screenings, workshops, and courses, like other

international festivals. Being an international festival, it does not limit itself to Saudi films. It includes the Red Sea Films Lab, an incubator for projects and screenplays for feature films. The first edition of the Festival will be held in Jeddah in March 2020.<sup>(151)</sup>

The Festival also announced the Tamheed Fund Competition, which aims to support production-stage Saudi feature films whose content is inspired by local concerns. The Fund announced a \$1 million production prize, to be divided between two films. This year, the winners were *The Book of Sun* (*Shams Alma'arif*), directed by Faris Godus and produced by Sohayb Godus, and *40 Years and One Night* (*Arbaon A'man wa Laila*), directed by Mohammed Alholayyil and produced by

Abdulrahman Khawj. Chosen from among 24 entries, these films will be screened at the festival's first edition in March 2020.<sup>(152)</sup> Many filmmakers and critics are relying on this festival to produce a true film industry in the Kingdom after a long history of individual efforts.



**2000**

Hani Al-Sultan launched Cinemac, the first specialized platform in cinema news for movie buffs in the Kingdom.

**2006**

The Jeddah Film Festival was established; Abdullah Al-Muhaissen and Rotana respectively produced the feature-length films *Shadows of Silence* and *What's Up?*, the latter of which was presented commercially outside the Kingdom.

**2007**

Rotana produced *Menahi*, which became the first film to be officially screened in the Kingdom.

**2008**

The first public film festival, the Saudi Film Competition, was hosted in Dammam; the Jeddah Festival was renamed the Jeddah Film Festival (which was canceled the following year).

**2015**

The Saudi Film Competition was relaunched as the annual Saudi Film Festival in Dammam.

**2012**

Haifaa Al-Mansour directed and produced the film *Wadjda*, which won three awards at the International Venice Festival; Rotana Productions organized the first and only Saudi Film Festival.

**2011**

Badr Alhomoud directed the movie *Monopoly* and screened it on YouTube, where it received a million views in one week.

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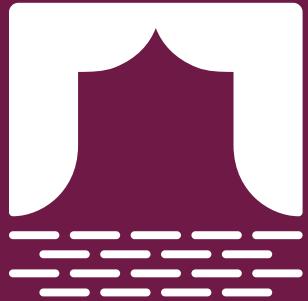
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Chapter Five

# 5





# Theatre

- **Theatre in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview**
- **Saudi Theatre Today**
- **Awards and Achievements**
- **2019 Cultural Participation Survey**
- **Infrastructure and Investment**

# Theatre in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview



## The Beginnings of Saudi Theatre

Playwriting appeared before theatre itself in Saudi Arabia. The poet Husayn Abdullah Siraj authored a number of plays, beginning with *He Who Wrongs Himself* (*Al-Zalim li-Nafsih*, 1932), followed by Jamil and Bu-thayna in 1942, and *Passion of Birth* (*Gharam al-Wilada*, 1952), which was printed by the famously selective Dar El Maaref publishing house in Egypt. When asked why he wrote these plays knowing that he was unlikely to see them brought to life on stage, he responded, "I wrote them to be read, and to be models for the writers of future generations. I wrote them to establish the idea of drama in modern Saudi literature."<sup>(1)</sup> Other authors who ventured into playwriting include Ahmad Abdulghafur Attar, who wrote *The Migration* (*Al-Hijrah*, 1946) and *The Epic* (*Al-Malhamah*, 1964), Abdullah Abduljabbar, who wrote *Uncle Sahnun* (*Al-'Amm Sahnun*, 1952) and *Mute Devils* (*Al-Shayatin Al-Khurs*, 1954), Muhammad Malibari, who wrote *The Conquest of Makkah* (*Fath Makkah*) and *Musaylimah the Deceitful* (*Musaylimah Al-Kadhdhab*) in 1960, along with Abdullah Bogis and Es-sam Khogeer.

Among the key figures who laid the foundation for Saudi theatre was Ahmad Al-Siba'i. With official approval, he founded a private theatre, named "The Quraish Center for Islamic Acting," in Makkah in 1960, and hired teachers to train aspiring actors. However, the theatre closed one week before the opening of its first play, and the project was reduced to study and discus-



sion before ultimately falling by the wayside.<sup>(2)</sup> Although these initial experiments in theatre were not realized, theatre did find an outlet in educational contexts and with official support.

School theatre was introduced in public and private schools under the leadership of teachers who understood its importance. One of these pioneers, Salih bin Salih, introduced theatrical works into the curriculum at his school in Unayzah. King Abdulaziz attended a celebration at the school and watched the students perform their plays.<sup>(3)</sup> The Al-Falah School in Jeddah also produced plays by Abdullah Khoja.<sup>(4)</sup> These efforts influenced the Ministry of Education's decision in 1402 AH to recognize theatre as one of the ar-

eas under the purview of the General School Activities Administration, bringing in experts and making theatre performance spaces standard facilities for newly constructed schools. Across the Kingdom's schools, annual playwriting competitions were also held in which winners received awards and had their plays circulated to all schools.<sup>(5)</sup> Theatre became a popular activity among students. For example, since the 1970s, didactic plays have formed a core component of the activities of the Literary Society. This student organization brings together students from the Saudi Scientific Institute and the Scholarship Preparatory School each week for cultural activities and hosts monthly and yearly events that include theatre.<sup>(6)</sup> Likewise, the Al-Ay-

tam school in Makkah used to host theatre events. Riyadh Secondary School also had a theatre where students could act, as did the Scientific Institutes, the College of Sharia, and Al-Anjal Private School. These educational institutions first used their performance spaces for lectures, seminars, poetry readings, and acting, though these initial forays into theatre were markedly simple.<sup>(7)</sup>

### The Theatre Boom

Adding to the efforts of schools and summer programs, the General Presidency of Youth Welfare (GPYW) helped to bring theatre to the stages of the athletic clubs under its purview. The GPYW was responsible for the establishment of a performing arts department and proceed-

ed to manage literary clubs and the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA), which produced dozens of theatrical performances featuring hundreds of actors. This led to a flourishing in theatre from the 1960s through the 1980s, especially while the GPYW was putting on its annual cultural and artistic festival, which lasted until 1984.<sup>(8)</sup> The Folk Arts Club, founded in Al-Ahsa in 1971, played a pioneering role with its programs in music, theatre, and other art forms. Renamed the Society of Folk Arts in 1972, the club joined the SASCA as its first branch location outside Riyadh in 1974. The club had been founded by a group of artists from Al-Ahsa that included Abdulrahman Al-Hamad, Hasan Al-Abdi, Khalid Al-Hamidi, Abdulaziz Al-Marzuq, Salih Al-Tanem, Khalid Al-Khairullah, and Umar Al-Ubaidi.<sup>(9)</sup>

In his book *The Birth of Saudi Theatre*, Abdulrahman Al-Khuraiji mentions over a hundred names among that generation who constitute the majority of the trailblazers of the Saudi theatre movement. Some of them continued in the field, while others eventually moved away or transitioned to other forms of media, such as television.<sup>(10)</sup>

This theatre boom led most Saudi universities to form their own theatre troupes that could participate in university events and festivals as well as represent the school on tour. For example, in 1976 and 1977, King Saud University presented two plays in Cairo and two plays in Jordan, in addition to the roughly 15 plays that the school put on domestically each year.<sup>(11)</sup> King Abdulaziz University, King Fahd University of Petroleum



and Minerals, and King Faisal University also made important contributions to theatre both domestically and abroad, introducing a number of big names to the theatre scene.

In 1961, the radio station in Jeddah began hosting a radio theatre program directed by Muhsin Shaikh and Adil Jalal. This radio program helped launch the careers of a number of talented actors such as Hassan Dardir, Lutfi Zaini, Muhammad and Abdulrahman Yaghmur, Amin Qattan, Khalid Zari, Al-Sharif Al-Ardawi, and Ali Gharar. The director Bashir Mardini went on to direct televised theatre after the advent of broadcast television, including the airing of the first locally produced Saudi television drama, *A Golden Groom ('Aris min Dhahab)*, starring Abdulrahman Al-Khuraiji, Hamad Al-Hudhail, Ahmad Al-Hudhail, Al-Sharif Al-Ardawi, Hassan Dardir, and Lutfi Zaini.<sup>(12)</sup>

### Female Playwrights and Children's Theatre

Female Saudi playwrights include Hind Baghaffar, who has written a number of plays since 1975, as well as Raja'a Alem, Wafa Al-Tayeb, and Kawthar Al-Maiman. The writer Melha Abdullah has had a particularly significant impact on Saudi theatre with her nearly fifty plays and her technical background in the field. She was honored at the 2010 Playwriting Conference in Riyadh, but despite her large number of plays, critics have decried her work as "one-legged theatre,"<sup>(13)</sup> because women did not have the same presence in theatre as men, and her output was limited to women's plays performed inside female educational institutions. This remained the state of affairs until February 2018.

Saudi children's theatre got its start in the 1970s thanks to the efforts of Abdulrahman Al-Marikhi at the Al-Jil Club in Al-Ahsa Governorate. His most famous work was "Al-Naflah Eve," which is considered by many to be the first children's play not only in Saudi Arabia but in the entire Gulf. The famous Kuwaiti play "Sinbad the Sailor" was first performed in 1978, two years after "Al Naflah Eve," which debuted in 1976. These efforts earned Abdulrahman Al-Marikhi the title "Pioneer of Saudi Children's Theatre." Other Saudi artists who have contributed to children's theatre include Ahmad Abu Rabiyah of Madinah, Abdullah Al Abdulmuhsin, Mishaal Al-Rashid, Fahd Al-Hawshani, Ibrahim Al-Khamis, Sami Al-Juman, Muhammad Al-Suhaimi, Umar Al-Jasir, and many more.<sup>(14)</sup>

### The Decline of Popular and Continuation of Elite Theatre

Despite all the theatre activity prior to the 1990s, several factors led to a decline, most notably theatre's failure to gain widespread popularity. Another contributing factor was that many artists moved away from theatre due to the limited financial prospects or to be in the television shows that were gaining popularity at the time. Indeed, most of the television stars of that period came out of the theatre. There were also contributing social factors such as the absence of women from public spaces and the influence of certain religious views regarding music that affected the quality of theatrical productions. But perhaps the most important cause behind the decline of popular theatre was the absence of infrastructure, most notably a lack of public performance spaces, as the limited venues at universities,



literary clubs, and branches of the SASCA lacked the up-to-date facilities required for modern theatre. It can be said that theatre during this period was limited to performances for small elite audiences among the theatrical community at the SASCA, the margins of book fairs, national celebrations and festivals like Janadriyah and Souk Okaz, and annual theatre festivals, most notably in Dammam, Al-Ahsa, Taif, and Jeddah. This decline in popular theatre coincided with a rise of elite theatre, evidenced by participation in Arab and international festivals and a number of prizes and other achievements. Some amount of theatre, both popular and elite, did continue in some cities and provinces, mainly in the Eastern Province.<sup>(15)</sup>



### Saudi Theatre Festivals

Festivals have played a major role in the presence and development of theatre in Saudi Arabia. In particular, the Janadriyah Festival, which has been held over thirty times, has had a clear impact on Saudi theatre artists. However, many festivals were discontinued due to a lack of necessary resources: the Saudi Theatre Festival, for example, came to an end after its fourth occurrence in 2007. Theatre maintained a presence at cultural and touristic festivals, of which theatre artist Sami Al-Juman recalls, "There was the Souk Okaz Festival in Taif, the Souk Hajar Festival in Al-Ahsa, the Dokhala Festival in Qatif, the Quss bin Sa'idah Festival in Najran, the Historic Jeddah Festival, and other festivals. If they lacked anything, it was financial support, in particular, followed by promotion in the media."<sup>(16)</sup> The following table lists the most important Saudi theatre festivals.

**Table 5-1: Major Saudi theatre festivals**

Festival Name		Organizing Authority	Years Held
1	Saudi Theatre Festival	Ministry of Culture and Information	Held 3 times beginning in 1997, then once more in 2008
2	Janadriyah Theatre Festival (coinciding with the National Festival for Heritage and Culture in Janadriyah)	The National Guard	1993-present, now held in Taif
3	Dammam Short Performances Festival	SASCA, Dammam branch	2002-2016, planned to be held again in February 2020
4	Al-Ahsa Theatre Festival	SASCA, Al-Ahsa branch	Held 3 times beginning in 2009
5	Children's Theatre Festival	SASCA, Al-Ahsa branch	Held 6 times from 2004 to 2012
6	Community Theatre Festival	Association of Saudi Theatre Artists	2011
7	Riyadh Monodrama Festival	SASCA, Riyadh branch	2008-2010
8	Souk Okaz Festival in Taif	Souk Okaz	2007-present
9	Abha International Comedy Festival	SASCA, Abha branch	Held 3 times ending in 2017

## Regional and International Presence of Saudi Theatre Over Time

Throughout its history, Saudi theatre has garnered 92 international prizes at 64 festivals in the Gulf, the Arab region, and the world. The table lists the prizes received between 1987 and 2014.<sup>(17)</sup>



**Table 5-2:** Selected list of foreign awards for Saudi theatre

	Play	Award(s)	Festival
1	People Below Zero (Nas Taht al-Sifr)	Best Actor	Second Gulf Youth Theatre Festival, UAE, 1987
2	The Locust (Al-Jarad)	Festival Certificate	Carthage International Theatre Festival, Tunisia, 1987
3	Endgame (Nihayat al-Mubarah)	Bronze Medal	Third Gulf Youth Theatre Festival, Qatar, 1989
4	The Caravan Proceeds (Wal-Qafila Tasir)	Second Prize for Performance, First Prize for Best Playwriting	Fourth Gulf Youth Theatre Festival, Bahrain, 1992
5	The Lionfish (Dik al-Bahr)	Judges' Choice Award	Carthage International Theatre Festival, Tunisia, 1994
6	The Prompter (Al-Mulaqqin)	Best Playwriting, Best Technical Production, Best Supporting Actor	Gulf Festival of Community Theatre, Bahrain, 1994
7	Child of Silence (Ibn al-Samt)	Innovative Writing Award	11 <sup>th</sup> Monastir International Theatre Festival, Tunisia, 1995
8	The Lighthouse (Al-Fanar)	Best Supporting Actor	Fifth Gulf Festival of Community Theatre, Kuwait, 1997
9	The Bank (Al-Haffa)	Best Supporting Actor	Sixth Gulf Festival of Community Theatre, Qatar, 2002
10	Real Time Beat (Iqa' Zaman Waqi')	Best Production	Ninth Arab Youth Festival, Alexandria, Egypt, 2002
11	Antithesis (Al-Naqid)	Best Set Design, Outstanding Performance	Seventh Gulf Youth Theatre Festival, Kuwait, 2004
12	While the People Sleep (Wal-Nas Niyam)	Best Performance, Best Actor	Tenth Arab Youth Festival, Sudan, 2005
13	Obsession (Al-Hajis)	Best Stage Direction	First Gulf Festival of University Theatre, Kuwait, 2006
14	Travel on the Margins (Safar al-Hawajis)	Best Stage Direction	Festival of Jordanian Theatre, Jordan, 2006
15	The Kindling (Al-Hashim)	Innovative Writing Prize	Monastir International Festival of University Theatre, Tunisia, 2007
16	The Barrier (Al-Hajiz)	Innovative Writing Prize	Monastir International Festival of University Theatre, Tunisia, 2008
17	The Barrier (Al-Hajiz)	Best Set Design	Fes International Festival of University Theatre, Morocco, 2008
18	Death of the Author (Mawt al-Mu'allif)	Best Supporting Actor	Tenth Gulf Festival of Community Theatre, Kuwait, 2009

	Play	Award(s)	Festival
19	The Coat (Al-Mi'taf)	Appreciation Award	14 <sup>th</sup> Monastir International Festival of University Theatre, Tunisia, 2009
20	The Age of Speech (Zaman al-Kalam)	Best Set Design, Second Prize for Best Performance, Outstanding Performance	Eighth Gulf Youth Theatre Festival, Qatar, 2009
21	The Great Prison (Al-Sijn al-Kabir)	Third Prize	Gulf University Theatre Culture Week, Oman, 2009
22	The Secret to Life (Sirr al-Hayah)	Best Production, Best Actor	Asilah International Festival of Children's Theatre, Morocco, 2010
23	The Sambuk (Al-Sanbuk)	Best Playwriting, Best Directing, Best Actor	Ninth Gulf Youth Theatre Festival, Qatar, 2010
24	Storm ('Asf)	Best Set Design, Appreciation for Playwriting	Second Gulf Festival of University Theatre, Bahrain, 2010
25	Full Fat Madness (Junun Kamil al-Dasam)	Best Playwriting, Best Supporting Actor	Second Gulf Festival of University Theatre, Bahrain, 2010
26	The Big-Mouthed Bat (Al-Watwat al-Kharrat)	Best Playwriting	Asilah International Festival of Children's Theatre, Morocco, 2010
27	The Council of Justice (Majlis al-'Adl)	Best Lead Actor	Second Gulf Festival of University Theatre, Bahrain, 2010
28	Who Wants to Be a Simillionaire? (Man Sayarbah al-Similyun)	Best Adult Actor, Best Child Actor	Nador International Spring Festival of Children's Theatre, Morocco, 2011
29	Who Wants to Be a Simillionaire? (Man Sayarbah al-Similyun)	Best Group Performance, Best Playwriting, Best Set Design	Hammam Sousse Children's Theatre Association, Tunisia, 2011
30	Venice (Al-Bunduqiyya)	Best Set Design	11 <sup>th</sup> Gulf Festival of Community Theatre, Qatar, 2011
31	You Are Not a Cave (Anta Lasta Gharan)	Most Promising Work	Fes International Festival of University Theatre, Morocco, 2011
32	Ascent of Glass (Mi'rāj al-Zujaj)	Best Directing, Best Décor	First Kuwait International Academic Festival, Kuwait, 2011
33	Silence of the Brooms (Samt al-Makanis)	Best Directing, Best Playwriting, Best Group Performance	Fes International Festival of Children's Theatre, Morocco, 2012
34	The Bodies (Al-Ajsad)	Best Supporting Actor	12 <sup>th</sup> Gulf Festival of Community Theatre, Oman, 2012
35	Mido and the Troublemakers (Midu wal-Ashqiya')	Best Music	9 <sup>th</sup> Asilah International Festival of Children's Theatre, Morocco, 2012
36	Maestro (Maistrū)	Outstanding Theatrical Performance	International Chekhov Festival, Ukraine, 2012
37	The Magic Flute (Al-Nay al-Sihri)	Best Actor	Nador International Spring Children's Theatre Festival, Morocco, 2012
38	Symphony of Hope (Simfuniyat al-Amal)	Best Music	9 <sup>th</sup> Biennial for Theatre and Treatment for Special Needs, Poland, 2012
39	Amulets (Talasim)	Ensemble Harmony	Sixth Tangier Festival of University Theatre, Morocco, 2012
40	Music of the Doves ('Azf al-Yamam)	Best Actor	Fes International Festival of University Theatre, Morocco, 2012
41	A Distance Made of Light (Masafa min Nur)	Best Set Design, Best Research and Experimentation	Fifth Gulf School Theatre Festival, Bahrain, 2012

Play		Award(s)	Festival
42	Illusion (Wahm)	Best Theatre Performance	Fes International Festival of University Theatre, Morocco, 2013
43	Remembered Bodies (Juthath fi-l-Dhakirah)	Best Script, Best Set Design	Third Kuwait International Academic Festival, Kuwait, 2013
44	Illusion (Wahm)	Best Set Design	Third Gulf Festival of University Theatre, Saudi Arabia, 2013
45	The Performance Has Remains (Lil-'Ard Baqiyah)	Outstanding Script	Third Gulf Festival of University Theatre, Saudi Arabia, 2013
46	Beyond the Darkness (Ma Wara' al-'Atamah)	Best Playwriting, Best Music, Best Supporting Actor, Outstanding Lighting Design	Gulf Youth Theatre Festival, Kuwait, 2013
47	Illusion (Wahm)	Best Set Design	Seventh Marrakech International Festival of University Theatre, Morocco, 2013
48	The Rope (Al-Habl)	Best Playwriting	Third Gulf Festival of Theatre for People with Special Needs, Bahrain, 2013
49	The Friends' Ship (Safinat al-Asdiqa')	Best Actor	Second Fes International Festival of Children's Theatre, Morocco, 2013
50	The Festival (Al-Mahrajan)	Best Playwriting, Best Set Design, Best Music, Best Actor	Asilah International Festival of Children's Theatre, Morocco, 2013
51	A Party (Haflah)	Judge's Choice Award for Best Directing	Third Gulf Festival of University Theatre, Saudi Arabia, 2013
52	The Vision (Al-Ru'yah)	Best Performance, Best Directing	First Casablanca Creative Theatre Festival, Morocco, 2013
53	Cadaver Zero (Al-Juththah Sifr)	Bronze Medal	Eighth International Free Theatre Nights Festival, Jordan, 2013
53	Lord of the Skulls (Sayyid al-Jamajim)	Best Performance	Ninth Al Sawari Theatre Festival, Bahrain, 2013
54	While the People Sleep (Wal-Nas Niyam)	Best Theatre Performance	Fes International Festival of University Theatre, Morocco, 2013
55	The Fisherman (Al-Sayyad)	Best Theatre Research	Fes International Festival of Children's Theatre, Morocco, 2014
56	Stampede (Tadafu')	Outstanding Theatre	Sixth Gulf School Theatre Festival, Bahrain, 2014
57	Coexistence (Ta'ayush)	Judges' Choice First Award	Second Maghrebi Days Theatre Festival, Algeria, 2014
58	Coexistence (Ta'ayush)	Best Set Design	Liverpool International Theatre Festival, Canada, 2014
59	A Space to Tell (Misahat Bawh)	Bronze Medal	Ninth International Free Theatre Nights Festival, Jordan, 2014
60	Waiting (Al-Intizar)	Best Playwriting	Tyre International Theatre Festival, Lebanon, 2014
61	Amulets (Talasim)	Amal Award for Best Leading Actor	Ninth Fes International Festival of University Theatre, Morocco, 2014
62	A Cry of Joy (Shahqat Farah)	Best Supporting Actor, Best Décor	Al Sawari Theatre Festival, Bahrain, 2014
63	Hope (Al-Amal)	Best Production	10 <sup>th</sup> Biennial for Theatre and Treatment for Special Needs, Poland, 2014

# Saudi Theatre Today

## The Return of Popular Theatre

Popular theatre had a significant presence in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and 1980s as artists focused on the social aspect of theatre, putting on productions that appealed to large audiences. These included Doctor with a Stick (*Tabib bil-Mish'ab*) and Under the Chairs (*Taht al-Karasi*) at the SASCA in Riyadh, The Orphans (*Al-Aytam*) and Dealers and Realtors (*'Aqaqir wa 'Aqarat*) at the SASCA in Al-Ahsa, A Doctor Despite Himself (*Tabib Raghma An-fih*) and House of Fiber (*Bayt min Lif*) at the SASCA in Dammam, and Other Half (*Man Yukmil al-Thani*) at the SASCA in Taif, among others.

When theatre decreased in popularity, as mentioned above, theatre artists moved towards television drama and elite productions at festivals. The Municipality of Riyadh was able to inject new life into popular theatre by supporting annual comedic theatre performances starting in 2000 during Eid Al-Fitr and official holidays. In 2018, the Makkah Youth Council announced the launch of the Theatre of Saudi Arabia, a family-oriented commercial entertainment space. The performances are in vaudeville style, relying on ironic juxtapositions and comical social situations, and they take place at the Literary Club in Jeddah five times a week. The week's final performance is recorded and televised. The first season of the Theatre of Saudi Arabia (2018) saw twenty thousand audience members and included over 50 performers, most of them amateurs.<sup>(18)</sup>

In a similar vein, stand-up comedy is also on the rise. While this is not theatre, strictly speaking, it shares the basic element of a performer on stage presenting prepared material to a live audience. Stand-up in Saudi Arabia got its start in 2010 with performances in English at private residences before spreading to YouTube, where there is now Arabic-language material. Jeddah's Comedy Club was started in 2010 with weekly stand-up performances, and in 2014, it added long comedic plays and sketch comedy to its repertoire.<sup>(19)</sup>

tating the exchange of expertise and experience. The three locations in Taif, Al-Ahsa, and Dammam are the only branches with their own perfor-

## Theatre Companies

The Association of Saudi Theatre Artists was founded in 2007 under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Information. Since its founding, the association has helped issue permits for several Saudi community theatre groups. It also seeks to develop talent and organize tours. In 2011, it held its Community Theatre Festival.

Theatre companies are also frequently formed in university theatre clubs or under the theatre councils of SASCA branches. The SASCA has become the most important organization for fostering Saudi theatre, particularly for amateurs, though there is variation between the different branches. The Taif, Al-Ahsa, and Dammam branches lead the pack in terms of quantity of activities, number of local and international awards, and popularity with audiences. Next are the Jeddah and Riyadh branches, which also host productions by troupes from outside the city, facili-



mance spaces, which has provided consistency and helped them build their audiences, as opposed to the other branches, which need to rent

or borrow space from universities or other educational institutions when they want to produce a show. Having their own venues has also allowed

the three leading branches to offer diverse programming, including both elite plays that typically have a limited audience as well as plays with high social or entertainment value that appeal to wider audiences.<sup>(20)</sup>

In March 2019, one of the initiatives announced by the Minister of Culture was the formation of the National Theatre Company, to be based in the King Fahd Cultural Center and directed by Abdulaziz Ismail.<sup>(21)</sup>

### Theatre Education Initiatives

The Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA) launched Thaqqif Institute on October 1, 2018, with the goals of producing professionals qualified to train others in various artistic and creative fields, strengthening the SASCA's resources through investment in training, and evaluating existing programming to measure its effectiveness.<sup>(22)</sup> The institute held two sessions specializing in theatre through October 30, 2019. The first, held in Jeddah, was "Preparing Actors for the Stage," and the second, in the Eastern Province, was called "Theatrical Techniques."<sup>(23)</sup> As part of its Quality of Life Program, King Abdulaziz University organized a number of courses in acting, directing, and technical theatre in Makkah, Jeddah, and Taif, which drew 482 participants.<sup>(24)</sup> Saudi Aramco's Ithra Center also held a number of courses and workshops, including one in January 2019 titled "From Playwriting to Directing," and two playwriting workshops in November 2019.



## Theatre by the Numbers and the Presence of Women

Popular theatre has had an active presence throughout the country, especially at government-sponsored events like the plays put on by the Riyadh Municipality, as well as at privately-owned venues such as amusement parks that show entertaining and family-oriented plays. The market for popular theatre remains limited, but its most prominent example is the Theatre of Saudi Arabia in Jeddah. Governmental support for popular theatre has come mainly from the General Entertainment Authority, which after its founding, became an important producer of plays for both local and foreign theatre companies. Its February 2018 production of Disney's *The Emperor's New Groove* at Dar Al Uloom University featured the first ever appearance of a woman alongside a man on stage. Tickets sold out quickly, indicating a positive public reception.<sup>(25)</sup> Other productions featuring women alongside men followed, including *The Straight Circle* (Al-Da'ira Al-Mustaqima) by Amal Alharbi, which was performed in the Al-Balad neighborhood of Jeddah and organized by the Saudi Arts Council and the Ministry of Culture. It was Saudi Arabia's first street play,<sup>(26)</sup> and it also featured women interacting naturally with men on stage at all performances. This is in contrast to the previously limited presence of women on stage, with the exception of women-only theatre such as that organized by the Municipality of Riyadh during holiday celebrations.

The General Entertainment Authority produced 44 plays in 2019. Examining this high number—between three and four plays per month—,

a number of observations can be made. First, the majority of these productions were local, and some featured artists from the Gulf, such as *The Wolf in the Well* (Al-Dhib fi-l-Qalib) by Nasser Al Qasabi. Egyptian theatre, especially comedies, also had a large presence, and there were many productions specifically for children. There were also a number of musical theatre productions, including *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. The majority of the straight plays were comedies, with the exception of a production of Shakespeare's *King Lear* starring Egyptian actor Yehia El-Fakharany that quickly sold out, indicating popular demand for serious classical theatre.

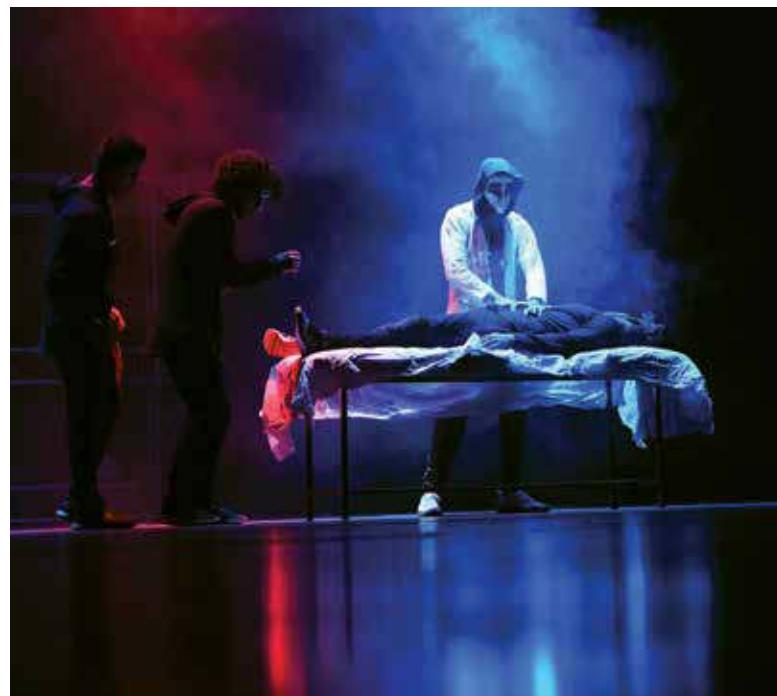
In addition to the General Entertainment Authority's productions, the Ithra Center has put on eight plays from around the Gulf region and the world. In 2018 the Center hosted Slava's Snowshow, Manganayar Connection, Mahabharata Nalacharitam, and Manual Cinema's Ada/Ava, and in 2019 it hosted The 80's Show, The Magic Flute, Brush, and The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.

The most important producer of theatre in Saudi Arabia is SASCA, which has produced 125 plays. The activity of the different branches is summarized in the following table.

**Table 5-3:** Number of plays presented by SASCA, by branch

Branch	Number of Plays	Total Attendance (approx.)
SASCA in Najran	3	350
SASCA in Taif	11	3,000
SASCA in Al-Qassim	0	0
SASCA in Bisha	8	900
SASCA in Al-Bahah	3	1,400
SASCA in Al-Jawf	0	0
SASCA in Al-Ahsa	9	1,848
SASCA in Northern Borders	4	900
SASCA in Hail	9	2,700
SASCA in Riyadh	0	0
SASCA in Jazan	2	200
SASCA in Tabuk	4	800
SASCA in Al-Madinah	12	200
SASCA in Jeddah	27	10,000
SASCA in Dammam	33	15,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>37,398</b>

One notable feature of the recent theatre boom is the participation of for-profit companies, either working independently or in partnership with governmental agencies. There is a number of such companies actively producing commercial theatre performances on a regular basis, including the Theatre of Saudi Arabia, the Jeddah Comedy Club, the Madinah Comedy Club, and the House of Comedy in Dammam. Most of these venues hold shows on Fridays and Saturdays each week. Rather than focusing on theatre per se, they mostly rely on stand-up comedy, occasionally programming sketch comedy or full-length plays. The Theatre of Saudi Arabia, however, only presents plays at its shows, which are performed on weekends and during various Seasons.



## Key Figures for 2019

**125**



Plays presented by the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA) across its various branches.

**37000**



The approximate number of people who attended theatrical performances at the Arab Society for Culture and Arts.

**33**



Plays hosted by SASCA in Dammam, a new record.

**15000**



The approximate number of people who attended plays hosted by SASCA in Dammam.

**482**



Participants in courses and workshops in acting, directing and technical theatre in Makkah, Jeddah and Taif, organized by King Abdulaziz University.

**44**



Plays produced in the Kingdom by the General Entertainment Authority in 2019.

**57000**



The approximate number of people who attended theatrical shows organized by the General Entertainment Authority in just the first half of 2019.

**50**



More than 50 actors and actresses performed at the Theatre of Saudi Arabia shows in Jeddah, the majority of whom were amateurs.

# Awards and Achievements

The year 2019 did not bring many awards—local or international—to Saudi theatre. This was due in part to the lack of local theatre prizes after a number of festivals were discontinued, although the Dammam SASCA's Theatre House did organize a playwriting contest to coincide with the second Dammam Playwriting Conference. Female playwrights carried the day, winning the top three prizes:<sup>(27)</sup>

1. Fatimah Al-Warthan, The Bottom of the Well (Ghayabat Al-Jubb)
2. Eshraq Al-Rawqi, Present in the Records of Absence (Hadirah fi Sijill Al-Ghiyab)
3. Fatimah Al-Saihati, The Pilgrim's Wool (Suf Al-Hajjiyah)

On the international stage, Leen Al-Sioufi won the Judges' Choice Award for Best Actress, and Nasser

Abdulwahid was nominated for Best Actor for their performances in the Nawras Theatre Company's play The Open Door (Al-Bab al-Maftuh) at the second Tuqous Theatre Festival in Jordan.<sup>(28)</sup>

In December 2019, the Ministry of Culture announced the National Cultural Awards initiative, which will include an award for theatre and performing arts.<sup>(29)</sup>

## Key Moments for Saudi Theatre

1932



Husayn Abdullah Siraj wrote the first published play, "He Who Wrongs Himself".

1960



Sheikh Ahmad Al-Siba'i established the first private theater and the first acting school in Makkah.

1961



Radio Jeddah began hosting a radio theatre program, which launched the careers of a number of talented actors.

1970



The Folk Arts Club was founded in Al-Ahsa, which was renamed the Society of Folk Arts (in 1972) before joining the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA).

1993



The Janadriyah National Festival introduced its Theatre Festival to accompany its annual event.

1997

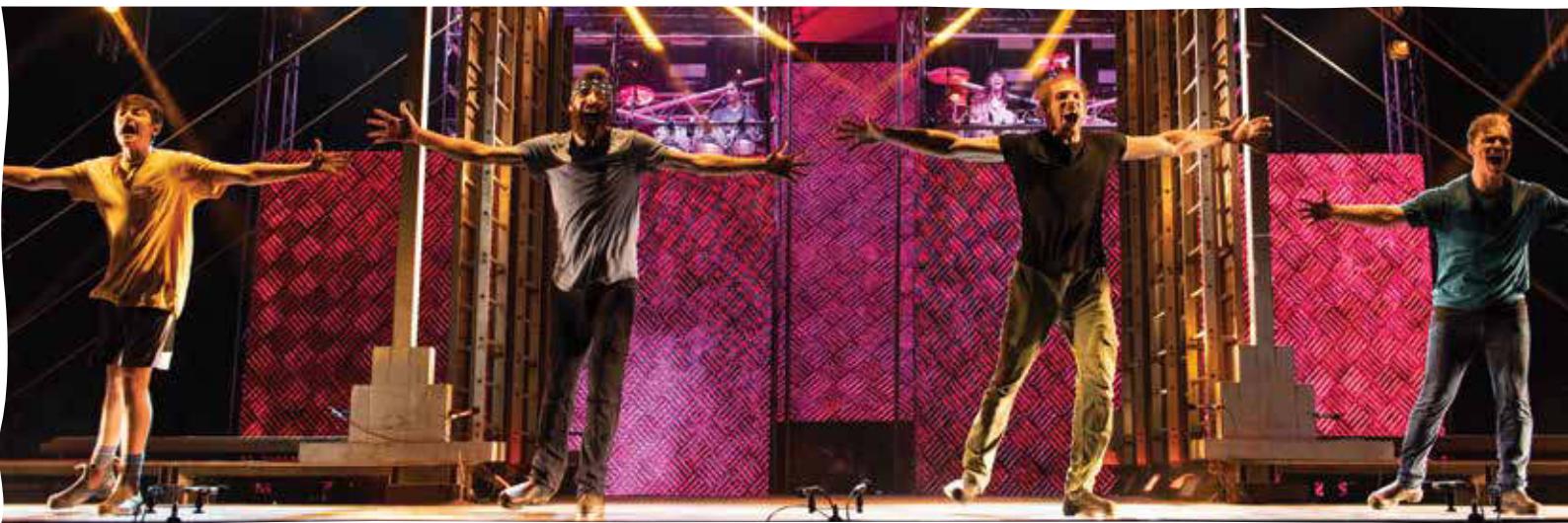


The Ministry of Culture and Information held the first Saudi Theater Festival, which was held for three years before returning in 2007 and ceasing again thereafter.

2002



The Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA) in Dammam launched the Dammam Short Performances Festival, which is the oldest and most continuous theatre festival (though it was paused in 2016, it is slated to resume in 2020).



1974



The Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA) was founded, which has become the main incubator for theatre to this day.

1974



The theater arts department at the General Presidency for Youth Welfare was established to promote Saudi theater in sports clubs and universities throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

1976



The play "Al Naflah Eve" was shown in Al-Ahsa at the Al-Jil Club, which counts the leadership of the Saudi and Gulf Child Theatres among its members.

1982



The Ministry of Education created the General School Activities Administration, which brought in experts and made theatre performance spaces standard facilities for schools.

2004



The Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA) in Al-Ahsa launched the Children's Theater Festival, which was held six times before its cancellation in 2012.

2007



The Association of Saudi Theatre Artists was established, which led to the licensing of many private groups to practice theater in Saudi Arabia and the hosting of the Community Theatre Festival in 2011.

2019



The Minister of Culture announced the creation of the National Theatre.

# 2019 Cultural Participation Survey

Community participation plays a vital role in theatre, not only because of the audience's role in the theatre boom but because theatre as an art form depends on the presence of a live audience. The 2019 Cultural Participation Survey, which collected its data in the fourth quarter of 2019, measured rates of theatre attendance in the Kingdom, as well as rates of participation in theatrical

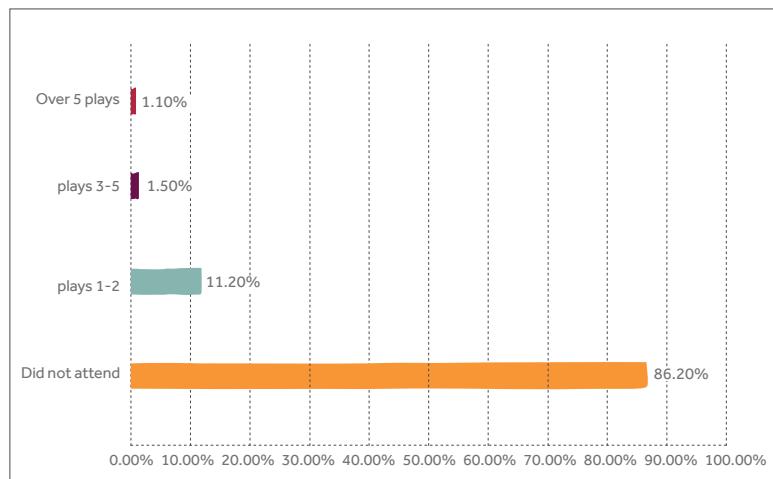
performances, mostly as amateurs. The survey respondents were a representative sample from all regions of the Kingdom.

As shown in Figure 5-1, 11.2% of respondents attended one or two plays in the past 12 months, while only 1.5% attended between three and five, and 1.1% went to the theatre more than five times. These rates indicate that while attendance numbers are good, most people who see plays do not become re-

peat theatregoers. This indicates the importance of offering performances continually throughout the year, as well as making them more attractive to audiences.

Figure 5-2 shows that attendance numbers in Saudi Arabia are promising, as they are similar to those in other countries, such as Japan and the United States. The proportion of Saudi adults who attended at least one play was 13.8%, an increase which can be linked to socio-

**Figure 5-1:** Number of plays attended by Saudi adults (past 12 months)

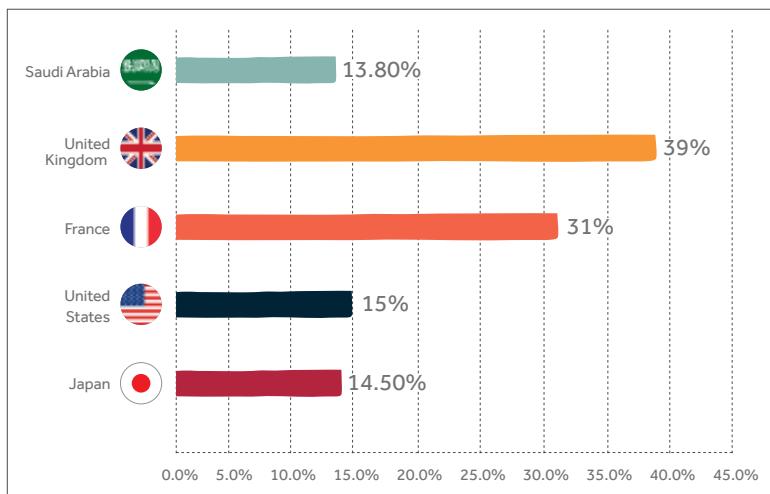


tal changes as well as the role of the General Entertainment Authority discussed above. It should be noted that the survey was conducted before Riyadh Season, which included many well-attended theatre pieces.

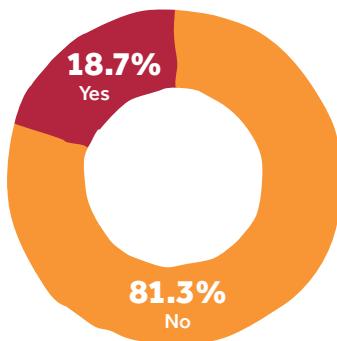
A total of 18.7% of Saudi adults have participated in a theatrical performance at least once. This high proportion can be traced to school theatre programs, as the survey question asked about lifetime par-

ticipation, rather than the year 2019 alone, and it is an indication that the theatre industry has potential for growth. There are higher rates of participation among males (21.6%) than females (15.2%), which may be due to the fact that women were permitted to perform publicly only recently (the first appearance of a woman on the popular stage having been in 2018). Up until that point, women's participation in theatre was limited to women-only venues.

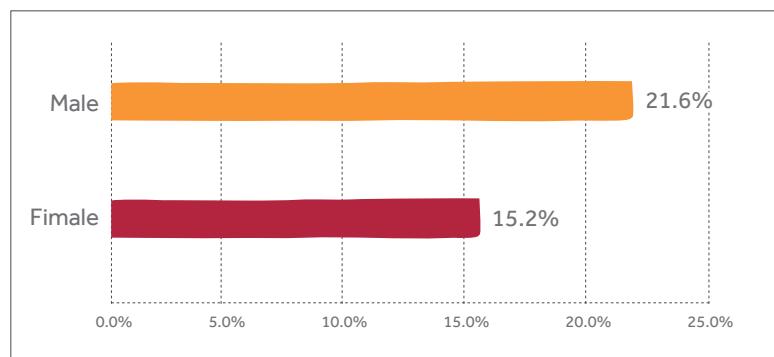
**Figure 5-2:** Proportion of adults who attended at least one play in the past 12 months, by country



**Figure 5-3:** Proportion of Saudi adults who have ever participated in a theatrical performance



**Figure 5-4:** Proportion of Saudi adults who have ever participated in a theatrical performance, by gender



# Infrastructure and Investment

## Facilities and Equipment

While there are many spaces that host theatrical performances throughout the year (roughly 70 theatres, 32 of which are housed at universities),<sup>(30)</sup> the main challenge facing the theatre industry in Saudi Arabia is the lack of well-equipped venues. All the spaces currently being used for theatre are set up for seminars or speaking events rather than being outfitted specifically for theatre. This situation is what led the General Entertainment Authority, for example, to build the Bakr Al-Shadi theatre, which is designed specifically for plays, for Riyadh Sea-

son. Meanwhile, the theatre companies that lack performance spaces at their branch of the SASCA borrow or rent space from universities or private entities and outfit the venue as best they can. The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) has the best-equipped performance spaces in the country, but its theatre programming remains limited to a small number of productions brought in from other countries each year. It has not opened up its facilities for local productions or talent development, creating a pressing need to build major national theatres as well as smaller venues equipped for modern theatre in various cities

across the country that can foster creative experimentation.

As for the private sector, the institutions active in the field do not have their own venues, relying instead on what is available. The Theatre of Saudi Arabia, for example, rents a lecture hall from the Jeddah Literary Club.<sup>(31)</sup> The space had to be adapted to allow weekly performances throughout the year. Apart from the four theatres mentioned above (Theatre of Saudi Arabia, Jeddah Comedy Club, Madinah Comedy Club, and the House of Comedy in Dammam), there is no permanent private-sector presence, though



the General Entertainment Authority or Saudi Seasons puts on occasional short-term shows.

### Education and Training

School theatre is the most important means of discovering and honing theatrical talent, especially through regular regional and national competitions. Nevertheless, theatre education and training remain very limited. The SASCA's Thaqqif Institute is still under development and has hosted only two theatre courses from its founding through October 30, 2019. There is no other entity offering specialized courses, with the exception of ones occasionally hosted by the SASCA, literary clubs, universities, or the Ithra Theatre. To make up for this, amateurs rely on self-study and learning-by-doing, signing up for plays at branches of the SASCA or universities. Private entities (Theatre of Saudi Arabia, Jeddah Comedy Club, Madinah Comedy Club, and the House of Comedy in Dammam) also offer performance opportunities for those who are interested in honing their skills, though this is typically limited to comedies and stand-up.<sup>(32)</sup>

Theatre in Saudi Arabia is fundamentally dependent on amateurs, as there are no arts institutes, and Saudi universities do not have theatre departments that can produce professionals. The study of theatre in higher education being typically limited to literature departments. Some who wish to pursue theatre attend programs abroad. As for the labor market, we find very few people working professionally in this

sub-sector.<sup>(33)</sup> There are 100 workers registered as wardrobe supervisors, 9 men and 91 women. This number does not tell the whole story, however, as this category includes people working in television. There are 158 scriptwriters, a number which—apart from being small—also includes writers across media. The Ministry of Labor's records include only one Saudi theatre director, along with seven non-Saudi directors, and 302 Saudi actors, 274 of them male and 28 female. Counting the actors in Saudi theatre and television productions indeed yields a higher number, especially since this figure is for actors across media. This is because these low numbers do not reflect a dearth of people working in theatre, but rather that very few of them are professionals. There is also a lack of specialized categories in these statistics, such as "theatre agent" or "theatre technician."

To address these inadequacies in theatre and other cultural sub-sectors, on December 30, 2019, the Minister of Culture announced its Cultural Scholarship Program, which includes theatre. In early 2020 the Ministry also announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Education to strengthen educational programming and cultural activities, and another with the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation to launch courses in various cultural areas, including theatre.<sup>(34)</sup>

### High Demand for Theatre

Despite the sub-sector's limited infrastructure and lack of trained

professionals, there are indications of high popular demand for theatre, which creates major opportunities for investment in this field. The plays produced by the General Entertainment Authority in the first half of 2019 drew 57,176 audience members.<sup>(35)</sup> These were overwhelmingly of an entertaining or social character as per the Authority's mandate, and all but one had paid entry, with prices ranging from 20 to 100 SAR for regular seats at most plays.<sup>(36)</sup> The Dammam branch of the SASCA drew 15,000 audience members for its 33 performances,<sup>(37)</sup> most of which were free or had a nominal charge of no more than 25 SAR. These varied performances differed from those of the General Entertainment Authority, offering dramas, experimental plays, and comedies.

The popular demand for theatre makes it clear that there are large investment opportunities. The Ministry of Culture anticipates announcing additional details about its initiatives in 2020 that will be led by Theatre and Performing Arts Commission and its CEO Sultan Al-Bazi'e, particularly regarding the construction of new performance spaces and the launch of the National Theatre Initiative. The Cultural Scholarship Program will also help to develop and professionalize the country's talent pool. It is expected that popular theatre will continue on its current trajectory as indicated by the attendance figures. The low number of private entities specializing in theatre and performing arts relative to demand leaves room for additional firms to compete and invest in this sub-sector.

**Endnote:**

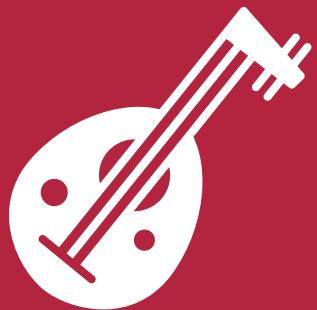
- (1) Abdulrahman Al-Khuraiji, *The Birth of Saudi Theatre* [Nash'at al-masrah al-Sa'udi] (SASCA, 1986), 42.
- (2) Ibid., 40.
- (3) Teacher and Society [Mu'allim wa-mujtama'] (Unayzah: Bin Salih Cultural Center, 1988).
- (4) Yasir Madkhali, *The Crisis of Saudi Theatre* [Azmat al-masrah al-sa'udi] (Dar Nashiri lil-Nashr al-Iliktroni, 2007), 83.
- (5) Abdulrahman Al-Khuraiji, *The Birth of Saudi Theatre* [Nash'at al-masrah al-Sa'udi] (SASCA, 1986), 83.
- (6) Abdullah Abduljabbar, "The Presence of Absence" [Hudur al-ghiyab], *Al-Jazeera*, February 25, 2005.
- (7) Abdulrahman Al-Khuraiji, *The Birth of Saudi Theatre* [Nash'at al-masrah al-Sa'udi] (SASCA, 1986), 44-45.
- (8) Saudi Theater Archive, Twitter, <[https://twitter.com/SaudiTheaterArc?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eser-p%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor](https://twitter.com/SaudiTheaterArc?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eser-p%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor)>.
- (9) "An Interview with Abdulrahman Al-Hamad," *Theatre World Archive*, <<https://www.startimes.com/f.aspx?t=11863640>>.
- (10) Abdulrahman Al-Khuraiji, *The Birth of Saudi Theatre* [Nash'at al-masrah al-Sa'udi] (SASCA, 1986), 133.
- (11) Abdulrahman Al-Khuraiji, *The Birth of Saudi Theatre* [Nash'at al-masrah al-Sa'udi] (SASCA, 1986), 77.
- (12) Ibid., 50-53.
- (13) Interview with actor/writer/director Khalid Al-Harbi, Jeddah, September 15, 2019.
- (14) Sami Al-Juman, *Saudi Theatre: From Beginnings to Renewal* [Al-Masrah al-sa'udi min al-riyadah ila al-tajdid] (Al-Ahsa Literary Club and the Al-Intishar Al-Arabi Foundation, 2018), 51.
- (15) Interview with SASCA Administrative Committee Director Abdulaziz Ismail, Riyadh, October 8, 2019.
- (16) Sami Al-Juman, *Saudi Theatre: From Beginnings to Renewal* [Al-Masrah al-sa'udi min al-riyadah ila al-tajdid] (Al-Ahsa Literary Club and the Al-Intishar Al-Arabi Foundation, 2018), 17.
- (17) This list is incomplete, as the efforts to document the achievements of Saudi theatre abroad are ongoing, and researchers indicate that there may be over 200 international prizes. Most of the information in this table was collected by Sultan Al-Nawah, SASCA, Al-Ahsa branch.
- (18) Special report on the first season of the Saudi Theatre.
- (19) Interview with Jeddah Comedy Club Founder and Executive Director Yaser Bakr, Jeddah, September 11, 2019.
- (20) Interview with SASCA Administrative Committee Director Abdulaziz Ismail, Riyadh, October 8, 2019.
- (21) "Ministry of Culture announces King Fahd Cultural Center as choice to house National Theatre Company and National Music Band," Saudi Press Agency, March 28, 2019.
- (22) Then president of the SASCA, Umar Al-Saif.
- (23) Thaqqif Institute.
- (24) "King Abdulaziz University organizes theatre arts workshops in Makkah, Jeddah, and Taif," Saudi press Agency November 13, 2019.
- (25) "The Emperor's New Groove plays at Dar Al Uloom University in Riyadh," Saudi Press Agency, February 11, 2018.
- (26) "Young Saudi women bring theatre to the streets," Independent Arabia, June 15, 2019.
- (27) "Conclusion of the second Playwriting Conference at the Dammam SASCA," Saudi News Agency, July 26, 2019.
- (28) "Saudi play wins prizes at second Tuqous Festival in Jordan," Al Yaum, September 7, 2019.
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Chapter Six

# 6





# Music

- **Music in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview**
- **Saudi Music Today**
- **Saudi Music in the World**
- **Awards and Achievements**
- **2019 Cultural Participation Survey**
- **Infrastructure and Investment**

# Music in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview

Song, both with and without instrumental accompaniment, has been ever-present in the culture of the Arabian Peninsula. The region overflows with melodies that vary according to the occasion or social context. This richness is evident in the diversity of Saudi musical heritage, as well as in the interaction between certain Saudi musical genres and the modern styles that emerged in the surrounding Arab region.

Music in the Arab world was largely an oral tradition,<sup>(1)</sup> and popular musical forms across the region have shared significant commonalities. Musical traditions in the Arabian Peninsula were shaped by the inter-communal contact and exchange between eastern and western regions of Arabia and neighboring regions in Yemen, Iraq, the Levant, Egypt, Persia, India, and Turkey. Perhaps the musical genre that best exemplifies this wide geographical circulation of musical culture is danah, a musical form associated with the sea, which is popular throughout the Gulf and Hijaz regions.

On the other hand, there are dozens of Saudi musical forms native to regions within its borders. For example, in the west, we find improvisational vocal styles like far'i, hadri, and Hijazi mawwal, wedding dances like majass, majrur, mizmar, and zaffat al-kharit, as well as celebratory forms like jakar, ghazalah, and naqi. In Yanbu, musicians play the simsimiya, a string instrument, and in the northern and central regions, we find the folkdance dahha and the hujayni song form. Meanwhile, in Najd, we have the 'ardah sword dance, as well as samri, mashub, rafiha, and





sakhri styles. In the east we find Gulf vocal arts including maritime music and work songs, as well as the folk genres liwa, farisa, hijazi, hayda, and zuhayri. The south is famous for 'ardah, along with mi'rad, dammah, khatwah, zuhafah, rubkhah, mathlu-thah, zamil, 'usabiyah, and 'ukayri.<sup>(2)</sup> Such a diverse musical heritage has been a rich source of inspiration for later Saudi music.

### Roots of Saudi Music

There are two main schools that form the basis of Saudi musical arts: the Hijazi school and the Gulf school, both of which have been influenced by the musical styles of neighboring regions. Historically, the Hijaz attracted migration from all over the Muslim World, mixing diverse musical traditions.<sup>(3)</sup> It was distinguished by a number of dance forms, such as mizmar and zir (or khabiti/'asiri/qasabah), traditional song forms like majrur, sahba, and kasra in the desert regions, and other genres like danah and 'adani. The Gulf school, on the other hand, is based on the samri and khimari styles, the former having been revived and developed by the Nabati folk poet Muhammad bin La'aboun (1797-1831).<sup>(4)</sup> Out of these schools came the early generations of Saudi musicians, who were born in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, beginning in the Hijaz. Most of these musicians were amateurs who did not make a living from music, as it was rare at that time to be a professional musician. The majority of these artists' work was never recorded, with the notable exceptions of Muhsin Shalabi, Muhammad Ali

Sindi, Mahmud Halwani, and Abdul Rahman Mu'adhin, who all rose to prominence in the 1940s.<sup>(5)</sup>

### Beginnings of Modern Saudi Music

While the pioneering generation worked within the framework of traditional musical forms, more formal compositions began to appear in the 1950s. These compositions were influenced by the wider trend in Arab music towards a division of labor between composers and singers.<sup>(6)</sup> Famous artists of this period, including Mutlaq Al-Dhiyabi, Tariq Abdul Hakim, Muhammad Al-Idrisi, Abdullah Muhammad, Abu Saud Al-Hammadi, and Shadi Al-Riyadh (Sa'ad Al-Yahya), laid the foundations for Saudi musical identity. The rise of this generation coincided with the emergence of supporting institutions. A radio station was founded in Jeddah, along with a music department in its West Arabian

directorate. Aramco Television was introduced, and records were produced in Al-Ahsa and neighboring Bahrain.<sup>(7)</sup> Additionally, the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces' Institute of Music took up the teaching of music and music theory in an academic setting, thus becoming a cornerstone of Saudi music. The school was launched in 1953 under the leadership of the pioneering modern musician Tariq Abdul Hakim.<sup>(8)</sup>

In 1962, Khobar's Municipal Park became the site of the first public concert to use musical instruments in the history of the Kingdom. The concert was held to celebrate King Saud's return from the United States, where he had been receiving medical treatment, and it lasted three days and nights. The performances featured string instruments, which during the preceding decades were not customarily heard in public.<sup>(9)</sup> The 1960s, in general, saw groundbreaking community-based and official musical

activity, with the formation of several musical ensembles, including the Fiddiyya Ensemble in Khobar, the Dammam Television Ensemble, the Amal Ensemble in Qatif, and the Hajar Ensemble in Al-Ahsa.<sup>(10)</sup> During the period of 1961-1964, music journalism emerged to accompany this movement. It was driven by the individual efforts of figures such as Badr Kurayyim, Lutfi Zaini, Muhammad Rajab, Hamdan Sadaqah, and Saad Al-Humaydeen.<sup>(11)</sup> The developments discussed here concern vocal music, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, as purely instrumental music was not part of Saudi heritage and remains rare. It is important to remember, therefore, that in this context, musical compositions always include lyrics and vocals.<sup>(12)</sup>

Alongside these changes, traditional folk music, as opposed to commercial pop music, became increasingly visible and established itself in the Saudi music scene. One of the



most prominent figures of traditional folk music is Basheer Hamad Shannan, whose career lasted only eleven years. Salama al-Abdullah was another of the first singers to release albums in this style, including tracks recorded with an ensemble in Cairo. He also founded the first recording studio in Riyadh.<sup>(13)</sup> Out of Al-Kharj Governorate came the star Hamad al-Tayyar, who wrote new arrangements for folk poetry that enjoyed widespread popularity. He also joined the Riyadh radio station's ensemble as an oud player and composer, and he performed at small functions for athletic clubs. The Eastern Province was home to the voice of Isa Al-Ahsa'i, the groundbreaking performer of folk music in Al-Ahsa. Some artists who have been performing since the 1980s remain prominent on the traditional folk stage, among them Maza'al Farhan, who has given concerts throughout the Gulf.<sup>(14)</sup> As for lyricists, the poet Muhammad Saad al-Janubi became famous for his well-known poem "Enough of Your Love" (Khalas Min Hubbikum), which was sung by Fahd bin Saeed. His poetry was also put to music by the likes of Shannan and Al-Ahsa'i.<sup>(15)</sup>

### Stars, Production, and Institutional Withdrawal

In the 1970s, the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA) played a major role in fostering musical activity, providing the fertile ground that produced a number of talented musicians, singers, and composers. The musician Sami Ihsan helped found the music department in the SASCA's Jeddah branch, which he also directed for many years.<sup>(16)</sup> Major figures arose in this period,<sup>(17)</sup> among them Mut-



Iaq Al-Thiyabi, who served as the president of the music department at Jeddah Radio,<sup>(18)</sup> as well as Siraj Omar, Fawzi Mahsun, Omar Kadras, Abdullah Muhammad, and Ghazi Ali.<sup>(19)</sup>

This was an era of increasing celebrity for singers, with the rise of artists like Talal Maddah and Mohammed Abdu, whose fame in the 1970s stretched across the Arab world. The artistic momentum of the pe-

riod can be traced to the creation of radio theatre (Masrah al-Radio) in 1961. As part of its programming development, Saudi Radio carried out a listener survey, which identified Talal Maddah, Tariq Abdul Hakim, and Ghazi Ali as the most popular singers. The songs that listeners most enjoyed were "Weeping for my Troubles" ("Abki 'ala Ma Jara Li Ya Hali"), "In the al-Madinah" ("Fi Rubu' al-Madinah"), and "The People's Darling" ("Habib al-Sha'b").<sup>(20)</sup> There were also important patriotic songs, such as Talal Maddah's "My Beloved Country" ("Watani al-Habib"), which remain part of Saudi popular culture. The lyrical content of Saudi song also developed at the hands of poets like Prince Badr bin Abdul Muhsin, Prince Abdullah Al-Faisal, and Ibrahim Khafaji, who wrote the lyrics of the national anthem.<sup>(21)</sup> Other members of this vanguard included Abadi Al-Johar, as well as female voices such as

Etab, Ibtisam Lutfi,<sup>(22)</sup> and the soloist and composer Fathiya Yahya Hasan, known by her moniker "Tuha," who flourished in the 1960s. The great Abu Bakr Salem released a collection of his greatest hits in the 1980s, including the famous patriotic song "Ya Biladi wa-Asli Allah Ma'ak."

As pop music spread, a local music production industry emerged, including private recording studios like Sawt Al-Jazirah and Riyadh Phone. The introduction of the cassette tape invigorated the market. Despite the growing arena for commercial music, by the mid-1980s, the role of both public institutions and independent ensembles began to recede. This can be seen, for example, in the suspension of the SASCA Music Committee (which had been renamed the Nasheed Committee),<sup>(23)</sup> and in the reduced activity or dissolution of performing groups.<sup>(24)</sup> Public music education

remained completely absent outside the context of the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces School of Music in Riyadh.

On the other hand, the ranks of musical celebrities grew in the 1990s to include Rashed Al-Majed, Rabeh Sager, Khalid Abdulrahman, and Ali Abdul Kareem, who followed the lead of Abdul Majeed Abdullah in the 1980s. The beginning of the decade saw the official launch of operettas at the Janadriyah Festival.<sup>(25)</sup> Some of the most important singers and composers in the Kingdom participated in this annual epic performance. Abdel Rab Idrees composed the operetta for the eighth Janadriyah Festival in 1995, titled Horses of the Dawn (Khuyul al-Fajr), and Siraj Omar, who had represented Saudi musicians at the Union of Arab Artists in Cairo, composed the operetta Unity (Al-Tawhid) for the festival in 1994.<sup>(26)</sup>

## Key Moments for Music in 2019

### March



The Ministry of Culture launched the first national music ensemble, led by musician Abdel Rab Idris and based out of the King Fahd Cultural Center in Riyadh.

### April



The King Fahd Cultural Sector in Riyadh held the second "Folklore Nights," celebrating traditional music.

### June



The Ministry of Culture hosted the Italian La Scala Opera at the King Fahd Center in Riyadh.

### August



The Ministry of Culture announced the establishment of arts academies, including one specialized in music, which will begin activities in early 2021.

### September



The Ministry of Culture organized a folklore competition, which included contests in traditional music and dance.

## The New Millennium

Since 1998, concerts have been held as part of summer festivals in the Kingdom. These include performances at the Muftaha Theater in Abha, which has had fluctuating levels of activity.<sup>(27)</sup> Jeddah hosted the Jeddah Music Festival beginning in 1999, which was enlivened by a number of soloists from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries.<sup>(28)</sup> The Jeddah Ghair Festival was held from 2002 until 2009.<sup>(29)</sup>

The last two decades have seen major changes in the music industry throughout the Arab world, from revolutions in media—moving from cassette tapes to CDs to digital platforms—to new distribution and production techniques and the dominance of regional giants in production. Foremost among these is the Saudi-owned media conglomerate Rotana.



Nevertheless, production companies did not control the entire field, and commercial pop was not the only form of music. Traditional ensembles continued to enliven social occasions as well as festivals, as seen in their significant presence at the Janadriyah Festival. A reinvited traditional singing style called "Shailat" also emerged, which combines chanted poetry with sound editing and has found a

wide audience.<sup>(30)</sup> In the late 2000s, rap and hip hop groups sprang up, as young people drew on the musical style that originated in New York City in the 1970s. This was part of a larger phenomenon of informal and independent music groups composed of self-taught amateurs who sought to fuse disparate musical genres, despite the lack of infrastructure and supportive initiatives at the time.

### November



The Watariyat Strings Festival was held by SACRA in Dammam to celebrate talented musicians.

### November



The Ministry of Education announced that music and arts would be included in the curriculum plan for public and private education, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture.

### November



The winners of the General Entertainment Authority's GEA Challenges, which includes singing and instrumental music categories, were announced.

### December



The first cultural scholarship program in the history of the Kingdom was launched, providing educational opportunities for male and female students studying culture and arts, including music.

### December



The first MDLBeast Music Festival was held over the course of 3 days in Riyadh, organized by the General Entertainment Authority.

# Saudi Music Today

## Music as Culture

There has been an active music scene in Saudi Arabia as of late, as live music has been celebrated by a number of authorities, including the General Authority for Culture (later the Ministry of Culture), the General Entertainment Authority, the General Sports Authority, and the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage. Since 2017, concerts and musical performances

have enjoyed official support, with many concerts held in Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam, and later in the remainder of the country.<sup>(31)</sup> Music has not been limited to the entertainment sub-sector, but rather has been recognized as an integral part of culture, from traditional music and folk dances emphasizing local heritage and identity to collaborations with international classical ensembles, and new genres such as jazz appearing on the local

stage. For example, in April 2017, the King Fahd Cultural Center in Riyadh inaugurated "Folklore Nights," an event dedicated to traditional music.<sup>(32)</sup> The following year, the General Entertainment Authority sponsored a jazz festival in Riyadh featuring both local and international performers.<sup>(33)</sup>

In this context of official celebration of music, the Ministry of Culture launched the Saudi National Music



Ensemble in March 2019. The first of its kind, this ensemble is directed by Dr. Abdel Rab Idris and based at the King Fahd Cultural Center.

In early 2019, the General Entertainment Authority announced that it was collaborating with the appropriate authorities to issue permits for live musical performances. This has helped create new spaces for young artists and amateur musicians to develop their talents, incorporating music into the daily cultural life of Saudi cities.



### Independent Bands and Young Talent

One of the most remarkable elements of the Saudi musical landscape is the phenomenon of young, self-taught amateur musicians and independent bands, performing in public and private venues such as cafés and restaurants (which have recently been permitted to host live performances) as well as musical-talent programs in other Arab countries. As mentioned above, amateur musicians began, on a small scale, to carve out a narrow space for themselves in the late 2000s, despite the limited musical opportunities at the time. With official support for music and the return of live musical performances to the public sphere, these artists have gained new momentum. In 2019, several of these bands performed as a part of major cultural events or under the auspices of supportive cultural institutions. For example, the Saudi band Mizan performed at the huge MDLBeast festival in Riyadh alongside Arab stars and bands from

around the world. Joining them in the lineup was the band Al Farabi, who also performed at the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) in August 2019. The Saudi jazz ensemble Peace Tune also gave concerts at the King Fahd Cultural Center in 2016 and 2017 along with other performers. Some of these groups include both men and women, such as the band Quite Noisy from the Eastern Province.

Another striking feature of the Saudi music scene is that young musicians have adopted western musical genres such as jazz, rock, and hip hop. Even more importantly, they have blended eastern and western styles. Some of these bands present themselves as bridging cultural gaps between East and West or as attempts to assert their identity in a globalized world. Some groups have taken steps towards becoming professionals. Among the winners at the 2014 Independent Music Awards held in New York was Al Farabi.<sup>[34]</sup> Abdulrahman Mohammed, who started out as an amateur singing classical Arabic poetry accompa-

nied on the guitar and other western instruments, has gone on to achieve widespread fame and perform at major festivals in the Arab world. Nevertheless, the majority of Saudi bands consist of amateurs and still need additional support.

This situation underscores the importance of local talent development initiatives, which have been absent until recently. In 2019, the SASCA branch in Dammam hosted the first Watariyat Festival with the goal of welcoming talented artists to the musical stage. The festival included a stringed-instrument competition, with more than 90 contestants, featuring the oud, violin, qanun, and cello. The first session of the festival was named in honor of Abadi Al-Johar. The General Entertainment Authority also organized the program The Talent in collaboration with Rotana Media Group, which created social media challenges to discover talented people in entertainment fields including instrumental music and voice. The first winner was Ahmad Gaseri, followed by Yazid al-Qarni.

## The Ministry of Culture: Music Commission and the Creation of Musical Education

In addition to the initiatives to discover and develop talent, there has been crucial development in musical education, which the field has lacked for decades. This is a high priority for the Ministry of Culture. In March 2019, the Ministry announced its strategic plan, which includes the creation of new structures for the cultural sub-sectors. It provides a framework for the founding of specialized bodies charged with supporting their respective sub-sectors through launching their own initiatives and events. The body responsible for music is the Music Commission, which is directed by the musician Jihad Al-Khalidi.

The formation of an independent cultural entity concerned with music marks a watershed moment in the history of Saudi music. This development comes alongside the launch of a number of infrastructure initiatives, including building professional studios and performance venues and the formation of national orchestras. These efforts will help develop the pool of musicians qualified to teach music and lead dedicated academic institutions. This year saw three historic decisions by the Ministry of Culture that aim to remedy the field's lack of highly-trained musical professionals:

- In August 2019, the ministry commissioned the establishment of art academies, including one specialized in music, which will begin activities in early 2021.

- At the beginning of November 2019, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, it was decided that music and arts would be included in the curricula for public and private education, provided that the Ministry of Culture has the authority to permit universities, institutes, and schools to activate cultural programs and activities related to the arts.
- In December 2019, the first Cultural Scholarship Program in the Kingdom was launched, providing educational opportunities to students in artistic and cultural fields, including music, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.





### Private and Community-Based Pushes for Musical Training

Given the lack of music infrastructure, young people's efforts to study music through private lessons with amateur musicians or over the Internet have served as a linchpin. Some have had the good fortune to enroll in music programs abroad. Efforts to teach music were hampered by a lack of financial resources, personnel, marketing, proper facilities, and musical instruments for music students.<sup>(35)</sup> Ghazi Ali was among the more prominent artists to attempt to establish a music academy, but his dream was not realized, and he only managed to use his limited resources to run a music school from his home.<sup>(36)</sup>

Over the past two years, there have been a number of community-based initiatives in this area that go beyond individual efforts. In late 2018, for example, the SASCA announced the establishment of the Thaqqif Institute. There have also been youth-oriented initiatives, such as the Arbab Alheraf (Craftsmen), which was launched in 2017 to foster talented young artists, as well as Bait Ziryab, a music school in historic Jeddah that offers music lessons and supports artists.<sup>(37)</sup> These initiatives still do not offer systematic, officially-recognized training, but rather base-level activities for amateurs and hobbyists. The Ministry of Culture, as the lead authority responsible for instituting regulatory frameworks for cultural activities in the community, is working to provide licensing for community-based music centers and academies.

### Folk Singing

Traditional folk singing has enjoyed relative continuity, compared with other musical forms in the Kingdom, gaining official recognition at national festivals and in everyday social life. Recently, its presence has increased with the growing emphasis on cultural identity. This interest has manifested in multiple ways, including documentation efforts, such as the registry of the Alardah Alnajdiyah sword dance from Najd on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2015, and mizmar in 2016,<sup>(38)</sup> as well as the expansion of performance opportunities including specialized festivals and public events.

In this context, the King Fahd Cultural Center hosted the second

"Folklore Nights" festival in April 2019, featuring traditional performing arts presented by local folk ensembles. Folk stars including Salim Al-Huwail, Tahir Al-Ahsa'i, and Hamad Al-Tayyar, were also honored. The folk singer Sa'ad Goma'a also performed a number of his songs, alongside emerging artists like Turki Al-Saleh and Abbas Bin Saleh.<sup>(39)</sup> Folk singing has become a more frequent presence at public occasions, from celebrations like Saudi National Day to cultural events like the Souk Okaz Festival<sup>(40)</sup> or programming as part of Saudi Seasons. Ensembles with a wealth of experience have participated in the revival of these events. Among these ensembles are the Jeddah-based group

Abu Siraj, which just celebrated its 39th anniversary; the Al-Diriyah Ensemble; the Saudi Al-Jawhara Ensemble, which performed for Saudi National Day at the Cairo Opera House;<sup>(41)</sup> the Al-Ahsa-based group Al-Nasiriyah; and many more from all over the Kingdom. The Saudi Heritage Preservation Society's 2019 report counted nineteen performance groups, comprising some 950 members.<sup>(42)</sup>

### Diverse Concerts and Performances in 2019

In 2019, musical performances experienced an upsurge compared to previous years with the launch

of the Saudi Seasons program under the leadership of a committee comprising multiple governmental authorities. These performances were somewhat diverse, with a noticeable presence of music as both a form of entertainment and cultural activity. In part, this took the form of orchestral concerts, including western classical music. The Ministry of Culture organized a performance by Italy's La Scala opera house, in which they presented musical selections for an audience of roughly 3,000.<sup>(43)</sup> The concert opened with an operatic rendition of the national anthem by Saudi soprano Sawsan Al-Bahiti. The Ministry of Culture also collaborated with the Russian Direct Investment Fund



to hold an event called "Cultures of Russia," that coincided with the visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin and included a concert by Russia's Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra featuring classical pieces performed for a Saudi audience.<sup>(44)</sup> The first Winter at Tantora, held in early 2019 in Al-Ula Governorate, also included performances of great classical works by international stars including the Chinese pianist Lang Lang, Egyptian composer Omar Khairat, and Italian opera singer Andrea Bocelli.

As for entertainment, pop music dominated the scene. The popularity of the K-pop band Super Junior, in particular, exemplifies Saudi youth's deep engagement with the phenomenon of globalized popular culture.<sup>(45)</sup> A number of the Arab world's most famous singers have also performed for holidays, Saudi National Day, and Saudi Seasons, including Angham, Assala, Ahlam, Waleed Al-Shami, Amr Diab, and Abdullah Al-Ruwaishid, as well as pop and rap stars like French Montana, Dimitri Vegas and Like Mike.<sup>(46)</sup> As part of the programming for Riyadh Season, the General Entertainment Authority also oversaw the major festival MDLBeast, which featured performers from a range of genres.

Saudi artists and Saudi music have also been well-represented. First-rate Saudi stars gave an unprecedented number of concerts, and the activities for Saudi National Day included an event called "From 1960 to Today" at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh. The five-day event featured sixty songs from the Saudi tradition spanning the period from 1960 to 2016.<sup>(47)</sup>



## Key Figures for 2019

**7.2%**

The average annual growth rate of music consumption in the Kingdom.

**10.5 \$**

The average per capita spending (in USD) on music streaming, which is just under the global average (11.45\$).

**240** million

The sales volume (in riyals) from online music streaming by 5.5 million users in 2019.

**19**



The number of performance groups reported by the Saudi Society for the Preservation of Heritage in 2019, with approximately 950 total members.



**90**

The number of musicians who participated in the Watariyat Strings Festival hosted by SASCA in Dammam.

## Saudi Music in the World

Despite institutional limitations, Saudi stars have still managed to shine bright for many years, and Saudi music has transcended the Gulf region. Many Saudi artists have performed in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Gulf countries, as well as in European capitals like Paris and London.<sup>[48]</sup> Some of the most important Saudi contributions to music abroad have been by composers like Tariq Abdul Hakim, Siraj Omar,

Abdel Rab Idris, Sami Ihsan, and Salih al-Shehri, all of whom have written songs for some of the Arab world's biggest stars.

The year 2019, likewise, saw Saudi musicians participating in music abroad. As part of its program to strengthen the worldwide exposure of Saudi culture, the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) organized an exhibition in South Korea titled "Bridges to Seoul." In the sec-

tion on Saudi music, Khalil Al Muwaili collaborated with a Korean ensemble to present a musical dialogue between the two countries. The Saudi cultural exhibition that was organized to accompany the Forum of Ministers of Culture at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris in November 2019 also included showcases of Saudi music throughout the period of the exhibition, including a number of performances by western musicians.



# Awards and Achievements

## Watariyat Festival

At the Watariyat Festival, organized by the Dammam branch of SASCA in November 2019, awards were presented for four instruments: oud, guitar, violin, and qanun. The artists Madani Abadi, Muhammad Al-Uthaymeen, and Abdulaziz Al-Abdulqadir were also honored.

## GEA Challenges

GEA Challenges, the General Entertainment Authority's award competition, was launched with the aim of discovering and providing training to talented Saudis in numerous entertainment fields, including singing and instrumental music. 11,744 people at various stages of education and from all over the Kingdom participated, and over 20 million SAR in prizes were awarded. Of the nineteen winners, Fahad Kashaf received the prize in instrumental music, and Moath Bugnah won the category for vocals.

## Folklore Competition

In September 2019, the Ministry of Culture organized a folklore competition as part of its efforts to preserve and promote non-material national heritage in its many forms. It included contests in music, dance, and storytelling, and music experts, such as Talal Bagher, sat on the panel of judges. In mid-January 2020, the Ministry of Culture announced the results, and the ten winners in the music category were honored with a prize of 35,000 SAR each. The Ministry of Culture has also announced the National Culture Awards initiative, one of which is devoted to the music field.



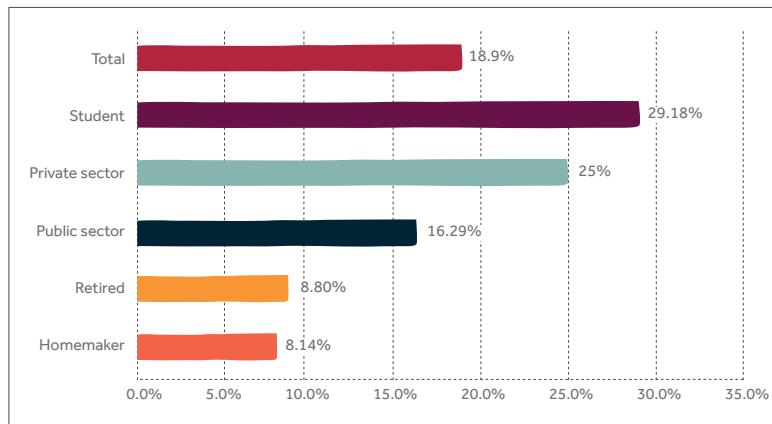
# 2019 Cultural Participation Survey

The Cultural Participation Survey, which was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2019, measured rates of concert attendance, demand for music education, and music listenership. The Survey took a representative sample of Saudi populations from every region.

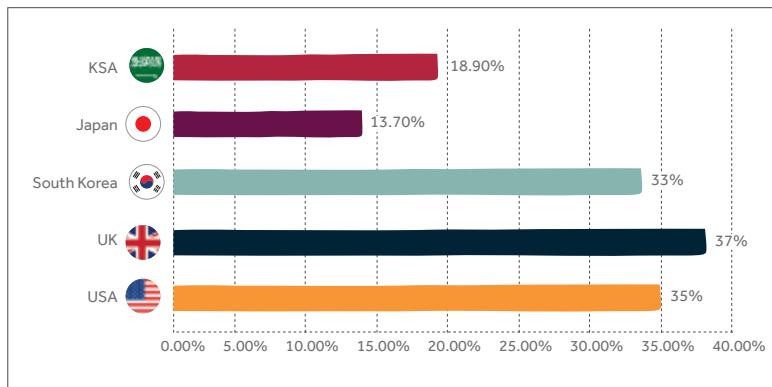
When asked about concert attendance in the past twelve months, 13.6% of respondents reported attending one or two concerts, 3.3% attended three to five concerts, and 2% attended over five. Of those who attended at least one concert, there were more men than women (19.95% vs 17.71%). The highest rates were reported among students, at 29.18%, compared with 25% of private-sector employees, 16.29% of public-sector employees, 8.80% of retirees, and 8.14% of homemakers.

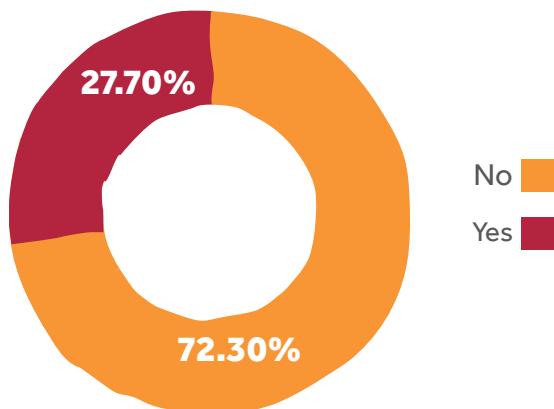
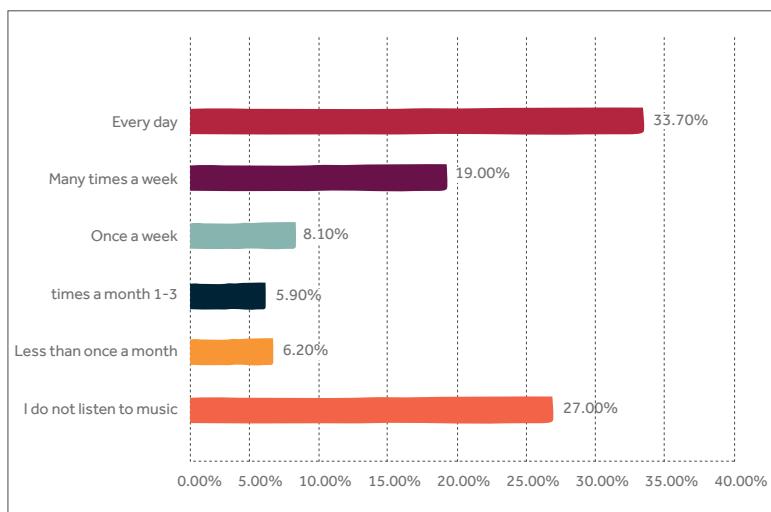
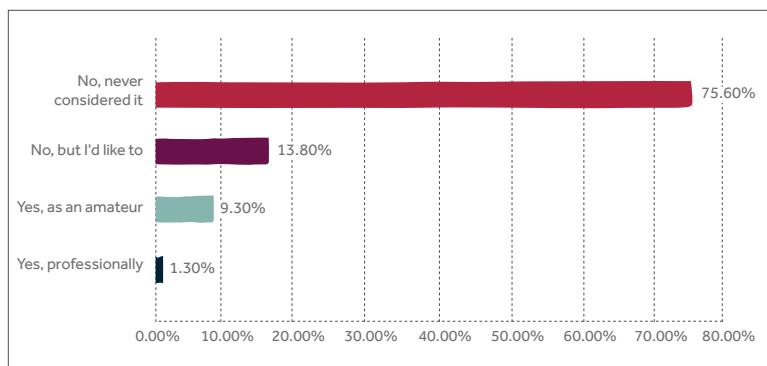
While the rates of concert attendance appear low compared with those in countries (Figure 6-2), they should, in fact, be positive indicators, given the newness of the industry, which has not yet penetrated all areas of the country.

**Figure 6-1: Rate of attendance of concerts and other musical events in KSA (among adults, past 12 months), by occupation**



**Figure 6-2: Rate of attendance of concerts and other musical events (at least once in the past 12 months), by country<sup>(49)</sup>**



**Figure 6-3: Interest in enrolling in a music school in KSA****Figure 6-4: Music listenership in KSA among adults (past 12 months)****Figure 6-5: Percentage of Saudis who play an instrument**

As for musical education, roughly a quarter (27.7%) of respondents indicated that they would be interested if music institutes were available. There was no significant difference in interest based on gender (28.25% of males vs 27.19% of females).

For music listenership, 33.7% reported listening to music daily, while 27% reported that they never listen to music. The percentage of Saudis who listen to music (70.6%) is somewhat lower than the corresponding rates in France (88%) and the United States (92%).

Looking at instrumental music, the vast majority (75.6%) of Saudis do not play a musical instrument and never considered learning one, whereas 13.8% do not play an instrument well but would like to learn. 9.3% reported playing an instrument as an amateur, while 1.3% play at a professional level. The rate of instrument playing among males was roughly double that of females (14% vs 6.54%). However, the proportion of females reporting interest in learning an instrument was slightly higher than among males (15.74% vs 12.19%). The relative number of amateur or professional instrumentalists in Saudi Arabia (10.6%) is comparable to that of other countries, such as the United Kingdom (11.7%), Japan (10.9%), the United States (11.2%). This is a positive indicator which promises major progress if the field can overcome regulatory and institutional obstacles to pursuing music professionally.

# Infrastructure and Investment

## Changing Patterns in Music Consumption and Production

Listeners' methods for accessing music have changed all over the world. Whereas artists used to release a complete album as a single product, whether as a tape or CD, new distribution channels have made individual songs a major unit of musical consumption. Saudi music production has moved in the same direction, with many artists releasing single songs instead of recording entire albums. The low cost of recording individual songs and the ease of distributing them online has also contributed to the decline of the complete album.<sup>(50)</sup> The conditions under which songs are pro-

duced have changed as well. While production companies used to be responsible for the acquisition, distribution, and marketing of new tracks, today, some artists take on the costs of production and recording, and then release their work on YouTube or other platforms in order to remain active in the arts scene and continue performing.<sup>(51)</sup>

The main challenge facing the Saudi music industry today, from recording and distribution to videography and marketing, is the scarcity of music production companies, which means that local artists and emerging talents lack options. Existing production companies may also impose certain musical forms,<sup>(52)</sup> neglecting other genres that might find an audi-

ence if there were more support and opportunities for production.

## Music Applications and Rates of Consumption

The use of CDs has been overtaken by streaming services, including iTunes, SoundCloud, Anghami, and YouTube, as well as Spotify, which began service in the Middle East in late 2018. The Kingdom's market for music has grown annually by a remarkable 7.2%, with online streaming revenue in 2019 reaching 234 million SAR, roughly 5.5 million users, and average per-capita spending close to the global average (10.50 USD compared with an average of 11.45 USD).<sup>(53)</sup>



## Demand for Live Music

Demand is not limited to recordings and streaming services, but rather extends to live performances, with high attendance levels that have surpassed organizers' expectations. From January to October of 2019, the total number of attendees at concerts and exhibitions of traditional art forms throughout the Kingdom was over 150 thousand.<sup>(54)</sup> This number is especially high when considering the newness of the industry. The sub-sector is still in its formative period, which creates fertile ground for investment, particularly given the positive indicators mentioned above.

## Services and Facilities

Concerts are generally held at universities, stadiums, and municipal auditoriums, due to the scarcity of national venues equipped for large-audience musical performances. There are 40 performance venues in the Kingdom, counting cultural centers and auditoriums in municipal buildings and parks.<sup>(55)</sup> However, these spaces lack essential amenities for hosting concerts, in addition to their limited capacity relative to popular demand. This is because large-scale performance venues are concentrated in major cities. For example, Riyadh boasts two massive theaters as part of the Riyadh Boulevard. The Mohammed Abdu Theater has a seating capacity 22,000, and the Abu Bakr Salem Theater can seat 6,000. Currently, there are no concert halls specifically designed for musical performances. To address this lack, the Ministry

of Culture has announced a plan to build an opera house at the Royal Art Complex in Riyadh, and another in Jeddah.

As for recording studios, there is a serious shortage of properly equipped facilities that can handle music production and distribution. Coupled with a lack of musical professionals such as composers, instrumentalists, and arrangers, this situation forces artists to travel abroad to record. A total of 130 music studios were approved by the General Commission for Audiovisual Media from 1999 to 2019.<sup>(56)</sup> While there are around 200 music studios registered with the Ministry of Commerce, many of these studios specialize in selling musical instruments and records or audio equipment, and they do not have the necessary facilities for music production.<sup>(57)</sup>

## Education and Training

As was mentioned above, music education in the Kingdom has been limited to individual efforts or short non-accredited workshops. Meanwhile, the Cultural Participation Survey revealed that the proportion of Saudis who want to enroll in a musical training program is 27%. Such a high rate indicates a large demand for music academies that is not being met except by limited individual initiatives. This imbalance between high demand and low supply elucidates the importance of the Ministry of Culture's music education initiatives. As the Ministry works to provide options for all educational levels, from general education through specialized academies, it is



creating regulatory frameworks to license music institutes. In this vein, it must be noted that it is essential to provide music education for children from an early age and invest in their talents, both amateur and otherwise, by providing specialized age-specific programs<sup>(58)</sup> as well as to create programs with specialized staff for people with disabilities.

The absence of an independent official sub-sector for music and traditional performance played an undeniable role in the musical stagnation that the cultural scene has experienced over the past several years, with the exception of commercialized music. There were no national ensembles qualified to represent the Kingdom and perform traditional Saudi music at international concerts or other events. Given the presence of talented artists, the demand for music education, and the high rates of music consumption, this field needs institutional backing that will use these elements to create an active music scene. The Ministry of Culture is working to make this a reality.

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Chapter Seven

# 7





# Cultural Festivals and Events

- **Cultural Festivals and Events in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview**
- **Festivals and Events Today**
- **2019 Cultural Participation Survey**
- **Infrastructure and Investment**

# Cultural Festivals and Events in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview

Festivals are one of the fastest growing cultural sectors in the Kingdom, and they are also the sector that is most closely connected to social, economic, and touristic activities. A report issued by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage notes that between 2005 and 2016 there were 730 festivals attended by over 85 million visitors.<sup>(1)</sup> These festivals brought in over 8 billion SAR in revenue, created more than 86,000 temporary work opportunities (70% of which went to young workers), and featured spaces for productive families to sell their products. These festivals and events, which take place throughout the Kingdom's regions, differ based on whether they are organized by ministries, commissions, municipalities, or private-sector companies. These festivals are also held for a variety of purposes: some are commercial, social, or cultural in their orientation, while others aim to attract tourists. Festivals also differ in terms of their target audiences, which may consist of families, children, or young people. Although some events, such as the Janadriyah Festival, take place in permanent venues, others, such as Hakaya MiSK and Colors of Saudi Arabia, are held in temporary locations. Seasonal festivals, including the Al-Bahah Summer Festival and the Winter at Tantora Festival, include cultural, heritage, and artisanal activities. There are also festivals that feature local agricultural products, sporting events, environmental events, desert events, art and music events, and more.

The popularity of festivals can be traced back to traditional markets, which once played the same so-



cial, economic, and cultural roles that festivals play today. These markets met all of their customers' needs, functioning as both a commercial space and as a prized venue for cultural events. These markets were also a social space for local inhabitants, allowing them to exchange news, give speeches, and take part in social and cultural events. These markets and the festivals that they hosted reflected the sociocultural diversity of the Kingdom's regions, each of which had its own distinctive architectural style, social fabric, crafts, costumes, products, and commercial ties to neighboring regions.

Markets are prevalent in many regions of the Kingdom. They are

usually named after the place where they are held, as is the case with Souk Qaisariah in Al-Hofuf, or for the days on which they take place, such as the Monday and Thursday Souk in Ad-Dilam, which is more than 200 years old.<sup>(2)</sup> Additionally, the Gulf region has historically celebrated Gargee'an, a traditional event for children which takes place during the month of Ramadan. Children knock on the doors of people in their neighborhoods and ask for sweets while singing folk songs specific to the occasion. This event has transformed over time from a small folk event to an occasion for large celebrations held by social institutions and other groups. However, traditional celebrations still take place in some cities and neighborhoods.



### Early History of National Festivals

The Janadriyah Festival (also known as the "Festival of Culture and Heritage") is a prominent early example of an officially recognized festival. It serves a "national" festival because, unlike festivals that came before it, it showcases the culture and heritage of all regions of the Kingdom.<sup>(3)</sup>

The festival was first held in 1985 and featured a complete reproduction of a traditional village. Later, it added a 19-kilometer camel race, which is held annually at the Janadriyah racetrack. With the support of the National Guard,<sup>(4)</sup> Riyadh Municipality, the General Presidency of Youth Welfare, the Saudi Arabian

Society of Culture and Arts (SASCA), the Ministry of Information, and the Equestrian Club, which organized the camel race, the festival came to encompass additional areas of culture. The first edition included various activities, including camel and horse racing and events featuring folk arts, Arabic poetry and literature, and fine art.<sup>(5)</sup> Janadriyah's cultural role expanded over time as its events came to reflect developments across Saudi Arabia and the Arab and Islamic world, due to the participation of prominent thinkers and literary figures from the Arab world and beyond.

The King Abdulaziz Camel Festival and the Souk Okaz Festival also have deep historical roots. Direct-

ed at camel merchants and owners as well as interested hobbyists, the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival (est. 2000) aims to preserve the Kingdom's camel culture. It has attracted participants by holding its signature camel race as well as a camel beauty contest. Later, the festival's activities expanded and diversified to include a theatre and heritage market in order to attract visitors. Another festival, Souk Okaz, was revived by the Principality of Makkah in 2007. A cultural landmark and a site for Arab tribes to engage in social and economic activity before and after the Islamic era, Souk Okaz dates back more than fourteen centuries.<sup>(6)</sup> Souk Okaz is well-attended, drawing 2,803,184 visitors between 2008 and 2018.<sup>(7)</sup>

**Table 7-1: Heritage festivals in provinces**

Festival	Province	Launch Date	Time of Year
Hareed Festival in the Farasan Islands	Farasan Islands / Jazan Province	2004	April
Souk Al-Musawkaf Festival	Unayzah (Al-Qassim)	2009	April
Turaif Folk Festival and Falcon Race <sup>(8)</sup>	Turaif	2012	March
East Coast Festival <sup>(9)</sup>	Al-Dammam	2013	April
Umluj Maritime Festival <sup>(10)</sup>	Umluj	2014	January–February
Historic Jeddah Festival	Jeddah	2014	Rabi' Al-Awwal

**Table 7-2: Festivals of local products**

Festival	City/Region	Organizer	Launch Date	Time of Year
Festival of Citrus and Agricultural Investment	Najran	General Administration of Agricultural Affairs in Najran <sup>(11)</sup>	-	January–February (annually)
Heritage and Productive Families Festival	Riyadh	Riyadh Municipality	-	March
Al-Qassim Date Festival	Buraydah/ Unayzah/ Al-Mithnah/ Riyadh Al-Khabra	Al-Qassim Municipality	-	August–September (annually)
Taif Rose Festival	Taif	Taif Municipality <sup>(12)</sup>	2005	April (annually)
Olive Festival <sup>(13)</sup>	Al-Jawf	Al-Jawf Municipality	2008	January (annually)
International Honey Festival	Al-Bahah	The Beekeepers Cooperative Organization and the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (now the Ministry of Tourism) <sup>(14)</sup>	2008	July (annually)
Annual Pomegranate Festival	Al-Bahah	Al-Bahah Tourism Development Council	2012 <sup>(15)</sup>	September (annually)
Palm and Date Festival	Alahsa	Al-Ahsa Municipality	2012 <sup>(16)</sup>	September

### The History of Saudi Festivals: From Heritage Festivals to a Diverse Scene

Festivals in the Kingdom have evolved in type and number. At first, they focused on national cultural heritage; later, as municipalities and regional chambers began to hold festivals and events, and institutions, government sectors, and the private sector (particularly festival planning companies and talent management agencies) began to participate in organizing them, they became more numerous and more diverse.

These festivals help to strengthen the local economy and the market for handicrafts, which helps support the families that produce them. Family handicraft production is administered by the Ministry of Labor and Social Development (now the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development).<sup>(17)</sup> Local civil-society institutions and charitable organizations

also contribute by promoting these handicrafts to attract public support for them.<sup>(18)</sup>

### The High Commission for Tourism & Development of the Sector

The High Commission for Tourism was established in 2000 as part of an effort to create a more dynamic tourism sector. The sector transformed significantly as the commission worked to create festivals and events that were aimed at tourists and revitalize domestic tourism. These changes were supported by systematic programs that worked to develop tourist products for cultural festivals and events. In 1424 AH, the Bureau of Antiquities, renamed the "Commission for Tourism and Antiquities," was added to the commission. Its role continued to expand until it was renamed a second time, becoming the Saudi Commission

for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) in 2015.<sup>(19)</sup> In 2005, the SCTH launched a program to promote tourist events by securing new sites for cultural events and developing existing ones.<sup>(20)</sup> The program also provides support for a variety of tourist events, including culture and heritage events like the Al-Abha Heritage Nights Festival and the Old Town Festival in Al-Ula.<sup>(21)</sup> Furthermore, the SCTH has established special programs to develop tourist areas, villages, and traditional markets so that they can become tourist destinations and sites for festivals and events. The areas that the program has worked to develop include the Farasan Islands, which host the Haarid Festival; the Rijal Almaa Village, which hosts the Rijal Almaa Heritage Festival; and Al-Bujairi Park in historic Diriyah, which became the regular site for seasonal events.<sup>(22)</sup> In early 2020, a royal decree was issued that converted the SCTH into the Ministry of Tourism.<sup>(23)</sup>

Table 7-3: Examples of the Ministry of Tourism's festivals and forums

Festivals and Forums	Year	Overview	Target Audience	Events	Location
The Colors of Saudi Arabia Forum	2012	An annual touristic art forum dedicated to photography that recognizes its importance to the tourism sector and works to support up-and-coming Saudi photographers.	Photographers and touristic filmmakers	6 events including an educational program, photographer excursions, and the Prince Sultan Prize.	Riyadh
Saudi Summer Festivals (annual)	2015	Summer festivals and events which take place in various regions of the Kingdom with the support of the SCTR and its partners, launched in 2015. <sup>(24)</sup>	The general public	65 festivals and events such as the Age of Ibn Khaldun Festival in the Eastern Province, the Jeddah Festival, and the Hang-Gliding and Archery Event in Al-Soudah.	Aseer, Northern Borders Province, Riyadh, Al-Madinah, Al-Qassim, Jazan, Hail, Tabuk, Al-Jawf, Al-Bahah, Taif, Al-Ahsa, Jeddah, Eastern Province
School Mid-Year Festivals (annual)	2017	These take place in January every year during the mid-year school break. The festivals feature heritage, touristic, sporting, and cultural events and promote folk and agricultural products, handicrafts, recreational and desert tourism, and more.	The general public	41 festivals and events, including the Seventh Jazan Winter Festival, the Eighth International Desert Festival in Hail, the Third Al-Sadu Festival in Al-Jawf. <sup>(25)</sup>	Aseer, Northern Borders Province, Riyadh, Al-Madinah, Al-Qassim, Jazan, Hail, Tabuk, Al-Jawf, Al-Bahah, Taif, Al-Ahsa, Jeddah, Eastern Province

Table 7-4: Festivals held by the Ministry of Tourism (2005-2016)<sup>(26)</sup>

<b>Number of Key Festivals</b>	730
<b>Total Number of Attendees</b>	85 million
<b>Number of Tourists Attending</b>	28 million
<b>Tourist Expenditures (Direct)</b>	8 Billion SAR
<b>Tourist Expenditures (Total)</b>	24 Billion SAR
<b>Number of Forums on Event Development</b>	5
<b>Qualified Institutions and Event-Planning Companies</b>	180
<b>Individuals Being Trained in Event Organization by Means of Courses and Workshops</b>	4,150
<b>Number of Job Opportunities</b>	86,000

# Festivals and Events Today

Since Saudi Vision 2030 was announced in 2016, the festivals and events sector has undergone organizational and administrative changes that have created opportunities for development and diversification. Some government commissions have been restructured, allowing more specialized and experienced agencies to take on the task of organizing the most important national festivals. Additionally, the Saudi Seasons initiative works to promote both domestic and foreign tourism by holding events and festivals in specific regions at particular times of year. Issuing tourist visas has also allowed the Kingdom to bring in more events from abroad so that it can diversify its offerings and foster domestic and foreign tourism.



**Table 7-5:** Cultural tourism data in KSA (2017-2018)

Year	Total Number of Tours	Percentage of Tourists who Participated in Cultural Activities	Percentage of Tourists who Attended Festivals and Events	Total Number of Tourists
Cultural Tourism in the KSA: Foreign Tourism <sup>(27)</sup>				
2017	3.5 million	11.12%	3.5%	184,824
2018	2.9 million	10.7%	4.1%	191,271
Cultural Tourism in KSA: Domestic Tourism <sup>(28)</sup>				
2017	6 million	6.5%	24.8%	1,937,536
2018	5.1 million	7.5%	34.7%	2,921,561

### Restructuring the Sector

The first move toward restructuring the sector was the transfer of responsibility for the Souk Okaz Festival from the Municipality of Makkah to the SCTH, which began organizing the festival in 2017 (the festival's twelfth edition). That year alone, the number of attendees rose to 940,000. The festival also introduced 13 prizes for art and literature, including

Souk Okaz's international Okaz Poet Prize for classical Arabic poetry. In 2019, the Souk Okaz Festival became part of Taif Season, which took place in August 2019. This edition of the festival saw an unusually large turnout of 498,185 visitors<sup>(29)</sup> and was well-received by industry experts.<sup>(30)</sup>

In 2016, responsibility for organizing the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival was transferred from the King

Abdulaziz Foundation, which had organized the previous two editions of the festival, to the Camel Club. In 2017, however, the third edition of the festival was organized by the administration with the help of the Camel Club.<sup>(31)</sup> Additionally, the Ministry of Culture took on the task of overseeing Janadriyah Festival in 2019, although it had been overseen by the Ministry of the National Guard for its first 34 editions.<sup>(32)</sup>

**Table 7-6:** Festivals and events which have transferred regulatory agencies

Festival	Date Founded	Previous Regulatory Agency	Current Regulatory Agency	Date of Transfer	Festival Edition at Time of Transfer
Souk Okaz	2007	Municipality of Makkah Province	Ministry of Tourism	2017	Transferred after 11 editions organized by the municipality of Makkah
King Abdulaziz Camel Festival	2000	King Abdulaziz Foundation	Camel Club	2017	Transferred after 2 sessions organized by the foundation
Janadriyah Festival	1985	Ministry of the National Guard	Ministry of Culture	2019	Transferred after 34 editions organized by the Ministry of the National Guard

## Vision 2030 and New Commissions

After the launch of Saudi Vision 2030, two new commissions, the General Entertainment Authority and the General Authority for Culture, were established by Royal Decree in May 2016. The General Entertainment Authority then began to play a key role in the festivals and events sector. It supports a number of cultural and recreational festivals and events, grants licenses for public and private-sector events, and contributes to infrastructure development, crowd management, safety and security services, talent development, and more. From 2016, the year the General Entertainment Authority was established, to the end of 2019, it has licensed and organized over 1,500 events.<sup>(33)</sup> Since its establishment in 2019, the Gen-

eral Authority for Culture has also helped organize a number of cultural events, including concerts, literature and poetry readings, and exhibitions of photography and fine art. It has also initiated international partnerships to hold culture days that highlight the work of Saudi artists abroad in collaboration with a number of agencies, including the Society for the Preservation of the Arts, the MiSK Foundation, and the King Abdulaziz Foundation. The authority has also established the Heritage Village in collaboration with the Eastern Region Municipality. The municipality continues to operate under the ministry's supervision. It also seeks to increase Saudi contributions to art and culture through events that feature poetry, film, folktales, and traditional costumes, as well as events and activities designed specifically for children.

In June 2018, the Ministry of Culture was founded by Royal Decree No. A/217. In 2019, the Ministry launched its new vision, which identified 16 cultural sub-sectors to be the focus of its efforts and initiatives. The Ministry provides licensing, funding, and support to special events in this sector. The Ministry has launched a number of cultural events, conferences, and initiatives in various parts of the Kingdom. For example, during Jeddah Season 2019, the ministry authorized, supported, and implemented 23 events, including exhibitions, art spaces, and performance art shows in historic Jeddah.<sup>(34)</sup> It also launched the Flowerman Festival in the Rijal Almaa Heritage Village during Al-Soudah Season. The ministry has also planned a series of future initiatives, which include a center for both cultural services and licensing.



**Table 7-7:** Events sponsored by the Ministry of Culture (2019)

Event	Date	Season	Ministry Role	City	Location	Target Sectors
Eastern Takht (Organized by the General Authority for Culture)	March 15–17		Organizer	Dammam	King Abdullah Cultural Center	Concert
The Red Palace	March 13–April 20		Organizer	Riyadh	The Red Palace	Exhibition
Arts Exhibition (Tuwayyah)	March 14–26	Sharqiah Season	Organizer	Jubail Industrial City	The Multi-Purpose Hall in the Al-Fanateer Cultural Center	Exhibition
Van Gogh Interactive Exhibit	March 14–30	Sharqiah Season	Organizer	Dhahran	Ithra Museum	Art Exhibition
Cultural Nights (Organized by the General Authority for Culture)	March 25–30	Sharqiah Season	Organizer	Al-Ahsa	King Abdullah Environmental Park	Exhibitions and Workshops/ Film/ Music/ Visual Arts/ Literature/ Theatre
Stand-Up Comedy	March 24–26	Sharqiah Season	Organizer	Dhahran	Dhahran International Exhibition Center	Performing Arts/ Theatre
La Scala Opera	June 14		Organizer	Riyadh	King Fahad Cultural Center	Music
Khuzam Palace	June 8–July 18	Jeddah Season	Organizer	Jeddah	Historic Khuzam Palace	Visual Arts
Nafthah	June 8–July 18	Jeddah Season	Organizer	Jeddah	Historic Khuzam Palace	Exhibition
Art for Al-Balad Auction	June 22–24	Jeddah Season	Organizer	Jeddah	Nassif House in Historic Jeddah	Charity Auction
City of Mirrors	June 6–8	Eid Al-Fitr Season	Organizer	Riyadh	Alfaisal University	Music
European Art Exhibition	June 6–10		Organizer	Riyadh	King Abdullah Financial District	Visual Arts
Flowerman Festival	August 8–12	Al-Soudah Season	Organizer	Aseer	Rijal Almaa Village	Museums/Heritage/ Cultural Events and Festivals/ Performing Arts/ Fashion
Cultural Events Associated with the G20 Summit	September 17–18		Organizer	Riyadh	Hilton-Granada Hotel	Music/Books and Publishing/ Visual Arts/Film/ Food and Culinary Arts/Museums/ Performing Arts
Week of Russian Culture	October 14–November 14, 2019		Co-organizer with the Russian Investment Fund	Riyadh	King Fahad Cultural Center	Film/Music/Visual Arts

Event	Date	Season	Ministry Role	City	Location	Target Sectors
Week of German Culture	November 8–16		Financial Support/ Authorization/ Providing a Venue	Riyadh	King Fahad National Library and Gardens	Film/Music/Visual Arts/Architecture
The Future of Fashion Convention	November 4–6	Riyadh Season	Organizer	Riyadh	The Cultural Palace in the Diplomatic Quarter	Fashion
BIENALSUR Exhibit	November 5–December 31		Organizer with the Cooperation of BIENALSUR for Modern Art	Riyadh	The National Museum	Visual Arts
International Red Sea Symposium for Sculpture	November 21–December 10		Organizer	Jeddah	Historic Jeddah/Waterfront	Visual Arts
From Within Exhibit	December 8–26	Al-Diriyah Season	Organizer	Al-Diriyah Season	The Al-Diriyah Industrial zone	Architecture/Interior Design/Visual Arts

### Rise of the Private Sector

In the past, government institutions and sectors contracted festival and event planning to specialized companies and agencies. The events and festivals were then implemented with the help of local and foreign experts. As a result of structural changes in the mid-2010s, private event planning companies became key players in the festivals and events scene, participating in every stage of the process, including planning, production, and implementation. This change has meant that events have become more consumer-oriented, placing a greater emphasis on selling food, beverages, and other products and on offering live music. These companies have also helped to bring international entertainment offerings to the Kingdom, including performing arts shows, the Marvel Experience and DC Experience, and live circus performances, which introduced new recreational and cultural experiences to the King-

dom. The private sector has become a partner in organizing and implementing national events, providing operational and logistical support that makes use of local human resources.<sup>[35]</sup> Organizing bodies, such as ministries and commissions, have outsourced organizational tasks to private-sector companies for big events such as National Day celebrations.<sup>[36]</sup>

### Young Talent in the Events Field

The private sector has not only driven the diversification of festivals and events but has also had a major impact on the job market. The private sector utilizes university student clubs, volunteer groups,<sup>[37]</sup> and talent agencies<sup>[38]</sup> to recruit primarily young workers for temporary positions organizing festivals and events in the regions in which they live. These companies build their own databases for organizational purposes. Workers in this sector indicate that the in-

tense competition between companies has led to an improvement in the quality of services provided and in the competence of the young workers they employ.<sup>[39]</sup>

### Community Participation and the Non-Profit Sector

Local communities have worked to revive celebrations and traditional seasonal events. One of these is Gargee'an, a children's holiday celebrated in the Eastern Province during the 13th, 14th, and 15th nights of Ramadan. Another example is the Hawamah Eid Celebration, which had disappeared until some neighborhoods, among them the Al-Yasmin District in Riyadh, revived it in 2014. The Riyadh Municipality officially sponsored it in 2018<sup>[40]</sup> and 2019.<sup>[41]</sup>

As for civil society organizations, the Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Foundation (MiSK) organizes public cultural festivals



in conjunction with educational and charitable programs for those with talent. These include "Hakaya MiSK," a prominent Saudi event held in six cities which supports writers, artists, animators, and directors from the Gulf region who produce stories and narratives. It was first held in Riyadh in 2015, and along with the MiSk Arts Festival allows artists and creators to display or sell their

works of visual art in a public space designed to promote the creative and artistic aspects of their work.

### Saudi Seasons

In February 2019, the SCTR launched a series of initiatives as part of the Quality of Life Program, including the Saudi Seasons program. A high com-

mittee which includes the Ministry of Culture, the General Entertainment Authority, the Ministry of Sports, and the General Authority for Exhibitions and Conventions worked on this initiative in cooperation with all other relevant authorities. In 2019, its first year, the Saudi Seasons program included 11 Seasons, which were distributed throughout the Kingdom and included national events.

**Table 7-8:** Saudi Seasons and responsible agencies

Season	Date	Duration	Location of Events	Organizing Agency
Eastern Province Season	March 14–30, 2019	15 days	Eastern Province	Eastern Province` Municipality
Ramadan Season	May 6–June 3, 2019	Approx. 1 month	All Saudi Provinces	Ministry of Tourism
Eid Al-Fitr Season	June 4–8, 2019	4 days	All Saudi Provinces	Ministry of Tourism
Jeddah Season	June 8–July 18	Approx. 40 days	Jeddah City	Jeddah Municipality
Taif Season	July 1–31, 2019	1 month	Taif City	Ministry of Tourism
Al-Soudah Season	July 1–31, 2019	1 month	Al-Soudah in Aseer Province	The Public Investment Fund
National Day Season	September 19–23, 2019	4 days	All Saudi Provinces	The General Entertainment Authority
Riyadh Season	October 11–January 31	80 days	Riyadh	The General Entertainment Authority
Al-Diriyah Season	November 22–December 21	1 month	Al-Diriyah	Ministry of Sports
Hail Season	December 22–February 10	50 days	Hail Province	Ministry of Sports
Al-Ula Season	December 19–March 3	Approx. 100 days	Al-Ula City	Royal Commission for Al-Ula



The Seasons' new concept involves cooperation among different parties. Each Season takes place at a specific time each year, and applications to hold events at that time may be submitted electronically by sectors, government agencies, ministries, organizations, private companies, civil-society organizations, and private individuals. This process ensures that the events offered are diverse. They include events for tourists as well as events built around culture, sports, heritage, entertainment, education, training, business, arts, and music. Government agencies and sectors like the General Entertainment Authority, the Ministry of Sports, and the Ministry of Culture plan events and festivals that are based on the unique cultural, touristic, historical, and geographical features of the cities and regions that host them (e.g., aquatic sports in Jeddah Season and

Eastern Province Season; obstacle courses and mountain climbing in Al-Soudah Season; holding events in historic Jeddah and the Qasr Al-Hukm area in Riyadh Season). These events helped to raise awareness of the local characteristics of each region, to improve infrastructure and the quality of facilities and services, and to increase community interest in heritage and culture in these regions and cities.

### Combining Imported and Local Events to Ensure Sustainability

The diversity of festivals and events allows them to play a dual role. On the one hand, they shape sociocultural practices and local identity. On the other, they connect local communities with ele-

ments of world culture. These two aspects do not necessarily contradict one another. Rather, they can work in harmony to attain global recognition through large projects aimed at stimulating domestic and foreign tourism and attracting regional and international attention. Interest in the Kingdom's regional diversity could serve as one means to that end.

In recent years, efforts have been made to diversify events to broaden their appeal. This has led to importing events from various countries, including Marvel, Comic-Con, MDL Beast Music Festival, Formula E, and others, which have been extremely popular despite the high cost of bringing them in. In contrast to these are small events which rely on the participation of community members, who are key contributors to success. According to

some experts, a community-based event is more likely to achieve continuity because it is rooted in the local culture. Interest can endure for generations, and community members may feel that the event's continued success depends upon their meaningful participation. This is not necessarily the case for imported mega-events, which are temporary and therefore do not offer a model for local communities to adopt. It is also difficult to adapt such events given the fact that the importer usually does not own them.<sup>(42)</sup>

Imported events, however, also provide undeniable benefits. They offer financial returns and stimulate tourism while introducing variety. For some time, Saudi festivals have lacked resources for creating new and diverse programs, rendering some of them tedious and repetitive.<sup>(43)</sup> Imported festivals and events attract investment, improve administrative skills, offer a broader range of enriching experiences to citizens, and improve the Kingdom's global standing. For example, the Winter at Tantora Festival attracted foreign investment in developing Al-Ula City. Both the Souk Okaz Festival and the Janadriyah Festival have contributed to strengthening the standing of the Kingdom's culture and heritage. Relying on foreign expertise, engaging with imported events, and using locally relevant elements of their success as models will support efforts to develop local events, ensure their sustainability, and improve their quality so that they can compete internationally. Festivals and events are temporary in nature. Their sustainability is determined by how much they are able to build an image and character for the

event, and by how much they contribute to the development in the area in terms of infrastructure, facilities and services. This allows some regions that see little tourism or economic activity when festivals and seasons are not in session to draw the at-

tention of investors as well as government agencies. Industry experts indicate that small regions benefit the most from festivals and events, which draw attention to local communities and lead to improvements in their infrastructure.<sup>(44)</sup>

## Key Figures for 2019



# 2019 Cultural Participation Survey

The 2019 Survey of Cultural Participation Survey showed that 55% of Saudi adults attended a festival or event in the Kingdom at least once in the past twelve months. This rate indicates a high level of interest in festivals, as is commensurate with their diversity and abundance. The data also indicates that interest in events and event attendance remain high among 23% of respondents. There seems to be a link between

attending events and education level: 61% of respondents with university degrees attended events, while 43% of respondents with secondary school diplomas or less attended. There is also a correlation between income level and attendance rate, which falls slightly among respondents with lower incomes.

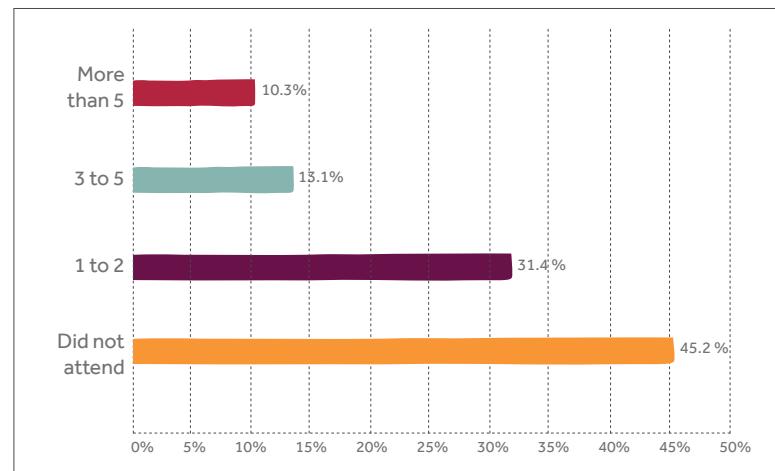
The demand for festivals and events in the Kingdom has increased. 77.7%

percent of the population would like to see more festivals and events. This percentage varies by gender: 79.40% of women would like more events while 76.09% of men would.

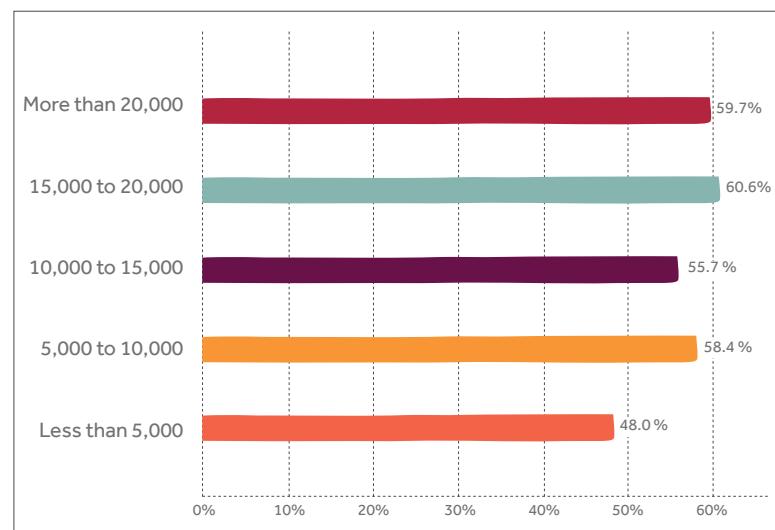
The demand for festivals is particularly high. When respondents were asked which events they would like to see increase, festivals topped the list at 23.8%. Only 8.6% wanted more musical events.



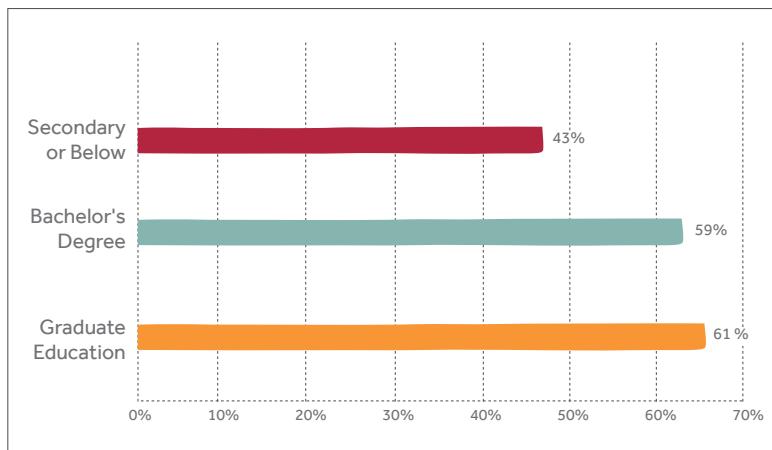
**Figure 7-1: Attendance at events and festivals in KSA (past 12 months)**



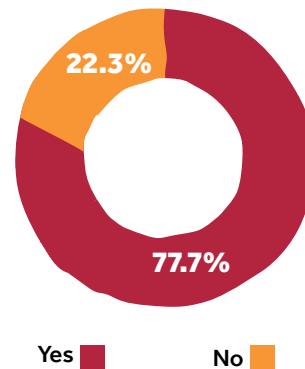
**Figure 7-2: Attendance at events and festivals in KSA (past 12 months), by income**



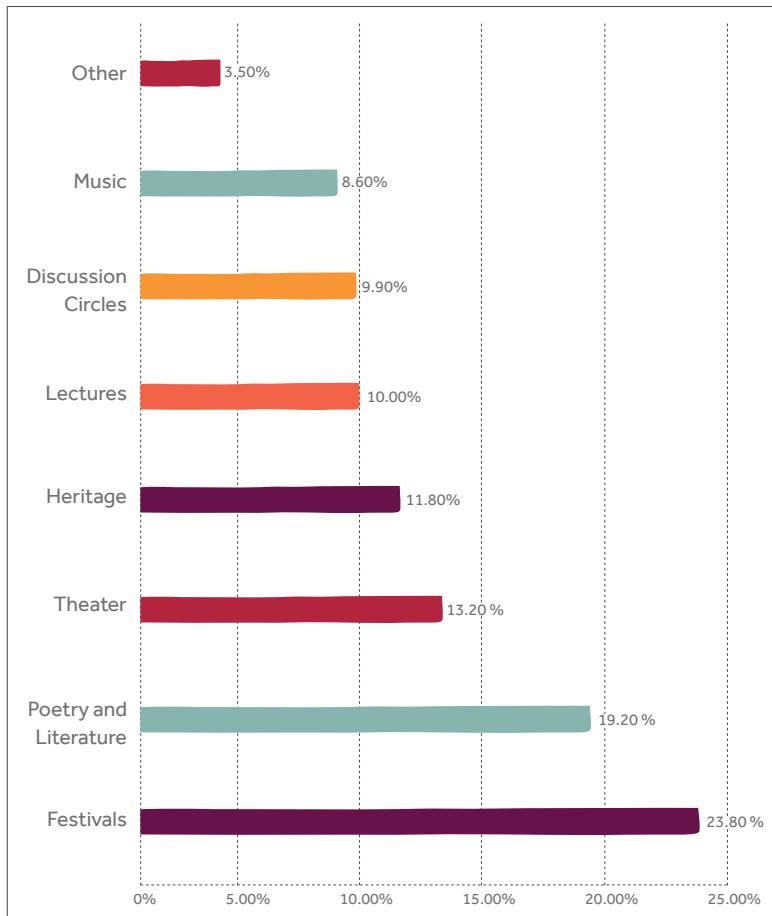
**Figure 7-3: Attendance at events and festivals in KSA (past 12 months), by education level**



**Figure 7-4: Proportion of population that would like more festivals and events in KSA**



**Figure 7-5: Types of events which survey participants would like to see increase**



# Infrastructure and Investment

In 2016, the value of the tourist event industry surpassed 100 million SAR annually. This figure is the result of work and investment by the 130 companies and institutions that organize tourist events in the Kingdom, which saw revenue of over 11 billion SAR.<sup>[45]</sup> In response to this huge growth in the sector, the Public Investment Fund in 2018 founded Saudi Entertainment Ventures (SEVEN) with an initial investment of 10 billion SAR.<sup>[46]</sup> This company is the fund's investment and executive branch in the Saudi entertainment field, and it invests in, as well as develops and operates, various local entertainment projects.<sup>[47]</sup>

## Event Distribution and Accessibility

The Kingdom's festivals and events are diverse and distributed throughout its regions. The two largest cities, Riyadh and Jeddah, host the majority of events, as is commensurate

with their population density, infrastructural capacity, and availability of services. However, organizing agencies have worked to gradually increase both the number and type of events offered in other cities and regions in both the south and north. According to the General Entertain-

ment Authority, no entertainment events were held in either the south or the north in 2016. In 2019, over 20 events with high turnouts were held.

Various organizing bodies such as the Ministry of Culture, the General Entertainment Authority, the Min-



istry of Sports, and the Ministry of Tourism have worked to promote these events through both traditional and modern advertising platforms. The public is able to view all planned and recorded events on these agencies' online platforms. One of these is the General Entertainment Authority's entertainment calendar, which was later renamed "Enjoy KSA" since it serves as an official platform for publicizing recreational activities throughout the Kingdom. Other platforms include the Ministry of Tourism's Visit Saudi website and the General Sports Authority's "Sharek" platform. The work of social media influencers who attend and promote events has also been beneficial. Workers in the field note that word of mouth is the most powerful way to increase interest in events. It also plays the largest role in shaping the event's reputation.<sup>(48)</sup>

The agencies responsible for licensing events include the Ministry of Culture, the General Entertainment Authority, the Ministry of Tourism, and the General Authority for Exhibitions and Conventions (previously the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau). They take into consideration the content and value of the festival or event, set conditions to ensure event quality, and require event organizers to provide reports on progress outcomes, which allows them to evaluate the event's viability and determine whether or not it was successful.

City municipalities play an important role in ensuring that events are diverse and distributed among various regions. These municipalities organize, promote, and support many local events that aim to support local culture and heritage, stimulate economic activity, and provide job opportunities for young people and productive families. They also cooperate with various branches of the General Authority for Tourism and organize festivals and events, including seasonal festivals in summer and fall and shopping festivals, in order to stimulate tourism. For example, the Al-Qassim Province Municipality organizes a series of date festivals, and the Northern Borders Municipality organizes the Arar Summer Festival. These municipalities also take part in larger national festivals, such as the Janadriyah Festival and Souk Okaz. Municipalities also utilize their planning and executive powers to facilitate organizational and administrative arrangements. Furthermore, they have direct contact with civil society organizations willing to participate, such as charities and organizations that care for people with special needs. They also contribute to developing the infrastructure and services that fall under their purview. Riyadh Municipality, for example, decorates streets and equips public parks, theatres, and squares for forums and exhibitions during Eid and National Day celebrations, ensuring that celebrations take place in all parts of the city.<sup>(49)</sup>



### Training Workers for the Field

Data indicates that training in the festival and event field focuses on organization and administration. There is a shortage of university programs in the field, and those that do exist generally offer only certificates and short training programs. One of the most important educational bodies in this field is the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation. Figures provided by the Business Center's Service to the Community indicate that in 2019 a total of 763 students were undergoing training in the events sector. 98 students are studying for a certificate in events administration through the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation, which runs technical colleges for boys.<sup>(50)</sup> This number is growing rapidly, as shown in Table 7-9.

**Table 7-9:** Education in event planning and organization

Academic Year	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Majors in Event, Exhibit, and Festival Administration in Colleges of Excellence					
Certificate Recipients	0	6	36	108	308

**Table 7-10:** Programs, degrees, and courses in event planning and administration

Degree	Provider	Gender	City	Program Duration
Master's in Event Administration	King Abdulaziz University, Faculty of Tourism	Male	Jeddah	2 Years
Vocational Degree in International Exhibition and Conference Administration	King Abdulaziz University	Male and Female	Jeddah	3 Months
Event Administration	Technical and Vocational Training Corporation	Male and Female		
Event, Conference, and Exhibition Planning and Administration Course	Success Skills for Human Developing Institute	Male	Riyadh	3 Days (12 Hours)

### Demand for Cultural Events

The huge attendance numbers at cultural events and festivals indicate that these events are popular and in demand. Events also attract foreign participation and investment. For example, the Winter at Tantora Festival, a 7-week festival that took place from December 20, 2018–February 9, 2019, organized for the first time that year by the Royal Commission for Al-Ula, was a huge success. 37,000 people from 72 countries attended,

and 11 local and international artists participated. The festival featured the King Salman Endurance Race in which 24 horses from 4 countries (France, Uruguay, Italy, and Spain) competed.<sup>(51)</sup> The great success and popularity of the festival led its third session to be extended to three months, from December 29, 2019 to March 7, 2020.<sup>(52)</sup> The Janadriyah Festival has also continued to welcome millions of visitors, admitting thousands each day in 2019, its 33rd year. Reports on the Festival ap-

peared on 150 television channels and 5,200 newspapers with the participation of 1,800 reporters from around the world.<sup>(53)</sup>

### Saudi Seasons Program in Numbers

The Saudi Seasons program has achieved success and popularity. Its well-attended first edition in 2019 offered diverse events and programs that promoted tourism and created new jobs.

**Table 7-11:** Saudi Seasons in numbers<sup>(54)</sup>

Season	Number of Events	Number of Visitors	About the Season
Eastern Province Season	116	3.2 million	Created more than 3,000 temporary jobs, and over 4,000 volunteers and organizational groups participated.
Ramadan Season	21	2 million	Took place in 5 cities throughout the Kingdom.
Eid Al-Fitr Season	350	5 million	Took place in 90 cities throughout the Kingdom.
Jeddah Season	150	14.9 million	Attended by 180,000 people from around the world, 82% of whom were tourists, and earned over \$1.2 million.
Al-Soudah Season	More than 12	Over 300,000	Over 380 hours of entertainment and cultural events.
Taif Season	70	2.8 million	Its events were incorporated into Souk Okaz this year.
National Day Season	184	3.7 million	More than 1,167 artists and creators participated in various events.
Riyadh Season	More than 100	10.3 million	Created 34,000 seasonal jobs and indirectly created 17,000 jobs.

## Key Moments for Saudi Festivals



**Endnote:**

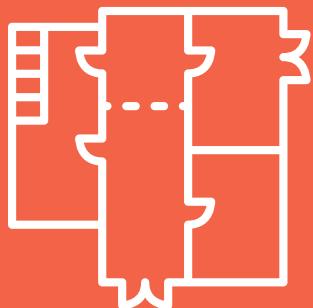
- (1) "730 Festivals in 10 Years...welcomed 85 million visitors and earned 8 billion riyals," Ministry of Tourism, October 10, 1438 AH, <<https://scth.gov.sa/MediaCenter/News/GeneralNews/Pages/a-g-2-2-8-17.aspx>>.
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- (28) ibid.
- (29) Cultural Activities Report 2019, MAS Tourism Information and Research Center, 4.
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- (36) Interview with Simon Muller, Director of Public Participation in Sports Programs at the General Sports Authority, Riyadh, November 18, 2019.
- (37) Interview with Mansour Al-Sanouni, CEO of With You Event-Organizing and Logistics Solutions Company, Riyadh, October 23, 2019.
- (38) Interview with Hadi Muhammad Ali, Supervisor of Knowledge Business Company, Riyadh, June 11, 2019.
- (39) Interview with Muhammad Al-Buty, The Cubex Company for Exhibition and Conference Organizing, Riyadh, November 20, 2019.

- (40) Al-Hawamah, "The People of Riyadh Enjoy Eid as it Was in Their Grandparents' Time," Saudi Press Agency, August 15, 2018.
- (41) "Memories of 'Al-Hawamah' Return to Riyadh Parks on Eid," Saudi Press Agency, February 6, 2019.
- (42) Interview with Dr. Muhammad Al-Hizan, Head of the Shura Council Media Committee and General Supervisor for the General Administration of Media and Public Relations at the former General Authority for Tourism and National Heritage, Riyadh, November 12, 2019.
- (43) Interview with Muhammad Al-Buty, The Cubex Company for Exhibition and Conference Organizing, Riyadh, November 20, 2019; Interview with Mansour Al-Sanouni, CEO of With You Event-Organizing and Logistics Solutions Company, Riyadh, October 23, 2019.
- (44) Interview with Dr. Muhammad Al-Hizan, Head of the Shura Council Media Committee and General Supervisor for the General Administration of Media and Public Relations at the former General Authority for Tourism and National Heritage, Riyadh, November 12, 2019; Interview with Mansour Al-Sanouni, CEO of With You Event-Organizing and Logistics Solutions Company, Riyadh, October 23, 2019.
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- (47) The Official LinkedIn page of the Saudi Entertainment Projects Company, <<https://ae.linkedin.com/company/entertainksa>>.
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- (49) "Riyadh Municipality Prepares for Eid Al-Fitr Celebrations," Saudi Press Agency, October 6, 2006.
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- (51) Invest Saudi, Investment Highlight, Spring 2019.
- (52) "The 'Winter at Tantora' Festival Begins its Second Session on December 19, 2019," Saudi Press Agency, September 25, 2019.
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Chapter Eight

# 8



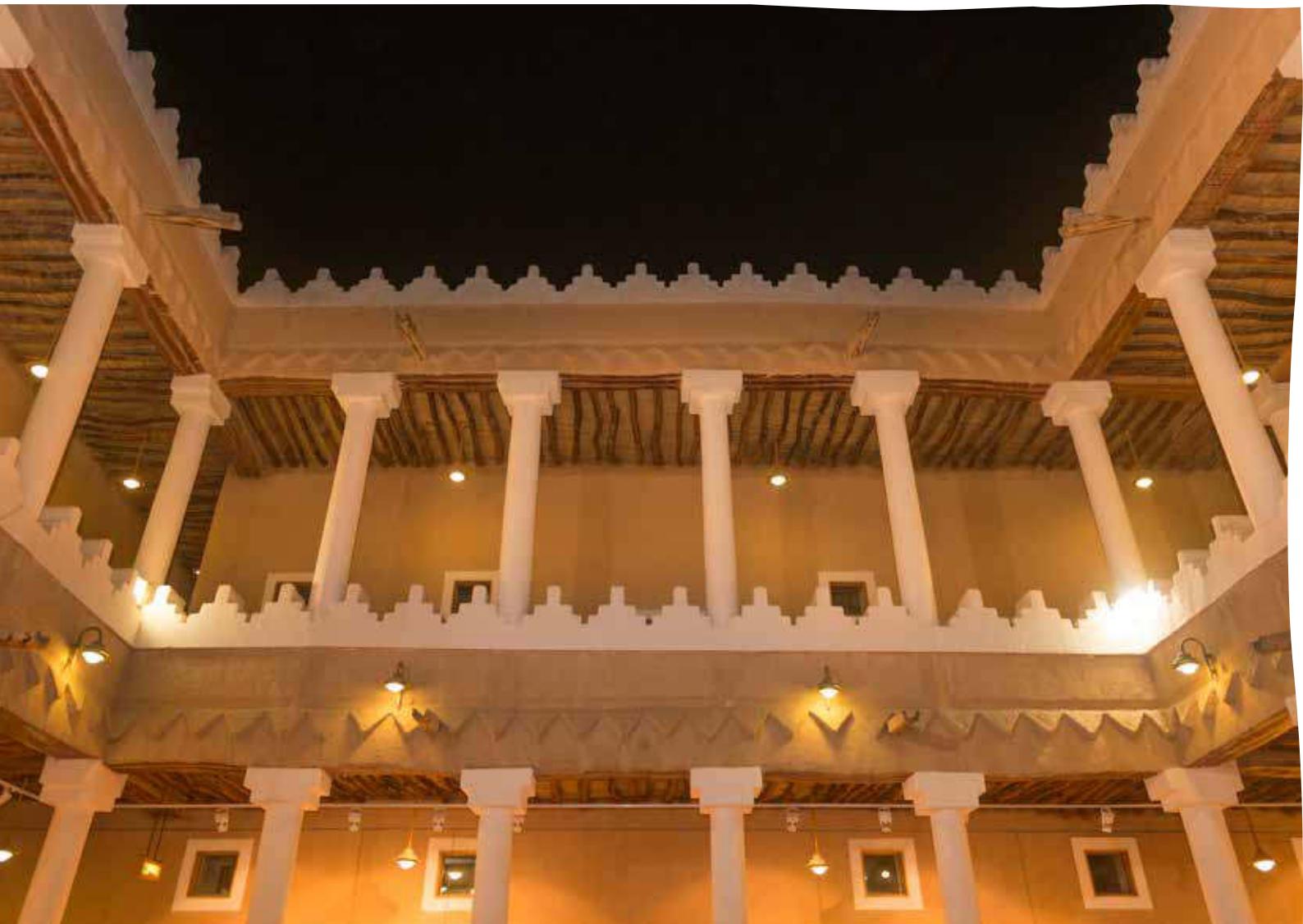


# Architecture

- **Architecture and Design in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview**
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# Architecture and Design in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview

Architecture at its most basic is the art of designing spaces for human habitat, from planning cities to the small scale of designing furniture. Through architecture and design, all aspects of the built environment embody the surrounding cultural and social context. Just as theatre is the mother of all performing arts, so architecture and design are the archetype for visual arts, because they incorporate drawing, forming, crafting and other art forms. When comparing the material legacies of humanity, architecture is at the forefront because it uniquely captures the ever-changing nature of societies over time. As opposed to other forms of cultural expression, architectural achievements reflect a living image of their cultural surroundings. This image consists of tangible and intangible elements such as the available techniques and materials, economic circumstances, social life, and, most obviously, the aesthetic tastes that fuse all of these elements together. Architecture in the modern era has moved to a new stage of cultural expression: while it was originally a craft that developed in parallel with the broader society, it has become a complex profession subjected to industrial techniques and limited to specialized practitioners.



## Changing Architecture in the Kingdom

### Traditional Architecture, Modern Architecture

Architecture in the Kingdom had remained stagnant for several centuries before the advent of the oil age in the 1930s. Construction and building methods remained simple and there were no specialized architects in the modern sense; communities produced their architecture with the help of builders who worked with their hands and used local materials, and this is what is now referred to as traditional architecture. For this reason, every region was distinguished by its own architectural style, which reflected a unique aesthetic determined by locally developed building materials and construction methods, as well as unique architectural solutions to the environmental conditions in each region.<sup>(1)</sup>

Mud-brick architecture is the hallmark of the arid desert regions which cover most of the Arabian Peninsula. This model spread from the center of the Kingdom to the north. There are several key examples, including Al-Masmak Fortress, Al-Murabba Palace in Riyadh, Ash-Shanana Tower in Al-Qassim region, and Al-Qishlah Palace in Hail. In the northern and north-western regions of the Kingdom, mixed materials, including mud-brick combined with stone, were available and can be seen in the Caliph Omar ibn Al-Khattab Mosque, the Marid Castle in Al-Jawf, and the old town of Al-Ula in Al-Ula Governorate.<sup>(2)</sup>



Regions bordering the Red Sea are characterized by the use of marine-excavated stone and multi-story houses that are decorated with ornate carved balconies called rawashin, such as those on the houses of Historic Jeddah. Likewise, this style was widespread in Makkah, the ports of the Hijaz in general, and in the opposite shores of the Red Sea in Sudan and Egypt, forming what might be called a Red Sea style.<sup>(3)</sup>

In the cities of the Eastern Province, the stylistic influence of the architecture in countries bordering the Arabian Gulf is apparent. This style is characterized by the use of coral limestone and other architectural elements such as wind-catchers and chiseled fresco reliefs. This type of architecture was common to the inland cities of Al-Ahsa and the coastal ports as in the House of Allegiance and the Princes School in Al-Hofuf or the traditional residen-

tial homes in Al-Qatif and in downtown Dammam.<sup>(4)</sup>

The architecture of agricultural terraces in the high mountains of the southern regions is characterized by multi-story houses, fortresses, and defensive towers built with stone. Colors made from botanical pigments are also used in the interior reliefs. These are referred to as the art of Al-Qatt, which has spread throughout Aseer and the surrounding regions.<sup>(5)</sup> The southern regions are endowed with many established heritage villages in which the craftsmanship of ancient builders is evident. These include historic Al-Akkas Village in Abha, Rijal Almaa Heritage Village, the ancient village in Al-Namas, and Thee Ain Village in Al-Bahah Governorate. However, all of this diversity and uniqueness in the architectural landscape of different regions began gradually to fade away after the Kingdom began experiencing an economic boom.

### Oil: Before and After

The period from the discovery of oil in 1933 to the height of the oil boom in 1973 was a historical turning point, during which the Kingdom made an unprecedented cultural leap that radically changed the character of its architecture. Saudi Arabia went from being a country of scarce resources that depended predominantly on limited agriculture and herding to an industrialized country in a period of less than four decades. This developmental pace was accelerated with the production of crude oil in commercial quantities after the end of World War II. One economist has described this development as reminiscent of science fiction, as if time travel brought twentieth-century industrial technology to an ancient land of the fifteenth century.<sup>(6)</sup> One of the most significant impacts of this rapid economic development was the appearance of new cities at the start of the rural-urban migration surge. Some migrated within the Kingdom,

and others immigrated from abroad to the oil-producing regions of Dhahran, Al-Khobar, and Dammam looking for better opportunities for work and trade.<sup>(7)</sup> The subsequent population growth demanded the launch of the Kingdom's first urban planning processes. One such project was the Al-Khobar City Plan of 1947, which featured an urban style never before seen in the Kingdom. The Al-Khobar Plan, which included a street grid designed for automobiles and relied on modern criteria imported from other places, became the prototype for city planning in the Kingdom thereafter.<sup>(8)</sup> This was an important step in forming the features of modern architecture in the Kingdom.<sup>(9)</sup> The aforementioned criteria were implemented at the city level in Al-Khobar and influenced everything from street measurements to land use, residential blocks, and building height. The introduction of construction machinery facilitated the mechanization of the building process, which had been completely manual up to that

point. Further, the establishment of electric power plants facilitated and mechanized the local production of modern construction materials, such as concrete and cement bricks. The spread of these methods led to the emergence of a new architectural landscape, which gradually took the place of traditional architecture.

### Imported Architecture, Local Architecture

At the beginning of the 1950s, the first spark of imported architectural innovation was struck in a country whose cities and architecture were still garbed in their traditional clothing. The major cities of the Kingdom, such as Riyadh, Jeddah, Makkah, and Al-Madinah, were still cloaked in the functional, traditional urban fabric of a bygone era. Indeed, some of these cities remained confined within ancient walls that were not demolished until the beginning of the 1950s. At that time, the state gradually began to construct insti-



tutions to introduce facilities, basic infrastructure, and management to its existing cities.

This period could be called the "pioneers" period as it featured the first tentative manifestations of modern Saudi architecture in its formative period. It was during this period that the architectural identity began to vacillate between the modern and the inherited. This tension was exacerbated by the arrival of experts from abroad, with different architectural backgrounds and capabilities. The vastness of the country and its emerging economy provided fertile soil for ready-made architectural models, which were cultivated despite of their limited coherence with the environment and society of the Kingdom. For example, after Jeddah expanded beyond its original walls in the 1950s, it embraced modern high-rise residential and office buildings. These had to be constructed out of reinforced concrete, which was not a locally available building material and had to be imported from abroad. The new material presented a challenge to local builders, who had inherited the practice of building with maritime stones for centuries but now had to utilize unfamiliar materials and foreign designs. The result was an architecture devoid of identity.<sup>(10)</sup>. Even so, the imported style was viewed as a sign of progress and sophistication: in the absence of a local architectural scene, the need for construction and development meant that imported models were not held accountable to local culture in any meaningful way due to the lack of national professional institutions<sup>(11)</sup> and schools of architecture at that time.<sup>(12)</sup>

In general, the excitement of renewal dominated the sentiment of that



early period such that incorporating local culture was not on the immediate agenda for most architectural projects, even in urban settings. After state administration was transferred from Hijaz to Riyadh in 1953, the new ministry headquarters were built in the international style, which was highly abstract and utilized pure engineering forms devoid of any cultural or local influence. At that time, even plans for modern districts and residential buildings, such as Al-Malaz District, shed the local urban style in favor of an architectural style only tenuously linked to social reality and the local environment: district planning relied on street grids designed for automobiles, and residential units adhered to a system of detached homes with enclosed back yards, in complete contrast to the traditional house of that time, which had an inner courtyard.<sup>(13)</sup>

Nevertheless, there were examples of modern architecture that incorporated aspects of the culture that hosted them. A good example of this is Dhahran International Airport, which was the first international airport in the Kingdom. It was designed by the American architect Minoru Yamasaki in the late 1950s. The de-

signer attempted to apply modern building techniques to local and Islamic architectural features, such as recurring archways and structured branching ceilings that resemble palm trees; the control tower was also designed to resemble a minaret. These design concepts drew aesthetic value from their surroundings and, as such, they were in greater harmony with them. As a result, Dhahran International Airport became an architectural icon for the Kingdom during that time, and it appeared on stamps and the national currency. In 1963, Yamasaki won the First Honor Award for this design from the American Institute of Architects (AIA).<sup>(14)</sup>

### Self-Examination and Cultural Reference

Since the late 1970s, a general architectural trend has appeared, which raises important questions about how modern architecture relates to the cultural identity of the Kingdom. The trend was shaped by two main factors: first, a local architectural culture was born out of the establishment of architectural education in the country and the

emergence of a local class of practitioners; and second, construction programs proliferated in the country following the oil boom in 1973 and the increased presence of Western architectural firms. Indeed, that period saw the beginning of critical interaction between architectural styles from abroad and others from within the Kingdom. Moreover, foreign architects themselves posed fundamental questions about the suitability of modern architectural styles in the local context, especially since applying these developed architectural models required the importation of both the technicians and engineers as well as the necessary building materials and equipment. This increased the cost to five times that of similar projects in the United States according to reports from American architecture firms in the mid-1970s.<sup>(15)</sup>

The significance of the cultural dimension has become a key element in architectural styles today, no less significant than technical and economic concerns. A number of major state projects, such as the project of the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu in 1975, were pursued with culture in mind. The plan for the residential development of these two cities took into account environmental conditions and local cultural practices in the design of residential units.<sup>(16)</sup>

In the early 1980s, the relationship between architecture and local culture became a pivotal issue in the local architectural discourse, as expressed in a number of academic conferences that discussed the matter. Among them were the "Symposium on Islamic Architecture and Urbanism," which was held

in 1980 at King Faisal University in Dammam<sup>(17)</sup> and the "Symposium on the Arab City: Its Characteristics and its Islamic Cultural Heritage," which was held in Al-Madinah by the Arab Towns Organization in 1981.<sup>(18)</sup>

The issue remained divisive among various groups, which is an inevitable part of any process in which rapid developments challenge the status quo. On one side were those who argued that modernization brought changes which affect every aspect of life, including architecture. They reasoned that the designs and methods of modern construction had spread to every corner of the globe so quickly that the architecture of major cities across the globe had become homogenized by best practices. The question of establishing architectural identity was an issue for practitioners to address us-



ing creativity and knowledge of the local culture. On the other side were those who advocated legislation to obligate architects to replicate traditional architecture and preserve that aspect of cultural identity. This position was rejected by some critics and architects because of its limitations on artistic freedom, which depends on distancing itself from ready-made stereotypes and embracing freedom of expression.<sup>(19)</sup>

It is notable that, during this time, the debate about architectural style was limited to high-profile projects, and that small projects such as residential construction—which is the most common kind—remained largely outside of the conversation. This period was also characterized by multiple levels of architectural style, from the purely local, which is seen in Qasr Al-Hukm district in Riyadh or locally inspired, such as seen in the National Commercial Bank headquarters in Jeddah, to Islamic architecture, which characterizes the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh and the railway stations in Riyadh, Al-Hofuf, and Dammam.

### City Architecture, Rural Architecture

It is worth mentioning that economic developments and the social and cultural transformations that followed them were not evenly dispersed across the Kingdom, as rural-urban migration remained concentrated in the few major areas of high economic importance. These were the Eastern Province, Riyadh, and Makkah, which together account for the largest share of the Saudi population and GDP. As a result, their architectural and con-

struction sectors are highly productive. According to statistics from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development on the distribution of registered architectural engineers at the national level, approximately 89% of them are distributed throughout these three regions: Riyadh, Makkah, and the Eastern Province.<sup>(20)</sup>

This concentration of experts meant that construction activities in small regions and rural areas relied on replicating the architecture of major cities, as can often be seen by simple observation. It also meant that opportunities for incorporating local architecture in rural areas eroded and disappeared in the face of this overwhelming influence from the cities, which have long housed most of the professional and educational activity in the field. This imbalance was further exacerbated by the aforementioned rural-to-urban migration, which has been increasing since the 1960s. Before this migration, 70% of the Kingdom's population was rural. However, after extensive internal migration, this percentage had decreased by 2015 to approximately 20%, meaning that 80% of the Kingdom's residents were living in cities.<sup>(21)</sup>

### Development of Frame- works for Professional Practice

Modern architectural ideas and styles began pouring into the Kingdom in an intensified manner after the oil-induced economic boom and the introduction of international design standards in the first city-planning process in Al-Khobar in 1974. This coincided with the introduction of new building materials

and techniques, which caused traditional, community-based builders to experience a decline as professional architects took their place, initially mostly from abroad. The construction industry has since been revolutionized by new engineering design principles and updated building materials and techniques. A new generation of experts also emerged locally with the proliferation of architectural education programs beginning in the late 1960s. Responsibility for architectural regulations was divided between the Ministry of Commerce for matters related to the trade aspect of the practice and municipalities for matters related to construction processes. In spite of the rapid pace of construction and development, architecture proceeded slowly on the path to becoming a unified industry with a single voice that can guarantee quality and social responsibility.

The problem is not that professionalization encountered insurmountable challenges, but rather that it stagnated. Architectural development in the Kingdom, as in other countries that developed rapidly, has gone through a number of phases. These phases have created strong foundations for developing an adequate level of professionalization to build on, which ultimately serve to improve and standardize the practice of architecture as a profession. In the United States, for example, the demand for improving the architectural scene increased during the industrial revolution at the end of the nineteenth century. As a result, the core of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) took it upon itself to develop frameworks for the practice of architecture, architects having previously been left to their own devices.<sup>(22)</sup>

# Saudi Architecture and Design Today

## Stakeholders

National architecture is influenced by a trio of key stakeholders that influence local architectural character, including (1) owners from both the public and the private sectors, (2) regulators such as relevant governmental agencies or professional and educational institutions, and (3) architects whether local or international. Municipalities and the

Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs are the primary governmental agencies involved in these affairs regulation-wise. In recent times, urban development agencies have emerged that play a major role in specific construction projects, the oldest of which is the Riyadh Development Authority (now the Royal Commission for Riyadh), which was established in 1975.<sup>(23)</sup> In terms of professional institutions, the Saudi

Council of Engineers represents all engineering specializations, including architecture. Likewise, the Saudi Society for Urban Sciences was established in 1988 under the auspices of King Saud University to bring together people interested in the field of urban planning. Finally, the National Center for Urban Heritage is concerned with preserving and rehabilitating urban heritage sites in the Kingdom.<sup>(24)</sup>



When considering architecture at the national level, we find that governmental projects, especially large ones, present superior architectural models in terms of quality and cultural value. Examples of this are numerous (see Table 8-1), taken together, they provide representative examples of modern architecture in the Kingdom. There may also be exceptional architectural models from the private sector, which likewise represent architectural feats of notable social and aesthetic value. This is the case with the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) in Dhahran, which was established by Saudi Aramco. However, the most prominent stakeholders in local developments in architectural practice are the architects themselves. Unfortunately, the level of local architectural practice is unable to compete with foreign architectural production, especially for projects of such a high caliber.<sup>(25)</sup>

### Publishing in the Field of Architecture and Design

Architectural publishing in the Kingdom is very limited. For example, architectural journalism has been virtually non-existent for the past several years, as there were only two specialized magazines published on the subject, one of which recently went out of print. There are a few universities that issue specialized publications of academic research in the domain of architecture and planning. Digital architectural publishing is still missing from the scene, with the exception of some limited attempts which appear for a short time before vanishing. Pri-



vate publishing houses rarely take on architectural books, while university publishing houses only produce one or two architectural books a year, usually titles that have been translated from foreign languages primarily aimed at university curricula. Some governmental and philanthropic institutions with an interest in architecture produce books or leaflets related to their activities in this sector, such as the Royal Commission for Riyadh (previously the Riyadh Development Authority) and Al-Turath Charitable Foundation.<sup>(26)</sup>

### Other Key Developments in the Architectural Character of the Kingdom

#### Professional Structure

The status of architects in the Kingdom has suffered in recent years, as the field lacks the appropriate professionalization to give this field the recognition it deserves and to recognize architecture as a key cultural component of the Kingdom on par with other cultural sub-sectors. As such, the Ministry of Culture's inclusion of architecture and design in its

cultural plan and the establishment of the Architecture and Design Commission is a first step in providing comprehensive training and accreditation for practitioners of architecture and interior design, while mitigating some of the long-standing deficiencies within those fields. In addition to these institutional developments, new royal commissions have been introduced in some cities with programming that focuses directly on the exceptional architectural and cultural value of these cities. Examples include the Royal Commission for Makkah City and Holy Sites, the Royal Commission for Al-Ula, and the Diriyah Gate Development Authority.

To build a firm foundation for improving architectural standards and modifying them over time, it is clearly imperative to adopt appropriate strategies at the national level. An encouraging step in this direction is Saudi Vision 2030's adoption of the notion of a vibrant society, focusing on developing Saudi cities, achieving environmental sustainability, promoting culture and entertainment, strengthening national identity, and encouraging a healthy and balanced

lifestyle. The programs to achieve this vision, such as the Quality of Life Program and the Housing Program, form the backbone of a solid development apparatus in Saudi cities.<sup>(27)</sup>

### Practical Initiatives

Vision 2030 calls for the preservation of Saudi identity as an essential component of social and economic development. From this perspective, the initiatives that contribute to consolidating cultural identity in the Kingdom are implemented at various urban, architectural, and design levels. For example, in recent years, a number of regions with exceptional urban and architectural value have been recorded in the UNESCO World Heritage List, including Al-Ahsa, Diriyah, and Historic Jeddah. The art of Al-Qatt Al-Asiri, the pattern used to decorate interior walls of homes, was also added to the UNESCO Intangible World Heritage List.<sup>(28)</sup>

There were also preliminary attempts to combine traditional archi-

tecture with contemporary methods, such as using compressed clay for the Al-Madi Park Mosque in Riyadh, which was completed in 2005 by the Riyadh Development Authority (now the Royal Commission for Riyadh). This project is considered to be a good example of the harmonization of modern techniques with locally available materials to simultaneously achieve a high degree of aesthetic value and structural and environmental integrity.

There have been initiatives with a direct impact on architecture at the national level, such as the Humanization of Cities initiative, which was the subject of an international conference organized by the Madinah Region Development Authority in 2018. This project centers on reimagining the design of the modern city—which currently revolves around the automobile—to be more conscientious of the human experience of the city, both physically and spiritually.<sup>(29)</sup> In a number of cities in the Kingdom, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs has already taken initial steps to

improve the quality of life and the urban landscape.

### A Flashy Architectural Landscape

Over the past two decades, a trans-national architectural landscape has developed as a result of globalization. Free-market activity and an unprecedented revolution in digital information and communications have compressed global space. The resulting architectural landscape is characterized by a modern architectural form that is not reflective of any one place in particular, appearing instead in all spaces, regardless of geography, as an icon of global transnational urbanism. This phenomenon is not new, having followed every economic and technical development that the world has seen (such as in major cities like Chicago and New York in the first half of the twentieth century). However, in our present moment, this paradigm has been criticized inasmuch as it represents a recurring consumption pattern that dissolves local identity.



This dissolution of identity can be observed in what have been referred to as emerging "global cities"—Singapore, Shanghai, Dubai, etc.—where a throng of glass towers fills the commercial center, and the modern architectural styles are so similar that local identity melts away.<sup>(30)</sup> On the one hand, this model may be seen as a sign of prosperity and sustained economic growth while on the other, it can be criticized as a model that not only fails to address environmental and social challenges, but which may even exacerbate them. Some architectural critics can be so tough on modern architecture that they charge it with being blind "to everything that is not itself."<sup>(31)</sup> We see similar steel and glass styles in the financial centers of some Saudi cities such as the King Abdullah Financial District in Riyadh, which is considered to be a city within a city.

In spite of the erosion of local architectural styles to the point of their disappearance in many places, unique works have emerged in the past few years that blend modern design and local architectural styles. For example, the concept for the King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center was based on the symbol of an inner courtyard, to reflect the idea of a structure that adapts to the desert climate and the imperatives of future expansion. The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dhahran has become a destination point for a large swath of the population because of its cultural, recreational, and educational services. There is no doubt that its architectural style, which is distinct from surrounding architecture in Dhahran, made it stand out and strengthened its social role. Although the building features a futur-

istic architectural style, the designer attempted to use local construction methods by employing the technique of compressing extracted soil from the same site to build some of the interior portions of the building. However, the degree to which similar efforts will succeed (or fail) is contingent on the extent to which they can achieve the goals set for them. This deserves to be evaluated separately.

### Community Participation

Perhaps one of the most positive developments has been an upswing in community participation and the emergence of architecture from its institutional shell. A number of active volunteer groups have emerged, though they are still in their infancy, which have facilitated this change. Examples include the Bawtaqah group and the ArchiNet group, which organize various activities such as lectures, discussions, and workshops in a number of cities throughout the Kingdom. In 2017, the Saudi Art Council launched its first design initiative in Jeddah, specifically devoted to interior designers, in order to foster community interest in interior design. This initiative was pursued for a second time in the following year.

It is common for these types of initiatives to come about in response to a pressing social need. This was the case with urban heritage preservation groups, which are motivated by the desire to preserve local memory and identity and to prevent them from disappearing. These groups are most likely to gain momentum on social media, and they are active in the most important heritage sites. Some examples are

the Friends of Al-Dirah committee in the old town of Al-Ula and the Heart of Jeddah group in Historic Jeddah, which organize introductory tours for individuals as well as educational institutions.<sup>(32)</sup>

### Architecture and Design Under the Auspices of the Ministry of Culture: Next Steps

The most pressing issue for all practitioners and professors of architecture and design in the Kingdom, which is still in need of a viable and definitive identity, is the creation of an independent professional structure that draws together the scattered efforts of many different agencies while avoiding the organizational and institutional constraints that have persisted over the years. Workers in this field anticipate that the inclusion of the profession of architecture as an independent sector under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture will be the first real step in achieving this long-sought goal.

Education remains the most important source of architects, which demands continuous review and development as well as innovation. The Cultural Scholarship Program, which was launched by the Ministry of Culture in January 2020, is an important step in this direction. It has gained the attention of many young people, as it provides opportunities to study architecture and design at several international universities. This represents a new and important resource for a long-term strategy, including many yet-to-be-announced initiatives to strengthen the field and to raise its standards.

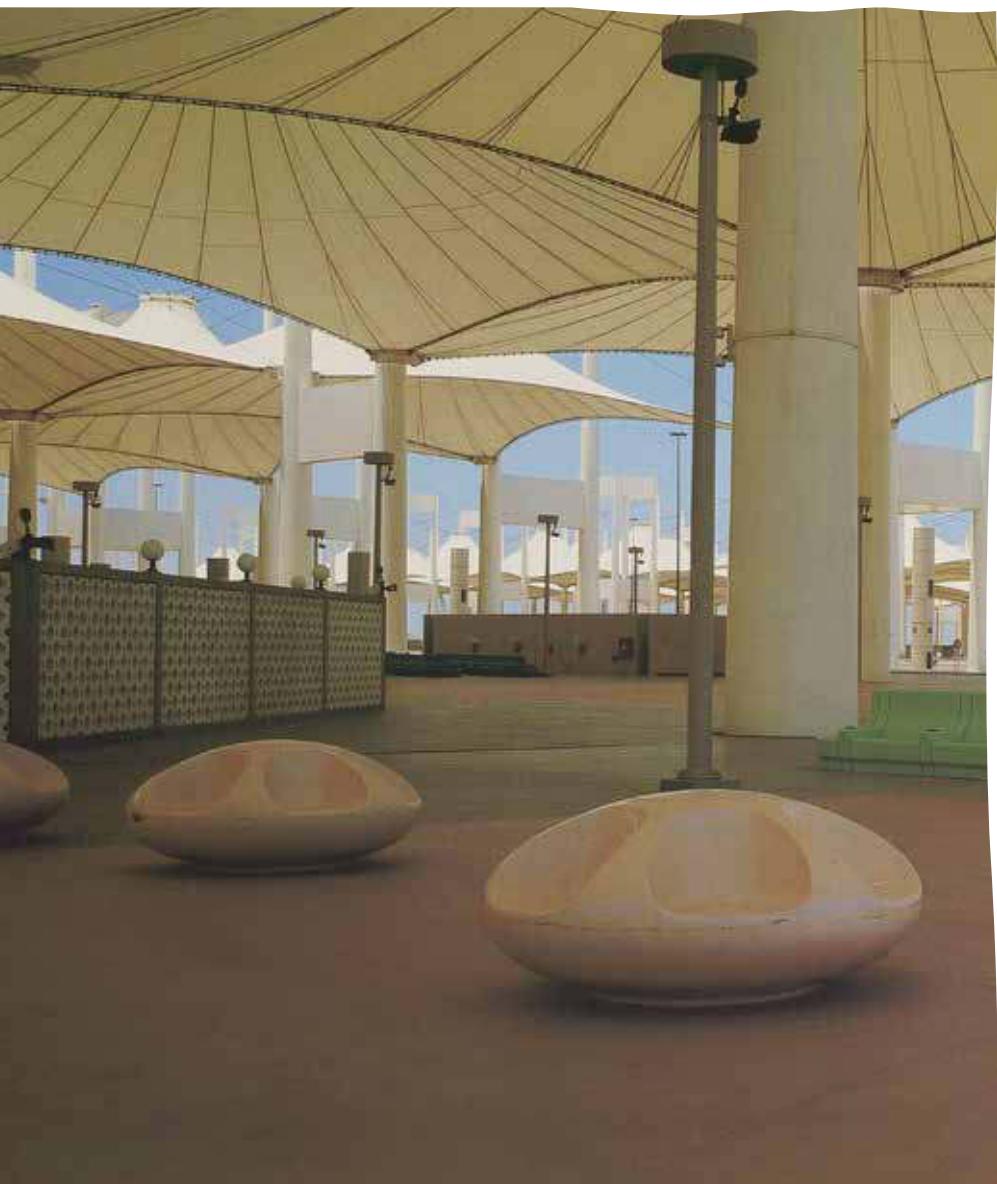
# Awards in the Field of Architecture and Design

There is no local architecture award given periodically at the national level for architectural excellence in general. The King Fahd Award for Design and Research in Islamic Architecture had previously been established as an international award granted every three years, but it was discontinued after its first cycle in

1985–86. There are awards granted by some private and public entities, but they are highly specialized and devoted to specific architectural issues, such as preserving heritage or a specific type of buildings. This is the case with the Prince Sultan bin Salman Award for Architectural Heritage, which was first launched

in 2005–2007, and the Abdullatif Al-Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture, which is an international Saudi architectural award established in 2011. The latter is focused on the contemporary architectural art of mosques and has been awarded to seven mosques from seven Islamic countries, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bangladesh, Turkey, Indonesia, Lebanon and Mali. The Saudi Society for Urban Sciences has also launched the first iteration of an award for graduate students' final projects in the fields of architecture, environmental architecture, interior design, and urban design, which started accepting submissions in 2019 and will be awarded for the first time in 2020.

Although historically, the best designs have come from architectural competitions, there is still an outstanding need to foster creativity in the fields of architecture and design at the local level. We see, for example, prizes that exclusively consider projects that have already been executed, even though the architectural process is broad and includes many important developments before its conclusion with design and implementation. This underscores the need to expand local competitions to include support for innovative ideas, even if they are ultimately never implemented, such as additional competitions for university students at the national level. Hopefully, the National Cultural Awards initiative, which was recently announced by the Ministry of Culture's Architecture and Design division, will fill this gap and institute a qualitative change in the field.



## Distinguished Projects which Won the Aga Khan International Award for Architecture

### 1980

**Makkah**

Intercontinental Hotel and Conference Centre.



### 1983

**Jeddah**

Hajj Terminal, King Abdulaziz International Airport.



### 1989

**Riyadh**

Al-Kindi Plaza.



### 1989

**Riyadh**

Hayy Assafarat Landscaping.



### 1989

**Jeddah**

Corniche Mosque.



### 1989

**Riyadh**

The headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



### 1990

**Riyadh**

The Great Mosque (Imam Turki Bin Abdullah Grand Mosque) in the Qasr Al-Hukm District.



### 1998

**Riyadh**

Tuwaiq Palace in Hayy Assafarat.



### 2010

**Riyadh**

Wadi Hanifa Wetlands Project.



# Saudi Architecture in the World

## Exhibitions

Before the advent of modern media, the general population was under the impression that this country was a barren desert devoid of cities or development. A series of exhibitions called "The Kingdom Between Yesterday and Today" contributed concretely and directly to painting a detailed picture of the Kingdom's cultural development and the scale of its urban development, which has only accelerated since the mid-1970s. This series toured

a number of countries between 1985 and 1991, including Germany, Great Britain, France, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Canada and the United States, and concluded at the Kingdom's pavilion at the 1992 Universal Exposition of Seville (Expo '92). The Saudi wing was distinguished by its breath-taking design, based on a blend of traditional mud-brick architecture and featuring a steel structure that carried a diverse assortment of visual entries from all parts of the Kingdom. The Kingdom's pavilion was classified as

one of the four best pavilions out of 122 participating countries at the exposition that year.<sup>[53]</sup> In 2018, the Kingdom took part in the Venice Biennale of Architecture for the first time with a pavilion put together by MiSK Art Institute.

## International Awards

Several distinguished projects in the Kingdom have been able to claim the international Aga Khan Award for Architecture over the years.



**Table 8-1:** Distinguished projects in KSA that have received the International Aga Khan Award for Architecture

Project	City	Year
Intercontinental Hotel and Conference Centre	Makkah	1980
Hajj Terminal, King Abdulaziz International Airport	Jeddah	1983
Al-Kindi Plaza	Riyadh	1989
Hayy Assafarat Landscaping	Riyadh	1989
Corniche Mosque	Jeddah	1989
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Riyadh	1989
The Great Mosque (Imam Turki Bin Abdullah Grand Mosque) in the Qasr Al-Hukm District	Riyadh	1995
Tuwaiq Palace in Hayy Assafarat	Riyadh	1998
Wadi Hanifa Wetlands Project	Riyadh	2010

### International Architecture in the Kingdom

Architectural design differs from other creative fields because it is a collaborative effort between the owner, the architect, and the implementing construction firm. For

some decades now, the Kingdom has offered ample space for the best foreign architects to introduce their professional ideas and experiences in a reciprocal process, which was previously unprecedented in the Gulf region. It is worthwhile here to note the contributions of inter-

national architects to the modern architectural character in the Kingdom since their arrival and the influence of their works, both locally and in their home countries.

Examples of these distinguished works can be found in Table 8-2.

**Table 8-2:** Selected distinguished architecture projects by international architects in KSA

Project	Architect	Date Inaugurated
Airport International The old Dhahran	Minoru Yamasaki	1961
King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals-Dhahran	Caudill Rowlett Scott (CRS)	1974
Airport International Abdulaziz King the at Terminal Hajj	Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM)	1981
King Faisal Foundation	Tange Kenzo	1982
King Khalid International Airport	Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum (HOK)	1983
Affairs Foreign of Ministry the of Headquarters	Larsen Henning	1984
King Fahd International Stadium	Ian Fraser, John Roberts & Partners	1987
National Museum of Saudi Arabia — Riyadh	Moriyama and Teshima Planners Ltd.	1999
King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center	Zaha Hadid	2017
King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture	Snøhetta	2018

# Infrastructure and Investment

## Regulatory Frameworks

It is common knowledge that the professional practice of architecture and design in the Kingdom lacks an independent professional body that looks after the holistic character of architecture to promote a balance between professional standards on the one hand and cultural and ethical standards on the other. Perhaps one of the most crucial observations is that architecture as a profession remains attached to other engineering professions in the Saudi Council of Engineers.

The lack of independent regulatory frameworks undermines the perception of the field's importance. Architecture and design are treated primarily as part of a commercial equation, without regard for how integral the cultural and creative dimension are to its core functions.

Another fundamental problem that architects face is the morass of governmental regulations in the architecture and construction industries, which are currently overseen by multiple entities, creating unnecessary red tape. Some architects believe that sclerotic regulation is a primary reason for the declining standard of architectural practice in the Kingdom.<sup>(34)</sup>

## Architecture and Design Education Programs

Architectural education is subject to the tripartite structure of higher education composed of relationships between students, professors, and universities. Architecture students come out of the public education system, which does not typically encourage critical thinking and creativity in its curricula.<sup>(35)</sup> Ar-

chitectural education in the university is influenced by several factors, the first of which are the regulations adopted by universities. For example, general admission policies may not take into account the ability and artistic taste, which are required of students hoping to specialize in architecture. Some admission policies may oblige students to choose certain majors based on their test scores without taking into account the student's own desires or future ambitions. All of this can undermine the production of high-quality graduates in architecture. Professors of architecture at the university also face organizational challenges, such as being barred from practicing their profession outside of university premises. According to experts, this widens the gap between theory and practice in the field of architecture and interior design.<sup>(36)</sup>

At the moment, public and private universities actively provide architecture and design study programs; there are 13 architecture departments and 17 interior design departments nation-wide. These departments offer bachelor's degrees in architecture and interior design, whereas advanced studies are limited to three doctoral programs in architecture, two master's programs in interior design, and eight master's programs in architecture. The majority of these departments are concentrated in major cities, and most interior design departments admit female students exclusively, whereas most architecture departments only admit male students.

One of the most serious challenges to improving architectural education



may be regulating its quality by providing the appropriate infrastructure and qualified teaching faculty. There are a number of architecture and interior design programs in the Kingdom that are currently seeking accreditation from foreign agencies, such as the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) or the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA). Although some educational standards can be applied anywhere, foreign accreditation systems are specific to the regulatory, legal, and cultural environment in which they originated. They are not necessarily appropriate for the local context.

### Labor Market

The number of engineering and consulting firms registered with the Saudi Council of Engineers in 2016 totaled 3,485. Three regions (Eastern Province, Riyadh, and Makkah) possessed the largest number of professional offices, accounting for approximately 84% of these professional firms.<sup>(37)</sup> By 2019, the number of practices registered with the Saudi Council of Engineers nation-wide has dropped to 2,801, a decrease of nearly 20% compared to 2016. Notably, the classification of these

firms includes all engineering disciplines, not only architecture.<sup>(38)</sup>

Some people working in the field see this decline in the number of consulting offices as the result of a number of challenges that push architects out of the market. The first of these challenges is economic recession, which causes the number of construction and development projects to drop and limits business-development opportunities. Given that architecture as a profession is totally dependent on costly human resources, administrative difficulties (such as limited funding or payment delays) on the part of contracted agencies can force these offices to delay their operations or close down completely. Some unfortunate situations, such as commercial cover-ups or the activities of unlicensed firms, aggravate the problem by flooding the market with unfair competition and low-quality projects, which can force professional firms out of the market.<sup>(39)</sup>

It is true that, historically, the profession of architecture has been associated with the outstanding talent of the individual architect. However, existing conditions do not allow individual architects to practice their

profession independently, because of a model which requires them to assume the financial burden of forming corporations. Current practices such as working remotely and using co-working space offer ways to go beyond this model.

### Support, Research, and Creativity

Architecture is both an artform and an industry. It is not merely a field of economic investment, but rather, a field of cultural knowledge, which deserves support and development in its own right. It is currently rare for private entities to take on initiatives to support architectural research and development. This means that, broadly speaking, architectural research is limited to the efforts of universities or public institutions, which magnifies the growing gap between architectural practice and theory. Just as there are entities, such as the Real Estate Fund, the Industrial Fund, and the Agricultural Fund, that support those sectors, there should also be a cultural fund to provide avenues of support for different facets of culture, including architecture. Perhaps the Nomow Cultural Fund, which was launched by the Ministry of Culture in March 2019, will occupy this as-of-yet unfilled position. The Nomow Fund follows the business incubator model and is invested in establishing extensive programs for professional practitioners, especially beginners (and not only academics). It is hoped that this will sharpen the competitive edge of architectural projects and turn the wheels of development and innovation.<sup>(40)</sup>

### Key Figures for 2019

**30**

Bachelor's degree programs for architecture and interior design in Saudi universities.



Postgraduate programs for students of architecture and interior design in Saudi universities.

**13**

**2699**

Saudi men and women registered as architects as of 2019.



**Endnote:**

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- (16) Ibrahime M Al-But'hie and Mohammad A. Eben Saleh, "Urban and industrial development planning as an approach for Saudi Arabia: the case study of Jubail and Yanbu," *Habitat International* 26, no. 1 (2002): 1-20.
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- (24) For more information, see the chapter on Heritage.
- (25) Interview with Dr. Faisal Al-Mubarak, Professor at King Saud University, Riyadh, July 1, 2020.
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- (34) Interview with Ali Shuaibi, architectural engineer, Riyadh, December 8, 2019.
- (35) Points in the Kingdom: A Report on the Exploratory Session, King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, June 4, 2019.
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Chapter Nine

# 9





# Heritage

- **Heritage in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview**
- **Heritage in Saudi Arabia Today**
- **Awards in the Field of Heritage**
- **Saudi Cultural Heritage in the World**
- **Infrastructure and Investment**

# Heritage in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia enjoys a deep, rich, and diverse heritage. The Arabian Peninsula has been a cradle of ancient kingdoms and civilizations and a gateway for intercontinental trade routes since ancient times. The Kingdom's strategic geographic position as a center of global commerce and a bridge for cultural engagement is reflected in the archaeological sites throughout the Kingdom that date back to prehistoric times.

The diversity and interconnectivity that characterize the Kingdom are strengthened by its links to the east via the Arabian Gulf and to the west via the Red Sea. These links include trade with India, the movement of peoples along the Gulf shores, commercial expeditions from the south and middle of the peninsula to the Fertile Crescent, the seasonal migrations of nomads, and the Hajj. In rural and urban areas alike, the Peninsula's inhabitants have drawn on the resultant cultural diversity to develop the unique traditions, practices, arts, and knowledge they have passed on through the generations. After the unification of the Kingdom in 1932, the various cultural legacies from across the Kingdom's regions, climates and lifestyles became intertwined. This has led to the formation of a Saudi identity that reflects the rich diversity of a large country engaged in continuous interaction with the world around it. On top of that, the rapidity of the social and economic modernization that followed the discovery of oil and subsequent development projects, combined with the challenges of preserving elements of ancestral heritage, has contributed to new social and cultural transformations.



## Introduction: History and Use of the Term "Cultural Heritage"

Although two international conventions have addressed the question, there is no standardized definition of what constitutes tangible cultural heritage. The 1956 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict defines heritage as both moveable and immovable property, including structures and centers with cultural significance. This is similar to the definition of heritage from the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which considers monuments, buildings, and sites (whether manmade or a composite of nature and human labor) as the components of international cultural heritage.<sup>(1)</sup> The Law of Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage, established by Royal Decree No. M/3, in 2014, distinguishes between urban heritage and archaeological sites. Bearing this in mind, tangible cultural heritage can be defined as follows:

### 1. Monuments

**Immoveable Monuments:** "Monuments linked to the land, such as natural caves or those excavated and used by humans; stones upon which pictures or inscriptions were drawn or etched; meteorites; stone circles; the ruins of towns and villages; installations that are either visible or buried underground; aqueducts; ancient trade and pilgrimage routes; traditional cities, villages and neighborhoods; and buildings constructed for various purposes, the

ruins of those buildings, and related architectural elements."

**Moveable Monuments:** "Artifacts which were originally constructed to be, by their nature, distinct from the land and immovable monuments and which can change location, such as sculptures, coins, writings, jewelry, accessories, and artifacts which can be considered national treasures because of their historical, scientific, aesthetic, technical, or traditional nature or because of their ancient usage."<sup>(2)</sup>

The Kingdom possesses thousands of artifacts and engravings from different eras, such as the Tabuk Region's Tayma inscription, which is one of the oldest engravings in the Arabian Peninsula, and the rock art in Hail.

### 2. Urban Heritage<sup>(3)</sup>

**Groups of Buildings:** "Everything built by humans, such as cities, villages, neighborhoods, and buildings, and all that they contain in terms of spaces, installations, and artifacts of urban, historical, scientific, cultural, or national value."<sup>(4)</sup> This includes Historic Diriyah; Historic Jeddah; heritage villages and towns; popular markets in many regions and provinces of the Kingdom; forts, citadels, and mosques, such as Masmak Fortress, the Hijaz Railway Station in Madinah, and historic mosques in different cities and villages of the Kingdom; and the religious, cultural, historical, scientific, and national legacy associated with these sites and structures.

### 3. Archaeological Sites<sup>(5)</sup>

These include "moveable, immoveable, sunken and buried objects within the borders of the



Kingdom and in the maritime spaces under its sovereignty or legal jurisdiction which were constructed, produced, invented, adapted, or painted by humans and which have archaeological characteristics due to human intervention over the ages, even if the history of these objects is from a more recent time period, provided they are not less than 100 years old. It is the Commission's responsibility to determine what recent antiquities to include among the historical sites."<sup>(6)</sup> For example, Al-Hijr (Mada'in Salih) is an archaeological site, and in 2008 it became the first place in the Kingdom to be included on the World Heritage List. Others include Historic Diriyah, Historic Jeddah, and the rock inscriptions in Jubbah and Shuwaymis in the Hail Region. The Kingdom's museums house thousands of other archaeological sites and artifacts, as well as distinctive artifacts which remain in storage awaiting the completion of the regional museums where they will be displayed.

**4. Composite Works of Nature and Human Labor (Mixed):** Areas with archaeological sites of exceptional value from a historical, aesthetic, ethnological, or anthropological perspective.

As for the term "intangible cultural heritage," as defined by the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,<sup>(7)</sup> it has not been used in common parlance in the Kingdom, where the terms "popular heritage" or "folk heritage" are more common. The term was introduced and defined by the Ministry of Tourism (previously the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage) in its Heritage and Culture Program under the Intangible Cultural Heritage Path in 2001. It later entered academic circles with the establishment of the first depart-

ment of heritage resource management and tourism guidance at King Saud University in 2006. This department promoted the term by employing it in a degree program which included specialized courses for the management of intangible cultural heritage. The Ministry of Culture and Information at that time attached great importance to intangible heritage in its works and publications, although it used the term "popular heritage" until 2008, when the Kingdom ratified the UNESCO Intangible Heritage List, from which point the term "intangible heritage" began to spread.<sup>(8)</sup>

The King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives (Darah) played a major role in increasing awareness of and education about the Kingdom's intangible heritage, launching a number of projects

aimed at documenting intangible heritage, including the Documentation of Oral Heritage in the Kingdom Project. The Saudi Society for the Preservation of Heritage, a civil society established in 2010, also played a major role in the adoption of the new terminology in official and in popular circles, and the society's use of the term grew in tandem with its relationship with UNESCO. As a result, the society began to publicize the term in its events and awareness-raising literature and in its work on intangible cultural heritage files, which were registered with UNESCO on behalf of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

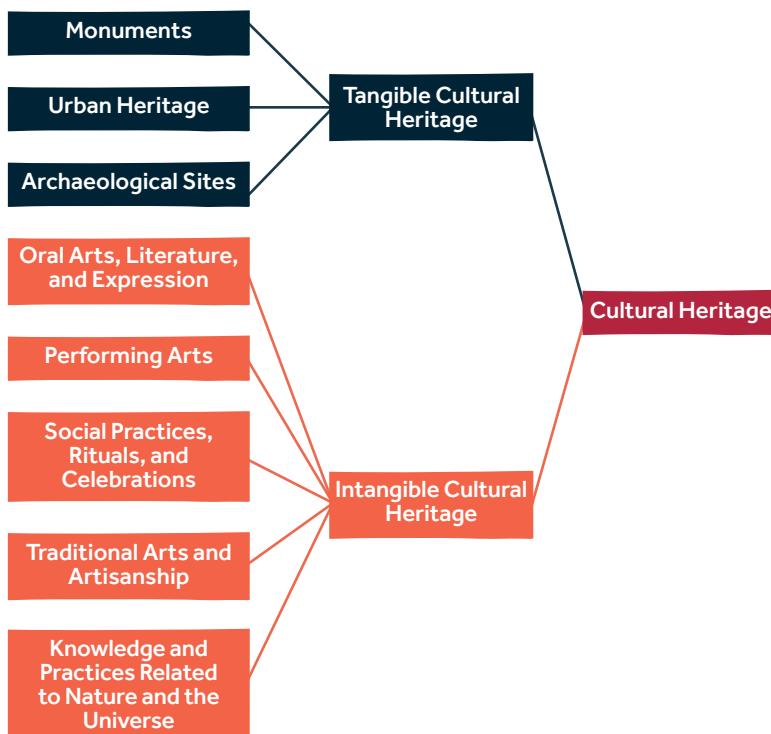
The sub-categories of intangible cultural heritage (according to the definition adopted by UNESCO)<sup>(9)</sup> are briefly clarified below:

**1. Oral Arts, Literature, and Expression:** The term "oral literature" in the Kingdom can refer to several different things, primarily poetry and storytelling, war songs, proverbs, fairytales (sabbahin) folk sayings, idioms, epics, and oral history.

**2. Performing Arts:** This includes singing, music, dance, popular games, and a plethora of performing arts in different regions of the Kingdom. These arts are characterized by their historical dimension and human depth in connection with nature and the conditions of life. Topics include the desert, agriculture and irrigation, the mountains and the plains, action and adventure, and fishing and the sea. There are also performances and songs associated with various social occasions.

**3. Social Practices, Rituals, and Celebrations:** These refer to all matters related to social events

Figure 9-1: Types of heritage



and group activities, such as Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, for which customs vary from one region to the next. Other examples are the rituals associated with Ramadan, birth, death, marriage, and other lifecycle events.

**4. Skills and Knowledge Related to Traditional Arts and Artisanship:** In spite of their relation to tangible heritage, handicrafts fundamentally center on inherited skills and the transmission of expertise through generations of artisans and craftsmen. The Kingdom's crafts meet a variety of needs and provide a source of livelihood by producing merchandise for seasonal and permanent markets by making clothing and jewelry, manufacturing bishts (men's cloaks), building rawashin balconies, painting al-qatt al-asiri (interior murals), smithing copper for brassware, weaving baskets from palm fronds, smithing gold, tanning, and practicing dozens of other handicrafts and industries.

**5. Knowledge and Practices Linked to Nature and the Universe:** This is the lore related to the natural world including traditional agriculture; folk medicine; knowledge of the cosmos, the stars, the lunar cycle, and the seasons; expertise in animal husbandry and the breeding of camels, horses, and falcons; and other kinds of knowledge and practice.

Despite these divisions, these sub-categories have significant overlap. For example, music could be included in the category of oral expression as well as performing arts. It is also occasionally difficult to distinguish between tangible and intangible heritage, as is the case with knowledge related to architecture, farming, camels, hunt-

ing, shooting, and traditional crafts such as traditional clothing, jewelry, weaponry, etc.

### Pioneers of Heritage

Some of the earliest forms of intangible cultural heritage were preserved by the writings of travelers and orientalists on the Arabian Peninsula, along with the photographs and documentary film collected by centers, universities, and museums, which provide a snapshot of the cultural heritage of the Kingdom in all its diversity. As early as the seventeenth century, a number of Europeans visited the Arabian Peninsula to explore and record its cultures and archaeology,<sup>[10]</sup> complementing efforts to preserve ancient artifacts and other relics. These visitors' reports on the heritage of the Arabian Peninsula paralleled the growth of archaeology as a field in the nineteenth century.<sup>[11]</sup> For example, Antonin Jausseen and Raphael Savignac's work on Al-Hijr and its environs between 1907 and 1914, published in Paris in 1914, offers an invaluable account of the region's archaeological riches.<sup>[12]</sup>

In the 1980s, the French academic researcher Thierry Mauger became the first to document the Aseer region's al-qatt al-asiri wall paintings. His nine works on the art of Aseer include three on al-qatt al-asiri and others on Bedouin women's adornment, tent decoration, and the practice of festooning men with flowers. Some Arabic writers, among them Ibrahim Rifat Pasha, Muhammad Labib Al-Batnuni, and Prince Shakib Arslan, also made contributions in documenting the emergence of the Saudi state, but their work was limited in scope and did not link directly to antiquities and heritage.



The writings of leading Saudi intellectuals who preserved intangible cultural heritage were initially limited to the fields of poetry, storytelling, and oral histories. An example of this work is the collection of dictionaries and folk literature across the various provinces of the Kingdom. To create these collections, these pioneers adopted the method of going into the field to meet with narrators and record their oral histories. Their methods of transcription, classification, and labeling were sometimes merely descriptive, but in other cases resemble the systematic approach characteristic of modern-day academic studies. Work in this field includes studies of popular literature by Abdullah Al-Khamis and

Atiq bin Ghayth Biladi, writings on mythology and folktales by Abd Al-Karim Juhayman and Muhammad bin Nassir Al-Abudi, work on folk art and games by Muhammad Said Kamal, and books on folklore and folk music by Tariq Abd Al-Hakim and Hind Baghaffar. Some individuals have taken it upon themselves to collect jewelry, furniture, weapons, agricultural implements, cooking and coffee-making utensils, and collections of poetry, which they preserve in private museums.<sup>(13)</sup> Some collectors have gone on to write books, dictionaries, and informative articles on these artifacts.

A number of Saudi travelers and historians who lived through the establishment of the modern Saudi state played crucial roles in the preservation of tangible heritage. Prominent contributors include Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Balihad Al-Najdi, Abdulquddus Al-Ansari, Hamad Al-Jassir, Abdullah bin Khamis, Muhammad bin Ahmad Al-Aqili, Atiq bin

Ghayth Biladi, Muhammad bin Nasir Al-Abudi, and Saad bin Junaydal. Their pioneering work in different regions of the Kingdom has helped preserve geographic and historical sites—including tribal lands mentioned in ancient Arabic poetry and other historical sources—as well as artifacts from pre-Islamic times. Their histories and travelogues document rock inscriptions and drawings, historical and cultural landmarks, and other archaeological finds, and in so doing provided a traditional model for the writing of archaeological surveys and reports.

or the performance of popular songs and dances of all types from different parts of Saudi Arabia. Media outlets publish various types of literature and folk art, while philanthropic organizations and festivals, such as the Janadriyah Festival, also play an important role; Souk Okaz, one of the most famous ancient Arab markets, was revived in 2007. Additional institutional activities to preserve heritage have continued to emerge from research centers for the study and documentation of intangible cultural heritage in the Kingdom, as well as from media sources such as radio, television, and the press.

### Institutional Activity to Preserve Cultural Heritage

In addition to the contribution of pioneering individuals, public and private institutions have also played an important role in preserving cultural heritage. There is hardly a public event that does not include the recitation of vernacular Nabati poetry

The Janadriyah Festival is the most prominent custodian of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, with a particular emphasis on traditional industries, Nabati poetry, and various performing arts. Since the first Janadriyah Festival in 1985, which featured the establishment of a collective for folk heritage and a (subsequently annual) camel race,



**Table 9-1:** Research institutions studying and documenting the intangible cultural heritage of KSA

Entity	Project	Date of Establishment
King Saud University	Dialects and Folklore Society	1968
King Fahd National Library	The Kingdom's Oral History Project	1995
King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives (Darah)	Center for Oral History	1996
King Saud University	Saudi Heritage Chair	2016
King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies	Saudi Memory Studies Unit	2015

it has gone on to become the center of heritage and culture festivals in the Kingdom.<sup>(14)</sup> The Abdulrahman Al-Sudairy Foundation in Al-Jawf, established in 1983, has also made remarkable efforts to preserve heritage. Even before establishing the foundation, Al-Sudairy himself made pioneering preservation efforts, including establishing the first organized camel race in 1963, creating an exhibition of local carpets and awarding one first prize in 1965, and spearheading the week-long Al-Jawf Cultural Heritage Festival, which also began in 1965.<sup>(15)</sup>

Saudi radio and television have devoted a large share of airtime, both recorded and live, to popular and folk heritage, hosting many storytellers, poets and singers. At the forefront of these programs was the writer and artist Mutlaq Al-Dhiyabi's program, "From the Desert" ("Min al-Badiyah"), first aired in 1377 AH, which included Nabati poetry and stories.<sup>(16)</sup> In 1388 AH, co-contributor Muhammad bin Shalah Al-Mutairi took over hosting and production duties for radio and television. Another advocate for popular literature was writer Mandil bin Fuhaid Al-Fuhaid, who presented "From the Desert" from 1384 AH on. The program continued until about 1395 AH, at which point Mandil capped his career documenting folk litera-

ture in a ten-volume magnum opus entitled Some of Our Popular Literature in the Arabian Peninsula (Min Adabina al-Sha'biyah fi-l-Jazirah al-'Arabiyah).<sup>(17)</sup> The first popular drama series, "From the Tents of the Desert," was produced by Riyadh Television in 1385 AH. Presented by Abdullah Al-Zamil and directed by Munthir Al-Naffuri, it featured some of the country's first actors.<sup>(18)</sup> The writer Sheikh Abdullah bin Khamis, who hosted the program, later recalled: "It was 1403 AH, and cultural heritage had begun receiving widespread attention in the Kingdom and the Gulf. There is no doubt that the emergence of popular magazines and private television stations, such as Sahara and Rawasi, contributed to raising awareness and highlighting the heritage of various people in the Arabian Peninsula."

Several research centers and units have been established to focus on the study of intangible cultural heritage in the Kingdom. The Dialects and Folklore Society (est. 1968) predates King Saud University, and the Kingdom's Oral History Project was established not long thereafter at the King Fahd National Library in 1995. In 1996, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives (Darah) founded the Center of Oral History; in 2015, the King Faisal Center for Research

and Islamic Studies founded the Saudi Memory Studies Unit; and in 2016, the Saudi Heritage Chair was established at King Saud University.

### Archaeology: The First Excavations

Official archaeological activities began in the mid-twentieth century, when the Saudi Arabian government collaborated with institutes and universities from Belgium, Canada, and Great Britain to identify archaeological sites in the Kingdom. This collaboration marks the beginning of organized archaeological surveying and excavation in the Kingdom. At that time, other unrelated governmental organizations, such as Aramco, also began to play a significant role. Aramco organized geological survey missions, including archaeologists and interested parties, to carry out research and search for oil. Through these expeditions and field studies, the missions made a number of important discoveries in the mid-twentieth century. The first official archaeological expedition in the Kingdom was the Belgian expedition carried out by Jack Ryckmans and Philippe Lippens, with the participation of Englishman John Philby (also known as Abdullah Philby). Their 1951-1952 mission uncovered archaeological sites in the south-

west of the Kingdom and recorded and photographed many rock etchings and inscriptions.

In the early 1970s, the Saudi government took the lead in this sector while still seeking to collaborate with academic and scientific institutions from abroad. Archaeological studies in the Kingdom can be dated back to the establishment of the Supreme Council of Antiquities and the issuance of the Antiquities Law in 1972; the work of comprehensive archaeological surveys began in 1975 with the first of the five-year survey plans.<sup>(19)</sup> Abdulrahman Al-Tayyib Al-Ansary of King Saud University also helped lay the groundwork for this sector with the establishment of the Society of History and Antiquities within the History Department in the College of Arts in 1967.<sup>(20)</sup> He later spearheaded the growth of the Society and the establishment of the Antiquities Branch in the History Department, after which it developed and transformed into

the Department of Antiquities and Museums in 1978.<sup>(21)</sup> He also played a major role in a number of archaeological excavations, including the villages of Qaryat Al-Faw and Al-Rabatha, the sites of Al-Khuraybah and Al-Mabiyat, and the survey of Harrat 'Uwayrid.

The Department of Antiquities and Museums, established in 1964, eventually became an Auxiliary Agency in accordance with the decision by the Council of Ministers to establish an administrative body concerned with the Kingdom's heritage. Directly connected to the Ministry of Education, this body would promote cooperation between the cultural preservation movement and the education sector. This marked the beginning of a productive era, wherein the agency was credited with the initial implementation of comprehensive archaeological surveys. In 1977, it issued an annual publication called *Traces (Atlal)*, dedicated to the academic study of

Saudi heritage. It has issued several other books and encyclopedias, including the *Antiquities of Saudi Arabia* series.

Interest in archaeology was not limited to discovery and excavation. A campaign to restore cultural heritage sites was launched in 2011, and an exhibition of restored national artifacts was announced at the Janadriyah Festival that year. The first exhibition, organized by the General Commission for Tourism and Antiquities at that time, was inaugurated the following year and featured over 14,000 restored artifacts.

### **Archaeological Sites: Initial Efforts in Conservation and Development**

Several important decrees have been issued in recent years regarding the stewardship of archaeological and cultural sites. In 2003, a decree was issued that transferred



authority over archaeological sites from the Ministry of Education to the High Commission for Tourism. In 2008, the High Commission was renamed the General Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, reflecting its responsibility for the protection, development, and administration of archaeological and heritage sites.<sup>(22)</sup> These decrees have helped pique interest in domestic tourism, bolstering the local economy.

Since 2005, the development of tourist destinations in the provinces, such as the Farasan Islands, the Tarfah Peninsula in Jazan, and Souk Okaz in Makkah Province, has increased interest in archaeological and heritage sites, which have become tourist attractions in their own right,<sup>(23)</sup> in keeping with the goals of the Commission and its national inter-agency tourism development project. Launched in 2009, the project included a comprehensive survey of the tourist sites in the Kingdom and the creation of an electronic database of heritage and archaeological sites.<sup>(24)</sup> The Commission's systematic approach resulted in a reorganization of the cultural heritage sector by means of standardized regulations, standards, inventory records, and information centers of all kinds, including information on excavations and archaeological discoveries as well as surveying and documentation. The restructuring also included fitting out a number of sites, historical trails, and rock-painting locations for tourism.

Also, in 2009, the Council of Ministers approved a draft of a new project for regulating the preservation of artifacts at the intersection of the commission's work with archaeological and heritage sites.



The project provides for protective fencing, informational signage, and registration with UNESCO's World Heritage List. It also provides for compiling a nationwide electronic register of archaeological and heritage sites, nationalizing privately-owned sites, and restoring them to receive visitors.

### Expanding Interest in Urban Heritage

Urban heritage, a fundamental symbol of human development through history, reflects mankind's ability to master the environment. The Kingdom's current urban heritage is an amalgamation of traditional and modern architecture that reflects the climatic, geographic, and social realities of various periods. In this way, architecture embodies the unique characteristics of Saudi society, preserving the customs and traditions that are the backbone of the country.

As the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH, now the Ministry of Tourism) ex-

panded its work, the Urban Heritage Administration broke away from the SCTH antiquities and museums sector. In 2011, the National Urban Heritage Center was established and charged with preserving, developing, investing in, and rehabilitating urban heritage sites including cities, neighborhoods, handicrafts, traditional industries, and historical monuments, as well as overseeing the efforts to protect them culturally and economically. The creation of the Center provided additional momentum for the promotion and protection of urban heritage in antiquities and museums sector.<sup>(25)</sup> Urban heritage had not previously been regulated, and the Center created regulatory provisions for this field. The SCTH was tasked with creating a register of urban heritage which would record relevant sites, structures, and regions, along with information about their categories designations of the protected as urban or archaeological heritage sites, called hima ("protected place"), each of which includes a 200-by-200-meter buffer zone surrounding the main site or structure.

The SCTH was also tasked with the preparation and development of a plan for urban heritage protection and advancement in conjunction with relevant agencies and authorities. This task includes classifying a structure or site as a piece of urban heritage, a classification that sets in motion the state's obligation to protect, preserve, and develop it, and to take part in efforts to protect, maintain, restore, and operate it and to prevent any change to the area under protection, all with the approval and supervision of the Commission. The Commission has the right to nationalize a site on behalf of the state if it cannot otherwise be cared for. Any kind of construction or restoration work is also prohibited without permission from the Ministry of Municipal and

Rural Affairs and approval from the SCTH. Any maintenance, rebuilding, partition or related work on heritage structures is also prohibited without express permission from the SCTH. Ownership of state urban heritage sites and structures may not be transferred without SCTH approval, and privately-owned heritage sites may only be sold or leased with permission. Urban heritage is not only addressed in Article VI of the Law of Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage, but is also addressed in the article on general regulations, as well as Article II, Article VIII, and other sections mentioning urban heritage.<sup>(26)</sup> The law makes an effort to keep pace with international developments and local efforts vis-a-vis the interest in urban heritage and to keep up with the legal developments

in the field, such as legal protections for urban heritage through a system which takes this into account. In addition, there is a Center for National Urban Heritage, which administers all matters related to urban heritage.

In keeping with the global trend towards naturalizing and preserving local heritage, the importance of urban heritage as a sustainable source of economic growth and tourism has become clear. This understanding orients the SCTH's revitalization and investment efforts toward transforming existing heritage sites to include accommodations, restaurants, national museums, art galleries, and open-air markets. There are also efforts underway to link urban heritage sites to their local communities as symbols of Saudi



culture and civilization, which helps to strengthen the sense of social responsibility towards them.

Municipal-level agencies have continuously played an important role in caring for urban heritage structures and sites throughout the Kingdom. For example, the Royal Commission for the Development of Riyadh has supervised the development of the historic district of Diriyah, which was the capital of the first and second Saudi states before the capital city was moved to Riyadh in 1998. Its efforts have resulted in the restoration of the Diriyah neighborhoods of Al-Bujairi and Al-Turaif, which are well known for buildings, historical monuments, palaces, and administrative buildings that date back to the first Saudi state and were added to the UNESCO list in 2010. The Royal Commission also supervised the development, revitalization, and rehabilitation of the Qasr Al-Hukm and Al-Masmak areas of Riyadh.<sup>(27)</sup>

### Institutional Preservation of Traditional Handicrafts

Traditional handicrafts are a part of intangible cultural heritage. "The most important aspect of this type of heritage is that it has inherited cultural features which reflect the artistic and aesthetic preferences associated with Saudi ethnicity."<sup>(28)</sup> The fear that these traditions may disappear has prompted organized civil and governmental efforts to shoulder the burden of protecting cultural heritage, and its intimate links to Saudi identity, from fading away. Prior to these interventions, the Janadriyah Festival and other heritage festivals in the Kingdom gave limited attention to displaying artisanal products, but these efforts

were often one-offs. The absence of a strategy for ongoing preservation led to the decline of traditional crafts and industries outside these events. However, in 2006, the Ministry of Tourism launched the first International Conference on Traditional Crafts and Tourism at the King Abdulaziz Historical Center, accompanied by an exhibition entitled "Masterpieces of Handcrafted Objects and Products."<sup>(29)</sup> This initiative clearly reflects the high level of institutional work being done to move handicrafts from the peripheries of seasonal festivals to the center of the Saudi art scene. In 2012, these efforts culminated in the establishment of the National Program for the Development of Handicrafts and Industries (Baree), which sponsors Saudi artisans, male and female, and allows them to market their crafts locally. The following year, the Baree program established a permanent center for instruction and investment in the traditional crafts within the mud-brick houses of the King Abdulaziz Historical Center in Riyadh.<sup>(30)</sup> The Center for Tourism Human Resources Development (Takamul) collaborated with the SCTR to train 3,099 artisans in 188 programs across the Kingdom from 2007 to 2011,<sup>(31)</sup> eventually establishing handicraft training centers. These centers, known as Handicraft Creativity Centers, operate under the auspices of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Cultural Heritage Program. Its work has promoted five specialized handicraft associations and produced 420 newly-trained artisans specializing in the most important crafts of six provinces in the Kingdom. One hundred and forty-six of these artisans are producing at the international level and have created over 8,000 artisanal products for international markets.

### Local Support for Heritage

Philanthropic organizations and women's societies, in particular, have played a key role in the preservation of heritage. Examples include the Nahda Philanthropic Society for Women, which was established as a center for the preservation of heritage; the Multi-Purpose Women's Cooperative Association in Al-Qassim (Herfa), which is involved in marketing the homemade goods of participating families;<sup>(32)</sup> and the Sleysla Association in Jeddah. In spite of their limited scope, these initiatives have laid the foundation for finding new uses and markets for traditional crafts, beyond what was imagined in the above-mentioned initiatives, despite their great importance. The most prominent organization in this space is the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society, which specializes in cultural heritage in all its manifestations and combines efforts to document and preserve it by reviving it in modern form. This society was established in 2010 and has implemented a number of engagement programs with the local community since then. It played a critical role in professionalizing the field by engaging with international organizations and facilitating the registration of some Saudi intangible cultural heritage on the relevant UNESCO list, in collaboration with state and civil agencies. The society also played a significant role in restoration and rehabilitation projects for urban heritage sites and structures, documenting them in cooperation with the relevant authorities and contributing to the enrichment of knowledge and an increase in community awareness regarding the importance of heritage by hosting annual awareness-raising events.<sup>(33)</sup>

## Heritage in Saudi Arabia Today



## Preservation of Heritage Through New Policies

Initiatives to preserve and celebrate heritage are currently a key part of the official cultural framework. In 2016, the Kingdom launched Vision 2030, which introduced agendas for preserving and developing cultural heritage. The Quality of Life Program mandates "preserving the Islamic, Arab, and national heritage of the Kingdom and publicizing it" and "revitalizing the Islamic, Arab, and national heritage, preserving it, and publicizing it locally and globally; preserving and rehabilitating heritage sites, and categorizing a number of them as heritage sites; reviving traditions, organizing events, and facilitating access to them." The document outlines indicators of success based on the following criteria: the comprehensive documentation of Saudi heritage, services offered that have to do with heritage, and the world heritage sites and elements of intangible cultural heritage recognized by UNESCO.

Official interest in archaeological and heritage sites has expanded from preservation and maintenance to development and revitalization, with an emphasis on encouraging tourism and strengthening the ties between sites and host communities as foundational elements of Saudi cultural identity and centers for cultural activity. Development efforts have grown in tandem with excavation activities, complementing the SCTH's accomplishments in that field. These achievements came on the heels of a major push by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Cultural Heritage Program, which was established by royal decree in 2014. Since then,



cultural heritage has received constant, systematic, and comprehensive support, including new efforts to rehabilitate archaeological, cultural, and urban heritage sites. Subsequently, this program was incorporated with an initiative to develop the tourism sector and national heritage under the auspices of the National Transformation Project, which works to develop specific cultural sites, like Al-Ula in Madinah Province and Okaz in Taif.<sup>(34)</sup> The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Cultural Heritage Program brought with it a set of support programs and organizations, as well as ten agendas covering different elements of heritage. Included in the priorities laid out in these agendas was "stewardship of sites of Islamic history," "establishing, rehabilitating, and equipping museums and archaeological sites in the provinces and governorates," "operating and maintaining archaeological sites," and "the preservation of urban heritage sites and development of heritage

villages." The agendas also included plans for outreach, events, and improved staffing.

With its establishment in 2018, the Ministry of Culture became the first state patron of cultural heritage, both in its tangible and intangible forms, as part of its mandate to "preserve Saudi heritage and culture" through the comprehensive development of the cultural environment. The Ministry established the Heritage Commission, which is responsible for promoting efforts to develop national heritage; raising the level of interest in and awareness of heritage; protecting it from disappearing; and encouraging individuals, institutions, and companies to produce and develop content in the sector. Finally, the vision of the Ministry of Culture, which was announced in March 2019, firmly established the importance of national heritage preservation. One of the explicit goals of these initiatives is "documenting oral and intangible heritage."

**Table 9-2:** List of key initiatives for protecting intangible cultural heritage in 2019

Initiative		Date
1	Establishment of the Saudi Society for the Preservation of Industrial Heritage	April 29, 2019
2	Establishment of the Society for the Preservation of Heritage in Al-Qunfudhah ("Turath")	July 3, 2019
3	Signing of an agreement between the King Abdulaziz Administration and King Abdulaziz University to establish the Red Sea and Western Saudi Arabia Documentation Center	October 7, 2019
4	Approval of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development to establish the Professional Association of Saudi Artisans	November 24, 2019

With the institutional restructuring of the cultural sector, the Ministry of Culture has assumed a key role in unifying the efforts of relevant institutions, both public and private, to curate heritage. This was reinforced by the memorandum of understanding signed in 2019 by the Ministry of Culture and the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) to transfer oversight of the national heritage sector to the Ministry of Culture.<sup>(35)</sup> (A royal decree was then issued to transform the SCTH into the Ministry of Tourism at the start of 2020.)<sup>(36)</sup> A royal decree was also issued in 2019 which transferred the hosting and organizing of the National Festival for Heritage and Culture (the Janadriyah Festival) from the Ministry of the National Guard to the Ministry of Culture.<sup>(37)</sup>

In this supportive context, the number of institutions concerned with heritage preservation, documentation, development, and education has increased in 2019. The year saw the registration of a number of important new heritage-related institutions and initiatives.

### Documentation and Existing Inventories of Intangible Cultural Heritage

A number of efforts to document cultural heritage are in the works by different agencies, in addition to the work being done by active research centers and the efforts of the SCTH to register elements of intangible cultural heritage with UNESCO. Recently, the General Authority for Culture produced a guide

on collecting intangible cultural heritage in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which was implemented by the Saudi Society for the Preservation of Heritage via a specialized committee of academics, specialists, and experts certified by UNESCO.<sup>(38)</sup> The Urban Heritage Center has also been working on a national heritage register that employs advanced technologies for recording, registering, analyzing, safeguarding, monitoring, and overseeing urban heritage sites. This project complements the Center's efforts to monitor the organization of urban heritage resources and institute legislation, regulations, and decrees related to this issue. The primary function of this register is to submit periodic reports on the state of urban heritage structures and sites in the Kingdom, to classify those sites according to their contents or technical specifications, and to warn of any critical situations involving urban heritage structures and sites. This register is considered a primary national database.

Despite these efforts, there is still no comprehensively documented inventory of intangible cultural heritage in the thirteen provinces of Saudi Arabia. It is our hope that the establishment of the General Authority for Culture will ultimately pave the way for an organized inventory of these sites, the first sign of this being the Ministry's launch of a



new set of initiatives which prioritize the collection and documentation of, as well as the promotion of public interest in, intangible cultural heritage in the Kingdom. The launch of the Industrial Heritage Competition in 2019, which asked participants to discover sites of industrial heritage and record stories and details of events which had an impact on traditional industry and cultural life in the Kingdom, reflects this newfound focus. In the same year, a competition was launched to revive popular folklore. It sought to engage with all members of society to discover the influence of popular folklore on music, dance, stories, and myths.

### **Archaeological Sites Today: From Discovery and Excavation to Documentation and Development**

#### **Discovery and Excavation**

As part of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Cultural Heritage Program's initiatives in documentation, preservation, and excavation of archaeological sites, 75 sites were discovered.<sup>(39)</sup> A number of foreign expeditions cooperated with Saudi expeditions at these sites, reflecting a recent history of collaborations that began with the 2001 bilateral agreements between the SCTH and the academic and scientific institutes to which these missions belong. The articles of these agreements stipulate that the head of the expedition be Saudi, that lo-

cal personnel be included in on-site work, and that the latest methods and techniques for archaeological excavation be utilized to equip Saudi Arabia to play a leading role in archaeological work in the near future. This initiative has been linked to the 2020 National Transformation Program, which is working to increase the number of known archaeological sites in the Kingdom to 200 and to prepare 45 of them for immediate fieldwork.<sup>(40)</sup> The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Cultural Heritage Program is also pursuing a project to discover sunken artifacts; a survey was carried out along the Red Sea coast through the collaborative efforts of a Saudi team and a team from the Philipps University of Marburg, Germany. Likewise, a survey of marine artifacts in the Red Sea was carried out in Al-Wajh and Yanbu by a collaborative team of researchers from Saudi Arabia and the University of Naples Federico II.<sup>(41)</sup>

In October 2018, the launch of the excavation season as part of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques program led to more extensive archaeological work. Across the Kingdom, 44 Saudi and international excavations took place at 20 sites. Saudi universities simultaneously worked to excavate six additional sites. At 16 archaeological digs, the SCTH (now the Ministry of Tourism) supervised research and excavation efforts.<sup>(42)</sup>

One of the most important new

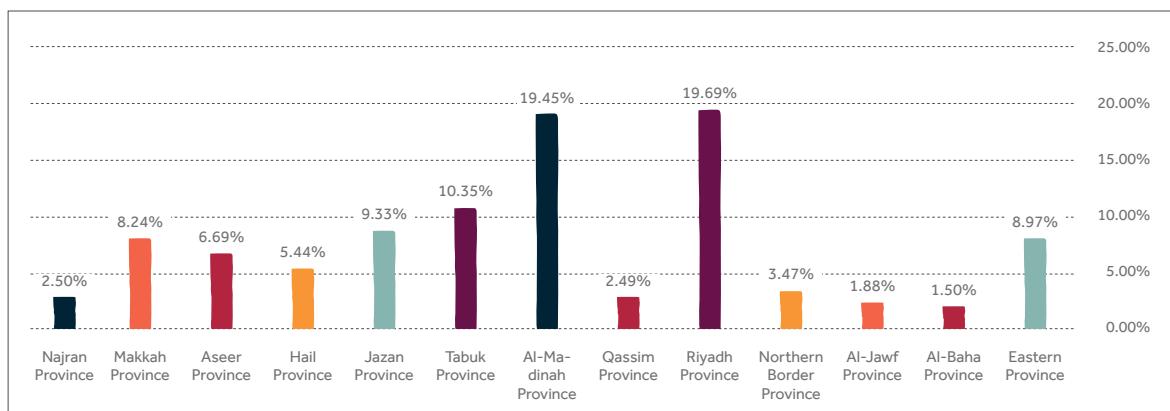
discoveries of 2019 was that the territory of the Kingdom lies along the routes taken by humans migrating from Africa half a million years ago. Another important discovery was that Thaj, according to the Saudi-French expedition responsible for excavating the region, was one of the most important cities in the Arab Gulf region in the pre-Islamic period.<sup>(43)</sup> That same year, the largest survey and archaeological excavation of Nabataean civilization began in Al-Ula, spanning a 3,300 square-kilometer area. It will last for two years with the participation of 60 experts and archaeologists, both Saudi and foreign.<sup>(44)</sup> In 2018, the Royal Commission for Al-Ula collaborated with local and foreign archaeologists and experts to launch the archaeological and heritage survey program for the region.<sup>(45)</sup>

#### **Development, Protection, and Documentation**

As part of its efforts to document, manage, and protect archaeological sites, the SCTH established a digital registry of archaeological sites linked to digital maps. The registry documents and photographs related to these sites, helping to preserve the cultural heritage of the Kingdom and make it available to researchers and other interested parties. The National Registry of Antiquities today includes more than 8,000 sites in various provinces of the Kingdom, reflecting significant growth in the number of these sites in recent years.<sup>(46)</sup>

**Table 9-3:** Number of archaeological sites according to the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH, now Ministry of Tourism)<sup>(47)</sup>

Year	Pre-2014	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of Sites Registered, by Year	6,014	808	134	441	166	240	484
<b>Total Number of Registered Archaeological Sites</b>	<b>8,278</b>						

**Figure 9-2: Distribution of archaeological sites by region<sup>(48)</sup>**

Also ongoing is the work of protecting archaeological sites, including fencing them off and having an active security presence on site to deter vandalism and theft. This has been common practice in development work since 2018 when 14 sites were placed behind barriers.<sup>(49)</sup> In spite of the systematic improvements made over the last decade, there is still a long way to go before the target number and quality of archaeological and cultural sites is reached. One of the most serious challenges the sector still faces is that very few national heritage sites are currently equipped to handle visitors.<sup>(50)</sup>

In recent years, archaeological sites have developed at an accelerated pace, with specialized agencies prioritizing the development of governorates that have archaeological and heritage sites. These agencies have played a role in raising professional standards to improve the results of rehabilitation efforts at these sites. One of these agencies, the Royal Commission for Al-Ula (est. 2017), seeks to develop that governorate, which is located in the northwest of the Kingdom, about 300 kilometers north of Al-Madinah. It includes the site of Al-Hijr (Mada'in

Salih), which was the first Saudi site registered in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2008 thanks to the presence of burial grounds, rock art, and ancient inscriptions dating back to the Aramean, Lihyanite, Thamudic, Minaean, Ancient Greek, Nabatean, and Latin civilizations. Al-Ula is well known for its historical sites, the most famous of which is Dadan or Al-Khuraybah, Mount Ikma, and the Qurh site of Al-Mabiyat and the ancient town. There are also many mountains and rock formations such as Elephant Mountain, Al-Ragasad (Dancers) Mountains, the Sharaan Region, and the Hijaz Railway stations.

A second restoration event took place in 2017 as part of the First International Forum on Antiquities, which drew over 400 participants and included presentations of over 100 research papers on the Kingdom's antiquities. A number of recovered archaeological artifacts, totaling around 33,000 from abroad and 21,000 from within the Kingdom, were also featured. This Forum involved citizens in the process of preserving and protecting their heritage through antiquity-restoration events and exhibitions at universities, schools, and commercial

centers. Citizens also participated in excavation projects. In its publication, the Commission made mention of notable contributions from citizens involved in local community efforts to survey and excavate archaeological sites.

### Urban Heritage Today: From Maintenance and Restoration to Development and Rehabilitation

Several municipal-level governmental bodies work in partnership with the private sector and the SCTH (now the Ministry of Tourism) through various initiatives adopted by the Commission to preserve urban heritage. These initiatives have the following goals:<sup>(51)</sup>

1. To protect and preserve urban heritage and develop surrounding areas by rehabilitating and maintaining the sites and buildings, whether they be publicly or privately owned, as well as issuing circulars to restrict their arbitrary removal without prior coordination with the Commission.
2. To inventory sites of urban heritage that can be developed for purposes of tourism, of which

1985 sites have been thus far recorded, among them are villages, districts, city centers, and buildings, and to set standards for their categorization and registration in the national heritage register.

3. To introduce and raise awareness of Saudi urban heritage through social programs aimed at raising public awareness of urban heritage and the importance of preserving it as a vital component of the kingdom's urban identity, and to organize specialized workshops and conferences to encourage both private-sector and individual owners of heritage buildings to develop, utilize and invest in them.
4. To rehabilitate and develop urban heritage in a sustainable manner without compromising its heritage value, and transform it into an economic resource and

a generator of new job opportunities for local residents, as well as a hub for cultural activities and artisanal and heritage-based handicrafts through a number of programs:

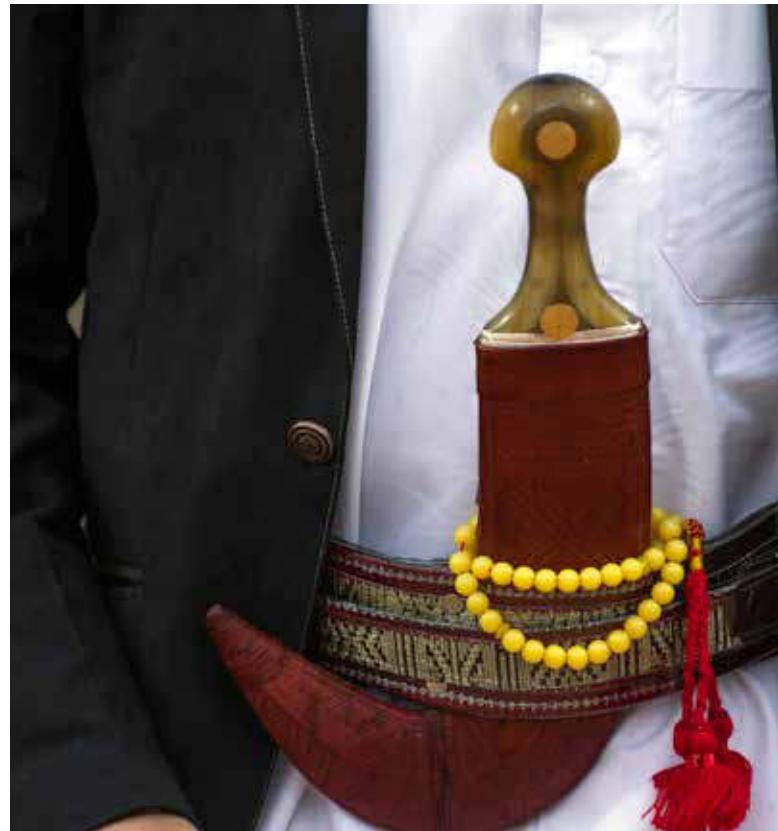
- The program for the development and rehabilitation of heritage villages such as the old town of Al-Khabra and the old town of Al-Midhnab in Al-Qassim Province, Al-Dar'i Quarter in Dumat Al-Jandal, and the old town of Al-Ghat in Riyadh Province.
- The program for the development of historical city centers and the preservation of their urban heritage by means of economic utilization and rehabilitation into tourist attractions in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, the private sec-
- tor, stakeholders, and the local community through several nationwide projects, which include projects for the Development of Historic Jeddah, for the Rehabilitation of the Abu Al-Saud historical quarter in Najran city center, for the Development and Rehabilitation of the historical city center in Abha, for the Development and Rehabilitation of the historical city center in Tabuk, and for the Development and Rehabilitation of Historic Diriyah.
- The program for the development and rehabilitation of open-air markets, which aims to revive heritage-based activities and handcraftsmanship.
- The program for the rehabilitation, restoration, and reuse of historical state-owned buildings dating back to the reign



of King Abdulaziz by transforming them into national museums or cultural centers for governors.

- The program for the rehabilitation of historic seaports in Northern Red Sea, such as those in Yanbu, Umluj, Al-Wajh, and Dheba, in collaboration with the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu and various local entities.

Since 2017, the National Urban Heritage Center has been developing a database for the documentation of urban heritage as part of the National Urban Heritage register.<sup>(52)</sup> Likewise, the designation of a track for urban heritage as part of the program begun by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques has prompted the opening of a branch of the Center in Al-Diriyah. In an effort to consolidate the work of the National Heritage Center, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs has established administrations specifically for urban heritage both at the ministry and municipal level to help the Center carry out its projects. Additionally, the Commission has instituted several programs, among them Imran, for the systematic activation of the partnership between the National Heritage Center and the municipalities; Thameen, for facilitating collaboration between the public and private sectors to fund urban heritage projects; and La Ytih ("Don't Let it Collapse"), to train locals to restore buildings and transform them into economic resources that generate job opportunities. Other activities include establishing a technical support unit within the urban heritage administration at the Commission for providing support, surveys, and technical and architectural oversight to individuals and



owners interested in developing and restoring urban heritage.

Furthermore, several specialized commissions were established for each urban heritage site. For example, the Diriyah Gate Development Authority, launched in Historic Diriyah in 2017, works on restoring the city structures and renovating the palaces of Al-Turaif.<sup>(53)</sup> In 2019, the groundwork was laid for the Diriyah Gate project, which aims to restore the historic area and transform it into a tourist attraction and a hub where the local community can organize various cultural and social activities.

Both public and private investment and partnerships are sure to spur the development of these sites in a way that does not violate Sau-

di heritage preservation laws. The year 2019 has seen the launching of one such model project, the Jeddah Downtown, with an investment of 18 billion Saudi riyals for a term of 10 years. The project is intended to preserve Historic Jeddah and has been overseen by the SCTH, the Jeddah municipality, and the Makkah Governorate since 2005,<sup>(54)</sup> and was successfully registered in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

### From Documentation and Rehabilitation to Reviving Elements of Heritage in Contemporary Social Life

As pointed out above, the purpose of folklore and industrial heritage competitions is not only to collect and document elements of heritage,

but also to raise awareness about heritage more broadly and reinforce its presence in contemporary public life. A number of programs and projects work with local communities on activities aimed at protecting intangible cultural heritage. This partnership guarantees the participation of the largest possible number of associations, communities, and individuals who work together to create, preserve, and disseminate elements of heritage as they participate in its management. Researchers from various organizations also conduct interviews with elderly members of local communities to collect first-hand accounts of the intangible cultural heritage of Saudi Arabia. Some of these organizations include the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society, the Society of Palms in Al-Ahsa governorate, and the Jeddah Encyclopedia Center, which specializes in

the unique cultural heritage of Saudi Arabia's west coast.

Nonetheless, these initiatives are not the main driving force behind the spontaneous growth of public interest in heritage. We can observe broader indicators of newfound interest on the part of younger generations in the prevalence of contemporary fashion designs inspired by heritage;<sup>(55)</sup> the broad circulation on social media sites of the profiles, photographs, art, and songs of Saudi folk singers; and the wide circulation of popular poets' classical, colloquial, and Nabati poetry. Performance arts have also gained traction in a short period of time without going through production companies, and sites and accounts for folk arts of all kinds have risen to prominence. Social media sites have uncovered anecdotal evidence for ancient arts

and melodies and have made these discoveries widely available.

Programs specifically designed to further integrate elements of heritage into public life have responded to increasing demand by providing cultural content. For example, the cultural festivals previously held by SCTR (now the Ministry of Tourism) both locally and internationally, as well as the cultural events and festivals for intangible cultural heritage which have been held in recent years by the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society, have raised awareness around the importance of preserving intangible heritage in a modern way that has broad societal appeal. Between 2014 and 2016, the Society held a concert series called "Taranim" in tribute to the most prominent Saudi musical artists: Ibtisam Lutfi, Tuha, and Tariq Abdul



Hakim. Between 2017 and 2018, the society held the tzahbi festival of traditional costumes, which were displayed in the mud-brick houses of the Al-Murabba district. In 2017, to highlight the importance of culinary heritage, the society held the first festival specifically for traditional foods.

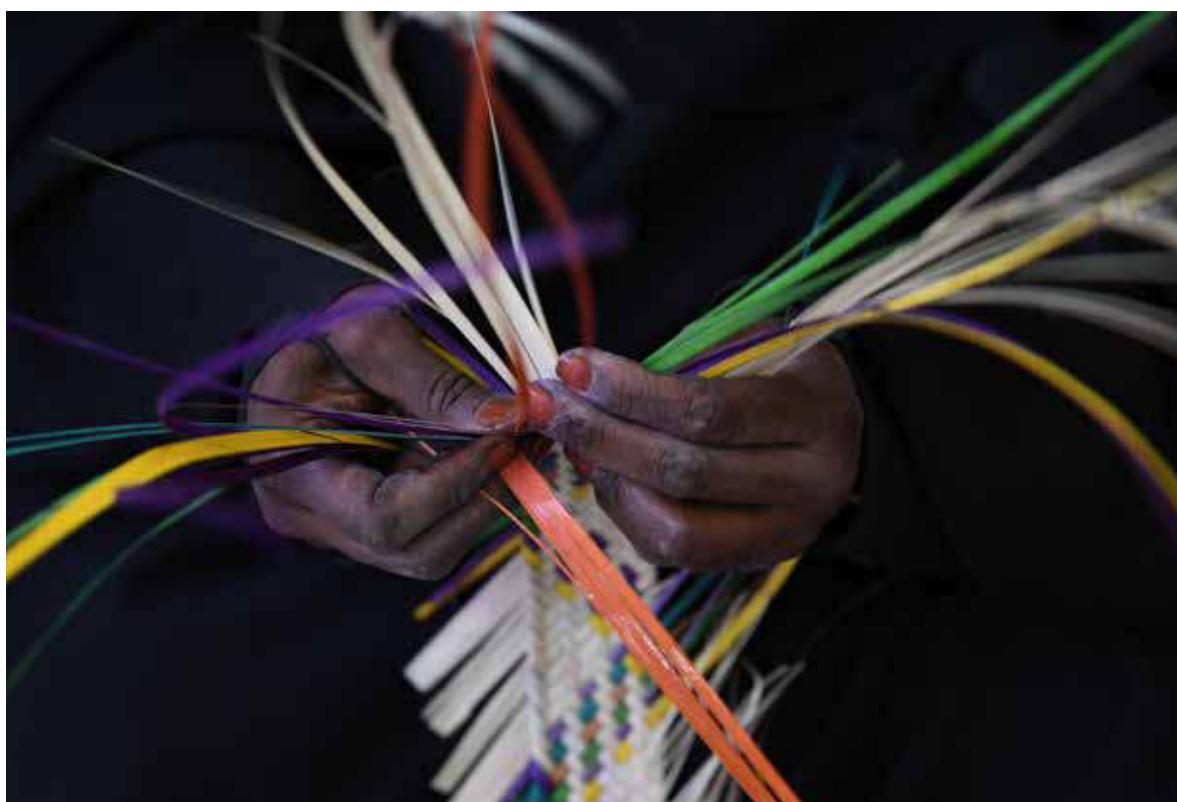
To integrate archaeological and heritage sites into daily public life, and to move beyond excavation and preservation to encourage interaction with archaeological finds as cultural and economic resources, the Ministry of Tourism (formerly the SCTH) launched the Program for the Development of Tourism Models. This program seeks to diversify and develop tourism models in the Kingdom by presenting specialized tourism products and programs. One of the outcomes of

this has been cultural and heritage tourism, which promotes cultural activities that are linked to archaeological sites, historical monuments, and heritage, including visiting museums, cultural events, festivals, and various archaeological and historical sites.<sup>(56)</sup>

Beyond tourism, holding festivals and seasonal events is still considered one of the most important ways to draw attention to cultural sites and make them points of attraction.<sup>(57)</sup> According to statistics from the Tourism Information and Research Center, festival visits in the Kingdom constituted the most popular cultural activity, accounting for 34.7% of all tourist activities in 2018.<sup>(58)</sup> A number of agencies are currently working to establish and manage cultural festivals and events at archaeological and cultural sites.

For example, the Royal Commission for Al-Ula has introduced several activities to attract visitors to the region, such as the Winter at Tantora Festival, which highlights unique features of the region. The festival attracted 37,000 visitors from 72 countries to its very first incarnation from 2018 to 2019.<sup>(59)</sup>

In Historic Jeddah, we have yet another example of strong bonds between the local community and its cultural sites. Several festivals, such as the Historic Jeddah Festival, which the SCTH hosts annually in cooperation with many agencies, have contributed by providing the opportunity for festival visitors to connect with traditions and customs through social and recreational events. These events have broad appeal, allowing visitors to experience the social realities of the past



and to visit old houses such as the famous Nassif House, which has been turned into a museum. The second year of the Historic Jeddah Festival in 2015 hosted 700,000 visitors of whom more than 190,000 were tourists.<sup>(60)</sup> In 2017, the number of tourists increased to 517,000.<sup>(61)</sup> The MiSK Foundation also organizes the MiSK Historic Jeddah Festival which aims to transform the area into a tourist destination and involve the local community in the preservation of this region through art exhibitions and cultural events.<sup>(62)</sup>

Another success is the Ministry of Culture's Flowerman Festival which is part of Al-Sawda Season and takes place in the Rijal Almaa Heritage Village in Aseer Governorate, which was nominated for inclusion on the list of UNESCO Heritage Sites. The festival attracted visitors to the

heritage village and drew attention to its unique social traditions and culture as well as its towering fortresses, which are over 900 years old. The attention helped lead to the renovation of the village museum and a number of sites such as Wadi Khulays to equip them to handle future festival visitors. The festival is celebrated with floral headpieces, which are part of the traditional garb of the region.<sup>(63)</sup>

In addition, a number of annual festivals with a direct link to cultural heritage are currently active in the Kingdom. These include the Souk Okaz Festival, the Dokhala Heritage Festival, the Al-Ahsa Creative Festival for Folk Arts and Handicrafts, the East Coast Festival, the Riyadh Oud Festival, the Riyadh Horse Heritage Festival, the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival, the King Abdulaziz

Falcon Festival, and the Grain Market Festival.<sup>(64)</sup>

Many agencies have hosted initiatives and events to promote cultural heritage in various forms. For example, the King Fahd Cultural Center in Riyadh hosted the Folklore Nights Festival in April to celebrate treasures of lyrical folk art in the Kingdom. It was accompanied by concerts and special awards for folk crafts and collectibles.<sup>(65)</sup> The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) also launched the "Being Saudi" exhibit in December, which explores Saudi heritage and sheds light on the rich cultural heritage of Saudi Arabia and the history of its many regions. Dozens of other events have also taken place, which vary in scope and interest given the breadth of cultural heritage, which intersects with all other areas of culture.

## Key Figures for 2019



## Awards in the Field of Heritage



The Ministry of Culture recently announced the winners of the Popular Folklore Competition and the Industrial Heritage Competition, both of which promote the collection and documentation of heritage. From among more than 800 entries, 21 participants won prizes across three different categories of the Industrial Heritage Competition.<sup>(66)</sup> The Popular Folklore Competition, in turn, had more than 1,300 entries in the categories of folk dance, folk music, and folk-tales and mythology, with 26 winners across the three categories.<sup>(67)</sup>

At the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival in March 2019, the ministry also announced the winners of the King Abdulaziz Folk Literature Award, which honors Nabati poetry, spoken word (muhawarah) poetry, and Arabic folk poetry,<sup>(68)</sup> among other forms.

For three years, the Baree Program held workshops for exceptional children of Souk Okaz to learn folk crafts such as wicker-weaving and pottery. Between 80 and 100 artisans competed along Souk Okaz Boulevard for four awards for the best design and best product. The winners were evaluated by local and international experts.

In an even more significant step to encourage participation and creativity in the field of heritage, the Minister of Culture included an annual heritage award among the new 14 awards it announced in December 2019.<sup>(69)</sup>

## Key Moments in Saudi Heritage

**1964**

The establishment of the Ministry of Education's Department of Antiquities and Museums.



**1967**

The establishment of the History and Archaeology Society in the History Department at King Saud University, Faculty of Arts.



**1972**

The establishment of the Supreme Council of Antiquities and the issuance of the Antiquities Law.



**1975**

The beginnings of a comprehensive archaeological survey in the Kingdom.



**2007**

The revitalization of Souk Okaz, one of the most famous ancient traditional Arab markets.



**2003**

The transfer of the Ministry of Education's Antiquities Commission to the High Commission for Tourism.



**1985**

The launch of the Janadriyah National Festival, considered to be the most prominent custodian of cultural heritage.



**1978**

The establishment of the Department of Archaeology and Museology at King Saud University.



**2008**

The Kingdom ratified UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage and Mada'in Saleh was registered as the Kingdom's first site to be included in the UNESCO world heritage list.

**2009**

The establishment of the Department of Tourism and Antiquities at the University of Hail and the Department of Tourism and Antiquities at Jazan University.



**2010**

International Exhibitions Launched - "Roads of Arabia: Archaeological Treasures of Saudi Arabia".

**2011**

The start of a campaign for recovering national antiquities and the launch of the Exhibition of Recovered National Antiquities.

**2019**

The transferal of national heritage activities in principle from the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage to the Ministry of Culture and the laying of groundwork for the project to develop Diriyah.

**2017**

The establishment of the Diriyah Gate Development Authority and the Royal Commission for Al-Ula.

**2014**

Approval by the Council of Ministers for the "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Program for the Care of the Kingdom's Cultural Heritage" and the issuance of regulations on Antiquities, Museums, and Architectural Heritage.

**2012**

The opening of the first Exhibition of Recovered National Antiquities.



# Saudi Cultural Heritage in the World

The Saudi government places high importance on highlighting Saudi cultural heritage on a global scale. In November 2019, the Kingdom officially became a member of the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and was nominated to serve on the organization's World Heritage Committee for the first time. The Saudi Heritage Preservation Society was registered with UNESCO as an official partner, thereby becoming the second international non-governmental Saudi organization, and the first organization from the Gulf and Arab world, to partner with UNESCO on matters of cultural heritage. This partnership reflects the Kingdom's continuing efforts to register its intangible cultural heritage sites with UNESCO through independent or joint filing.<sup>(70)</sup>

A number of events and exhibitions have also been held to promote Saudi cultural heritage. The exhibit "Roads of Arabia—Archaeological Treasures of Saudi Arabia," organized by the SCTR, is a significant international exhibition of Saudi archaeological treasures in museums



around the world. Since 2010, it has displayed over 460 archaeological artifacts selected from the holdings of local museums outside the Kingdom and shown for the first time. Besides appearing in 14 international exhibitions, these artifacts made two local stops: at the National Museum in Riyadh and the Museum of the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra). In 2019, the seventeenth exhibition was held at the

National Roman Museum in Rome, Italy, in partnership with the Ministry of Culture and with the sponsorship of Saudi Aramco.<sup>(71)</sup>

In 2019, the Royal Commission for Al-Ula launched the exhibit "Al-Ula, Wonder of Arabia" in collaboration with the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris at the institute's headquarters. The exhibit was launched with support from the French Agency for

**Table 9-4: List of Saudi intangible culture elements registered with UNESCO**

Element of Intangible Culture	Date of Registration with UNESCO	Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage
Falconry	2012	Jointly registered with Germany, Austria, Belgium, UAE, Spain, France, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Mongolia, Pakistan, Portugal, Qatar, Syria, Korea and the Czech Republic.
Al-Ardah Al-Najdiyah	2015	Individually registered in Saudi Arabia.
Arabic Coffee	2015	Jointly registered with Oman, UAE, and Qatar.
Majlis	2015	Jointly registered with Oman, UAE, and Qatar.
Almezmar	2016	Individually registered in Saudi Arabia.
Al-Qatt Al-Asiri	2017	Individually registered in Saudi Arabia.
Date Palms	2019	Jointly registered with Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen.

Al-Ula Development (AFALULA) and displayed the heritage and the treasures of Al-Ula Governorate, including rare archaeological artifacts, heritage pieces, photographs captured by professional photographers, and other types of visual media.<sup>(72)</sup>

Over the past five years, archaeological and cultural sites have also seen notable developments, partly driven by increased interest in rehabilitating archaeological and cultural sites in the Kingdom in order to register them on the UNESCO World Heritage List. By the end of 2019, there were seven registered sites (See Table 9-7). The SCTH also received royal approval to register ten more archaeological sites with UNESCO in 2015. The commission has been working to establish the following sites, which meet the List's criteria: the Darb Zubayda Iraqi Pilgrimage Route, the Hijaz Railway, the Syrian Pilgrimage Route, the Egyptian Pilgrimage Route, Rijal Almaa Village, Thee Ain Ancient Village, Qaryat al Faw, the Bir Hima Rock Petroglyphs and Inscriptions, and the Al-Dar'i Quarter in Dumat Al-Jandal.<sup>(73)</sup> This goal is in keeping with the National Transformation Program 2020.<sup>(74)</sup> In 2018, the Rijal Almaa Village file was submitted to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, and initial preparations were undertaken to register the Dumat Al-Jandal Oasis.<sup>(75)</sup>

**Table 9-5:** Exhibitions of the "Archaeological Treasures of Saudi Arabia" exhibit

Location of Exhibition	Year
Louvre Museum (Paris, France)	2010
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona, Spain)	2010-2011
State Hermitage Museum (Saint Petersburg, Russia)	2011
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (Washington D.C., USA)	2012
Pergamon museum (Berlin, Germany)	2012
Carnegie Museum of Natural History (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA)	2013
Museum of Fine Arts (Houston, Texas, USA)	2013-2014
Nelson Atkins Museum of Art (Kansas City, Missouri, USA)	2014
Asian Art Museum (San Francisco, California, USA)	2015
National Roman Museum (Rome, Italy)	2019
National Museum of China (Beijing, China)	2016
National Museum of Korea (Seoul, South Korea)	2017
Tokyo National Museum (Tokyo, Japan)	2018
Louvre Abu Dhabi (Abu Dhabi, UAE)	2019
Benaki Museum (Athens, Greece)	2019
National Roman Museum (Rome, Italy)	2020

**Table 9-6:** Saudi sites registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List

Name	Registration Year	Location
Al-Hijr (Mada'in Salih)	2008	Al-Ula Governorate
Al-Turaif District	2010	Historic Diriyah
Historic Jeddah	2014	Jeddah
Rock Art in Jubbah and Shuwaymis	2015	Hail
Al-Ahsa Oasis	2018	Al-Ahsa

## Infrastructure and Investment



## Regulatory Frameworks

The Kingdom is part of a global movement that places increasing emphasis on preserving cultural heritage. It has signed a number of international agreements in support of this goal, including the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict in 1954;<sup>(76)</sup> the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (with UNESCO) in 1971, which called for protecting natural and cultural heritage from being lost;<sup>(77)</sup> the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property in 1972; and the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage in 2001.

The Law of Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage issued in 2014 is considered the most important regulatory framework for the preservation of cultural heritage in the Kingdom. It includes policies, regulations, by-laws, and amendments to the old Law of Antiquities issued in 1972.<sup>(78)</sup> The law protects ancient heritage, both movable and immovable, provided it is at least 200 years old and distinguished by historical, artistic, or national significance. The law also regulates historical and popular-heritage sites. It prohibits certain activities within the boundaries of antiquities sites; regulates sunken antiquities, movable antiquities, and excavation of them; makes provisions for trading in heritage pieces; and regulates museums. It further outlines the penalties for those who violate these laws including arrest, interrogation, and trial. These regulations have successfully



protected hundreds of archaeological sites from tampering and vandalism, leading to more effective protection and preservation of ancient artifacts and sites.<sup>(79)</sup>

## Professions, Education, and Training in Cultural Heritage and its Administration

Some Saudi universities have departments and academic programs to study cultural heritage and its preservation. The Department of Antiquities and Museums at King Saud University, later renamed the College of Tourism and Antiquities, was the first academic department in the Kingdom to specialize in this field.<sup>(80)</sup> In 2009, the Department of Tourism and Antiquities was established at Hail University, along with the Department of Tourism and Antiquities at the University of Jazan. A first-of-its-kind master's program in urban heritage conservation studies was also introduced at Qassim University. The College of Tourism and Antiquities at King Saud University also includes the Department of Heritage Resource Management, which offers a curriculum in heritage collection, documentation, and preservation.

Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go before these educational programs can produce enough qualified graduates to keep pace with the development and expansion of the sector. There is an acute shortage of archaeology majors, who are needed if the field is to advance. The limits of the current curricula are evident from the insufficient number of trained professionals in the sector. In 2019, there were only three people registered with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development as specialists in the restoration and excavation of antiquities. There were 110 people (88 men and 22 women) registered as general tour guides without a topical specialty.<sup>(81)</sup> Fortunately, these small numbers do not reflect the true number of people working in the field. For example, the Tourism Commission's list of those qualified to conduct tours of heritage sites in the Kingdom contains over 600 Saudis.<sup>(82)</sup>

The Saudi Heritage Preservation Society published a breakdown of the number of employees working in professions related to intangible cultural heritage between 2010 and 2019 in its most recent report. The results can be seen in Table 9-8.<sup>(83)</sup>

**Table 9-7:** Breakdown of heritage practitioners by area of expertise (2010-2019)

Skills and Knowledge Linked to Nature and the Universe	Customs and Traditions	Oral Arts	Traditional Handicrafts and Industries	Performing Arts
300	25	46	78	19 Performing Groups (~950 Individuals)

In addition to academic instruction, training options related to urban and intangible cultural heritage are available. Many colleges offer courses in urban heritage restoration and rehabilitation for employees of companies that work on projects related to urban heritage. These include the College of Architecture and Planning and the College of Tourism and Archaeology, both based at King Saud University; the Faculties of Architecture at King Faisal University, King Abdulaziz University, Umm Al-Qura University and Hail University; in addition to community colleges. These courses were developed in cooperation with the SCTR.<sup>(84)</sup> The Saudi Heritage Preservation Society also offers workshops specifically designed to train community members to nominate intangible cultural heritage sites to the UNESCO register.

The tourism sector offers many employment opportunities at the intersection of tourism and cultural heritage. 2018 saw the implementation of a new regulation for licensing Saudi nationals of both genders as tour guides. It grants two different kinds of credentials for site guides and regional guides, and includes training and qualifying exams to make sure specialists can meet rigorous international standards.<sup>(85)</sup> In 2014, the Council of Ministers approved the establishment of a professional association for tour guides, called the Saudi Association for Tourist Guidance, which is responsible for providing tour guides with professional development.<sup>(86)</sup> In 2019, the Association joined the World Federation of Tourist Guide Societies in order to work towards improving professional

performance standards.<sup>(87)</sup> The National Center for Tourism Human Resources Development (Takamul) also provides specialized training and offers credentials in human resources and other professional roles in the tourism sector.<sup>(88)</sup>

In 2019, the Ministry of Culture launched its Cultural Scholarship Program to help address the shortage of specialized professionals equipped to work in the cultural heritage sector. The participants are students of antiquities, tourism, and national heritage at the bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels. The program allows Saudi students, male and female, to study cultural and artistic disciplines at the greatest universities in the world. The Ministry also announced the establishment of an academy to pro-





mote traditional arts; it will begin accepting applications in Fall 2020.

The Royal Commission for Al-Ula has also launched an exchange program for students to study subjects related to tourism and antiquities in the United States, Great Britain, and France. It sent its first cohort of undergraduate and graduate students abroad in 2019, and will continue for five years.<sup>(89)</sup>

### Training and Investment in the Field of Traditional Handicrafts and Industries

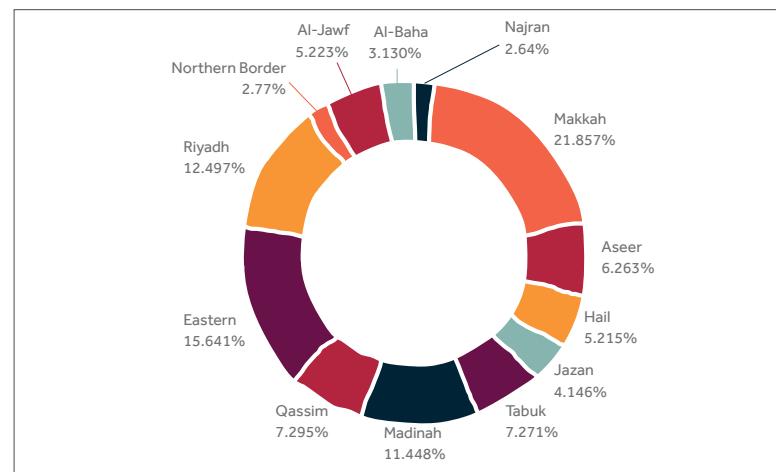
The field of traditional handicrafts is distinct from other types of heritage activities due to the potential for professionalization, which allows artisans to enter the labor market. To realize this potential, the National Program for Traditional Handicrafts and Industries (Baree) has worked to establish 17 centers for creative and artisanal development at cultural sites throughout the Kingdom,

including Madinah, Al-Qassim, and Al-Ahsa.<sup>(90)</sup> Complementing these efforts, the Jameel House of Traditional Arts in Historic Jeddah, established in 2015, provides an annual educational program for 20 students in various heritage arts, such as Islamic architecture and design, woodworking, sculpture, and various types of traditional handicrafts.<sup>(91)</sup> Both institutes collaborated with the

British Prince's Foundation School of Traditional Arts and the Turquoise Mountain Foundation in the development of their programs.

The registry of artisans, which undergirds the Baree program, had provided professional and artistic training at the regional level to 4,127 registered professionals by the end of 2019 (Figure 9-3).

**Figure 9-3:** Registered artisans in the Baree program for handicrafts and artisanal program by province<sup>(92)</sup>



Thanks to government promotion of the traditional handicrafts market, the field of traditional handicrafts has had some success in translating creativity in the realm of heritage into marketing and production. The Saudi Heritage Hospitality Company, established in 2005, is active in this area. Programs and festivals have contributed at the local and the international level to revitalizing the Saudi artisans' market, in part by offering traditional handicrafts as souvenirs at official events. In an event that played a major role in revitalizing the Saudi artisans' market, the Baree program in 2019 provided 297 artisans with the space to sell their goods at 19 different festivals in Saudi cities.<sup>(93)</sup> These outlets not only sold goods to individuals, but partnered with businesses to provide popular products. For example, Saudi artisans sold 1,249 crafts to the Radisson Blu Hotel, which opened in the Riyadh Diplomatic Quarter in 2019. This sale led to dozens more orders by hotels and companies. As of March 2020, more than 7,000 products had been manufactured for that specific purpose. The

government has moved to protect the handicrafts market from foreign competition by establishing specific criteria for evaluating artisanal products and ranking registered artisans, among other measures.

### **Investment in Archaeological and Heritage Sites and the Promotion of Tourism**

In 2017, the Kingdom ranked 126 out of 136 countries for the size of its travel industry. Since then, increased private-sector support and participation is expected to generate greater economic returns from the domestic tourism sector.<sup>(94)</sup> For example, the SCTH and the Investment Commission signed a set of agreements in 2019 with local and foreign companies allocating 100 billion SAR for development and investment in the Saudi tourism industry. These included agreements with the Royal Commission for Al-Ula, the Diriyah Gate Development Authority, and the Red Sea Project, which oversee archaeological sites and pilgrimage routes dating back to the Nabatean period.<sup>(95)</sup>

The Tourism Marketing Board is developing marketing tools, including specialized products, activities, and events, to promote the tourism sector. Ultimately, these efforts will promote knowledge of local archaeology, create year-round (as opposed to seasonal) tourism, encourage and support investments from the private sector, and encourage the overall development of the tourism industry.<sup>(96)</sup> These objectives require flexibility and innovation to meet the shifting demands of the new tourism sector.<sup>(97)</sup> The Saudi Heritage Hospitality Company (Nuzul) is also actively reviving archaeological sites through investment in heritage structures, including rehabilitating them to serve as tourist accommodations or hospitality venues at heritage sites.<sup>(98)</sup>

Launched in 2019, the Saudi Seasons program supports a calendar of recreational, athletic, and cultural events to promote local engagement and interaction with archaeological and cultural sites in different regions of the Kingdom. This part of the Quality of Life program represents a collaboration between the Ministry of Culture, the General Entertainment Authority, the Ministry of Sports, the General Authority for Exhibitions and Conventions, and other relevant agencies. The Saudi Seasons initiative is key to promoting economic growth by stimulating domestic tourism, attracting tourists from abroad, and providing temporary and permanent job opportunities for Saudi citizens.

The archaeological and cultural sites sector in the Kingdom has significant potential to contribute to the economy. Developing cultural heritage not only benefits the tourism industry and related areas



such as hospitality, but also creates opportunities for growth in the transportation, handicrafts, and entertainment sectors. The tourism sector has experienced a revival in recent years: combined cultural and non-cultural tourism revenue increased from 57.3 billion in 2004 to 166.8 billion SAR at the end of 2016. In 2017, revenue grew to over 193 billion and in 2018 surpassed 211 billion SAR. Also, in 2018, the tourism sector contributed over 107 million SAR to the national economy. The growth of tourism has directly impacted other sectors. In 2018, the transportation sector brought in revenues of over 63 million, the hospitality sector generated more than 86 million, and tourism and travel revenues exceeded 8 million SAR.

Despite these positive trends in public engagement with heritage



in general, participation in these cultural sites has remained low. Although festivals are a pull factor in domestic tourism, the rate at which citizens visit historical and cultural sites is still limited. Table 9-9 clearly illustrates the low visitation rate for historical, archaeological, and

cultural sites when compared to the attendance at festivals in the Kingdom. This may be the result of limited awareness of the significance of heritage sites or the limits of their current infrastructure, which does not allow visitors full access to these sites.

**Table 9-8:** Domestic cultural tourism (2017-2018)

Year	Number of Domestic Trips	Percentage of Cultural Activities	Number of Repeated Trips for Cultural Purposes <sup>(99)</sup>	Festival Visits	Visits to Historical Sites	Visits to Heritage Sites
2017	6 million	6.5 %	7.8 million	24.8%	17%	1.4%
2018	5.1 million	7.5 %	8.4 million	34.7%	15.8%	8.1%

There seems to be limited community awareness of how important these regions are, as domestic visits to these sites pale in comparison to international tourism (Table 9-8), es-

specially in terms of visits to historical and heritage sites. It is not surprising that domestic tourism should lag behind foreign tourism, since the latter often takes place through cultural

tours designed to introduce these sites. Even so, the magnitude of difference indicates that some other factor is driving down visits by citizens and residents of the Kingdom.

**Table 9-9:** International cultural tourism (2017-2018)

Year	Number of Tourists	Percentage of Cultural Activities	Number of Repeated Trips for Cultural Purposes	Festival Visits	Visits to Historical Sites	Visits to Heritage Sites
2017	3.3 million	11.2%	5.3 million	3.5%	45.8%	44.3%
2018	2.9 million	10.7%	4.6 million	4.1%	43.7%	42.3%

In 2017 and 2018, the Makkah and Al-Madinah regions had the highest rate of international tourism.<sup>(100)</sup> This suggests that religious vis-

itation, the only type of tourism permitted in those regions at the time, remains the biggest draw. It is anticipated that, with the issuance

of new tourist visas in 2019, there will be an uptick in visits to cultural and archaeological sites in the other provinces.

**Endnote:**

- (1) Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972.
- (2) The definitions contained are according to the Regulation on Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage issued February 11, 2014.
- (3) The term "cultural sites" comes from the texts of the UNESCO organization and was replaced with "urban heritage" by the Regulation on Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage issued by Royal Decree, <https://mt.gov.sa/ebooks/Documents/Others/P14/AntiqMuesHeirRegulation/AntiqMuesHeirRegulation.pdf>.
- (4) The definition contained is according to the Regulation on Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage (2014).
- (5) The Regulation on Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage does not differentiate between antiquities and archaeological sites. As a result, they will be addressed within the confines of the chapter in the same context.
- (6) The definition is according to the Regulation on Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage (2014).
- (7) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO, 2003.
- (8) Telephone interview with Abdulrahman Alieedan, Director of the Saudi Society for the Preservation of Heritage (We are Our Heritage), April 12, 2019.
- (9) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO, 2003.
- (10) Jacqueline Perrin, Discovery of Arabia, translated by Qadri Qalaji, ed. Hamad Al-Jassir (Beirut: Arab Writer House). (11) Bidwel, Robin, Travelers in Arabia (London: Hamlyn, 1970).
- (12) Antonin Jaussen and Raphael Savignac, Mission archéologique en Arabie, translated by Saba Abd Al-Wahhab Al-Faris, ed. Sulayman bin Abd Al-Rahman Al-Tib and Said bin Fayyiz Al-Said (Riyadh: King Abdulaziz Administration, 1424 AH).
- (13) For more information, see the chapter on Museums.
- (14) Abd Al-Aziz Abd Al-Rahman Al-Shuwaiy et al., The National Festival for Heritage and Culture (Riyadh: National Guard Press, 1986), 112.
- (15) Abdulrahman Al-Sudairy Cultural Center, Profile of the Founder.
- (16) Talal Al-Saeed, Nabati poetry: Its Origins, Its Art, and Its Development, 1st ed. (Kuwait: Dhat Al-Salasil Publications, 1981), 114.
- (17) Bakr Hazal, "Mandil Al-Fuhaid is a source of modern literature in popular poetry," Al Riyadh News, 28/10/1429 AH.
- (18) "Television...wonder at its initial broadcast...included the most famous broadcasters and a plurality of educational programs," Al Riyadh News 19/06/1435 AH.
- (19) "Archaeological discoveries and the results of survey and excavation teams' work," General Authority for Tourism and National Heritage, 10, <<https://mt.gov.sa/ebooks/Documents/p17/ArchDiscoveries/ArchDiscoveries.pdf>>.
- (20) Saad bin Abd Al-Aziz Al-Rashid, "Antiquities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia over the Course of 100 Years," The King Abdulaziz Administration and The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 100 Years (Riyadh: The King Abdulaziz Administration, 2007).
- (21) Muadh bin Abad Al-Mashukhi, The Use of Digital Technology in Documenting Museum Collections: The Museum of the College of Tourism and Antiquities as a Model (Riyadh: The General Authority for Tourism and Antiquities, 2014).
- (22) Achievements of the General Authority for Tourism and Antiquities 1421-1434 AH (2000-2012 CE): Report Submitted to the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia (General Authority for Tourism and Antiquities, 2012), 56.
- (23) Ibid.
- (24) Achievements of the General Authority for Tourism and Antiquities 1421-1434 AH (2000-2012 CE): Report Submitted to the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia (General Authority for Tourism and Antiquities, 2012).
- (25) "Urban Heritage...Protection and Investment," The General Authority for Tourism and National Heritage.
- (26) The Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage Law.
- (27) The Royal Commission for the Development of Riyadh.
- (28) Fahd Al-Hussain, "Documenting Traditional Handicrafts and Industries and Their Importance Within the National Program for Managing the Heritage of Handicrafts: The Experience of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," Odomato Magazine 21 (January 2010): 60.
- (29) "The Inauguration of the Site for the International Conference on Tourism and Traditional Handicrafts," Al-Yawm News, April 6, 2000.
- (30) "The Tourism Commission qualifies 20,000 artisans to revive the handicraft sector," Baree, <<http://shp.gov.sa/MediaCenter/News/Pages/news24.aspx>>.
- (31) "Riyadh tourism" establishes a permanent center for handicrafts training and investment," Baree, <<http://shp.gov.sa/MediaCenter/News/Pages/news41.aspx>>.
- (32) Both have launched trademarks which incorporate elements of heritage in their products, including jewelry and clothing.
- (33) Saudi Society for the Preservation of Heritage.
- (34) The National Transformation Project document.
- (35) Saudi Press Agency, April 24, 2019, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/1916790>.
- (36) Ministries for "Sports," and "Tourism," and investment...including "civil service" for "labor," Okaz News, February 25, 2020.
- (37) Thaqafi / The Minister of Culture appreciates the guidance to transfer the Janadriyah Festival to the Ministry of Culture, Saudi Press Agency, July 16, 2019.
- (38) General Commission for Culture, A Guide to Collecting Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2018.
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- (40) Ibid., 12.
- (41) Ibid., 13.
- (42) "Cultural: The Tourism and National Heritage Commission launches the archaeological excavation season for 1440 AH with 44 Saudi-international expeditions," Saudi Press Agency, October 10, 2018.
- (43) "General: Discovery of the largest archaeological site in the Kingdom's east," Saudi Press Agency, March 27, 2019.
- (44) "Discovering Secrets of 'Nabatean' Civilization in Al-Ula," Al-Jazirah News, July 10, 2019.
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- (48) Ibid.
- (49) Ibid.
- (50) Ibid.
- (51) "Urban Heritage Initiative." Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage.
- (52) "National Urban Heritage register.. Authenticated Database for Sites" Aljazirah newspaper 6/11/2017
- (53) The Diriyah Gate Development Authority
- (54) "Historic Jeddah.. A Journey Through the Past, Present and Future," Ministry of Tourism.  
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- (55) For more information, see the chapter on Fashion.
- (56) "Programs: Saudi Tourism Programs and Products - Diversity and Richness," General Authority for Tourism and National Heritage, 43-44, 48-49 (2015).
- (57) For more information on cultural festivals and events, consult the chapter on Cultural Festivals and Events.
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- (59) "Winter at Tantora attracts 37,000 visitors from 72 countries," Ashraq Al-Awsat News, February 26, 2019.
- (60) "Historic Jeddah Festival — Second Version," National Urban Heritage Center, Ministry of Tourism, 2015.
- (61) "Half a million visitors to the Historic Jeddah Festival," Okaz News, September 4, 2017.
- (62) MiSK Historic Jeddah, MiSK Foundation, <<https://MiSK.org.sa/services/historic-jeddah-2019/>>.
- (63) "Flowerman Festival recounts the richness of the flower ring in the Saudi Arabian heritage of Aseer," Ashraq Al-Awsat News, August 14, 2019.
- (64) For more, see the chapter on Festivals.
- (65) For more, see the chapter on Music.
- (66) "Thaqafi / Ministry of Culture announces names of the winners in the Industrial Heritage Competition," Saudi Press Agency, December 23, 2019.
- (67) "Thaqafi / Ministry of Culture announces names of the winners in the Popular Folklore Contest," Saudi Press Agency, January 16, 2020.
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- (69) "The Minister of Culture announces the allotment of 14 cultural awards for Saudi creatives," Ministry of Culture, December 12, 2019.
- (70) "Report: The State of Heritage in the Kingdom: Efforts of We Are Our Heritage Society in Preserving Cultural Heritage in the Kingdom."
- (71) "Opening of the Archaeological Treasures of Saudi Arabia" exhibit in Rome...Tuesday," Ministry of Culture, 2019, <<https://scth.gov.sa/MediaCenter/News/MainNews/Pages/a-m-1-25-11-19.aspx>>.
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- (73) "Archaeological sites eligible for registration in the World Heritage List," Ministry of Culture, <<https://scth.gov.sa/Antiquities-Museums/SitesList/Pages/ArchSitesSuggestedRegWHL.aspx>>.
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- (75) "The Nineteenth Annual Report of the General Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (1439-1440 AH)," General Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, 36, 2018, <<https://mt.gov.sa/ebooks/Documents/Reports/r2018/mobile/html5forwebkit.html>>.
- (76) The 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its Protocol, International Committee of the Red Cross, <<https://www.icrc.org/ar/document/protection-cultural-property-event-armed-conflict-model-law>>.
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- (92) The National Program for Traditional Handicrafts and Industries (Baree).
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- (99) The number of repeated trips refers to the number of cultural activities in which a tourist partakes, considering that a tourist may partake in several cultural activities on a single trip.
- (100) Tourism Information and Research Center (MAS).



Chapter Ten

# 10

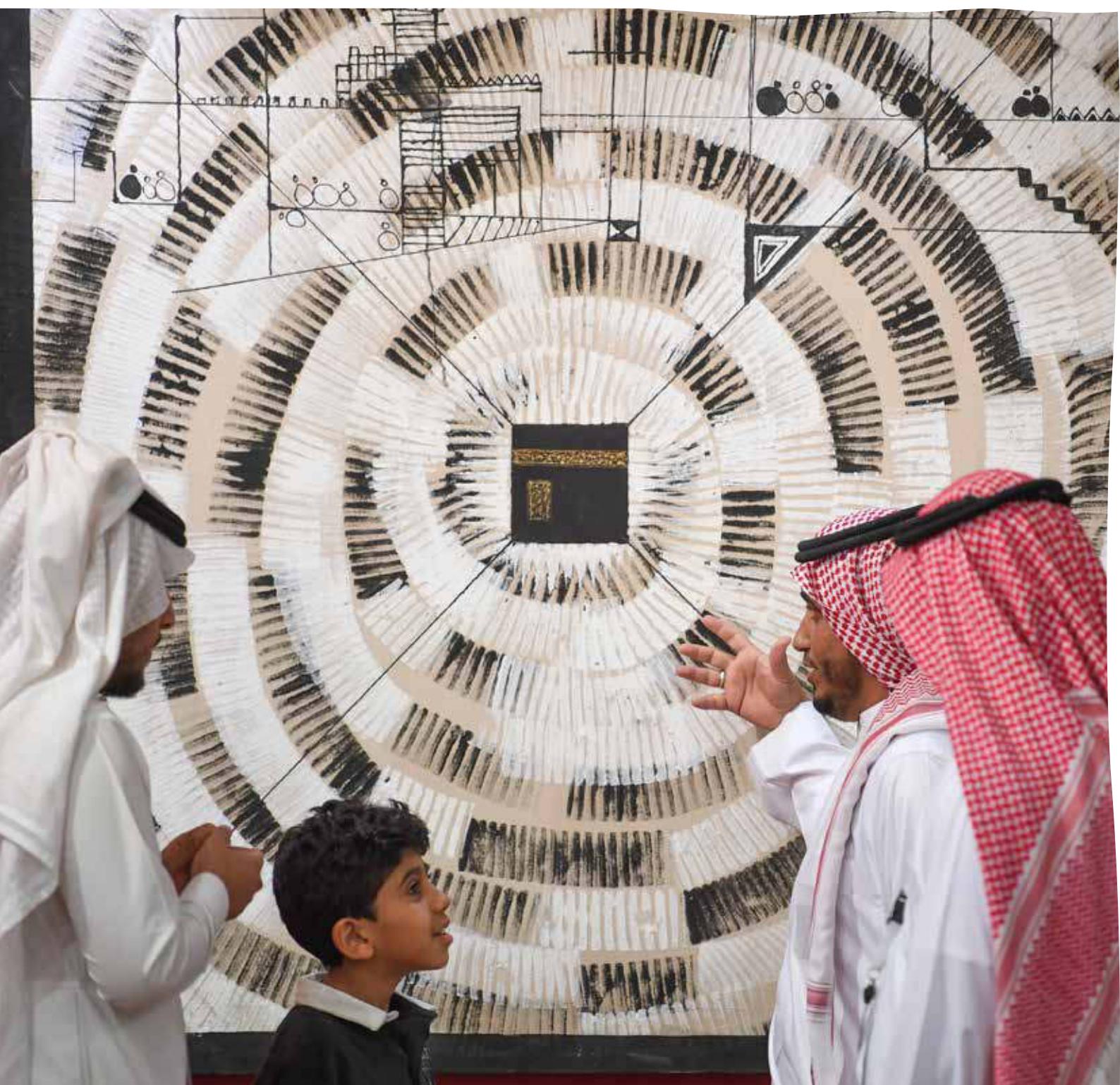




# Visual Arts

- **Visual Arts in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview**
- **Saudi Visual Arts Today**
- **Awards and Achievements**
- **Saudi Visual Arts in the World**
- **2019 Cultural Participation Survey**
- **Infrastructure and Investment**

# Visual Arts in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview



More than 60 years have passed since the 1953 opening of the first art-school exhibition in the history of Saudi public education. It was there that Abdul Halim Radawi showed his early work. This was followed in 1958 by the first national art gallery, which was inaugurated by King Saud bin Abdulaziz and hosted by the Ministry of Education. These events represent the beginnings of modern Saudi fine art, which took its place alongside Arabic calligraphy and handicrafts,<sup>(1)</sup> previously the only forms of visual art commonly practiced in the societies of the Arabian Peninsula.

In the period before modernization, handicrafts in their various forms turned everyday objects such as decorative engravings, housewares, ornaments, and clothing, into works of art. In contrast to modern art, handicrafts, far from serving merely aesthetic aims, played a functional role in daily life and flourished during seasonal markets.<sup>(2)</sup> Arabic calligraphy had symbolic significance because of its association with the writing of the Quran. It was rooted in translocal traditions of transmission from masters to students through the ijazah system.<sup>(3)</sup> In 1905, with the establishment of the Al-Falah schools in Jeddah and Makkah, it became the first type of art to be included in formal education. Among the schools' graduates is Sheikh Muhammad Taher Al-Kurdi, who left behind numerous works. Calligraphy continued to be a part of schooling at the Saudi Information Scientific Institute in Makkah, the first formal school of the Saudi era, and home to the calligrapher Muhammad Adib. During the era of King Abdulaziz, Adib was entrusted with the design of coinage and postage stamps.<sup>(4)</sup>

### Modern Visual Arts: Early Stages

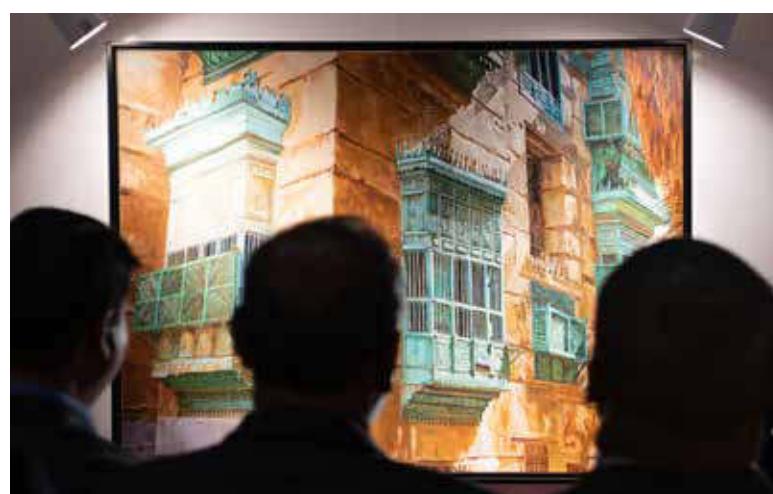
The Ministry of Education's inclusion of painting and fine art in the curriculum for boys in 1957 and girls in 1959 laid the foundation for the practice of fine art in the Kingdom.<sup>(5)</sup> Though supplies and qualified teachers were limited, public education helped introduce students to art. From 1954 to 1964, Arab and Saudi artists such as Abdul Halim Radawi offer summer intensive training courses. Radawi began teaching these courses immediately after graduating from the Accademia di Belle Arti di Roma,<sup>(6)</sup> where he was sent by the Ministry of Education in the 1960s. Muhammad Al-Saleem, Muhammad Al-Saqabi, Dia Aziz, Ahmad Falamban, and others were also sent abroad for the same purpose. Their solo and group shows presented pioneering works of modern Saudi art.<sup>(7)</sup>

Schools and athletic clubs served as the first platform for Saudi artists, with exhibitions like Abdul Aziz Al-Hammad's 1966 debut at the

Fifth School in Dammam, and Muhammad Al-Saleem's 1967 exhibition in the Al Nassr Club in Riyadh.<sup>(8)</sup> Female artists were also part of this vanguard, with the 1968 collaborative show by Safeya Binzaghr and Mounirah Mosly at the Dar Al-Tarbiyyah Al-Hadeethah School in Jeddah.<sup>(9)</sup> This period also saw cultural newspapers featuring art journalism in appendices or designated art pages, some of which were edited by the likes of Abduljabbar Al Yahya, and in a later period, Abdulrahman

Al-Suleiman and Muhammad Al-Monif.<sup>(10)</sup> Artists went beyond their own galleries to establish societal art initiatives, such as the Saudi Center for Fine Arts, founded by Abdul Halim Radawi in 1968 under the auspices of the Ministry of Education;<sup>(11)</sup> and Dar Al-Funoon in Riyadh, founded by Muhammad Al-Saleem in 1979.<sup>(12)</sup>

The major milestone for Saudi art education, however, was the 1965 establishment of the Institute of



Art Education in Riyadh. Because there were no academies specializing in fine art, the Institute set out to produce graduates qualified to work as instructors. The Institute's teachers included established Arab artists such as Shakir Hassan Al Said and Saadi Al-Ka'bi of Iraq. Al-Ka'bi's work was later displayed in an exhibition titled "After a While", organized by the Ministry of Culture in 2020. The institute's first cohort, who graduated in 1968, included such pioneers of Saudi fine art as Ali AlRuzaiqa, Muhammad Resayes, Mansur Kurdi, Muhammad Al-Monif, Abdulhamid Al Bakshi, and Abdullah Hammas, among others. The institute helped set the pace for many of the Kingdom's artists and assisted in showing their works in an annual exhibition held at the end of each academic year. After producing the second generation and part of the third generation of Saudi fine artists, the Institute closed its doors in 1990.<sup>(13)</sup>

In addition to the Art Institute's central role, the Youth Welfare depart-

ment contributed to the Saudi art scene, hosting an exhibition in 1969. It was later separated from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to become the independent General Presidency for Youth Welfare (GPYW), which became the steward of artistic activities in the Kingdom by supporting and organizing exhibitions and awards.<sup>(14)</sup> These were managed by the GPyW's General Administration of Cultural Activities, as well as through its supervision and support of the Saudi Arabian Society of Culture and Arts (SASCA), founded in 1974. In tandem, these two entities served as the institutional core for the field of fine arts, providing artists with financial and moral support through awards and certificates of appreciation. The GPyW provided financial support for a variety of events, the foremost of which was the General Holdings Exhibition, launched in 1976. This gallery "aimed to acquire the largest number of artistic works possible in order to encourage artists of all levels and arts of all kinds

in the Kingdom."<sup>(15)</sup> In 1979, the Saudi Exhibition of Contemporary Art, one of the most prestigious events in the Kingdom, was held for the first time. It offered awards and monetary prizes to artists in the fields of painting, drawing, and applied arts.

### Visual Arts Beyond Galleries and Institutes

In its early stages, Saudi fine art had few opportunities to interact with community at large, evidenced by the testimony of artists who relate that their galleries were empty, and the few people that did attend reacted with visible bewilderment.<sup>(16)</sup> Fortunately, the program of city beautification conceived by Muhammad Said Farsi, former governor of Jeddah, brought fine art out of the realm of connoisseurship. In 1968, Abdul Halim Radawi installed the first public art in the streets of Jeddah,<sup>(17)</sup> and public works by other Saudi artists followed. Over the course of two decades, these piec-



es, combined with dozens of installations and sculptures by foreign artists, transformed Jeddah into an open-air art gallery. This experiment foreshadowed another development: private patronage of the arts, or the use of private funds to support art, as many of these pieces were funded by the merchants of Jeddah.<sup>(18)</sup> Other municipalities followed Jeddah's lead. The central regions of the Kingdom have been beautified by the sculptures of Muhammad Al-Saleem, Saad Al-Obied, and Ali AlRuzaiqa. The Eastern Province is likewise adorned with the works of Muhammad Al-Sandal, Abdulrahman Hafez, and Ahmad Al-Maglouth.<sup>(19)</sup>

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Saudi airports such as King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, King Fahd International Airport in Dammam, King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah, as well as other government buildings, were adorned with sculptures and murals.<sup>(20)</sup> Despite this rapid expansion of the plastic arts, painting remained the dominant form of visual art until the 2000s.<sup>(21)</sup>

### **Weak Infrastructure and Continued Production**

After a decade of vigorous support for the arts, the activities of the General Administration of Cultural Activities and SASCA waned in the mid-1980s,<sup>(22)</sup> leading to a steep decline in the development and community presence of the visual arts. Though the number of art-education departments grew, there was not a parallel increase in quality, as art was limited to educational institutions. Nevertheless, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, public institutions not explicitly concerned



with art did provide a space for artistic activity. The Saudi Arabian National Guard, for example, organized annual fine art exhibitions at the Janadriyah Festival, launched in 1985. Similarly, Saudi Arabian Airlines (Saudia) launched an initiative entitled Saudi Color in 1992, which continued for several years.<sup>(23)</sup> Further, the Al Muftaha Art Village, inaugurated in Abha in 1989, includes 12 studios and galleries now curated by the Ministry of Culture.

Even without a strong institutional infrastructure, talented artists continued to emerge. The appearance of new talent in each generation grows out of collaboration between artists and the reimagination of style and form. From the realism of Safeya Binzagr and Abduljabbar Al

Yahya's depictions of everyday life, to the impressionism of Abdullah Al-Shalty's portrayals of Aseer's natural beauty, or the surrealism of Abdulhamid Al-Bakshi's work in the 1970s, a significant amount of artistic diversity has emerged, with the first generation employing significant elements from Saudi heritage. Saudi artists were also influenced by the Hurufiyya movement, which combined calligraphy with modern art and continued on into the 1980s.<sup>(24)</sup> Though there were attempts at artistic innovation, individual styles that deviated from the work of earlier generations of Saudi artists received a chilly reception.<sup>(25)</sup>

One of the most notable features of the period from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s may be the individual and

collective effort expended to build a community despite the paucity of resources and support. In 1993, the House of Artists in Jeddah began organizing a number of exhibitions and workshops for artists and young people.<sup>(26)</sup> Later, it was subsumed by the GPYW, where its permanent exhibition received many international delegations.<sup>(27)</sup> Similarly, the still-active Madinah Artists Group, the Darb Al-Naja Group from Jazan, the Ashtarut Group, and the Qatif Fine Arts Group at the Qatif Arts Club,<sup>(28)</sup> among others, carved out gathering spaces for artists despite the roadblocks that hindered their progress.<sup>(29)</sup> The activity of Saudi artists was also evident in civil society initiatives, such as the Saudi Center for Fine Art founded in Jeddah in 1988 by Princess Nourah bint Badr and artist Mona Al-Qasabi. The center organized numerous exhibitions and specialized workshops, which served to raise awareness and promote arts education.<sup>(30)</sup>

### Visual Arts at the Beginning of the Third Millennium

At the turn of the third millennium, visual arts groups continued to emerge. These include the Ta'akuz Group in Taif; the Colors Group for Fine Arts which is comprised of artists from inside and outside of Riyadh; the Riyadh Fine Arts Group; and the Asdiqa' Al-Risha Group, an assemblage of artists from inside and outside Dammam.<sup>(31)</sup> Likewise, Masahat Mushtarak in Taif and Shetaa in Abha also provide artistic experience in contemporary art. Alongside these fine arts groups, other visual arts have had an even greater presence. These include photography and digital art, forms which began to spread glob-



ally during this period. To adapt to the changes in visual arts, the third meeting of the SASCA Board of Directors moved to change the names of its committees and include one for photography.<sup>(32)</sup> The Saudi Society for Photography was also created,<sup>(33)</sup> along with the Saudi Society for Fine Arts and the Saudi Scientific Association of Arabic Calligraphy after Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Sabeel assumed the post of Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture and Information when it was established in 2003. Stewardship of the cultural and artistic affairs of the Kingdom were transferred from the GPYW to the Ministry.

Photography as an art form rose to prominence in the early 2000s, strengthened by the royal order on regulating photography in public places and tourist locations in 2005.<sup>(34)</sup> Its popularity was evident from the tens of thousands of visitors<sup>(35)</sup> to the Colors of Saudi Forum, which was launched by the Saudi Commissions for Tourism and National Heritage in 2012.<sup>(36)</sup> Interest in the field was also reflected in increased numbers of Saudi photographers winning international awards. Despite the long period of decline that photography had undergone for social and religious reasons, attempts were made to establish a place for it through journalism and exhibitions organized by institutions like the House of Saudi Photographers, founded in 1987.<sup>(37)</sup>

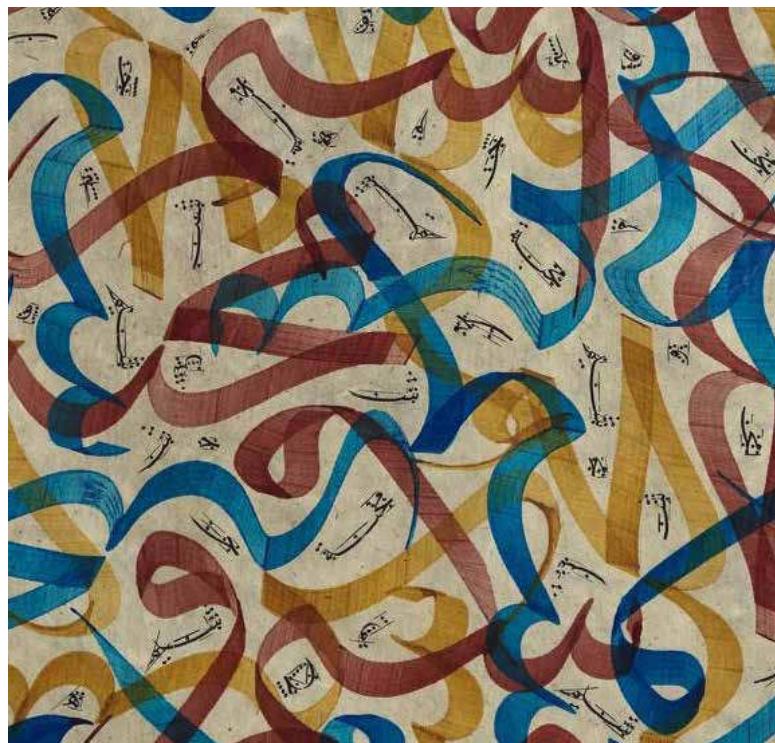
The lack of art museums and gallery spaces has been offset by private and commercial galleries. Personal and private spaces also contributed to an increase in the number of art exhibitions, which rose to an estimated 100-130 annually in the early 2000s.<sup>(38)</sup> This period also saw

the 2000 opening of the House of Safeya Binzagr in Jeddah, a museum which despite its small size is of major historical importance.<sup>(39)</sup> During this period, the Agency for Cultural Affairs at the Ministry of Culture and Media—the government agency responsible for arts at the time—took up the GPYW's task of holding exhibitions. The foremost of which was the Exhibition of the Saudi Contemporary Art, which continued until its 24th edition in 2018.<sup>(40)</sup>

### Arabic Calligraphy After Modernization

Arabic calligraphy as an art form has not enjoyed the same level of institutional interest. The student competitions held by the Ministry of Education helped discover young talent, and there have been initiatives focusing on calligraphy, including sporadic forums in Madi-

nah.<sup>(41)</sup> Yet these did not lead to the founding of schools or educational programs. Instead, apprenticeship to a master calligrapher continues to be the main path of transmission for this art form. Associations of professional calligraphers have retained traditional educational methods, such as the ijazah system. Instruction at the Two Holy Mosques still has continued to produce the most important calligraphers, under the tutelage of Abdullah Rida at the Prophet's Mosque, and later Ibrahim Al-Arafi at the Great Mosque of Makkah.<sup>(42)</sup> Other prominent calligraphers are self-taught, having learned the art through studying from manuals produced by the Islamic world's great practitioners. Nasser Maymoon of Riyadh is one example of a self-taught calligrapher who has granted ijazahs to a group of the Kingdom's calligraphers and won many awards internationally and in the Arab world.<sup>(43)</sup>



# Saudi Visual Arts Today

## The Contemporary Art Scene

Since the early 2000s, a new generation of artists has emerged, producing work that differs in style and scope from that of their predecessors.<sup>[44]</sup> Special exhibitions featuring their work have attracted the attention of the international art community, and the resulting media attention has led institutions of global stature, such as the British Museum, to acquire their works.<sup>[45]</sup> Whether conceptual, installation-based, or digital, their art is characterized by a diversity of trends and techniques. Their sculptures, installations, and photography employ new media and rebel against prevailing local traditions. Some of their pieces have broached new questions of social criticism while others incline toward symbolism, in what Mona Khazindar has described as a "reinterpretation of traditional symbols."<sup>[46]</sup>

This new art scene, which has been actively engaged with international institutions, has been dubbed "contemporary Saudi art" by critics.<sup>[47]</sup> In this, it follows the trail blazed by non-governmental institutions such as the Al-Mansouria Foundation, which since 2001 has had an artist-in-residence at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, with the aim of supporting Saudi and Arab artists as well as galleries such as the Athr Gallery in Jeddah. Contemporary art is patronized by individuals and companies as well. The most significant investment in such resources has come from associations such as the Edge of Arabia initiative, the result of a collaboration between the Shetaa Group in Abha with a British artist. Edge of Arabia launched its first exhibition in London in 2008 with the support of the Ministry of





Culture and Media and the Abdul Latif Jameel Social Initiative.<sup>(48)</sup> Important exhibitions ensued, such as the 2012 "Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam" at the British Museum in London,<sup>(49)</sup> and "We Need to Talk" at the Equestrian Club in Jeddah, which gave contemporary art new prominence at the local level.<sup>(50)</sup> It is within this context that the sisters Shadia and Raja'a Alem participated in the 2011 Venice Biennale with the sponsorship of the Ministry of Culture and Media. This was the first time Saudis had participated in this international exhibition.<sup>(51)</sup> Their debut was followed in 2017 by Maha Malluh, who was invited to display her work at the public exhibition.<sup>(52)</sup>

In addition to up-and-coming artists, some veteran Saudi artists

also form part of this contemporary scene. These include Bakr Shaykhun, whose work crosses stylistic borders, along with Faisal Samra and Zaman Jasim. This wave of contemporary art has fostered the emergence of a new, expansive artistic sector. It has also forged a path for young artists, who found a welcoming environment and a network of patrons initially concentrated in Jeddah. Thanks to international attention, Saudis who have only recently launched their careers have found themselves participating in global events.

The factors that have contributed to artistic success are also responsible for the mixed critical reception of the local art scene. Critics fear excessive assimilation into global



artistic trends without critical assessment of their roots,<sup>(53)</sup> and they express concern that given the relative novelty of artistic practice, newcomers and amateurs will not move beyond ready-made artistic forms. The rebellion against conventional artistic styles has caused a rift between the younger generation and their predecessors—a rift which, if it persists, might erode collaboration and communication across generations.<sup>(54)</sup> In recognition of this danger, the MiSK Art Institute concluded its 2018 season with an event entitled "Generational Dialogue."<sup>(55)</sup>

Despite the range of critical attitudes towards contemporary art in the Kingdom, the trend has engendered a dynamic situation that may stimulate a more robust fine arts scene and more productive critical discourse. The exhibition "From the Inside," organized by the Ministry of Culture in late 2019, reflects a desire to connect with the international art scene without abandoning the heart of Saudi art and its national environment. The exhibition took the first step toward putting Al-Diriyah on the map as a site of contemporary art, with the attendant creation of a local, independent art

**Table 10-1: Number of exhibitions by selected institutions (2019)<sup>(59)</sup>**

Entity	Number of Art Exhibitions
SASCA, including its 16 branches	145
Municipalities	35
Athar Gallery	17
MiSK	10
Madinah Contemporary Art Center	9
Mono Gallery	9
Saudi Center for Fine Art	9
Pure Art Gallery	5
Saudi Society for Fine Arts	4
Other Entities and Galleries	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>255</b>

scene that is open to outside influences without being overwhelmed by them.<sup>(56)</sup> Meanwhile, to celebrate the history of local Saudi art, the MiSK Art Institute culminated its 2019 programming with the reopening of the Prince Faisal bin Fahd Fine Arts Hall, which played a pioneering role in modern fine art upon its opening 35 years prior. The reopening and renovation of the hall were accompanied by "Space: A Tale," an exhibition featuring 100 works of art—some of which were returning to their original home, where they were displayed between 1985 and 1994.<sup>(57)</sup>

### Expanded Participation in Visual Arts

One of the most prominent features of the current moment in the field of visual arts throughout the entire Kingdom is the substantial number of exhibitions and events, and the growth of interest in the arts (see Table 10-1). This is not simply a response to the wave of contemporary art, but also to the growth occurring at the same time in other areas of culture, detailed in other chapters of the Report, as they expand beyond elite circles. One indicator of this increased interest is the strong attendance at art events. For example, 27,000 people attended the MiSK events that held from October 29 to November 2, 2019, featuring 240 artists.<sup>(58)</sup> Youth who are still in school, it should be noted, are the most interested in art because it serves as an outlet for self-expression and because they have grown up in the intensely visual world of social media. Data from the 2019 Cultural Participation Survey confirms this, with 41.64% of university students reporting interest in practicing art, compared to 34.64% of other groups.



The diversification of forms of artistic practice has encouraged emerging artists to produce commercial art. They display their work to potential buyers in rented spaces in small booths on the sidelines of festivals and shopping malls. Others have gone beyond the walls of institutions, turning to social media to advertise their art.<sup>(60)</sup> While positive public reception of visual arts is a positive indicator for the incorporation of visual arts into daily life, the scarcity of fully-fledged artistic institutions blurs the line between professionals and amateurs still honing their craft. The imbalance in the opportunity structure facing artists could negatively affect the quality of artistic production; quantity does not imply quality.

### Impact of Non-Profits

There are signs that the quantitative growth in visual art has been accompanied by qualitative development as well. This has been evident in the emergence of non-profit organizations that sponsor art at a high level of professionalism with an abundance of resources that were previously inaccessible. These non-profits—typically funded by corporate social responsibility programs, charities, and art-loving businesspeople—organize educational programming and exhibition tours for different parts of society. One of the most important of these initiatives is “21,39 Jeddah Arts,” which the Saudi Art Council has hosted annually since 2014, one year after its founding. This initiative takes place

over a period of two months and hosts a number of workshops, field trips for students, and exhibitions in conjunction with participating galleries and institutions.<sup>(61)</sup> “21,39 Jeddah Arts” has become a major event on the Jeddah arts scene, leading the Ministry of Culture to support its seventh iteration in 2020. In Riyadh, the MiSK Art Institute was established in 2017, under the auspices of the MiSK Foundation. In 2019, MiSK offered a variety of artistic events, including workshops, exhibitions, and public events throughout the cities of Al-Ula, Dammam, Al-Awamiyah, and Tabuk, in addition to courses and exhibitions abroad.

This spectrum of institutions and their resources provides Saudi artists with lines of communication and



increased opportunities abroad. For example, the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) launched the Bridges initiative to present Saudi cultural creative work, including visual arts, to the world. By 2018, Ithra had funded art residencies and supported 100 artists of both genders, who exhibited 147 works in top museums and art institutions in eight American states.<sup>(62)</sup> In June 2019, the "Bridges to Seoul" exhibition took place in the South Korean capital, featuring Saudi art.<sup>(63)</sup> Likewise, MiSK hosted international exhibitions in major artistic centers such as the exhibition "In-cense Road" at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. They also hosted "Unpacked: Refugee Baggage" at the United Nations headquarters in New York in 2017, and a Saudi contemporary art exhibition in Washington, D.C., in 2018. In 2019, MiSK organized the exhibition "After Illusion" at the Saudi National Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.<sup>(64)</sup> These institutions also hosted international artists in Saudi Arabia, which helps provide networking opportunities.

The presence of institutions such as Ithra, MiSK, Art Jameel,<sup>(65)</sup> and the Al-Mansouria Foundation does not diminish the role played by the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA). With its 16 branches, SASCA is able to reach every region of the Kingdom more effectively than any other organization. It was the Kingdom's largest organizer of art exhibitions in 2019, not to mention its role in discovering emerging talents and fostering them through educational courses in fine art, calligraphy, and photography.

of initiatives within the sub-sector. The Ministry has coined a guiding slogan that reflects its priorities in constructing educational foundation: "Education first...education last," reframing the challenge of expanding the field as an opportunity. In late 2019, the Ministry announced art education initiatives and the launch of new exhibitions. In December 2019, it declared 2020 the Year of Arabic Calligraphy, a symbolically important designation that will be accompanied by artistic events and activities throughout the Kingdom's provinces.

### The Ministry of Culture and the Year of Arabic Calligraphy (2020)

The most important institutional development to impact visual arts was the establishment of the Ministry of Culture in 2018. In 2019, the Ministry announced the creation of specialized bodies for different cultural fields, including the Visual Arts Commission, which will oversee the formulation and implementation

The Year of Arabic Calligraphy happened upon a scene founded mainly on the individual efforts of calligraphers, who had to take upon themselves the formation of collectives and the teaching and transmission of their craft. Furthermore, in addition to the individual transmission of the craft to students, some instructional centers exist, such as the Al-Kateb Institute in Riyadh, the Ibn Al-Bawwab Center for Arabic Calligraphy Education in Abha, and the Hrofiat Institute in Jeddah, which holds activities, exhibitions, and courses.<sup>(66)</sup> Other contributors include universities, including Umm Al-Qura University, which hosts the Saudi Scientific Association of Arabic Calligraphy,<sup>(67)</sup> and the Islamic University of Madinah, which is launching an Arabic calligraphy program for non-native speakers of Arabic.<sup>(68)</sup>

### New Media and Intersecting Styles

A large measure of the effectiveness of the art scene today comes from the growing presence of new media and forms of art alongside the plastic art that has dominated the Saudi art scene since the





mid-twentieth century. Installations, photography, and digital arts featured prominently in exhibitions in 2019. For example, "Naphtha," hosted by the Ministry of Culture in the historical Khuzam Palace in Jeddah, depicted the social history of oil in a complex display of sculpture, photography, and video art. 2019 also brought forums dedicated to new art forms, including the Second International Video Art Forum held by the Dammam branch of SASCA,<sup>(69)</sup> and the Global AI Summit's Artathon competition, which focuses on the link between artistic design and artificial intelligence. The first session of the summit took place in Riyadh in 2019, and the Ministry of Culture will organize the second one in 2020.<sup>(70)</sup> In this field, Lulwah Al Homoud and Dania Al-saleh presented a piece that blends Arabic calligraphy with artificial intelligence. Their work was displayed at the "Artificial Intelligence and Intercultural Dialogue" exhibition at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia.

For their part, traditional art forms also have a presence in spaces dedicated to contemporary art, apart from festivals or programs like the National Program for the Development of Handicrafts and Industries (Baree). In 2019, the MiSK Art Institute organized an exhibition of Arabic calligraphy featuring the most distinguished calligraphers from around the globe.<sup>(71)</sup> The Madinah Center for Contemporary Art hosted an exhibition of the work of calligrapher Abdulaziz Al-Rashidi that coincided with an exhibition by photographer Faisal bin Zara'ah. Saudi Design Week included an exhibition sponsored by Art Jameel featuring contemporary works based on traditional designs.<sup>(72)</sup> This intersection

The screenshot shows the landing page of the 'The 2020 Year of Arabic Calligraphy Platform'. It features a teal header with the title. Below it is a text block about idea submission, followed by sections for 'Submission Period' (January 15 to February 15, 2020), 'Types of Submissions' (private and non profit sector, governmental agencies, individual), and 'Types of Support' (promotional support, logistical support, both full and partial financial support). A note at the bottom states that ideas are evaluated to determine the appropriate type of support.

of styles was not limited to spatial proximity: it was evident in the style of those fine artists who continue in the tradition of the Hurufiyya school by incorporating elements of Arabic calligraphy in their paintings, as well as in the work of calligraphers who apply the principles of Arabic calligraphy in contemporary conceptual pieces. Examples of the latter are Nasser Al Salem's calligraphy panels, shown at exhibitions in London and Spain,<sup>(73)</sup> and the work of Othman Khuzaim, whose work was featured at the "Letters without Words" exhibition at UNESCO as part of the festivities for World Arabic Language Day.<sup>(74)</sup>

Another instance of artistic intersection is the field of graphic design, a creative activity that extends beyond its commercial components. Despite its focus on utility as opposed to pure expressive function, design remains a subfield of the visual arts. In November 2019, the multidisciplinary Saudi Design Week featured innovative layouts by Saudi artists and designers.<sup>(75)</sup> Digital calligraphy, similarly, has blended the aesthetic quality of calligraphy with digital design. For example, the Kalem online Arabic typeface design program<sup>(76)</sup> uses AI applications on a digital platform to allow artists and designers to incorporate

Arabic calligraphy into their works. This presents an opportunity for a greater presence of calligraphy in the field of design and commercial calligraphy, which had experienced a decline since it was first used in business signage.<sup>[77]</sup>

### Art in Public Life

The expansion of public interest in the arts has acquired a spatial dimension as well, as can be seen in the artwork that appears unprompted on neighborhood walls. In recent years, critics as well as the public have come to recognize graffiti as an art form, as graffiti garners local attention and critical acclaim, some municipalities have attempted to organize and incorporate it into the visual cityscape. Some practitioners have become professionals, offering their services to restaurants and cafés seeking decoration for their interiors.<sup>[78]</sup> The Al-Ahsa branch of SASCA, for example, commissioned 50 artists to complete a 300-meter mural.<sup>[79]</sup> The municipality of Tabuk among others has commissioned a brightly-colored mural incorporating calligraphy and graffiti.<sup>[80]</sup> The most significant development in public art has been the announcement of the Riyadh Art project, which will bring Saudi and international artists together to adorn the city's gates, intersections, landmarks, parks, and public transit stations with more than a thousand works of art.<sup>[81]</sup> In its Cultural Vision document, the Ministry of Culture has also announced a public art initiative.

Sculpture, by contributing to urban beautification, joined this flourishing of public art. Through the Dammam branch of SASCA, Saudi sculptors collaborated with Al-Khobar

Municipality and the Eastern Province Council for Social Responsibility on the 2018 "Nuqoush Al-Khobar" initiative.<sup>[82]</sup> In March 2019, the Ministry of Culture took this initiative to the next level when it organized the First International Tuwaiq Symposium, which took place that year. The symposium hosted international sculptors for a period of 20 days, during which they were asked to sculpt a representation of their artistic and national culture on Saudi and Omani stone, alongside their international counterparts.<sup>[83]</sup> This event was followed by the Red Sea International Sculpture Symposium held in Historic Jeddah, again hosted by the Ministry of Culture.

Not only has art been displayed in the public sphere, but it has also been created there. Open-air artistic spaces have appeared in several

Saudi cities. For example, Art Street was inaugurated in Abha in 2017 after Awad Zareb transformed the street into an open-air art studio.<sup>[84]</sup> Other cities such as Hail, Jeddah, and Tabuk, followed suit. In 2019, Al Bujairi Square in Historic Diriyah was also transformed into an open-air painting space.<sup>[85]</sup> MiSK did the same as part of its "Tajallat" initiative by holding open-air painting activities in Al-Awamiyah, Al-Ula, and Al-Sawda.<sup>[86]</sup>

Similar initiatives have given artists a role in reviving heritage sites and possibly developing them as well. For example, the Zawiya 97 initiative hosted workshops in woodworking and carving traditional rawashin balconies. This training helped prepare local young people to assist in the restoration of Historic Jeddah and its antique structures.<sup>[87]</sup>



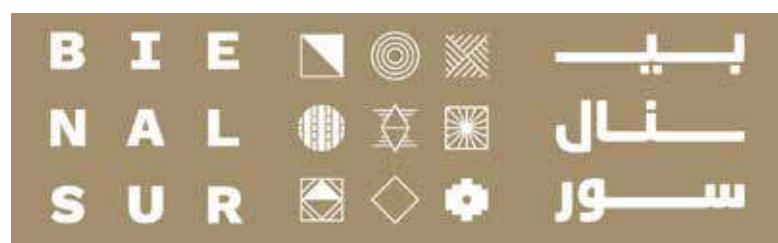
**Table 10-2:** Notable art exhibitions organized by the Ministry of Culture (2019)

Exhibition	City	Location	Date	Partner Institution
Red Palace	Riyadh	Red Palace	March 13-April 20	-
Art Gallery (General Authority for Culture)	Al Jubail	King Abdullah Cultural Center	March 14-26	-
Van Gogh Interactive Exhibition (General Authority for Culture)	Dhahran	King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra)	March 17-April 11	King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra)
Cities Destroyed by Terrorism	Riyadh	National Museum	April 17-May 17	Arab World Institute in Paris
Red Palace	Jeddah	Khuzam Palace	June 8-July 18	-
Naphtha (accompanying the Red Palace exhibition)	Jeddah	Khuzam Palace	June 8-July 18	-
BIENALSUR Riyadh	Riyadh	National Museum	November 5 -December 5	Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, Argentina
From the Inside	Al-Diriyah Governorate	Industrial Zone, Al-Diriyah (JAX)	December 8-26	-

### Notable Art Exhibitions in 2019

In addition to "From the Inside," the Ministry of Culture also organized the "Red Palace" exhibition at the Khuzam Palace in Jeddah. Accompanied by "Naphtha," which was mentioned above, the exhibition presented the history of that venerable palace. Further, the ministry oversaw BIENALSUR Riyadh, a part of the travelling Argentinian exhibition called "Restoring Stories, Restoring Imagination," with participation by three Saudi artists and their international colleagues. In a collaboration between the Ministry of Culture and the Arab World Institute in Paris, Riyadh served as the second stop of the traveling exhibition "Cities Destroyed by Terrorism," hosted at the National Museum. This exhibition transported visitors to Arab cities whose cultural heritage has been destroyed by war.

The Saudi Art Council organized the 2019 edition of "21,39 Jeddah Arts," entitled "Al Obour," which featured 25 Saudi artists of different generations, as well as other Arab and international artists.<sup>(88)</sup> The exhibition "Desert X," organized as part of Winter at Tantora, featured contemporary installations exhibited in the open air at historical and archaeological sites in Al-Ula.<sup>(89)</sup> Also among the year's exhibitions were "Space: A Tale," organized by MiSK in Masaha Gallery (formerly called the Prince Faisal bin Fahd Fine Arts Gallery), and "Gallery 23," organized by Pure Art Gallery in collaboration with MiSK. These two exhibitions were particularly important be- cause of the historical and artistic value of the works displayed, which included pieces by the pioneering generations of modern Saudi artists.<sup>(90)</sup> "Gallery 23" featured the work of graduates of the Art Institute for Educators in Riyadh (1965-1990). Pure Art also organized the fifth iteration of "Our Heritage is Our Love" in Riyadh in the mud-brick houses at the King Abdulaziz Historical Center.<sup>(91)</sup> The exhibition scene in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia anticipates many more exhibitions and initiatives related to the visual arts. These include the "Al-Diriyah Biennale" and the "Contemporary Art Exhibition" announced by the Ministry of Culture.



## Key Moments in Saudi Visual Arts

**1953**

The first exhibit of school activities in the history of public education by the artist Abdul Halim Radawi.



**1957**

The Ministry of Culture introduced painting and fine art as a subject in the curriculum for boys' general education.

**1958**

King Saud bin Abdulaziz inaugurated the Ministry of Education's first art exhibition on a national scale.

**1959**

The Ministry of Education introduced painting and fine art as a subject in the curriculum for girls' general education.

**1965**

The establishment of the Art Institute for Educators in Riyadh.

**1968**

Artists Safeya Binzagr and Mounirah Mosly held their first joint exhibition at the Dar Al-Tarbiyyah Al-Hadeethah School headquarters in Jeddah.

**1968**

The implementation of the first artistic work by the artist Abdul Halim Radawi on the streets of Jeddah as part of the "Beautifying Jeddah" Project.

**1974**

The establishment of the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA).



**1979**

The General Presidency of Youth Welfare (GPYW) held the first iteration of the "Saudi Exhibition of Contemporary Art" in Riyadh.

**1987**

The establishment of the House of Saudi Photographers which was involved in photography.

**1989**

The opening of the Al Muftaha Art Village in Aseer, which contained 12 studios and galleries.

**1992**

Saudi Airlines launched an initiative for the Saudi Colors competition, which lasted for several years.



**2000**

The opening of the Safeya Binzagr in Jeddah.



**2003**

The transferal of responsibility for cultural and artistic affairs from the General Presidency for Youth Welfare to the Ministry of Culture and Media and, following this, the creation of the Saudi Scientific Association of Arabic Calligraphy, the Saudi Society of Photography, and the Saudi Art Association.

**2011**

Sisters Shadia and Raja'a Alem participated in the Venice Biennale in the first Saudi contribution to this forum.

**2012**

The launch of the first Saudi Colors forum for photography by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Natural Heritage.

**2014**

The launch of the first 21,39 Jeddah Arts initiative.

**2015**

The inauguration of the Jeddah Sculpture Museum.

**2017**

The establishment of the MiSK Institute of Arts in Riyadh under the auspices of the Mohammed bin Salman Foundation (MiSK).

**2017**

The launch of the Ithra Award for Arts in collaboration with "Art Dubai," specific to Saudi artists, both female and male.

**2018**

The establishment of the Ministry of Culture as the primary patron of the arts in the Kingdom.

**2019**

In December: The MiSK Art Institute reopened the Prince Faisal bin Fahd Fine Arts Hall since he played a foundational role in the emergence of modern art in the Kingdom.

**2019**

In August: The Ministry of Culture announced the establishment of an Academy of Arts specializing in heritage, traditional arts.

**2019**

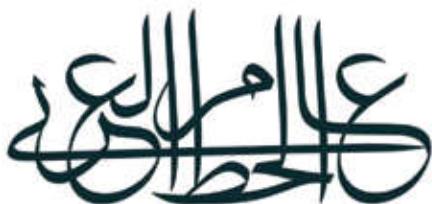
In October: The participation of the Saudi National Pavilion in the Venice Biennale with the "After Illusion" project by Zahra Al Ghamdi, with support from the Ministry of Culture and which was managed by the MiSK Art Institute.

**2019**

In March: The announcement of the "Riyadh Art" project as one of the main Riyadh projects that Saudi and international artists participate in to beautify Riyadh with over 1000 pieces of art.

**2019**

In December: The Ministry of Culture designated 2020 the Year of Arabic Calligraphy.



**Year of Arabic Calligraphy**

# Awards and Achievements

For decades, the Saudi Contemporary Art Award has been esteemed as one of the foremost awards in fine arts.<sup>(92)</sup> Colors of Saudi Arabia, presented by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Natural Heritage, is the leading award in photography. To these have been added the prizes offered by Okaz Cultural Market. All of these prized were last awarded in 2018.

Although no prizes were awarded in 2019, the field anticipates the launch of the National Culture Awards announced by the Ministry of Culture, which since its inception, has been the first sponsor of culture, including visual arts.

Other entities offer notable awards in a variety of fields:

## Ithra Art Prize

This prize is awarded by Aramco's King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra), in conjunction with Art Dubai, to male and female Saudi artists. The winner in 2018 was Ayman Zedani; in 2019 Dania Al-saleh, for her piece Sawtam;<sup>(93)</sup> and in 2020 Fahd bin Nayef.

## "Our Calligraphy is Our Heritage" Award

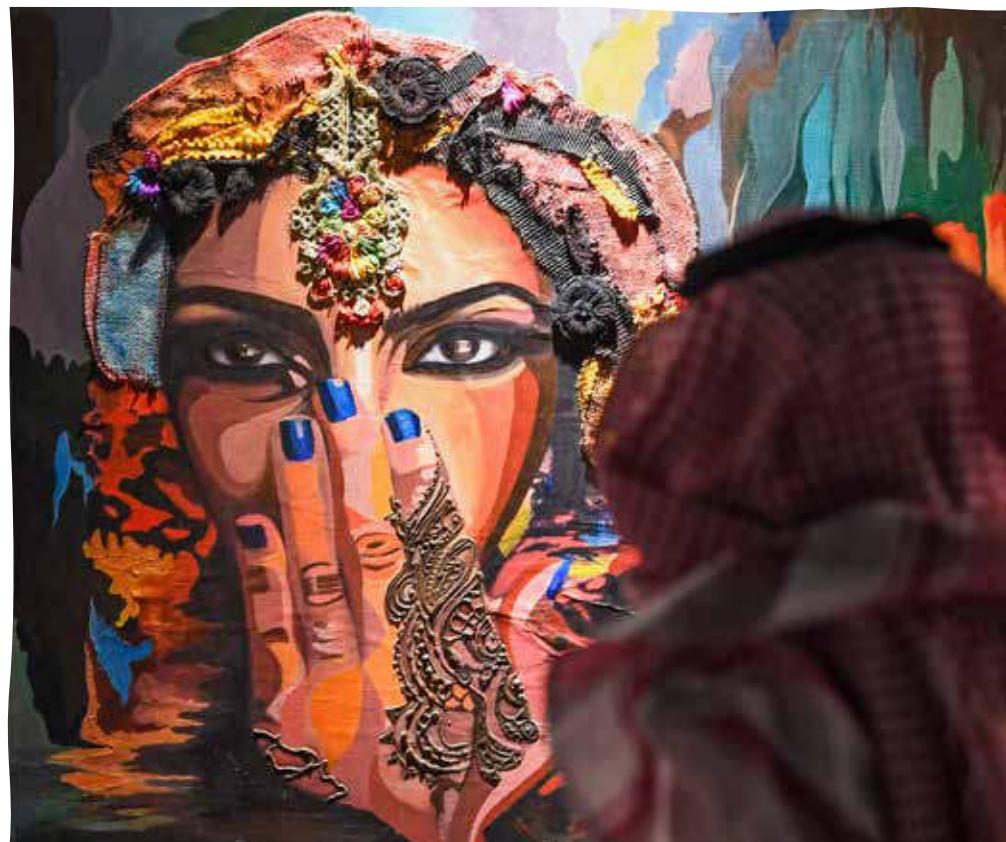
This prize is awarded by the Jeddah branch of SASCA, in conjunction with the Torathuna Social Responsibility Company. Over 700 submissions were received, and 60 were long-listed. The Governor of Makkah, Prince Khaled bin Faisal, presented the 500,000 SAR award to the winners in each of the competition's three Arabic calligraphic styles: thuluth, naskh, and diwani.<sup>(94)</sup>



# Saudi Visual Arts in the World

The first attempts to engage with modern art outside of the borders of the Kingdom took place in the 1950s and 1960s, when the pioneers of fine arts were studying abroad, competing in international competitions and holding solo exhibitions.<sup>(95)</sup> These solo exhibitions represent the beginning of an engagement that was later expanded through governmental, and then civil-society support.

After its formation in 1976, the Committee for Foreign Exhibitions of Fine Art organized the Saudi Culture Week program. In the 1980s and 1990s, it sponsored events at home as well as in the Gulf countries, Iraq, Algeria, Morocco, Sweden, and Germany.<sup>(96)</sup> The Committee's exhibitions of contemporary Saudi art later formed part of a travelling exhibition called "Saudi Arabia: Yesterday and Today." Organized by Riyadh Principality, this exhibit was presented at venues across Germany, the UK, France, Egypt, and the US between 1981 and 1990.<sup>(97)</sup> During this period, Saudi artists maintained close ties with other Arab artists, and some showed their work in Europe outside the framework of group exhibitions.



The entry of civil society organizations into the field of visual arts was a watershed moment for Saudi art abroad. The initiatives of groups like Al-Mansouria, MiSK, and Ithra served to introduce Saudi artists to the world. Saudi artists today have more exposure and some have become known in the field even

without institutional support. The Report compiled a list of no fewer than 25 collective or individual exhibitions abroad. The list is full of names of up-and-coming artists. Table 10-3 displays the most prominent of these exhibitions, which were supported by the Ministry of Culture.

**Table 10-3:** Selected list of Saudi contributions to international exhibitions (2019)

Contribution	Artist(s)	Sponsor	Location
"After Illusion" - Saudi National Pavilion, Venice Biennale	Zahra Al Ghamdi	Ministry of Culture, MiSK	Venice, Italy
Second BIENALSUR, Buenos Aires	Fatima Al-Banawi, Faisal Samra, Ayman Zedani	Ministry of Culture	Buenos Aires, Argentina
"Artificial Intelligence and Intercultural Dialogue" organized by the Hermitage Museum	Dania Alsaleh, Lulwah Al Homoud	Ministry of Culture	St. Petersburg, Russia
"Letters without Words"	Othman Khuzaim	UNESCO	Paris, France

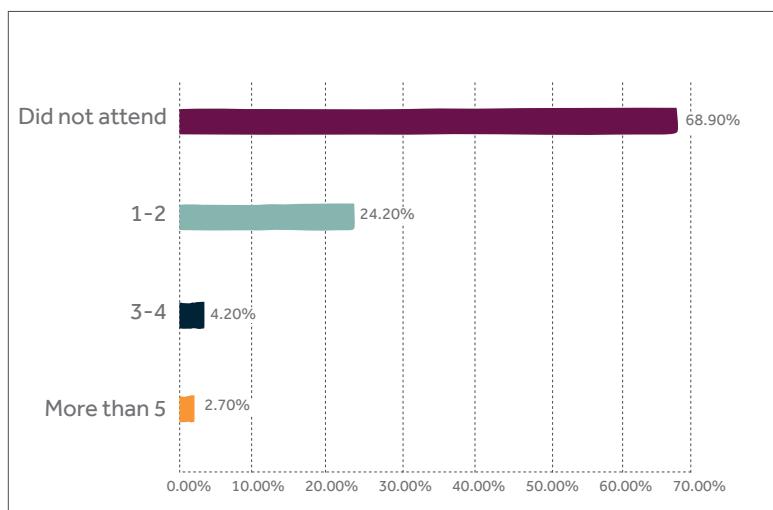
# 2019 Cultural Participation Survey



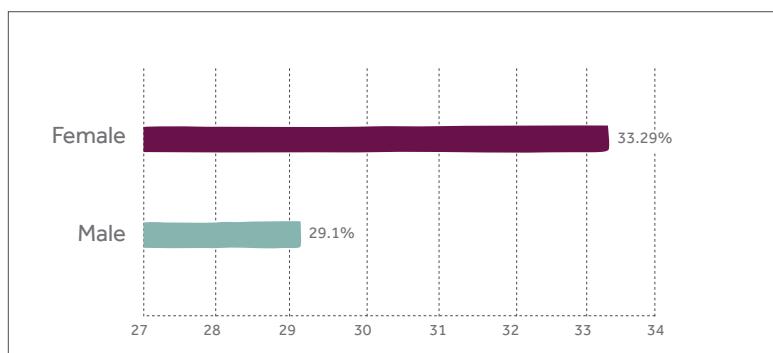
The 2019 Cultural Participation Survey indicates that nearly one-third of adults attended at least one visual-arts event during the last 12 months. This includes visiting exhibitions of fine art, photography, or

handicrafts. This rate of attendance compares favorably to that of other countries, such as Japan and the United States, and also exemplifies an expanding public interest in art (see Figure 10-3).

**Figure 10-1:** Rates of attendance of photography, fine arts, or handicrafts exhibitions among adults (past 12 months)



**Figure 10-2:** Rate of attendance of photography, fine arts, or handicrafts exhibitions (past 12 months), by gender

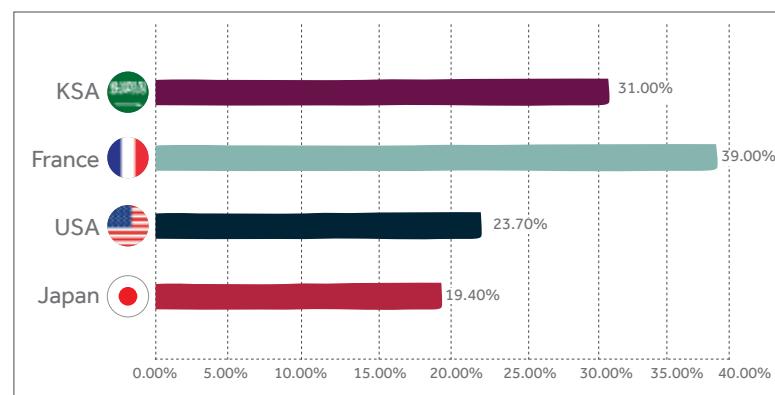


This interest is not limited to reception but includes the practice of art as well. Of survey respondents, 18% reported practicing some form of modern art such as painting or sculpture as an amateur, and 4.8% considered themselves professionals. These rates are comparable to those for the practice of traditional handicrafts as amateurs or professionals, where the percentage was 21.70% (15.60% amateurs, 6.10% professionals). These figures demonstrate the proliferation of artistic practice, which can be invested in to develop the field.

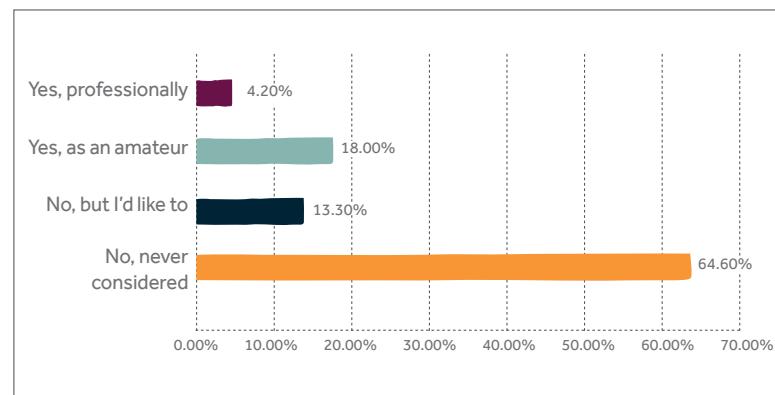
Another significant observation that can be drawn from the survey data is the higher rate of interest in art among women compared to men. This is most evident in rates of practicing art, with 28.25% of women reporting that they practice several types of art, as opposed to only 16.99% of males. These numbers demonstrate the importance of Saudi women in visual arts, a field they have participated in since the beginning.



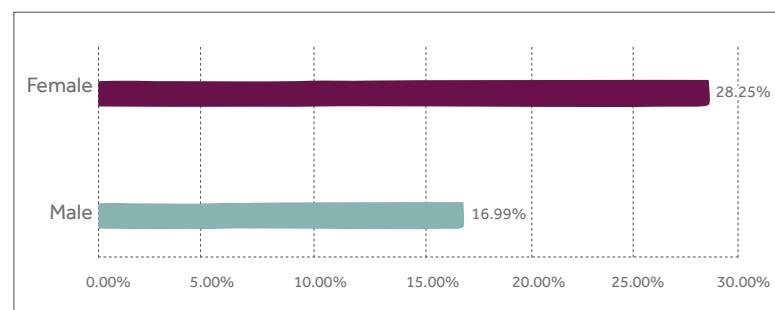
**Figure 10-3: Attendance of art exhibitions at least once in the past 12 months, by country<sup>(98)</sup>**

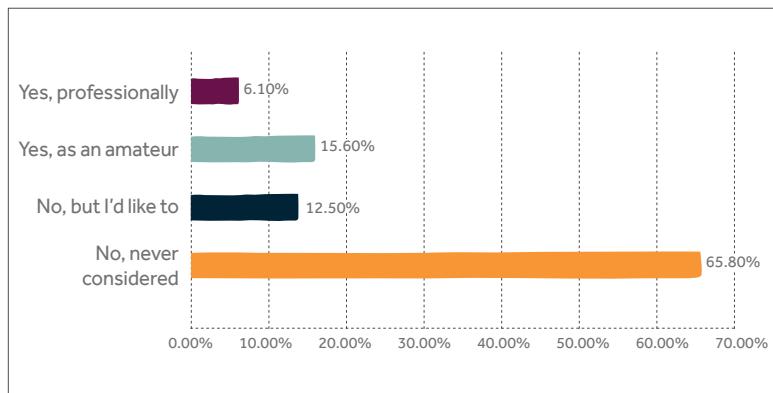
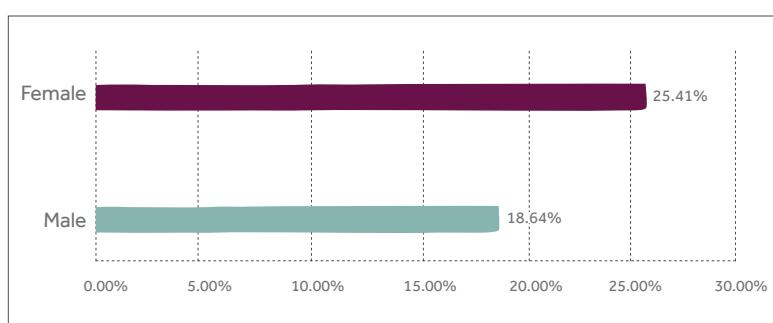


**Figure 10-4: Rates of practicing art, such as sculpture or painting**



**Figure 10-5: Proportion who practice art (including amateurs and professionals), by gender**



**Figure 10-6:** Proportion who practice handicrafts**Figure 10-7:** Proportion who practice handicrafts (including amateurs and professionals), by gender

# Infrastructure and Investment

## Academic Education and Vocational Training

The beginning of the 2010s saw the first harbingers of change in the Saudi art education system. Between 1981 and 2002, 28 art education departments were established in schools of education, though there were still no fine arts departments.<sup>(99)</sup> By 2016, only 8 remained, alongside seven departments for female students at public universities in the fields of fine arts, sculpture, art history, and applied arts.<sup>(100)</sup> The transformation began with the establishment of the College of Art and Design at King Abdulaziz University (2009)<sup>(101)</sup> and the restructuring of the arts college at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, which the Council of Higher Education approved in 2011.<sup>(102)</sup> While the role of schools of education in paving the way for visual arts in the Kingdom should not be overlooked, there are now departments specializing in fine arts and design at a number of Saudi universities. A selection of programs that reflects this moment of restructuring in Saudi arts education appears below.



**Table 10-4:** Visual arts and graphic design departments in public universities<sup>(103)</sup>

University	Department
Taif University	Arts
Jazan University	Applied Arts
Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University	Visual Arts
Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University	Graphic Design
Jeddah University	Graphic Design
Jeddah University	Painting and Arts
Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University	Graphics and Multimedia
Umm Al-Qura University	Publication and Advert Design/Visual Arts
University of Hail	Fine Arts
Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University	Product Design/Publication and Multimedia Design



However, the most important transformations of 2019 in the field of visual arts came from the Ministry of Culture's launch of programs that have the potential to transform of art education. The most important of these are the following:

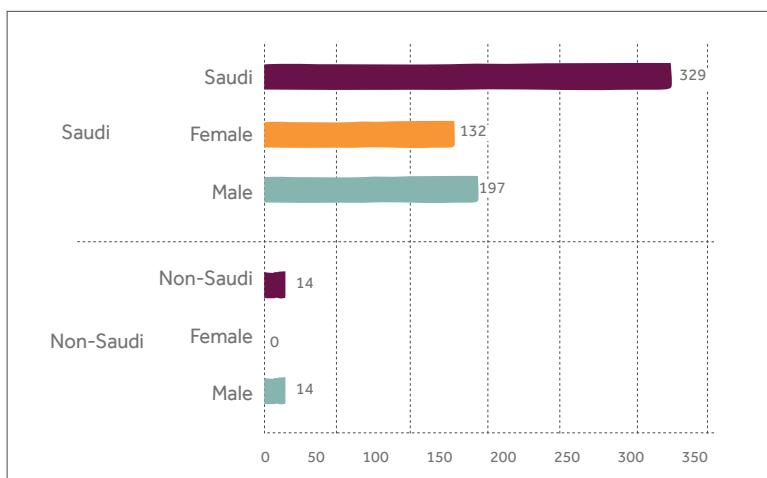
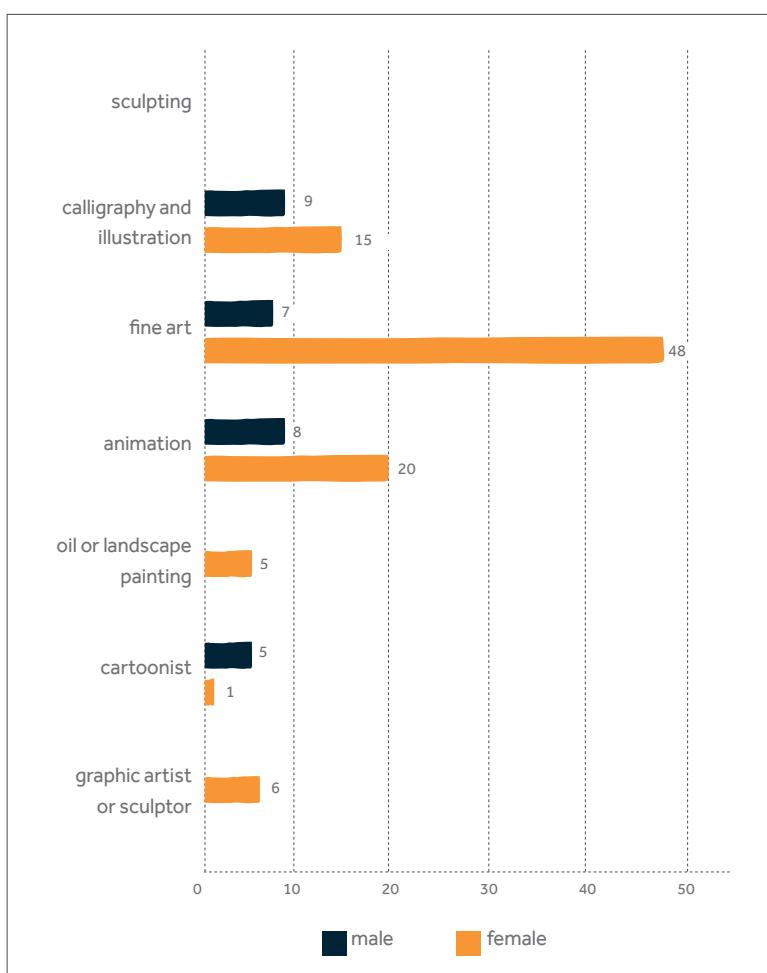
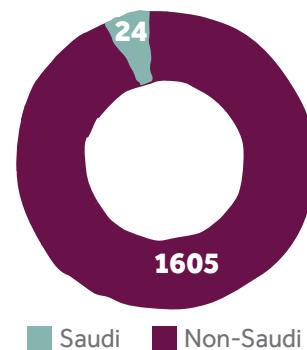
- After a decades-long scarcity of specialized academies, the Ministry of Culture announced the establishment of art institutes. One of these will focus on heritage and traditional arts. In August, the Ministry gave notice that it would begin accepting applications from prospective students in 2020.
- The launch of the Cultural Scholarship Program, beginning in 2020, offering talented students from all regions opportunities to study abroad or study a culturally significant discipline such as the visual arts.
- In conjunction with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture seeks to incorporate the arts into school curricula. The Ministry is

also responsible for issuing permits to institutes, universities, and private schools regarding all innovative cultural and artistic activities, including programs, exhibitions, and new facilities.

In addition to the curriculum changes that spur on professional art development, some other opportunities are available to aspiring artists. The Technical Vocational and Training Corporation relies on 21 institutes throughout 9 provinces to provide training in fine art and design. None of these institutes specialize professionally in visual arts, with the exception of the Arts and Skills Institute in Riyadh, which offers a certificate program in visual arts.<sup>(104)</sup> The leading institution in this domain is the Saudi Center for Fine Arts in Jeddah because of its continued course offerings over the past three decades. Other institutions also play a role in arts training through workshops open to the public. These include the MiSK Art Institute, which offered 24 workshops in 7 provinces,<sup>(105)</sup> as well as Ithra and the branch locations of SASCA.

## Labor Market and Art Specializations

According to data from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, there are 6,272 people working in visual arts outside the educational system. Of these artists, 15.4% are Saudis. Design for publicity and advertising provides many employment opportunities in the field, with nearly half of the labor force (2,938) working on the advertising side of design. Nationality data for this portion of the labor force is unavailable. As for calligraphy and illustration, which are linked to advertising, the numbers are similar, with 1,629 calligraphers and illustrators, of whom only about 1.5% are Saudis. A noteworthy feature of the 2019 data is the inclusion of statistics for gallery docents, 96% of whom are Saudis, a number which coincides with the increase in number of exhibitions and participation in the arts outside the field of advertising.

**Figure 10-8: Gallery docents by nationality and gender****Figure 10-10: Saudis working in visual arts, by gender****Figure 10-9: Number of employees working as "calligrapher or illustrator"****Fine Arts**

There are 1,943 persons registered as professionals in fine arts, of whom 124 are Saudis. The profession of "illustrator and calligrapher" is the most prevalent. The numbers given do not reflect the totality of artistic practice in the field, but only the number of professionals. In general, these numbers do not accurately account for all the people working as artists professionally, as there are many artists, both early-career and established, who practice their art in addition to some other economic activity. It should be noted that most of the registered artists are female (76.6%), which is consistent with the educational output in the field.



## Photography

Around 1,008 persons work in the field of photography. Nearly half (49.5%) are Saudis. The pattern seen in other fields, stated above, is the same: a weak presence of Saudis in the advertising industry.

## The Art Market

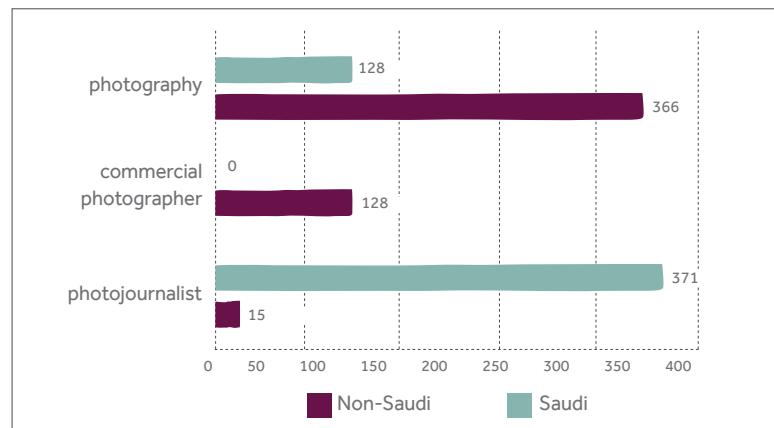
There is little statistical information on the art acquisition market. There is also a lack of consistent standards for assessing or authenticating art, which leads some local art buyers to go abroad in search of new acquisitions, including works by Saudi artists. An important step toward changing this state of affairs was the Ministry of Culture's 2019 charity auction in Historic Jeddah. Hosted by Christie's auction house in partnership with the Hafez Gallery, the event raised 5 million SAR.

Traditional craftsmanship and handiwork have succeeded to some extent in translating creative work into commercial products, laying the groundwork for a full-fledged traditional craft market. The Baree handicrafts program, which participated in 19 festivals and supported 297 artisans, provided an outlet for sales in 2019. This endeavor has revamped the market<sup>(106)</sup> because it has moved the handicraft market beyond the traditional retail sales model into the realm of large corporate contracts, as Saudi artisans learned firsthand when the Radisson Blu Hotel opened in the Riyadh Diplomatic Quarter in 2019.<sup>(107)</sup>

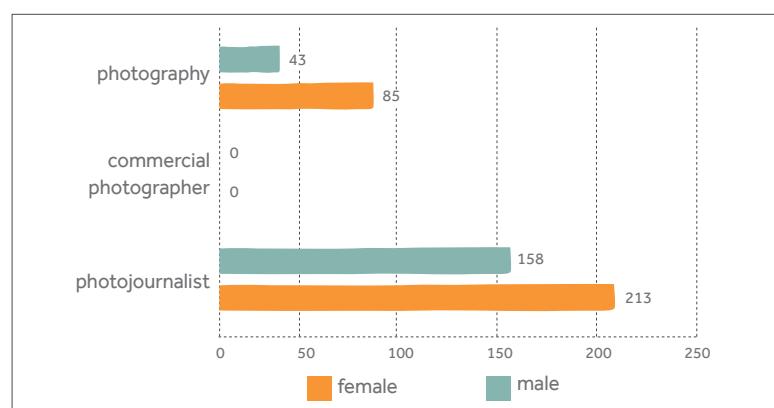
## Financial and Moral Support for Visual Arts

One type of support available to Saudi artists today is residency

**Figure 10-11: Professional photographers by nationality**



**Figure 10-12: Professional photographers by gender**



programs. The Ministry of Culture announced an artist-in-residence program as part of its "non-material support" initiative, beginning with the Al-Balad residency program in Historic Jeddah, based in the historic, 200-year-old Rabat Al-Khanji building. The 6-week residency promotes collaboration between international and local artistic talents and experts.<sup>(108)</sup> In 2019, the MiSK Art Institute also sponsored a group of young talents through its three-month "Fa'nan" residency program, which included cultural and artistic excursions. The program culminated in an exhibition titled "Rethink."<sup>(109)</sup> Further, the MiSK Art Institute,

in cooperation with Fikra Designs, launched a designer-in-residence program which will foster long-term connections between Saudi and Emirati artists.<sup>(110)</sup>

Other forms of support are also becoming available, such as new cultural centers to provide an environment conducive to artistic creativity. It is expected that 2020 will see the creation of a cultural center planned by Art Jameel called "Hayy: Creative Hub" in Jeddah.<sup>(111)</sup> Also planned are the opening of a MiSK Art Institute cultural center in Riyadh, and of Al Muftaha Art Village in Abha, which will offer artist-in-residence programs.<sup>(112)</sup>

**Endnote:**

- (1) This chapter adopts the definition used by the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics for visual arts: "Art forms that focus on the creation of works, which are primarily visual in nature, and aimed at attracting the visual sense." Graphic design will be covered as it relates to visual arts.
- (2) Ahmad bin Masa'id Al-Washmi, Traditional Handicraft and Craftsmanship in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Riyadh: Dar Al-Uaimi, 1430 AH).
- (3) Nasser Muhammad Mansour, Ijazah in Arabic Calligraphy (Cairo: Dar Al-Majdalawi, 2000).
- (4) Muhammad Tahir Al-Kurdi, History of Calligraphy and Its Literature (Riyadh: SASCA, 1402), 419, 424.
- (5) Mohammed Resayes, The History of Fine Arts (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, 2010).
- (6) Abdulrahman Al Sulaiman, The Journey of the Saudi Fine Arts Movement (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, second edition, 2012).
- (7) Mohammed Resayes, The History of Fine Arts (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, 2010).
- (8) Ibid.
- (9) Eman Aljebreen, "Image making: representations of women in the art and career of Safeya Binzagr from 1968-2000," PhD Dissertation (University of Sussex, 2015).
- (10) Abdulrahman Al Sulaiman, The Journey of the Saudi Fine Arts Movement (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, second edition, 2012).
- (11) Ibid.
- (12) Both terminated in 1970 and 1986, respectively.
- (13) Mohammed Resayes, The History of Fine Arts (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, 2010).
- (14) Media and Publishing Department, General Presidency for Youth Welfare (1411 AH Report).
- (15) Mohammed Resayes, The History of Fine Arts (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, 2010).
- (16) Abdulrahman Al Sulaiman, The Journey of the Saudi Fine Arts Movement (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, second edition, 2012).
- (17) Abdullah Mana', The Story of Art in Jeddah (Jeddah: Dar Al-Bilad For Printing and Publishing, 1409 AH).
- (18) See a number of works financed by businessmen. See also, ibid.
- (19) Muhammad Ayda Al-Thaqfi, "Trends in Contemporary Sculpture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: An investigative analysis," Unpublished MA Thesis (Umm Al-Qura University, 2018).
- (20) This was an initiative of the Ministry of Defense and Aviation, as it was known at that time.
- (21) Mohammed Resayes, The History of Fine Arts (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, 2010).
- (22) Interview with Muhammad Al-Monif, Artist and Editor of Fine Arts, Riyadh, November 17, 2019; Interview with Saad Al-Obied, Fine Arts Artist, Riyadh, November 19, 2019.
- (23) Mohammed Resayes, The History of Fine Arts (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, 2010).
- (24) Abdulrahman Al Sulaiman, The Journey of the Saudi Fine Arts Movement, 2d ed. (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, 2012).
- (25) Mohammed Resayes, The History of Fine Arts (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, 2010).
- (26) "President of the House of Arts in Jeddah in conversation with Rawafid News," Rawafid Al-Arabiyya News, June 6, 2012.
- (27) "House of Artists in Jeddah Welcomes Chinese Artists, Ashraq Al-Awsat, April 12, 2002.
- (28) Mohammed Resayes, The History of Fine Arts (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, 2010).
- (29) Interview with Saad Al-Abid, Fine Arts Artist, Riyadh, November 19, 2019.
- (30) Mohammed Resayes, The History of Fine Arts (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, 2010).
- (31) Interview with Muhammad Al-Monif, Artist and Editor of Fine Arts, Riyadh, November 17, 2019.
- (32) SASCA, Annual Report 1431 AH (SASCA, 1431 AH).
- (33) Saudi Photography Association, Annual Report 1431 AH (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2008).
- (34) National Center for Archives and Records.
- (35) "Saudi Colors 2012," Saudi Colors, <http://colors.sa/About/2012/Pages/default.aspx>.
- (36) For more information on Saudi photographers and their achievements, see 100 Saudi Photographers (Dar Al-Sahara, 2013).
- (37) "President of the House of Saudi Photographers in the Kingdom, Salih Aqbawi: dozens of photographers participate in their work together to celebrate Riyadh, the capital of Arab culture," Al-Jazirah, December 8, 2000.
- (38) Mohammed Resayes, The History of Fine Arts (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture and Media, 2010).
- (39) Autobiography of Safeya Binzagr, "House of Safeya Binzagr," <<http://daratsb.com/ar/safeya>>.
- (40) Award winners for the Saudi Contemporary Art exhibition 24, Ministry of Media, October 30, 2018, <https://www.media.gov.sa/news/2502>.
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# Museums

- Museums in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview
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# Museums in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview



Official interest in antiquities museums in Saudi Arabia can be traced back to 1945, when the Kingdom participated in the founding of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Soon after, the Kingdom signed the Cultural Treaty of the Arab League. Article 10 of the treaty emphasizes the need to focus on the field of antiquities in the Arab world and to convene archaeological conferences. Museums were discussed at the first five meetings of archaeological conferences held by the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALESCO).<sup>(1)</sup>

Community initiatives in the field, however, date back to the early twentieth century, when Muhammad Salih Ba'ishen founded the first private museum inside his home in Jeddah in 1902. He collected antiquities and artifacts from Jeddah as well as from a range of Arab and Asian countries.<sup>(2)</sup> Decades later, Saudi public museums were established for preservation and educational purposes and have long been associated with heritage and archeology<sup>(3)</sup>. The Law of Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage, established by Royal Decree in 2014, defines a museum as a "place, open to the public on fixed dates, where archaeological, artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific objects are permanently displayed in a manner that achieves cultural, educational, or recreational objectives."<sup>(4)</sup> The changing nature of official interest in museums demonstrates the various distinct stages that the concept of museums has undergone locally.



### Museums as Repositories

The first Saudi public museum was established before the field of museums and antiquities enjoyed governmental support. The main purpose of museums established in the 1960s and 1970s was to preserve artifacts and make them available to researchers.<sup>(5)</sup> The country's first museum, the Jeddah Museum of Artifacts (al-'adyyat), occupied a large hall in the Technical Affairs Building for Mineral Resources, which later became affiliated with the Ministry of Petroleum and Minerals (now the Ministry of Energy). The museum was filled with books, ancient Islamic stone inscriptions, ceramic vessels, and coins. This museum was already open in 1961 when it was visited by Abdulquddus Al-Ansari, who described its holdings in detail in his book Between Antiquities and Heritage.

Cabinet Resolution No. 727, issued in 1964, marks the beginning of effective official interest in museums. The resolution established an Antiquities Department linked to the Ministry of Education. The department began its work in one of the halls of the Model Capital Institute in Riyadh and has worked since its inception to establish museums throughout the Kingdom's regions.<sup>(6)</sup> Antiquities and museums have been associated with the Ministry of Education due to the relationship between antiquities, education, history, and geography. The ministry has branches in all regions of the Kingdom, including villages and deserts, and has access to antiquities from all regions.<sup>(7)</sup> Royal directives were issued calling for antiquities in the possession of government institutions, commissions, other sectors, and individuals to be relinquished. This collection

of artifacts later formed the core of collection of the National Museum of Antiquities and Folklore.<sup>(8)</sup>

Two years later, in 1966, universities began to play a role in the field. The Department of Arabic in the College of Arts at King Saud University, then known as Riyadh University, opened a museum that collected artifacts of traditional Saudi heritage to preserve them in the face of accelerating lifestyle changes in the Arabian Peninsula at that time.<sup>(9)</sup> The following year, the university opened the Museum of Antiquities as a part of the History and Archaeology Society under the auspices of the Department of History in the College of Arts. Supervised by the archaeologist Abdulrahman Al-Ansary, its goal was to preserve the artifacts discovered by members of the society on their expeditions or

elsewhere.<sup>(10)</sup> After the Society was founded, an archaeological division was added to the Department of History in response to calls from the Department of Antiquities and Museums in the Ministry of Education. This division aimed to produce qualified Saudi graduates in the field.<sup>(11)</sup> In 1978, it became the first department of antiquities and museums in the Kingdom.<sup>(12)</sup> It was the sole department devoted to antiquities until the Departments of Tourism and Archaeology at Jazan University and the University of Hail were established in 2009. Later, the department began to offer master's and doctoral degrees,<sup>(13)</sup> and its graduates played foundational roles in the Department of Antiquities and Museums.

When the Five-Year Development Plans began in 1972, Royal Decree

M/26 was issued, forming the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) and approving the Law of Antiquities, which at that time provided regulations only for artifacts, not for museums.<sup>(14)</sup> This law remained in effect for nearly 45 years until it was replaced by the Law of Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage.

Later, the Antiquities Department relocated to an independent headquarters<sup>(15)</sup> in Al-Shemaisy, in Riyadh, adjacent to the National Museum of Antiquities and Folklore, which was opened in 1978. In addition to its former holdings, the Department added many collections that had been assembled after the Comprehensive Archaeological Survey of 1976 and subsequent excavations, as well as collections gathered from individuals who were encouraged to submit their artifacts.<sup>(16)</sup> Years lat-





er, its collection would become the foundation of the National Museum.

This period was marked by many geographical, historical, and literary studies that treated the subject of museums and antiquities. A number of explorers, surveyors and historians including Abdulquddus Al-Ansari, Hamad Al-Jassir, Muhammad Al-Aqili, and Atiq Al-Biladi,<sup>[17]</sup> published books and articles in the field.<sup>[18]</sup>

### Antiquities Museums

After the Department of Antiques and Museums moved to its own headquarters, it became the auxiliary agency for Antiquities and Museums, setting in motion long-term plans to advance the sector.<sup>[19]</sup> Museums began to open in areas known for their rich archaeological

sites that possessed enough artifacts to fill a museum. These were not only museums but also administrative bodies for the agency in the areas where it had established research centers. This dual function established a close connection between museums and the antiquities sector.<sup>[20]</sup> Throughout this period, the agency focused on building local museums to serve as administrative units and research centers for antiquities specialists. It also worked on restoring historical structures and transforming them into museums in the hope that they would become regional museums (museums in the major cities of the region) with responsibility for antiquities in the region in which they were located. In 1987, six local museums opened in the cities of Al-Jawf, Hofuf, Tayma, Najran, Jazan, and Al-Ula.<sup>[21]</sup> In 1995, three restored palaces opened as museums: the Masmak Fortress

Museum in Riyadh, which played an integral role in King Abdulaziz's first effort to unite the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; the Khuzam Palace as the Jeddah Regional Museum, and the Shubra Palace as the Taif Regional Museum.<sup>[22]</sup> The restorations of Al-Majma'ah Museum in Al-Rabi'a Heritage Palace and the Hijaz Railway Museum in Al-Madinah<sup>[23]</sup> were completed in 1998.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the emergence of specialized museums, whose holdings did not primarily consist of archaeological or heritage-related artifacts collected by government agencies or universities. The Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority, for example, opened the Currency Museum in Riyadh, Aramco opened the Oil Museum in Dhahran,<sup>[24]</sup> and the College of Science at King Saud University opened the Zoological Museum.<sup>[25]</sup> Additionally,

the first university publication specializing in antiquities and museums was issued on the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the Department of Antiquities and Museums at King Saud University.<sup>(26)</sup> It remained the only publication of its kind for many years until the first peer-reviewed Saudi university periodical was published by the same department.

The Assistant Undersecretary of Antiquities and Museums worked in tandem with regional and international organizations, in particular the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS), the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, the Islamic World Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, and UNESCO. The Antiquities and Museums Agency also signed a number of international agreements and diligently attended important events in the field. The Kingdom greatly

benefited from this cooperation because it brought experts in museum restoration and development to the Kingdom, and local specialists were able to visit field projects in other countries.<sup>(27)</sup>

### **The National Museum and the Museums Sector at the End of the Second Millennium**

Under the patronage of King Fahd, the National Museum opened in Riyadh as part of the King Abdulaziz Historical Center in 1999, the centennial of King Abdulaziz's recapture of the city.<sup>(28)</sup> This event marked a milestone in the field thanks to the museum's comprehensive coverage of the history of the Kingdom. The Museum's architectural style complements the King Abdulaziz Historical Center's other buildings.<sup>(29)</sup> It included a women's section that would contribute to the museum's development in the coming years, especially through the Museum

Education Program, which aimed to attract more visitors, particularly families and pupils on field trips. After the museum opened, a great effort was undertaken to publicize it on visual, audio, and written media platforms. Even so, museum traffic remained lower than hoped, as school curricula were insufficiently integrated with so-called museum education, and community support and cultural tourism programs were not forthcoming.<sup>(30)</sup>

Despite the lack of financial resources and professional staff during that period,<sup>(31)</sup> the agency of Antiquities and Museums opened Al-Namas Museum (also known as Palace of Al-Namas) in 2000. A year later, the Al-Qunfudhah City Museum of Archaeology and Folklore opened. This was the last museum founded under the auspices of the agency.<sup>(32)</sup> Other governmental and private actors established specialized museums associated with their own field of activity. For example, the Ministry





of Defense and Aviation (now the Ministry of Defense) inaugurated its first museum, the Saqr Al-Jazira Aviation Museum in Riyadh, during the centennial of King Abdulaziz's recapture of the city. The General Presidency for the Affairs of the Two Holy Mosques opened the Two Holy Mosques Architecture Exhibition in Makkah,<sup>(33)</sup> as well as museums in archaeological, military, medical, and scientific faculties.<sup>(34)</sup>

### Museums as Tourist Destinations

Royal Decree No. 141, issued in 2003, attached the Agency of Antiquities and Museums to the High Commission for Tourism and charged the commission with overseeing the Museums and Antiquities sub-sector, considering both to be important elements of boosting tourism.<sup>(35)</sup> That year, both the Al-Bahah Museum and the Hail Museum opened in two temporary

buildings, as did the Tabuk Regional Museum, which had been located in the exhibition hall of the region's Department of Education. The Heritage and Antiquities Museum in Unayzah's restored Albassam Heritage House opened the following year.<sup>(36)</sup>

In 2008,<sup>(37)</sup> after the completion of the merger,<sup>(38)</sup> the General Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, as it was then called, began to implement its Five-Year Plan. Although the plan focused on the Program for Expanding Cultural Resource Development as a part of the National Tourism Plan, the sub-sector still sought to support research, establish new museums, develop existing ones,<sup>(39)</sup> and renovate a number of historic buildings for government use during the rule of King Abdulaziz. It also invested in restoring some historic buildings in the governorates and turning them into museums, and in founding specialized museums with the cooperation of other government agencies. Last-

ly, it prepared a plan to improve the National Museum.<sup>(40)</sup>

The majority of museums in this period arose from plans to develop tourist sites and villages with important architectural heritage. After its 2009 renovation<sup>(41)</sup> and subsequent opening, the Subaie Heritage House in Shaqra, for example, made the city a tourist destination for groups of foreigners, citizens, and residents alike.<sup>(42)</sup> In 2012, the Al-Ghat Museum opened after its building was renovated as part of the Heritage Village Development Project (in the Ghat Governorate). The Museum of the Shami Hajj Road in the Islamic Fortress in Al-Hijr (also known as Mada'in Salih), also a part of the Heritage Village Development Project, was opened in Al-Ula Governorate. Lastly, in 2013, the Hijaz Railway Museum was opened in the locomotive workshop at the Hijaz Railway station in Al-Madinah. It also offers museum exhibitions in the main railway station.<sup>(43)</sup>

# Saudi Museums Today



## New Policies and New Horizons

The museums sector has undergone major changes over the past five years. These changes are linked to a number of general policies aimed at developing the sector. These policies accord museums profound importance not only within the context of boosting tourism, but also as cultural institutions that enrich national identity and culture and that improve quality of life.

In 2014,<sup>(44)</sup> Royal Decree No. 28863 ratified the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Cultural Heritage Program.<sup>(45)</sup> This program is tasked with the protection, development, and stewardship of cultural heritage in museums and with buttressing the Kingdom's civilizational standing. It also works to raise public awareness and foster a sense of shared identity, while also using heritage to encourage comprehensive economic development through its ties with the tourism industry. The program implemented several initiatives to establish and develop museums<sup>(46)</sup> after nearly six months of support from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Program. The Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage Law was also issued in 2014 by Royal Decree No. M/3, of which Article 7 concerns museums.<sup>(47)</sup>

The year 2016 saw the launch of Saudi Vision 2030,<sup>(48)</sup> which lays out six strategic First-Level Objectives. The first, to "strengthen Islamic values and national identity," comprises three Second-Level Objectives, one of which is to "strengthen the national identity." This objective, in turn, is made up of three Third-Level Objectives, one of which is "to conserve and promote the Islamic, Arab, and

National heritage of the Kingdom." To accomplish this vision, twelve programs were founded, including three linked to national heritage and, by extension, museums. These programs are the National Transformation Program 2020, the Quality of Life Program, and the National Character Enrichment Program.<sup>(49)</sup> The National Transformation Program adopted 33 initiatives, including the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Cultural Heritage Program.<sup>(50)</sup> Furthermore, the Quality of Life Program has set an ambitious goal to open 106 museums throughout the Kingdom.

The Kingdom has sought to stimulate international cooperation in the field of museums by becoming a member of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) of UNESCO and the ICOM Regional Alliance of Arab Countries (ICOM-ARAB). The Kingdom participates in their regular meetings, benefiting from ICOM's activities and participating actively in ICOM-ARAB.<sup>(51)</sup> The Saudi Committee for Museums (ICOM-Saudi), established in 2015 under the aegis of the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society,<sup>(52)</sup> began to see the results of these efforts this year when ICOM-ARAB was elected to the ICOM Board of Directors for the 2019-2022 session. His Highness Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan Al-Saud, the Minister of Culture, the honorary president of ICOM-Saudi, was selected as president.<sup>(53)</sup>

### Museums as a Cultural Sub-Sector: The Ministry of Culture and the Museums Commission

The Council of Ministers issued a decision in early 2020 to transfer the



activities related to national heritage from the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH, now the Ministry of Tourism) to the Ministry of Culture.<sup>(54)</sup> Soon after, supervision of the National Museum was transferred to the Ministry of Culture, and the Minister of Culture His Highness Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan Al-Saud was tasked with setting up the museum's board of trustees.<sup>(55)</sup> This took place prior to the Ministry of Culture's establishment of a specialized body in the sub-sector, the Museums Commission, which is charged with continuing museum development under the leadership of its CEO, Stefano Carboni. The ministry and the Diriyah Gate Development Authority announced plans to develop the first public art museum in the Kingdom, to be called the Saudi

Museum of Contemporary Art. This museum will be built in Al-Bujairi in Diriyah Governorate.<sup>(56)</sup>

The SCTH has completed museum projects in Tabuk, Aseer, and Al-Jawf, and submitted them for approval to the Ministry of Culture so that they can open soon. These museums, in addition to the Hail Museum, were constructed according to the most up-to-date global standards and with an eye towards integrating each region's heritage and architectural style. The museums exhibit and will likewise use the latest technology. They include halls that will house both temporary and visiting exhibitions. Plans are in place to make these halls cornerstones of culture to attract the local community and promote cultural activity as well as tourism.<sup>(57)</sup>

## Public Museums: Steady Quantitative and Qualitative Growth

Since the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) assumed responsibility for the sub-sector, twenty-six museums have been opened, including archaeological, military university, scientific, or medical museums at colleges and universities, or museums opened by other government or semi-governmental actors.<sup>(58)</sup> Approximately one-third do not specialize in antiquities or heritage, demonstrating that museums are no longer limited to antiquities, as they had been for decades due to the organizational and administrative links between the two. Today, the sub-sector takes a more comprehensive view of museums.



**Table 11-1:** Museums opened from 2007-2018

Museum Type	Number	Locations
Regional	1	Northern Border in 2007 <sup>(59)</sup>
Renovated Palaces and Provincial Museums, mostly in the Historical Museums and Palaces of King Abdulaziz	17	Al-Zulfi, <sup>(60)</sup> Al-Duwadimi, Wadi Al-Duwasir, Duba, Al-Wajh, Shaqra, Shami Hajj Road in the Islamic Fortress in Al-Hijr, Hijaz Railway in the Locomotive Workshop in Al-Hijr, Al-Majmaah, Al-Badi'a, Al-Ghat, Tabuk Fortress, Hijaz Railway Station (Tabuk Station), Qurayyat, Al-Hofuf, Al-Ahsa, and the Khuzam Palace, which was turned into the Jeddah Regional Museum named after King Abdulaziz <sup>(61)</sup>
Open-Air, Outdoor	1	The Jeddah Sculpture Museum, an art museum featuring a number of sculptures that were part of the Jeddah landscape from since the 1960s <sup>(62)</sup>
Virtual	1	Brochure: "The Virtual Museum of the Kingdom's Archaeological Masterpieces" <sup>(63)</sup>
Specialized	6	Museum of Science and Technology in Islam at the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Thuwal, which has its own website; <sup>(64)</sup> the Museum of Science and Technology in Islam at the Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh; <sup>(65)</sup> The Museum of Arab Islamic Art at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh; <sup>(66)</sup> and the Ithra Museum and the Ithra Children's Museum at the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dhahran; the King Salman Science Oasis in the Municipality of Riyadh, one of eight interactive science and technology museums, called King Salman Science Oases. These museums will be located in different neighborhoods of Riyadh, and one will be a children's museum. <sup>(67)</sup>

Of the museums that were opened over the last decade, none has been more important than the Ithra Museum at the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dhahran, which opened in 2018 under the auspices of Aramco. It was constructed using the most up-to-date technology and focused on providing interactive experiences for patrons,<sup>(68)</sup> including four galleries, each of which focuses on a specific theme and holds regular exhibitions. These galleries are: Funoon Gallery, which is dedicated to contemporary art; Ajyal Gallery, which is dedicated to Saudi heritage, culture, and identity as seen in fashion, music, poetry, and art; Kunooz Gallery, which is dedicated to Islamic Art; and Re-hlaat Gallery, which is dedicated to

the natural history of the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>(69)</sup> Later, the Ithra Children's Museum opened its doors under the same policy and now operates in the same fashion.<sup>(70)</sup>

**In 2019, many museums opened, including:**

1. The Ibrahim Palace in Al-Ahsa, following restoration.<sup>(71)</sup>
2. The Hail Regional Museum in conjunction with Hail Season.<sup>(72)</sup>
3. The Diriyah Museum at the Salwa Palace in the Al-Turaif District in Diriyah, specializing in the first Saudi State. It was inaugurated by the Royal Commission for Riyadh in conjunction with Diriyah Season.<sup>(73)</sup>

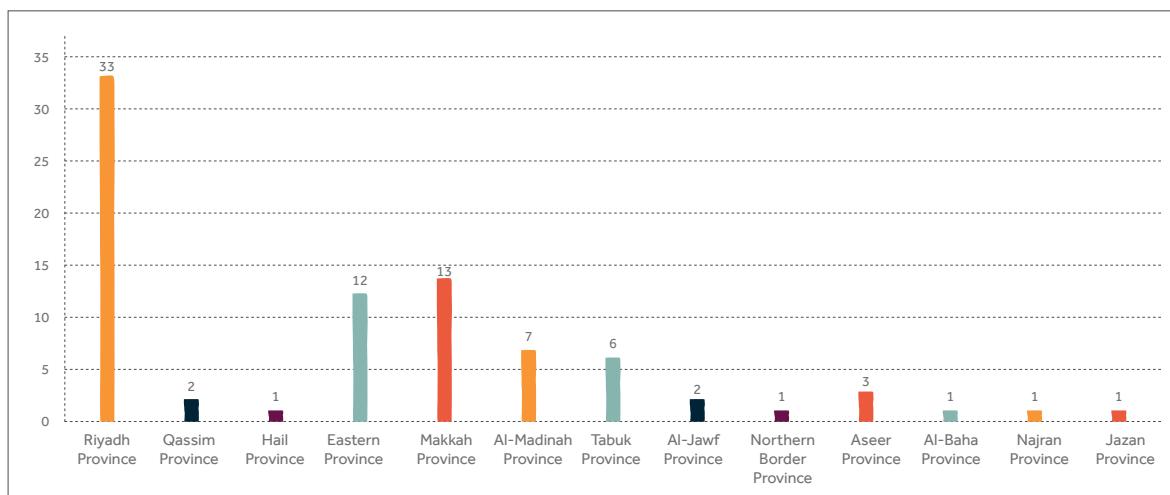
4. The Saudi Women's Museum at the Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh.<sup>(74)</sup>

5. "Qisat Almakan," which provides a 3-D experience offered in eight languages taking patrons on a journey through the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) addition to other historical Islamic narratives. It was inaugurated by the Development of Madinah Authority and has its own website.<sup>(75)</sup>

### Private Museums

Private museums are museums owned by private entities or individuals.<sup>(76)</sup> Since it was issued, the Law of Antiquities has allowed individuals and institutions to establish



**Figure 11-1: Distribution of public museums by province**

private museums.<sup>(77)</sup> The new Law of Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage has continued this policy while also granting such museums financial support, albeit with regulations to monitor the trade of antiquities and heritage-related artifacts and ensure that all items are legally owned.<sup>(78)</sup>

The holdings of private museums vary widely, but most fall under the category of "folk heritage artifacts." Because there is a lack of knowledge on how to preserve and properly document these artifacts, coupled with the fact that they are not stored in independent facilities but inside their owners' homes, private museums are largely underdeveloped. Additionally, they struggle to attract visitors because they lack activities and security guards, in addition to the fact that visitors are often unaware that they exist because their locations are unclear.<sup>(79)</sup> Nevertheless, a few private museums have distinguished themselves by offering quality exhibits in architecturally pleasing spaces and through the diversity and rarity of their holdings. Combined with their ability to host

events, these features have made these collections cultural landmarks in the cities and regions in which they operate.<sup>(80)</sup> These museums include, for example, the Dar Al Madinah Museum for Urban and Cultural Heritage, the Coffee Museum in Al-Ahsa, the Alfelwah and Aljowhara Museum in Dammam, and others. Museums not dedicated to heritage include art galleries like the Abdul Raouf Khalil Museum in Jeddah.<sup>(81)</sup> Additionally, the renowned artist Safeya Binzagr has opened her private library and a gallery containing her work, though the space is not marketed or licensed as a private museum.<sup>(82)</sup>

The Law of Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage outlines the responsibilities of museum regulators in the following manner: "granting licenses; classifying museums into three categories: A, B, and C, based on their collections and activities; according the logo 'Saudi Museum'; providing technical and procedural assistance; making a museum part of tourism routes in its home region; helping to develop exhibitions through professional training and development, including trips to observe

international museums; promoting museums in the Commission's publications and creating special webpages for each museum on the Commission's website that include images, basic information, and directions; and implementing an online portal for private museums."<sup>(83)</sup> Furthermore, the SCTR hosted the Forum on Supporting Private Museum Owners in order to support investment in private museums.<sup>(84)</sup> In 2019, the Training Program for Children of Licensed Private Museum Owners was held at the National Museum to qualify them to care for the museums and ensure that they remain open in the event of the owners' death.<sup>(85)</sup>

These efforts bore fruit, bringing new visitors to private museums. In 2018, the first year private museum traffic was monitored, these museums saw 303,162 visitors.<sup>(86)</sup> In 2019, there were a total of 217 licensed private museums.<sup>(87)</sup> A poll conducted by the Tourism Information and Research Center in 14 private museums in 2019 showed that 67% of visitors expressed total satisfaction with their visit, while 74% noted the richness of the exhibits.<sup>(88)</sup>

## Museum Distribution

Figures 11-1 and 11-2 show that there are museums in every region of the Kingdom. The figures also illustrate the density of private museums in Aseer and Riyadh Provinces as well as the Eastern and Al-Qassim Provinces. The charts highlight the concentration of many public museums in Riyadh Province. Figure 11-1 includes all public museums in the Kingdom, whether at colleges and universities, such as the Pharmacological Museum at the College of Pharmacy at King Saud University, or government museums, such as the King Fahd National Library Museum, the Postal Museum, or the museums at the Ministry of Agriculture.<sup>(89)</sup>

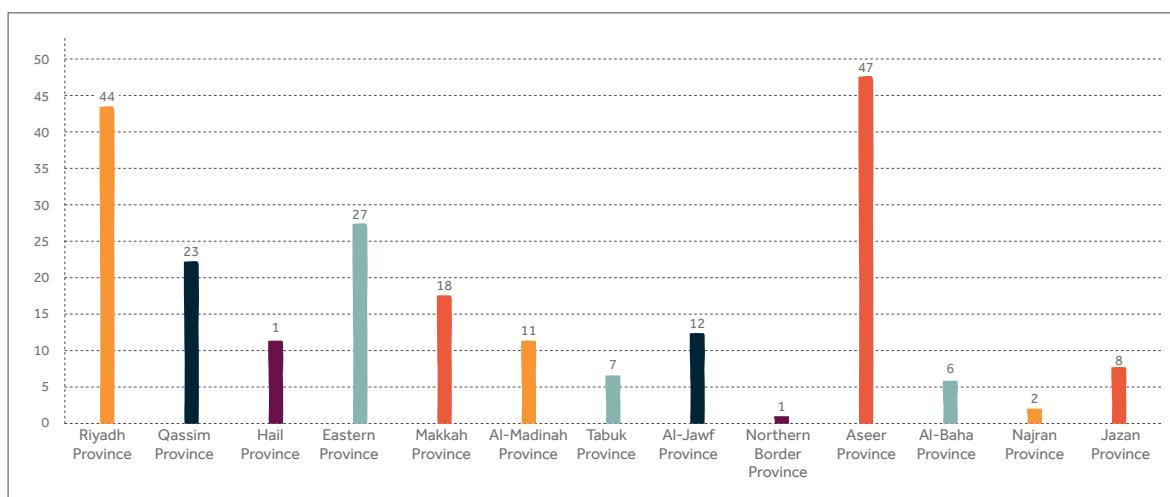
## Foreign, Domestic, and Visiting Exhibitions

The National Museum and other museums, such as the Ithra Museum in Dhahran, have hosted a number of local archaeological, artistic, or other exhibitions, in addition to hosting visiting exhibitions from museums abroad.<sup>(90)</sup> About 217 exhibitions have been held in the National Museum since its opening in 2000.<sup>(91)</sup> Work has also been done to increase investment in exhibitions, subject to appropriate regulation.<sup>(92)</sup> The National Museum organized and hosted the following exhibitions in 2019: the 'Ahd Al-Wafa Sculpture Exhibition, featuring works by the sculptor Wafa Alqunibit at the National Museum; the History and

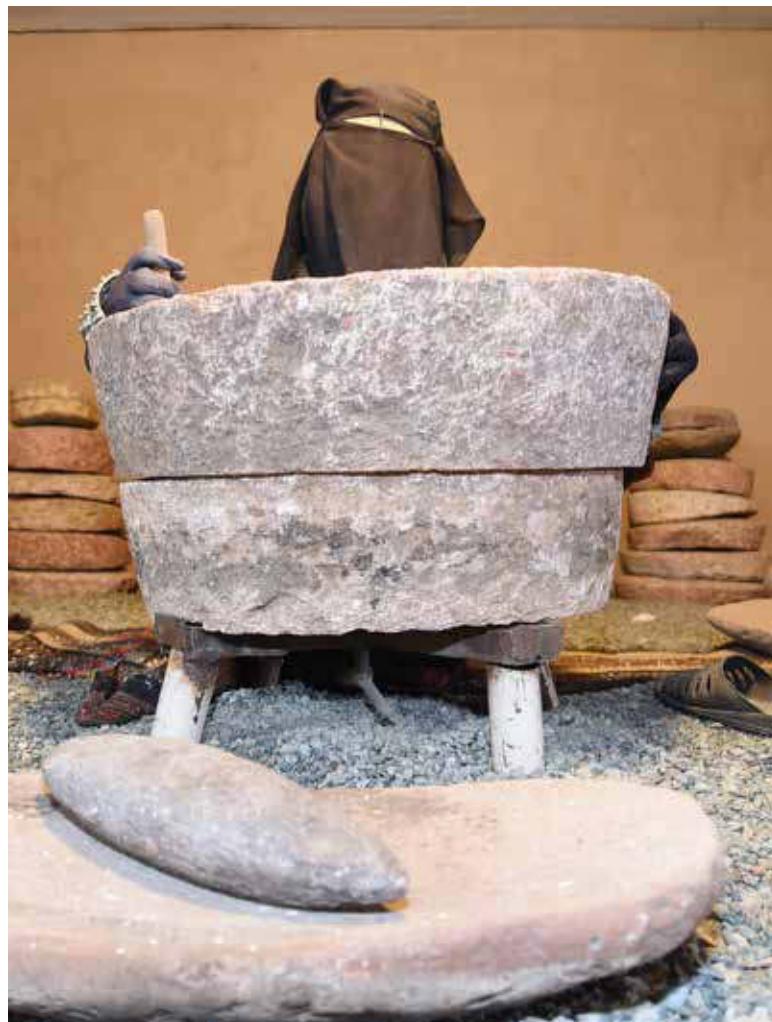
Culture of Korea Exhibition entitled "The Enchanting Journey To Korean Civilization" at the National Museum; the "Cities Destroyed by Terrorism" exhibition; the International BI-ENALSUR Exhibition at the National Museum; the Exhibition of Trade Routes of the Arabian Peninsula at Souk Okaz in Taif; and the "Our Culture is From a Homeland" exhibition at the Panorama Mall in Riyadh on National Day.<sup>(93)</sup> At the Funoon Gallery, the Ithra Museum this year organized the Mara'ina Exhibition, a display of photography and video reflecting the "concepts of Arab identity, history, and culture."<sup>(94)</sup>

In addition to local and visiting exhibitions, the Royal Commission for Al-Ula organized the exhibition

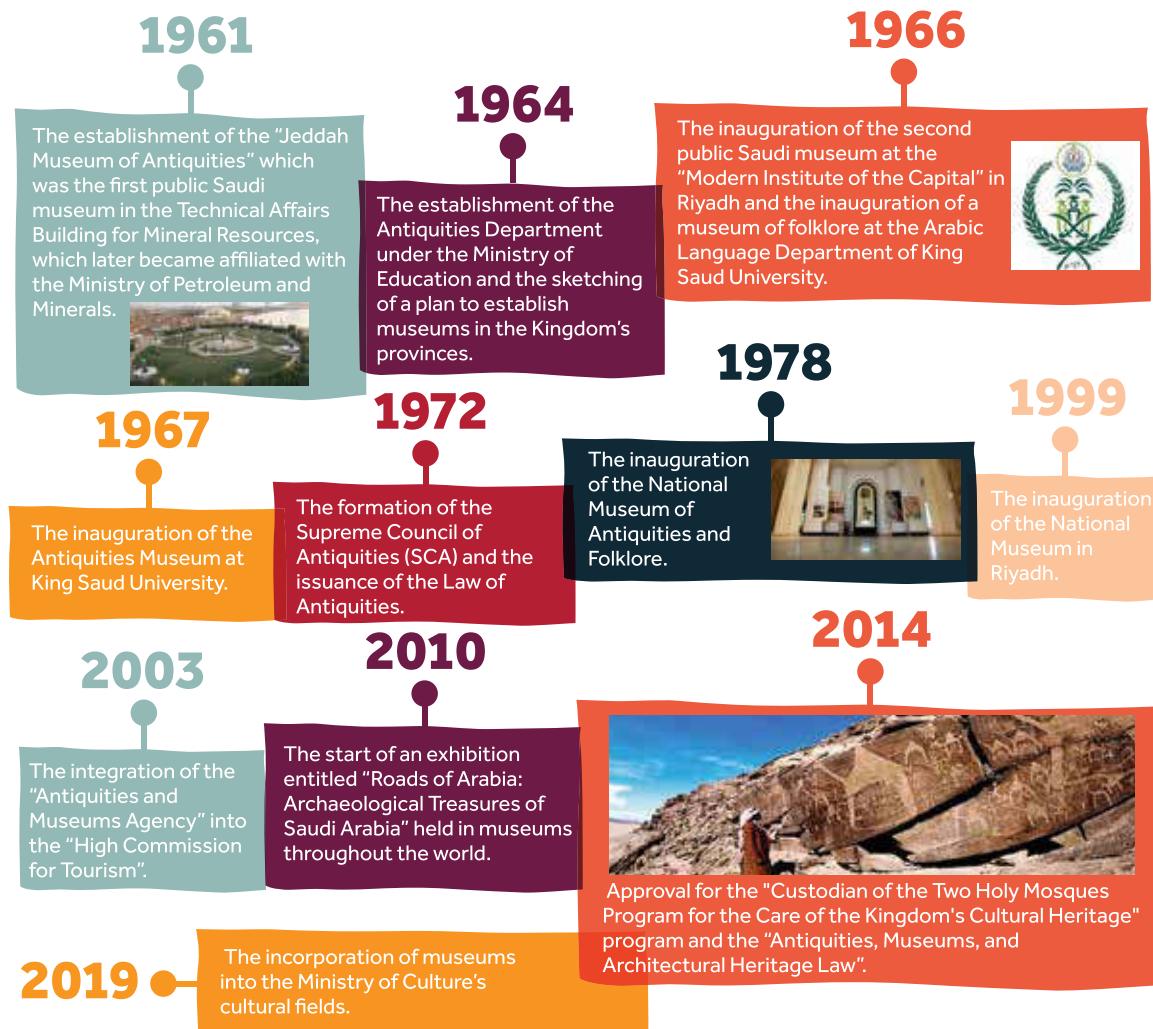


**Figure 11-2: Distribution of private museums by province**

"Al-Ula, Oasis of Wonders in the Arabian Peninsula" at the Arab World Institute in Paris. It also organized an exhibition that participated in the "World Travel Market Exhibition" in London and China.<sup>(95)</sup> The National Museum participated in "The Splendor of Asia: An Exhibition of Asian Civilizations" at the Chinese National Museum in Beijing and contributed an exhibition entitled "Masterpieces of Antiquities in Saudi Arabia Across the Ages" at the Benaki Museum in Athens, Greece.<sup>(96)</sup> This is a rotating exhibition, which has been on display internationally since 2010 as a window into the Kingdom's civilization.<sup>(97)</sup> The National Museum has also organized the Bridges Initiative for the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra), which works to increase communication between Saudis and Americans and to export Saudi culture and art. For example, the Saudi Art Galleries Program arranges Saudi art exhibitions at museums and prominent art centers in the United States. Thus far, it has arranged "five art exhibitions, attended by 19,000, displaying 147 works by 100 Saudi artists in nine states."<sup>(98)</sup>



## Key Moments in Saudi Museums



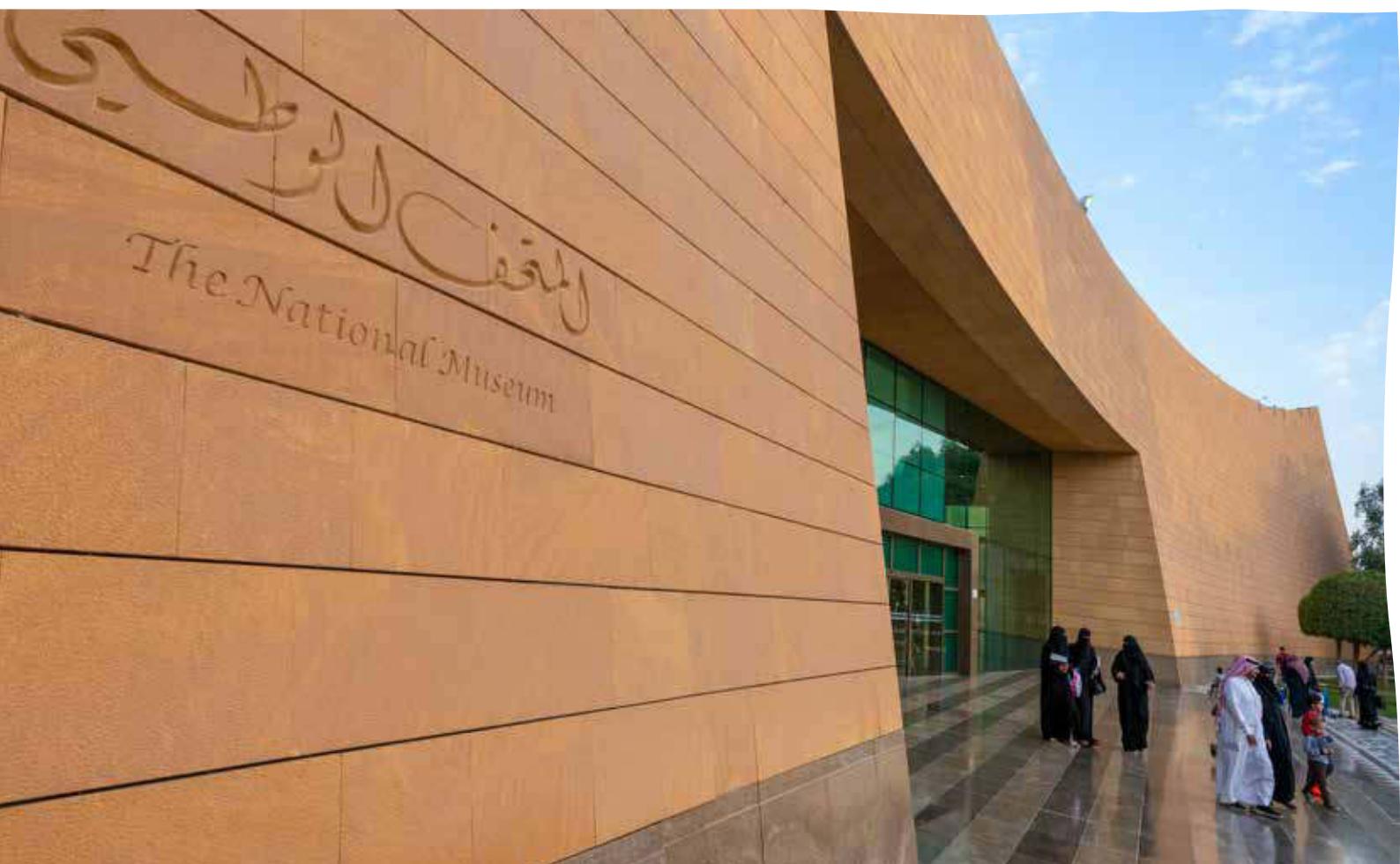
## Key Figures in Saudi Museums (2019):



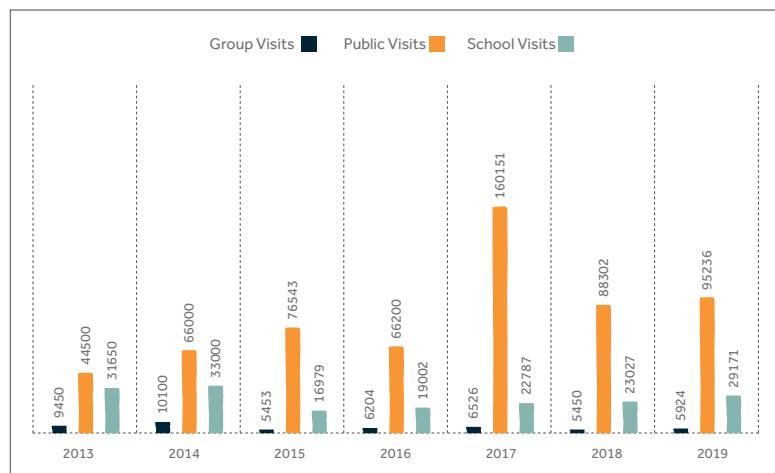
# Museum Culture and the 2019 Cultural Participation Survey

Relevant authorities are working to develop museum culture and increase museum visits, which will, of course, produce opportunities for investment in museum development. This will allow museums to better exhibit Saudi heritage to both citizens and tourists. It will increase the number of job opportunities, while also raising awareness of national heritage, which plays a key role in building national identity.<sup>(99)</sup> A 2019 survey of seven government museums conducted by the Tourism Information and Research Center found that 51% of visitors to public museums believe that these museums "increase feelings of pride towards the Kingdom."<sup>(100)</sup>

One of the greatest challenges facing Saudi museums has been low public awareness and the disconnect of museums from their local communities.<sup>(101)</sup> Compared to other cultural and touristic activities, visits to museums and art galleries accounted for 22.4% of total cultural activity in 2017, a measurement that includes all the Kingdom's museums (with the exception of Al-Jawf). In 2018, this percentage decreased to 14.4%, and Al-Jawf's museums continued to see few visitors. Incoming tourists also did not visit museums in large numbers, which indicates that visitors are unaware of them. In 2017, repeat visits to museums and art galleries amounted to only 2% of total cultural activity. These visits were limited to four regions: Riyadh, Makkah, Al-Madinah, and the Eastern Province. In 2018, the number increased to 3.9%, and repeat visits grew in other regions, including museums in the provinces of Aseer, Jazan, and Najran.<sup>(102)</sup>



**Figure 11-3: National Museum visits by type (2013-2019)<sup>(103)</sup>**



Some parties who are active in the museum sub-sector have implemented a number of programs that aim to develop museum culture. One example is the Investment Commission of the National Museum's efforts to establish the "Museum Education in the National Museum" program in 2005, as mentioned above. In 2007, it held "practical lessons" that linked educational curriculum to museum exhibits.<sup>(104)</sup> This program branched off into programming for educational levels from kindergarten to university, programming for people with special needs,<sup>(105)</sup> and various other programs.<sup>(106)</sup> This program helped to increase school field trips to 902 each year.<sup>(107)</sup> Also helpful are the National Museum's art and heritage exhibitions, seminars, lectures, workshops, readings and other events,<sup>(108)</sup> as well as visiting exhibitions at other museums that have galleries, such as the Ithra Museum in Dhahran.<sup>(109)</sup> Training courses for employees on customer service also contributed,<sup>(110)</sup> as did the availability of volunteer opportunities at the National Museum,<sup>(111)</sup> a virtual tour on

the museum's website,<sup>(112)</sup> a downloadable application, and the use of social media as a cultural heritage platform.<sup>(113)</sup> The "Live Saudi" program—part of the National Transformation Program's initiatives—organizes youth trips to different regions of the Kingdom, especially those with cultural or natural heritage sites, including museums.<sup>(114)</sup>

In addition to these efforts, support has been provided for cultural and heritage events at other museums. Fifteen heritage palaces, which are palaces converted into museums, like the King Abdulaziz Palace in Al-Kharj, have hosted festivals. Additionally, efforts have been made to raise awareness through Saudi National Day celebrations<sup>(115)</sup> and International Museum Day celebrations, which began in 2018 under the slogan "Museums and the Internet: New Approaches and New Audience."<sup>(116)</sup> In 2019, this celebration developed further under the slogan "Museums as Cultural Hubs: The Future of Tradition." To mark the occasion, a social experiment called the

"Treasures of the National Museum" was conducted at Riyadh Park as part of Saudi National Day. There, performers introduced attendees to artifacts while dressed in costumes inspired by each artifact.<sup>(117)</sup> Thanks to its success, this community experiment was repeated in November 2019 at the same location in an event entitled "Our Heritage is a Homeland,"<sup>(118)</sup> along with other educational, marketing and media campaigns.<sup>(119)</sup> Efforts have also been made to develop additional museums with halls for visiting exhibitions in the hope that these museums will become cultural landmarks, as mentioned above.

The year 2019 witnessed many tourist Seasons that included cultural events, museum visits, or hosting events in museum spaces. During Riyadh Season, for example, the Glow Garden events in the Al-Murabba neighborhood—which is also home to the National Museum—were attended by numerous international restaurants and held well-received musical performances.<sup>(120)</sup>

## Infrastructure and Investment



## Regulatory Frameworks

The new Law of Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage devotes an entire chapter to all kinds of museums and regulates the sale and purchase of archaeological and heritage-related materials, as mentioned above.<sup>(121)</sup> The Tourism Information and Research Centre provides continuous monitoring of cultural tourism.<sup>(122)</sup> Lastly, all archaeological and heritage artifacts are registered in the National Antiquities Register.<sup>(123)</sup> It is also possible for individuals or institutions to register special collections.<sup>(124)</sup>

## Upcoming Projects

Building museums is a key component of improving cultural infrastructure and quality of life. As noted, there are indicators that museum culture is developing, and reasons to anticipate an increase in demand for cultural facilities. This is due to population growth and the fact that the majority of the population is young—60% of Saudis will be under the age of 40 in 2030. Demand is also expected to rise as the level of education among Saudis improves. Increased expenditures on cultural facilities have also played a role, as has an anticipated 165% jump in cultural tourism: by 2030 tourists will number 4 million, in contrast to only 1.6 million in 2020.

Many programs and initiatives are involved in planning museum openings. As previously mentioned, the National Transformation Program has adopted the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Cultural Heritage Program.<sup>(125)</sup> This program is divided into two phases: the first



extends through 2020 and the second through 2030. During the first phase, a sum of 1.951 billion SAR was allocated to this program, 335 million of it in 2017. First-phase actions included the renovation and operation of established museums in addition to the establishment of new ones.<sup>(126)</sup>

With the transfer of supervision to the Ministry of Culture and the founding of the Museums Commission, the Museums sub-sector expects to see projects and strategies that will promote development and ensure that museums have a broad and well-rooted presence within the Saudi cultural arena.

## Shortage of Professionals and Education

One of the key challenges that the sub-sector faces is the shortage of qualified specialists, the result of a lack of specialized museum education programs in Saudi universities. Majors in archaeology and tourism are offered at three Saudi universities: the College of Tourism and Archaeology at King Saud University and the Departments of Tourism and Archaeology at Jazan University

and the University of Hail.<sup>(127)</sup> These programs do not, however, offer degree tracks specialized in museums. Students in these programs major in archaeology, heritage material management, and tour guiding. Colleges offering programs in art education also lack specialized training programs in the museum field.<sup>(128)</sup> In the 2017–2018 academic year, there were eight male students on scholarship in this field, including one master's student in museum studies, one master's student in museum professions, three master's students in archaeology and museums, and three PhD students in archaeology and museums.<sup>(129)</sup> The number of students in this field is low despite the fact that there will be a need for this specialization in the future, given the efforts underway to have 300 private and 61 public museums by 2030.

To tackle the lack of specialization in the field, the Ministry of Culture has launched the Cultural Scholarship program, which offers scholarships for museum majors.<sup>(130)</sup> The Royal Commission of Al-Ula also launched the Local Community Development Program, which is now in its second phase, and currently provides scholarships to 500 students, some of whom are majoring in museums.<sup>(131)</sup>

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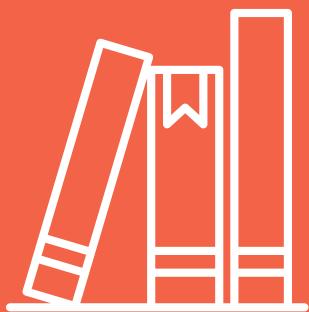
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Chapter Twelve

# 12





# Libraries

- **Libraries in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview**
- **Libraries in Saudi Arabia Today**
- **Infrastructure for Libraries and Literary Project**

# Libraries in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview

Found across the Kingdom in palaces, mosques, and schools, libraries have always been a key component of Saudi culture and society. Although older libraries differ from their modern counterparts, they played a pivotal role in facilitating cultural and intellectual movements and benefitting scholarship and scholars more broadly.<sup>(1)</sup> Endowed libraries, especially those in the Two Holy Mosques in Makkah and Al-Madinah, are among the oldest and most important in the Kingdom. The provenance of the library of the Great Mosque of Makkah, for example, dates back to 160 AH. It acquired the name of "Library of the Holy Mosque of Makkah" during the reign of King Abdulaziz.<sup>(2)</sup> Libraries spread throughout the Najd region, due in part to the sizable number of Islamic and other books imported from Iraq, the Levant, Morocco and Yemen. As many historians have noted, a great many of those books were moved to Riyadh after the death of King Abdulaziz. This transfer not only benefitted the large number of students there, but also directly contributed to the growth of private libraries in Riyadh. These included the Sheikh Abdullah bin Abdul Latif Al Sheikh Library, which housed an impressive collection of manuscripts, and the Sheikh Hamad bin Faris Library,<sup>(3)</sup> among others.

## The Promotion of Libraries and the Emergence of the Modern Library

In the decades ensuing the Kingdom's establishment, its libraries sought to bring themselves into line

with modern notions of how such institutions work with respect to organization, equipment, and specialized services. These efforts not only preserved and developed existing collections but led to the opening of various new libraries, especial-

ly public libraries, throughout the Kingdom. The most prominent public libraries during the reign of King Abdulaziz were:<sup>(4)</sup>

- The Public Library of Dhahran (est. 1347 AH)
- The Maktabat Al-Haram Al-Madani (est. 1352 AH), located inside Al-Haram Al-Madani, historically overseen by the Ministry of Hajj and Endowments and currently overseen by the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Great Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque<sup>(5)</sup>
- Prince Musaid bin Abdul Rahman Library (est. 1364 AH)
- Makkah Al-Mukarramah Library, formally established by Sheikh Abbas Suleiman Qattan in 1370 AH after he purchased and donated the Al-Kurdi collection
- Shaqraa Public Library (est. 1371 AH)
- Unayzah Public Library (est. 1372 AH)
- The Riyadh Saudi Library, established in 1373 AH on the recommendation of the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al Al-Sheikh, historically overseen by the Mufti, then the House of Ifta, and currently overseen by the leadership of the Department of Academic Research and Ifta



## Library Reorganization and Expansion

As libraries expanded and began to modernize, the question arose of how they should be organized and supervised. For example, the administration managing the endowments of Al-Madinah began overseeing the Mahmudiya Library in the year 1960 AD. That same year, the Aref Hikmat Library also came under their purview. During the reign of King Saud, the General Administration for Libraries at the Ministry of Education was established after the issuance of Cabinet Resolution No. 30 in 1959, which mandated that the Ministry of Education establish libraries, including existing individual and institutional libraries, across the Kingdom. This responsibility was transferred to the Ministry of Culture and Information in 2004.<sup>(6)</sup> In early 1978, the Maktabat Al-Haram Al-Madani library was moved to its current location at the Gates of Omar ibn Al-Khattab on the northern side of the Prophet's Mosque.

In addition to the reorganization of libraries, this period also was characterized by the expansion of public libraries across the Kingdom. The Public Library of Madinah was established in 1960 on the southern side of the Prophet's Mosque and was later transferred—along with its endowed collections—to the King Abdulaziz Public Library in Al-Madinah. That same year, the first women's library was established in Unayzah under the supervision of the Al-Salihiyah Charitable Society. Libraries were established not only in large cities but also in villages, such as Rawdat Sudair (est. 1958), Ushaqir

(est. 1955), and Hotat Bani Tamim (est. 1957).

## Quality Libraries and the Organization of Public Libraries

A number of quality libraries were established across the Kingdom in the 1980s. The most prominent example is the King Abdulaziz Public Library in Al-Madinah (est. 1983), one of the largest affiliated with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance. This library is unique due to its hybrid form: it is part public library, part manuscript center, and part scholarly research center. It also houses one of the endowed collections of Al-Madinah. In the same year, the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies Library was established in Riyadh.

Perhaps the most important development in the library sector in the Kingdom was the founding of the King Fahd National Library in the city of Riyadh, which began as a grassroots initiative and was later adopted by the government. The project began under the supervision of the Riyadh Municipality and was completed after three years, opening its doors to the public in 1988. The founding of the King Abdulaziz Public Library in Riyadh in 1987 was equally important.

The foundation for this growth was laid by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Five-Year Development Plan. This initiative, which began in 1309 AH and is revisited every five years, affirms the importance of the library sector. In its third iteration (1400-1405 AH), increasing the number



of public libraries was a key development goal. Over that five-year period, 9 public libraries were established, adding a collection of 82,844 total documents. The School Libraries Administration became affiliated with the General Administration of Libraries, which reports to the Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education for Cultural and External Relations.<sup>(7)</sup>

In the fourth iteration of the Development Plan (1405-1410 AH), the number of public libraries grew to 59, adding a total collection of 1,121,979 documents, and the labor force grew to 262. The plan also emphasized the importance of updating public library facilities and ensuring that their technology was up-to-date, in addition to other key goals such as encouraging public libraries to host book fairs and to make their services accessible to all segments of society, with a particular emphasis on women and children.<sup>(8)</sup>

With the sixth iteration of the Development Plan (1415-1420 AH), the number of public libraries grew to 71. In 1417 AH, the Ministry of Education, which oversaw this sector at the time, approved the "Public Libraries: Rules for Internal Organization" regulation, which provides for the development of libraries and the strengthening of their social and cultural position.<sup>(9)</sup>

# Libraries in Saudi Arabia Today

There are currently 2,329 libraries in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including public libraries, private libraries, university libraries, endowed libraries, and specialized libraries, in addition to the Kingdom's national library, the King Fahd National Library in Riyadh (see Table 12-1).<sup>(10)</sup> A subset of Saudi libraries has kept pace with the rapid developments that have occurred in library sciences and global information flow. This is evidenced by the strides that some have made in developing technical training and jobs and in diversifying their sources of information. Today, a number of leading public libraries have contributed to the growing interest in reading in Saudi society, and have revived the role of the library as a center of knowledge through various cultural activities and initiatives.



The development of public libraries has been limited to those that enjoy continuous support and organizational independence, such as the King Fahd Public Library in Jeddah, the King Abdulaziz Public Library in Riyadh, and the Ithra Library of the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dhahran. However, the 84 widely scattered public libraries formerly affiliated with the Ministry of Education and currently affiliated with the Ministry of Media (formerly the Ministry of Culture and Information) have contended with severe underperformance and lack of supplies. Likewise, although privately-owned libraries open to the general public

continue to exist in a number of cities in the Kingdom, they have declined in number and have experienced only limited development. Conversely, a number of endowed libraries have grown over time through individual contributions from living donors, as well as posthumous endowments made to ensure the proper management and preservation of private collections. These libraries also benefit from the support of independent institutions such as the King Abdulaziz Complex for Endowment Libraries in Al-Madinah.

This report also sheds light on the current standing of university and

public-school libraries. The libraries of Saudi universities differ from others in the sector in the size of their holdings and their ability to keep pace with rapid technological development. Public-school libraries attempted to keep pace with this development in a relatively early period when they became learning resource centers. Overall, a number of projects have excelled in meeting the challenges of the digital revolution in the library sector. The most notable is the Saudi Digital Library Project, which primarily serves university libraries.

**Table 12-1:** Types of libraries in KSA

Library Type	Definition	Libraries in the Kingdom
National	A library whose main function is "to acquire, control, document, define, and publish the national intellectual production." <sup>(11)</sup>	The official National Library in the Kingdom is the King Fahad National Library.
Public School	A library that serves a general education school, providing services to the school's community of students, teachers and administrators.	These libraries were renamed Learning Resource Centers by the Ministry of Education in 1418 AH as part of their plan to reinvigorate and develop public school libraries.
University	A library that serves an independent university or college and provides services to the university's employees, students, faculty members, researchers and administrators.	Across the Kingdom, every university houses its own library, and some universities with branch locations may have multiple libraries.
Private	A library created and supported by an individual, whether in their home or on private property. Some of these libraries may be open to the general public.	Today, there are dozens of private libraries in cities across the Kingdom that make their collections available to the general public. <sup>(12)</sup>
Public	A library that serves all members of society without exception and receives support from the government or civil institutions. <sup>(13)</sup>	Public libraries vary organizationally, as there are endowed libraries supervised by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance, as well as libraries organized by non-profits. Most public libraries were overseen by the Ministry of Education until 2004 and are now supervised by the Ministry of Culture and Information.

Library Type	Definition	Libraries in the Kingdom
Specialized	A library that specializes—in resources, holdings, or both—in a specific topic for a specific audience.	In the Kingdom there are dozens of specialized libraries within ministries and government institutions, such as the library of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the library of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency. Still others belong to private entities such as the Economic Library in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Jeddah. Many are medical libraries in hospitals and health colleges in cities across the Kingdom.

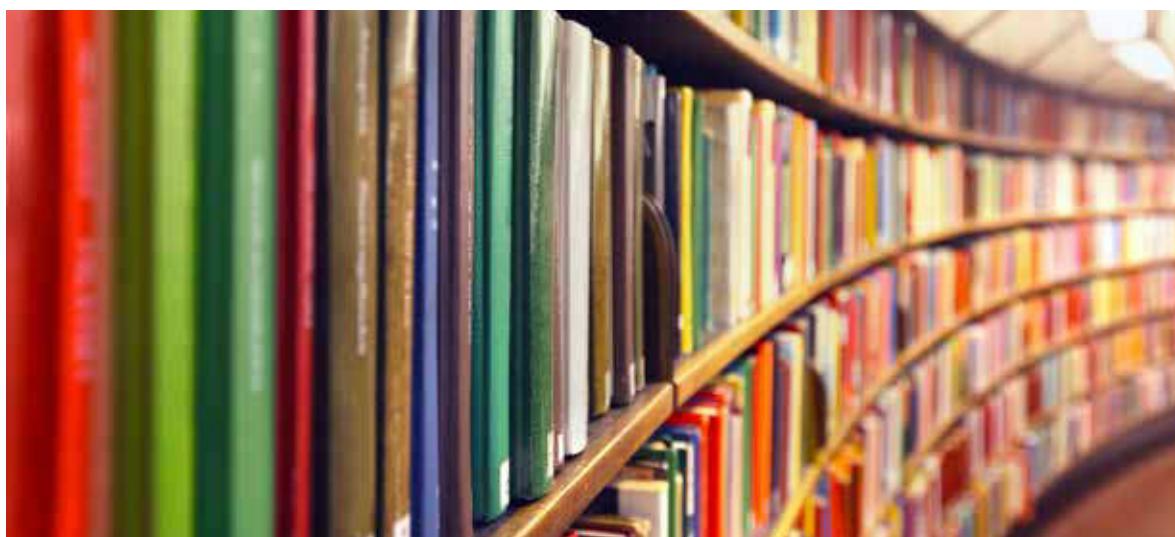
### The National Library: King Fahd National Library

The King Fahd Library in Riyadh was designated by the Council of Ministers in 1989 as the national library of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The designation included the possibility of setting up other branches, to be administrated by the Office of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, within the Kingdom.<sup>(14)</sup> The National Library's primary role is to acquire, preserve and document Saudi intellectual production and to disseminate it. In pursuit of these goals, the King Fahd National Library collects various articles published by Saudi citizens at home and abroad. Since 1995, it has issued a national bibliography of intellec-

tual works covering all of the Kingdom's intellectual production since printing first came to Saudi Arabia at the end of the nineteenth century up through the present day; the thirty-sixth part of the bibliography covers works from 2015-2016.<sup>(15)</sup> The National Library also regulates and analyzes Saudi periodicals via the Saudi National Portal, which registered 129,475 records in the year 2019.<sup>(16)</sup> In general, the National Library houses many sources of information, most notably books, theses, audiovisual media, magazines, documents, original and illustrated manuscripts, and microfilm. As of 2019, its collection exceeded two million holdings. In addition to holding exhibitions, conferences and meetings, the National Library also provides

services to government and private groups and represents the Kingdom in international forums.

The role of the National Library extends to citizens, who enjoy full access to its services. Between 2015 and 2016, the library served 120,525 in-person visitors; over that same period, its online portal served 771,817 visitors.<sup>(17)</sup> In 2017, the library's website won the award for the best website of an informational institution during the eighth convention of the Saudi Library and Information Association.<sup>(18)</sup> It is the largest online database of material in Arabic of any library, containing 640,431 titles of Arab and foreign works, of which 256,076 are authored by Saudis.<sup>(19)</sup>



One of the main things that has set the King Fahd National Library apart as a national treasure and a key provider of public services is the 2014 modernization and expansion of its premises, which grew from 21,000 square meters to 87,000 square meters and established the Library as a pioneering architectural masterpiece in the heart of the capital.<sup>(20)</sup> This expansion also equipped the library with the updated facilities and technologies that have enabled it to open its doors to all segments of society—as it created an integrated women's hall that served more than 10,359 female researchers between 2015 and 2016<sup>(21)</sup>—and to offer the activities and programs needed to foster an atmosphere of learning, including the events held throughout the year in the distinguished library garden. The King Fahd National Library building has received many awards, most notably the Gulf Cooperation Council's MEED Quality Award for Social Project of the Year, which it won the first year it opened after its expansion.<sup>(22)</sup>

### The State of Private Libraries

Today, 35% of Saudi families have a private library in their home (see Table 12-2 for a breakdown of this figure according to administrative regions).<sup>(23)</sup> This data does not specify the gender or age group of the individuals who own the library, and thus does not necessarily shed light on the interests of particular groups or the types of books they own. Consequently, the data does not highlight related trends that may differ over time or by generation, particularly given the transformative role of technology over the last two decades.<sup>(24)</sup>

**Table 12-2:** Percentage of households with private libraries by administrative region<sup>(25)</sup>

Administrative Region	Percent with Private Library
Riyadh	40.58%
Makkah	34.72%
Al-Madinah	30.39%
Al-Qassim	33.57%
Eastern Province	37.72%
Aseer	37.56%
Tabuk	27.50%
Hail	26.76%
Northern Borders	15.30%
Jazan	35.16%
Najran	30.61%
Al-Bahah	23.90%
Al-Jawf	13.77%
Kingdom Average	35.36%

**Table 12-3:** Percentage of private libraries containing different book types across in KSA<sup>(26)</sup>

Book Type	Percent of Private Libraries
Academic	47.86%
Mystery / Thriller / Horror	4.46%
History / Politics	30.64%
Autobiographical	19.70%
Religious	70.61%
Science Fiction / Fantasy	6.94%
Realistic Books	13.29%
Sports / Fitness	5.93%
Poetry / Literature	41.24%
Technical	9.43%
Art	6.82%
Other	7.75%

Individual libraries occupy a gray area between private and public services, as the practice of opening private libraries with large holdings to the general public is widespread. Almost every region of the Kingdom has private libraries owned by scholars, thinkers, and locally prominent individuals who open the doors of their libraries to visitors and the local community. Although it is difficult to quantify the activities that occur in this space, efforts were made in 2015 to do so by studying 120 distinguished private libraries in eight Saudi cities. Of those private libraries studied, Makkah had 29.2%, Al-Madinah had the same, and Riyadh had 17.6%.<sup>(27)</sup> The libraries contained a total of 103,863 total documents, including 11,263 books and 738 manuscripts.<sup>(28)</sup> However, the number of private libraries being established is notably declining. While 36 were founded between 1400 and 1409 AH, only three were

established between 1430 and 1434 AH.<sup>(29)</sup> The main reason for the drop-off is that no private individual can afford the facilities, technologies, and specialized staff needed to maintain a library. In addition, private libraries may fail to invite community engagement, whether because of a lack of media attention or a lack of interest in their holdings or activities.<sup>(30)</sup> Generational differences may also account for some of the declining interest.

### Private Libraries and their Donors' Gift to Society

The phenomenon of individual donors gifting their private libraries, particularly as endowments after death, is important to sustaining the private library sub-sector and enriching intellectual society more generally, and it is one of the main reasons that private libraries have

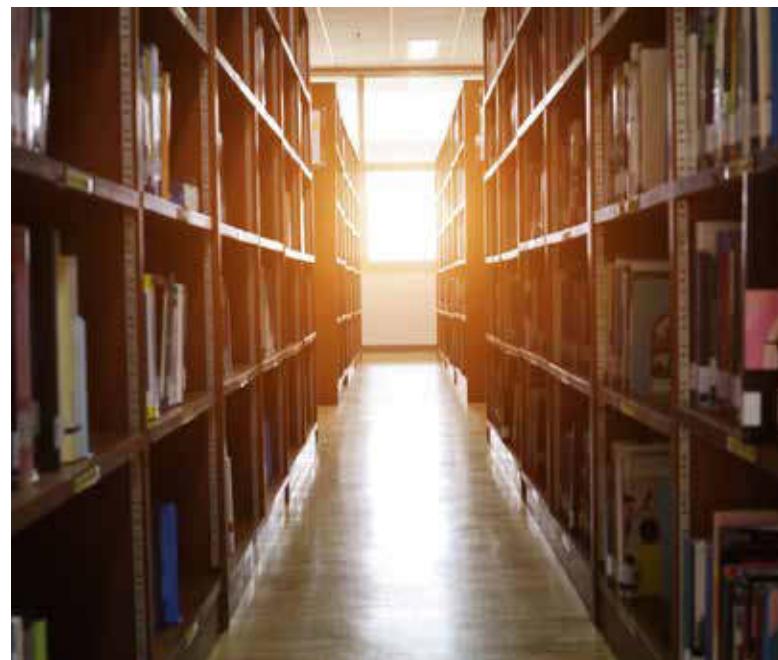
not completely vanished. The most notable examples of the lasting impact of these personal libraries are the collections left by the scholars, intellectuals, and notables of Makkah and Al-Madinah to the Library of the Holy Mosque and the Library of the Prophet's Mosque during their lifetimes or after their deaths. Scholars and visitors from all over the world benefit from the knowledge contained within the libraries of the Two Holy Mosques, particularly the collections related to Islamic law, linguistics, and history, and occasionally, rare or important manuscripts.<sup>(31)</sup> Among these donated collections are the libraries of Sheikh Abdulrahman Yahya Al-Mu'allami, who was the director of the Library of the Great Mosque in Makkah; Sheikh Abdul Sattar Al-Dahlawi, one of the most prominent scholars of Makkah; and Sheikh Abdul Wahhab Al-Dahlawi, one of the scholars of the Great Mosque.<sup>(32)</sup>



The relationship between the King Fahd National Library and the owners of private libraries is a close one. More than 28 private libraries have been donated, presented, endowed, or purchased, the foremost of which is the collection of Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdulaziz Al-Manea, which included a thousand documents and records of telegram correspondence between kings and scholars. The private collection of Sheikh Abdullah bin Khamis contained about 7,740 books and many manuscripts. The collection of Sheikh Othman bin Hamad Al-Hogail contained a similar number of documents.<sup>(33)</sup> Saudi university libraries have also benefitted from such donations. The private library of Khayr al-Din al-Zirikli was donated to the King Saud University Library, and other private collections have been donated to King Faisal University, Umm Al-Qura University, and Imam Muhammad bin Saud University, among others.<sup>(34)</sup> It would be remiss not to mention those collections endowed to Saudi literary clubs, such as the library of the poet Hussain Arab, who was a member of the literary club in Makkah.<sup>(35)</sup>

### School Libraries and Learning Resource Centers

It is difficult to determine the precise beginning of the emergence of school libraries in the Kingdom due to the lack of accurate documentation, but it is agreed that this type of library existed in the early stages of the Kingdom's history. For example, the Al-Sawlatiyyah School in Makkah in 1324 opened a public library, the oldest in the Kingdom, which was frequented by students reading and borrowing books outside of class time. A library called



the Student Library was opened in the Saudi Scientific Institute in 1358 AH. Thereafter more school libraries were opened to support education and serve students and teachers. The year 1379 AH is of particular importance in the history of school libraries, as it was the year that the General Administration of Libraries was established by the Ministry of Education as an independent organizational entity to oversee public school libraries.<sup>(36)</sup>

In 1997, the Ministry of Education decided to transform school libraries into learning resource centers (LRCs) that accommodate technological changes and provide access to knowledge and knowledge production beyond the normal scope of traditional library services. LRCs provide an integrated learning environment that allows teachers to employ traditional and non-traditional media in their lessons. Teachers can also use various sources and techniques to encourage their

students to actively engage in their education, in addition to facilitating self-directed learning. Students can also use the centers to develop research skills and meet their own informational needs.

The establishment of learning resource centers in the Kingdom has evolved following the introduction of a learning resource center certification program in collaboration with Saudi universities in order to produce cohorts of graduates capable of managing such centers. The first six centers, established in Riyadh in 1420 AH, first sought to determine the requirements for establishing learning resource centers in the most heavily used Saudi school buildings. This was followed by a preparatory phase that established and monitored 70 centers to study the process of developing the necessary frameworks and staffing, and to create a blueprint for launching similar centers. Subsequently, the LRC project broadened its focus

to the education of boys and girls, and today, more than 1,400 learning resource centers have been established.<sup>(37)</sup>

The current state of learning resource centers varies according to the nature of the school in which they are located. There are four categories of center classified according to their size, namely: Class A (150 square meters or more), Class B (120-150 square meters), Class C (80-120 square meters), and Class D (40-80 square meters). Every center contains two halls: the self-study and the group learning halls. All are equipped with computers, internet access, smart boards and various other technologies. Recently, the LRC program implemented the Noor system in order to support the learning process and facilitate the mission of the Learning Resources Secretary. The Noor system was also adopted to promote the goals of LRCs, help the supervisory authorities in the Education Department, and assist the Ministry in evaluating the centers' performance. Studies have revealed some challenges that LRCs face. Willingness to use resources requires updated devices, rapid internet connections, and the pedagogical training needed to use them effectively. It also hinges on the presence or absence of a Learning Resource Center Secretary professionally and academically qualified to maintain effective lines of communication with teachers. In addition to these challenges, the requirements of the traditional education process, the weakness of existing infrastructure, the lack of internal support and the lack of incentives for trustees and teachers have hindered the progress of the LRCs.<sup>(38)</sup>

Reducing these obstacles requires a strategy that continues beyond the construction of centers to providing training for staff and interactive programs to encourage student involvement. Learning resource centers currently offer a limited number of such programs and initiatives. These include the Individual and Self-Learning Technologies initiative by the School Equipment Department in Al-Madinah, the Media Tools Program for the Trustee of Learning Resources, prepared by Riyadh Education, the Technical Idea Forum by the School Equipment Department in Tabuk, the Taif Education Department's Aoun Our Resource Initiative to assist those with special needs, among other programs and initiatives.<sup>(39)</sup> Although these programs and initiatives deserve support and commendation, there is still a need for an overarching strategy that provides a basis for continuing them in a sustainable and effective manner.

### University Libraries

Since the inauguration of the first Saudi university, King Saud University, in 1957, university libraries have emerged across the Kingdom. These libraries have numerous goals. They work to serve the academic community by facilitating research and providing resources for engagement inside and outside the university. They strive to cultivate knowledge and enrich local culture through in-person activities such as lectures, programs, initiatives, and online offerings on electronic platforms and social networks. In Saudi Arabia, the term "university library" includes the central libraries in every Saudi university. It also includes the colleges' libraries, which are inde-

pendent from the central libraries. These independent college libraries differ in the content of their holdings, which may consist of items associated with a specific field of inquiry. For example, there are military college libraries, such as the King Abdulaziz War Library, the oldest Saudi military library, which was established in 1374 AH; the libraries of schools of education; and the libraries of women's colleges. Broadly speaking, there are more than 26 deanships for library affairs in various Saudi universities.<sup>(40)</sup>

As it is difficult to give a full account of the holdings of these university libraries and their role within the library sub-sector, it will suffice to highlight the largest and most important of them: the King Saud University Library. This library includes the King Salman Central Library as well as numerous branches. These include medical libraries such as the Medical College Library at King Khalid University Hospital and King Abdulaziz University Hospital as well as the libraries of community colleges, such as the community college student library in Riyadh. Across the King Saud University Library and all its branches, the collection spans 731,529 titles and 1,737,443 volumes. The university also subscribes to a number of Arab and foreign periodicals, amounting to 460 titles and 1726 volumes, and houses 129,751 government publications. It preserves 11,414 original manuscripts out of a total of 89,525 manuscripts, original and photocopied.<sup>(41)</sup> In 1439-1440 AH, the university acquired 1,065,179 titles and 2,317,488 volumes, operating within a budget of 5,726,462.21 SAR.<sup>(42)</sup>

In addition to its lending services, the King Saud University Library,

like other Saudi university libraries, offers many reference, advisory and research services; photocopying, copying and indexing; manuscript archiving and digitization; and support, including Braille Sense and magnification devices, for people with special needs. In 1439-1440 AH, the library loaned more than 67,755 books.<sup>[43]</sup> University libraries also provide resource donation and exchange, training and development programs for faculty members and university students, cultural events, tours for official delegations, and occasional educational and social activities.

### Public Libraries: Steps Towards Renewal

Public libraries serve all members of society without exception. The management of public libraries varies: some were overseen by the Ministry of Education before coming under the auspices of the Ministry of Media (formerly the Ministry of Culture and Information), while others rely on endowments managed by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah, and Guidance. Still other libraries are managed by the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Two Holy Mosques. In addition, a further subset of public libraries is owned by non-profit civil institutions. This report will discuss the state of public libraries in three of these sub-sectors: (1) public libraries across the Kingdom that were overseen by the Ministry of Education until 2004, when the then-Ministry of Culture and Information assumed management of them through a specialized Department of Public Libraries; (2) active libraries affiliated with institutions that enjoy relative independence,

such as the King Abdulaziz Public Library in Riyadh, the King Fahd Public Library in Jeddah, and the Ithra Library at the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dhahran; and (3) endowed libraries and libraries of the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Great Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque.

#### 1. Public Libraries Overseen by the Ministry of Culture and Information (now the Ministry of Information)

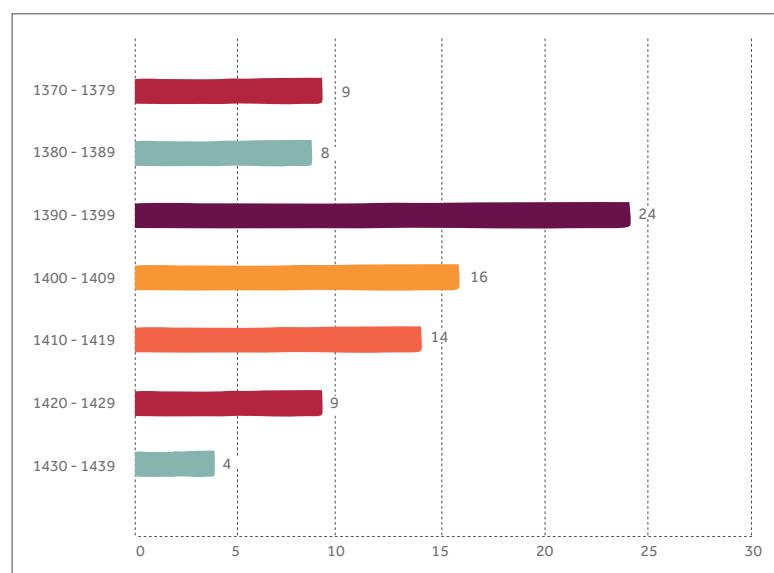
Public libraries are the backbone of the library sub-sector in the Kingdom in terms of both their number and their presence beyond major cities, which theoretically make them capable of serving local communities. Given their importance, this report will discuss public libraries in some detail. To assess their current status, surveys were conducted in all 84 public libraries in the Kingdom (see Figure 12-3). The surveys focused on eight key measures related to infrastructure,

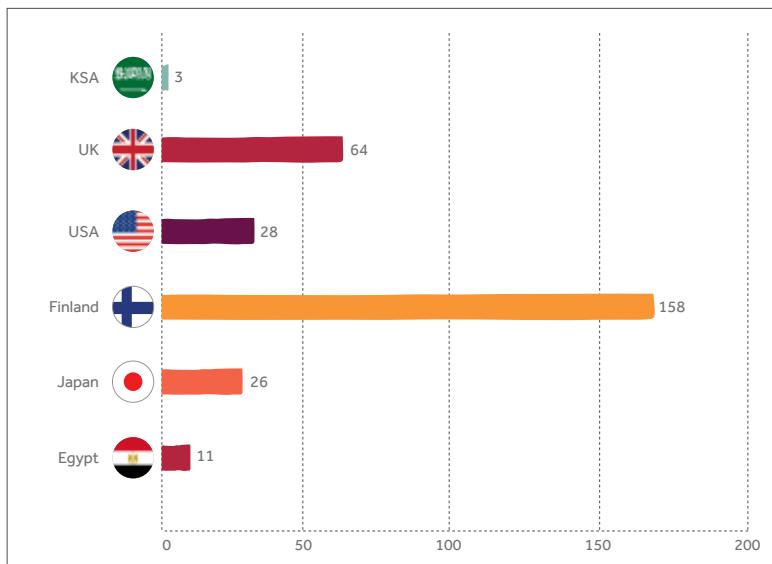
operations, and community participation that, taken as a whole, define each library's performance and key contributions. This data will help transform public libraries into cultural centers with even stronger connections to the local community, as this sub-sector suffers from inadequacies in all eight measures. These inadequacies make it difficult to view them as effective cultural centers for local communities.

#### Stunted growth

Between 1430 and 1439 AH, only four public libraries were established in Saudi Arabia (see Figure 12-1), most recently in Jannah (1434 AH). To date, there are 84 public libraries across the 13 regions of the Kingdom, a number which is small relative to the total population. Finland, for example, has 870 public libraries, despite being smaller in area and population.<sup>[44]</sup> The dearth of libraries is particularly evident when the number is calculated per capita (see Figure 12-2).

**Figure 12-1:** Number of public libraries opened by date (AH)



**Figure 12-2:** Number of public libraries per million inhabitants<sup>(45)</sup>

[CHART LABELS: KSA; Egypt; Japan; Finland; USA; UK]

**Figure 12-3:** Distribution of Public Libraries in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

#### Buildings and facilities

Location is a major factor in whether a library can become a social and cultural center. Today, many libraries remain unsuitable for this goal, as they are located in hard-to-reach places, lack signage indicating their presence, or need appropriately equipped buildings to meet the needs of their communities. The infrastructure of these libraries, including their facilities and equipment, is also important, but many libraries (43 at time of writing) are in government buildings, most of which are old and in poor condition. The rest are located in rented buildings, most of which lack specialized facilities such as meeting rooms, spaces for events and training sessions, and quiet spaces for individual reading and study. In both cases, these libraries suffer from outdated books, furniture, and equipment.

#### Employees

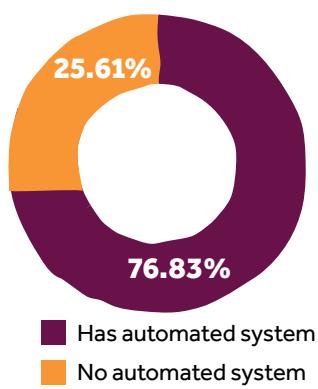
Public libraries employ a labor force of 789, of whom a large percentage (67%) are library science or information specialists. Despite the high percentage of employees with specialized skills, there is a constant need for training in the evolving aspects of these technical jobs. Furthermore, only 39 employees currently specialize in information technology, an undoubtedly small number especially given the Ministry's efforts to expand automation and digitization, which require specialists in various technical fields, including IT.

#### Technological capabilities

These public libraries also suffer from a lack of technological infrastructure and cannot support elec-

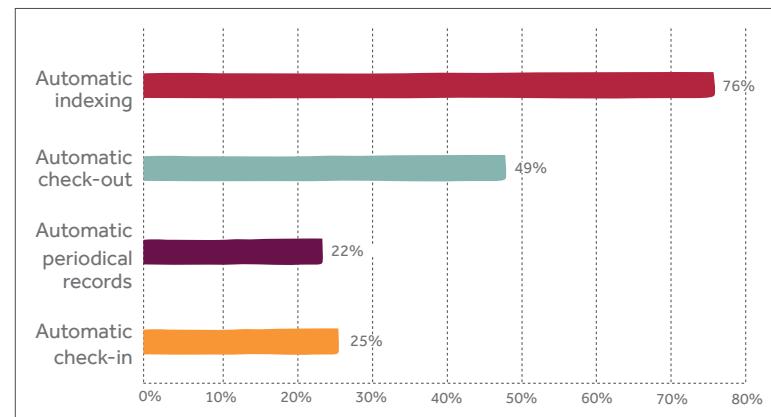
tronic transactions. Most (65.85%) do not offer public internet, either because they are not connected to the internet at all, or because use is limited to employees. Despite the broad trend in government institutions moving to online platforms and streamlined electronic functionality, only 76.83% of public libraries overseen by the Ministry of Culture and Media use an automated system to manage their collections (see Figure 12-4). Moreover, those library departments that do use automation use an outdated system developed two decades ago by the Ministry of Education. It is used mostly for automatic indexing, which excludes procurement and loan procedures from automatic check-in and check-out (see Figure 12-5). Perhaps surprisingly, social media use is quite high in these libraries, as approximately 90% market their services and activities through social media, with Twitter being the most popular platform (see Figure 12-6).

Figure 12-4: Percentage of public libraries with automated systems

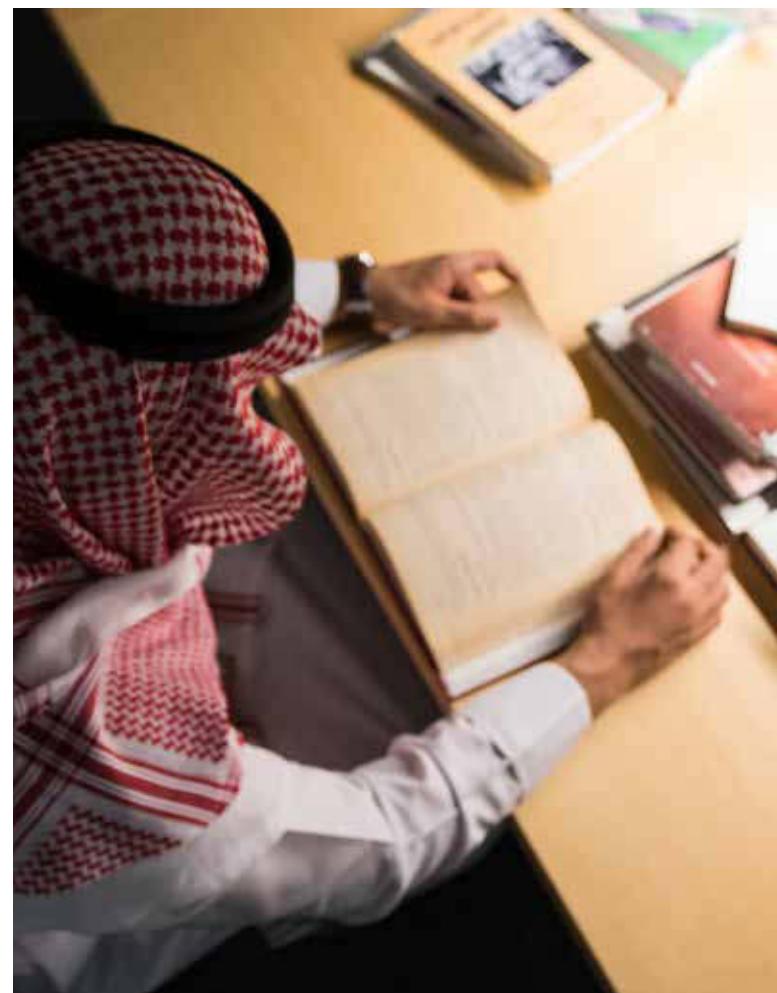


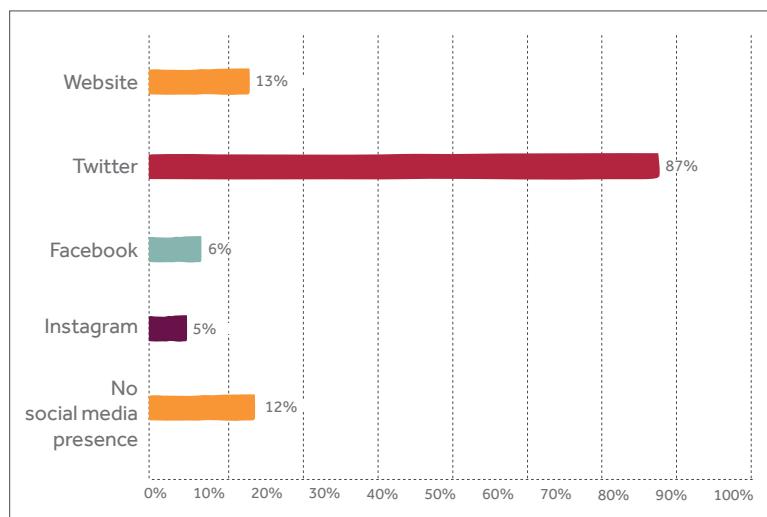
[Legend translation: Has automated system, No automated system]

Figure 12-5: Job automation in public libraries



[CHART LABELS: Automatic check-in; Automatic periodical records; Automatic check-out; Automatic indexing]



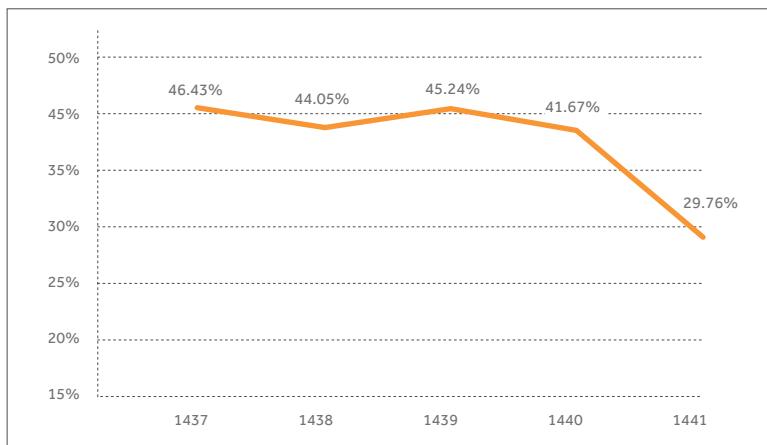
**Figure 12-6:** Public libraries communication via the internet and social media

[CHART LABELS: No social media presence; Instagram; Facebook; Twitter; Website]

#### Library holdings

These public libraries have limited resources, as is evident from the size of their holdings: 46.42% have less than ten thousand books, many of which, furthermore, are outdated

and should be replaced. The supply of new books to many public libraries has decreased over the past five years (see Figure 12-7). Beyond their small size, these holdings lack diversity in media: 83.75% do not have any audio or visual materials.

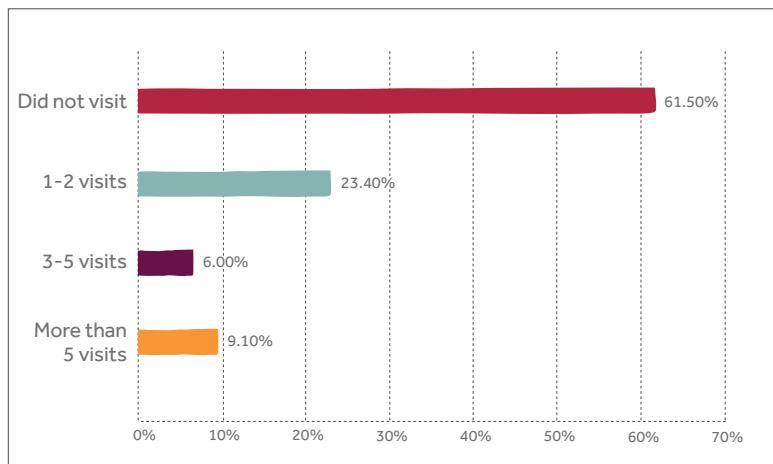
**Figure 12-7:** Percentage of public libraries expanding their collections, by year (AH)

#### Public library and community: visits and user segments

The role of public libraries is not limited to providing lending services. Rather, their responsibilities include encouraging ongoing community involvement and forming collaborative relationships with individuals, government agencies, academic institutions, private sector institutions, and civil society, as part of a long-term strategic plan. For public libraries to serve as vital cultural institutions throughout the year, such collaboration must expand beyond sporadic seasonal programs and events. The Cultural Participation Survey, administered in the fourth quarter of 2019, measured the rates of library visits and community participation in library activities across the Kingdom. The survey did not focus specifically on public libraries and was conducted across all different types of publicly accessible libraries. The Survey was administered to a representative sample of 3,137 individuals. Its results show that most of the respondents (61.50%) had not visited a library over the past twelve months, and 23.40% had gone to a library only once or twice (see Figure 12-8).

Across the 84 public libraries, the average number of visitors is only 194 people per month.<sup>(46)</sup> Compared to that of the Kingdom's leading libraries, this is a very low rate. The women's section of the King Fahd Public Library in Jeddah, for example, averages 4,000 visitors per month.<sup>(47)</sup> To put this in perspective, the data shows that across the Kingdom, there are approximately five library visits per thousand people, versus an average of 4,480 library visits per thousand people in the United States.

Figure 12-8: Visits to public libraries by adults in KSA (past 12 months)

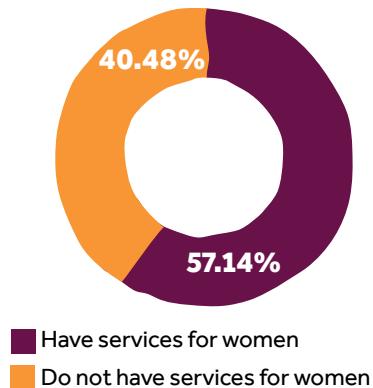


[X-Axis translations from left to right: Did not visit; 1-2 visits; 3-5 visits; More than 5 visits]

The low rate of public library utilization is reflected in the limited range of services they provide. Women's participation is particularly low, as 40.48% of these public libraries do not provide any services to women (see Figure 12-9), and only 28.5% offer private sections for women, which limits the number of women who can benefit from their services. Only 32.83% of men currently utilize library services (see Figure 12-10). In recent years, some of these libraries have attempted to engage with families and children and have improved services for children. 79.79% of these public libraries currently offer services for children, but they are not offered consistently throughout the year.

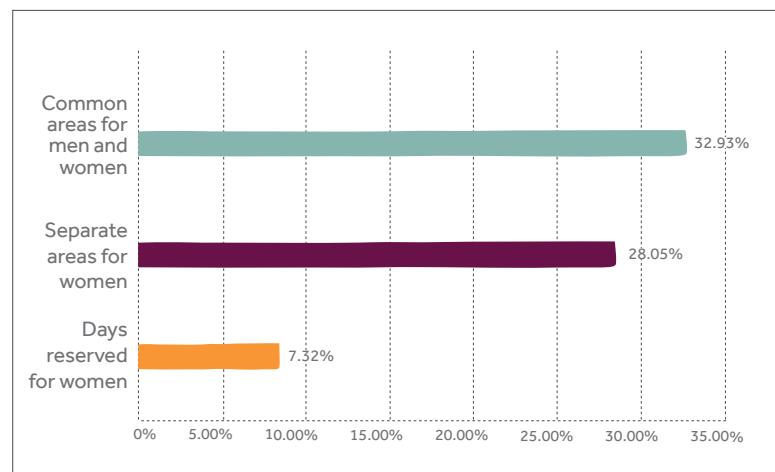


**Figure 12-9:** Percentage of public libraries that provide services to women



[Legend translation: Have services for women; Do not have services for women]

**Figure 12-10:** Types of women's services offered



[X-axis translation from left to right: Common areas for men and women; Separate areas for women; Days reserved for women]

People with disabilities are also underserved by the public library sub-sector, as only 25% of libraries are equipped to serve the disabled.

#### [Identity of public libraries: libraries as cultural centers](#)

One of the Ministry of Culture's main goals is to transform public libraries

into cultural and social hubs for their respective communities. However, public libraries today often do not offer much beyond office services, such as the lending of materials. Nearly 60% of public libraries do not host any activities such as book fairs, lectures, or seminars (see Figure 12-11). The Cultural Participation Survey also revealed that even

the small percentage of visitors that go to public libraries are reluctant to attend their sporadic lectures and other events, so community engagement is almost non-existent. Approximately 82% of the people surveyed indicated they had never attended a single public library event (see Figure 12-12).

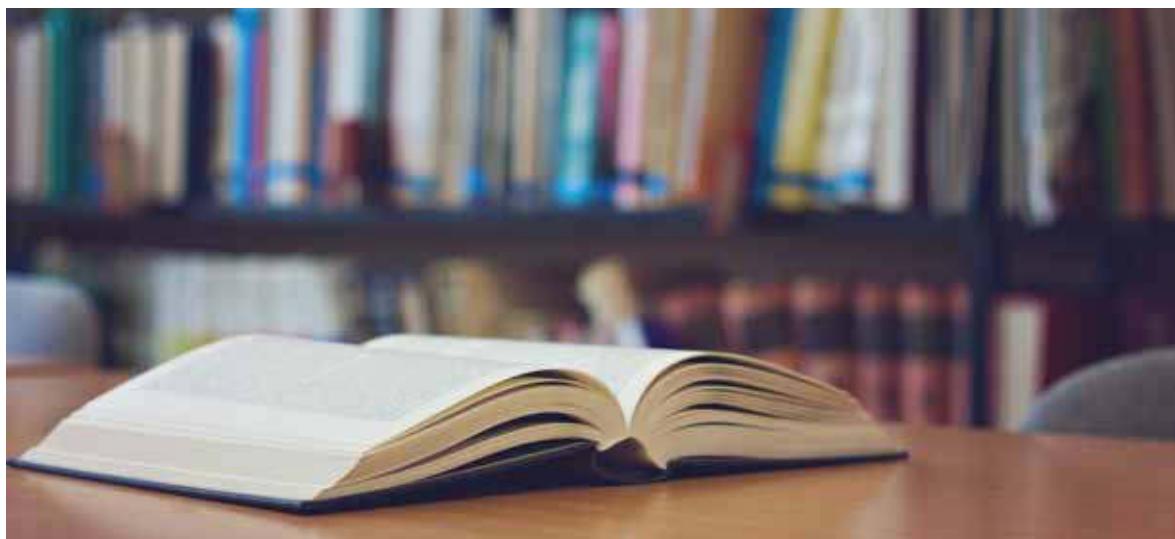
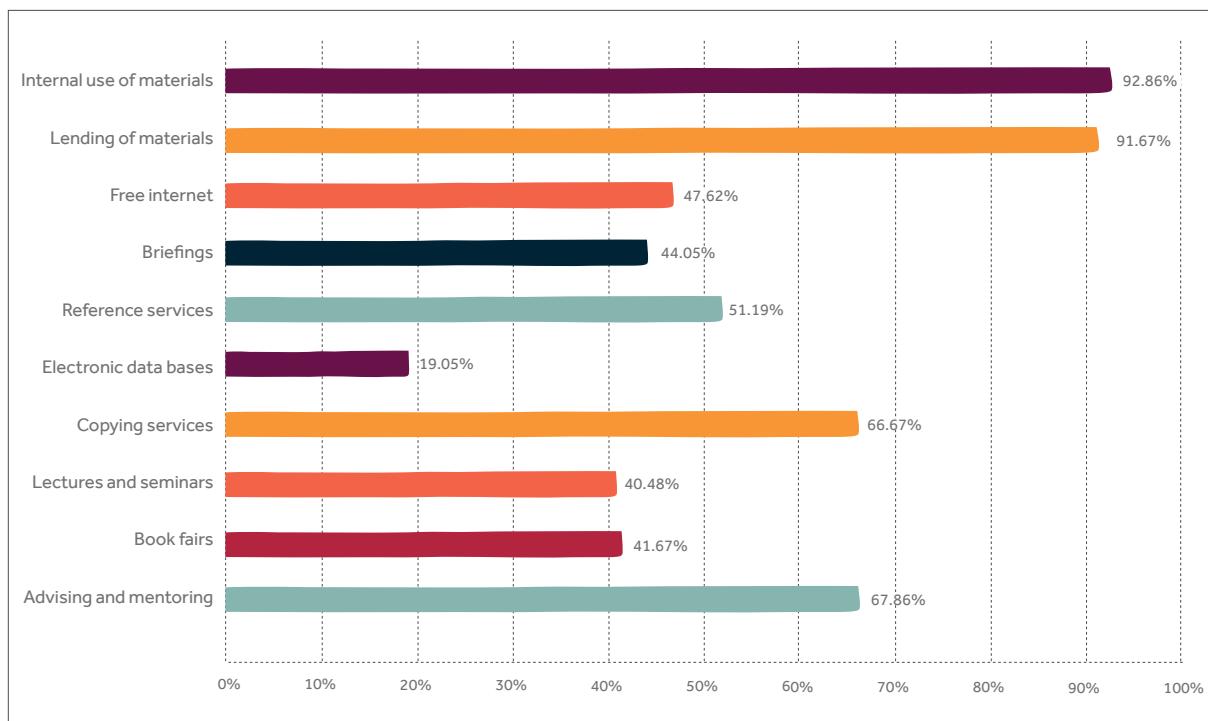
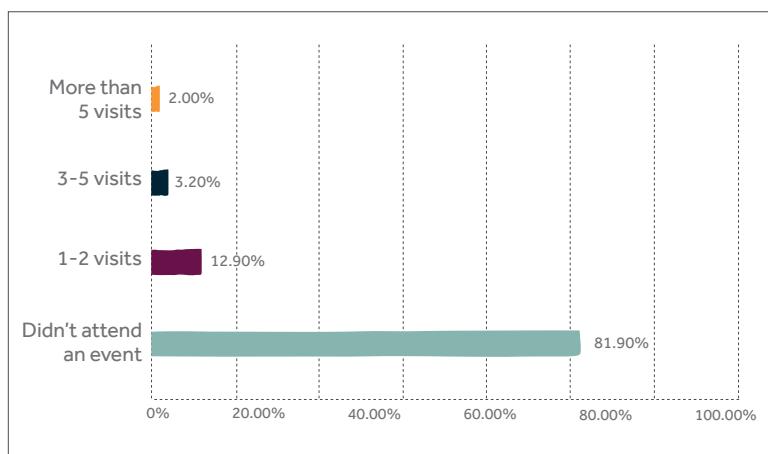


Figure 12-11: Services provided by public libraries



[X-axis translation from left to right: Internal use of materials; Lending of materials; Free internet; Briefings; Reference services; Electronic data bases; Copying services; Lectures and seminars; Book fairs; Advising and mentoring]

Figure 12-12: Attendance at public library events in KSA (past 12 months)



[X-Axis translations from left to right: Didn't attend an event; 1-2 visits; 3-5 visits; More than 5 visits]

In an attempt to improve community participation, some public libraries hosted separate events and activities in 2019. For example, the Abha Public Library hosted events in collaboration with the General Administration of Water Services to raise awareness on World Water Day. The Abha Public Library also hosted reading events in collaboration with the General Administration of Education in Aseer. The Baljurashi Public Library set up a public reading program; the Zulfi Public Library held various workshops overseen by the Technical College for Girls; the Qatif Public Library contributed to a blood donation campaign; the Aflaj Cultural Committee presented several cultural events in partnership with

the Laila Public Library; the Jubail Public Library presented a program on the art of recitation and rhetoric in addition to their third rhetorical competition; and the Madinah Public Library hosted a symposium highlighting the landmarks and history of the city. These examples of sporadic programs, partnerships, and seasonal events are unique to a small subset of public libraries and do not reflect the overall dearth of activities that the statistics demonstrate. They are not indicative of an overarching strategy to provide continuous programming that engages all members of society.

The survey in this section demonstrates the inability of the 84 public libraries to embody their role as community cultural institutions because their infrastructure is weak; their facilities, buildings, and technical equipment are sub-standard; their holdings are outdated, and their employees lack technical training. Until these issues are addressed,

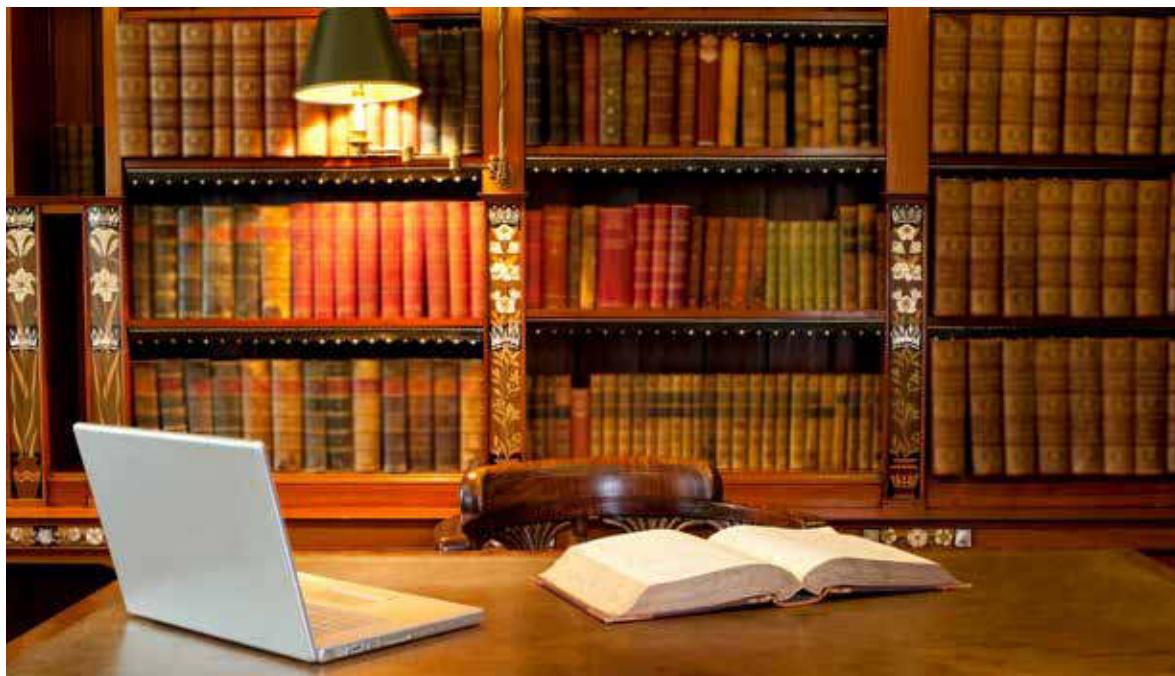
these public libraries cannot fulfill their mission of supporting the development of skills and the production of knowledge in their communities. When libraries fulfill their role as social and cultural centers to the fullest extent, their communities become motivated to provide them with sustainable support by volunteering and paying membership dues. They are also likely to look to the library (and its governmental and community partners) to provide and facilitate services and events.

## **2. Pioneering Public Libraries: Models for Activating the Role of the Public Library in Society**

Unlike the deficient 84 public libraries discussed above, a number of active public libraries in the Kingdom enjoy a degree of organizational independence and are distinguished by their successful programming and their outreach to local communities. A number of these public libraries are

semi-governmental and semi-private. Outstanding examples include the King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah) Libraries, which was established in 1972 to preserve the historical, geographical and literary heritage of the Kingdom, and Arab and Islamic heritage more generally;<sup>(48)</sup> the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies Library, which was established with the Center in 1983 and distinguished by its preservation of more than 28,000 original Islamic manuscripts;<sup>(49)</sup> and the Saleh bin Saleh Cultural Center Library in Unayzah, overseen by the Salehia Charitable Society, established in 1960 as an independent women's library and opened to the general public in 1978.

Below, we highlight the independent libraries currently doing the most to provide integrated and technically advanced library services, serve as social centers, promote reading and self-directed learning, and support institutional research projects.



### King Fahd Public Library

Located in the city of Jeddah, this library was established in 2014 through the Research Endowment Fund to support research at King Abdulaziz University. It is one of the most prominent public libraries in the Kingdom and offers a range of services to various members of society. It consists of the main collection, a reference library, a multimedia library, and libraries dedicated to youth, women children, and the blind.

### King Abdulaziz Public Library

This is a charitable library established in 1985 under the patronage of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz. It later became a charitable institution providing library and information services to all segments of society, especially women and children. It houses a women's library and a children's library at its headquarters in Riyadh and its Al-Murabba branch. It is distinguished by its academic and cultural initiatives and projects, such as hosting the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Prize for Translation. Other projects include developing the Unified Arab Index, the Arabic Digital Library, and the Encyclopedia of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

### Ithra Library

This library is part of the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dhahran. Its four floors contain more than 270,000 books printed in English and Arabic and 10,000 audio-digital books on a wide variety of topics. The Ithra Library's digital resources are available in Arabic and English, including audiobooks

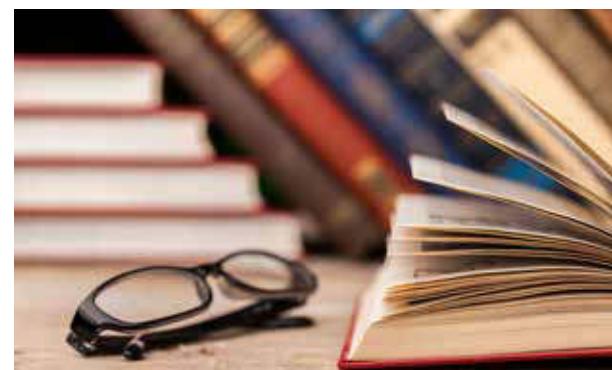
and digital books, and it constantly updates and adds to its collections. Today, 60% of its holdings are in Arabic, and 40% are in English. Visitors can peruse its collections on site or check materials out.

### Events and programs

Leading public libraries offer a variety of services, events, and programs to appeal to different segments of society and meet the changing needs of their patrons in this age of information and technology. In addition to traditional services, these libraries provide a range of electronic services. For example, the King Fahd Public Library in Jeddah offers electronic books, display screens, wireless internet access, and electronic games at its facilities.

The wide appeal of these services is evident from the activities they organize. For example, Ithra Library has hosted the "Read" (Iqra) national reading competition at the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dhahran, attracting more than 50 thousand participants across all education levels since its launch in 2014. The King Abdulaziz Public Library in Riyadh also created a National Cultural Reading Project to promote reading in 2003.

Mobile library initiatives also stand out, including the Learning Resources Bus project launched in Ramadan 2019 by the King Abdulaziz Public Library in Riyadh, which has served more than 870,000 people.<sup>(50)</sup> In the same year, the Library of the Grand Mosque launched a mobile library project that aims to provide visitors to the Kaaba with reliable scholarly information, especially on matters of religion.<sup>(51)</sup> Mobile libraries have been present in the Kingdom of



Saudi Arabia since 1982, when the first was established by the Saudi Aramco Libraries. To date, more than 370,000 students have benefited from these efforts.<sup>(52)</sup>

### **3. Endowed Libraries and the Libraries of the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Great Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque**

This third subset of public libraries is distinguished by the value of their collections of manuscripts and rare materials. Over the past five years, they have received increased institutional support. The endowed libraries in the Kingdom are overseen by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah, and Guidance. The most prominent is the King Abdulaziz Public Library in Al-Madinah, which holds more than 14,000 original manuscripts, 1,878 Qur'anic manuscripts, 25,000 rare books, and approximately 9,000 databases.<sup>(53)</sup> The King Abdulaziz Public Library in Al-Madinah consists of 35 endowed collections. Some, including the Library of the Noble Qur'an, were established after the creation of the Saudi state, while others date back to older historical periods. These include the Sheikh Aref Hekmat, Mahmoudi, Shifa, Bashir Agha, and Kelly Nazari libraries, as well as legal-school and Sufi-lodge libraries such as the Ih-

saniyyah, Irfaniyya, Kazaniyah, Ribat Sayyidna Othman,,Qarabash Ribat, and Rabat al-Jabr libraries. It also includes the collections of some scholars of Al-Madinah, such as those belonging to Sheikh Hassan Kutbi and Sheikh Muhammad Al-Khader Al-Shanqeeti.

To organize these endowed collections and make them accessible to the public in a modern, fully equipped venue, the King Abdulaziz Complex for Endowment Libraries was established by decree in Al-Madinah in 2016. The library's contents were transferred to a temporary complex at the Islamic University and held there until the construction was complete. During the transfer, the library's holdings were documented and tagged so that they could be identified by RFID technology. The rare manuscripts and books in the collection (see Table 12-4) were then formally registered and conserved.<sup>(54)</sup> The Complex aims to make endowed libraries publicly accessible, highlight the unique cultural heritage contained within their collections, and encourage academic research. In pursuit of these goals, the Complex, in cooperation with the Islamic University held an international conference, sponsored by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz, entitled "Innovation and Renewal Trends in Libraries." The conference discussed challenges facing the library sub-sector, such as best practices in administration, organization, and use of technology. It also solicited suggestions for innovative ways to help libraries interface with society and establish a strong relationship with their communities that might encourage participation and broad public support.<sup>(55)</sup>

**Table 12-4: King Abdulaziz Complex for Endowed Libraries<sup>(56)</sup>**

<b>Endowed Collections</b>	35
<b>Manuscripts</b>	19,000
<b>Rare books</b>	30,000
<b>Printed books</b>	100,000
<b>Antiquities</b>	800
<b>Total Collection</b>	150,000

Though many of the endowed collections held within the Complex came from the region of Al-Madinah, such collections come from all regions of the Kingdom, and all, especially those that are outdated, require efforts to protect and develop them. Libraries with endowed collections include the Makkah Library, which was established in 1951 and includes many scholarly collections from throughout the Kingdom; the Abdullah bin Al-Abbas Library in Taif; the Sheikh Muhammad al-Saleh Library in Al-Midhnab; and the Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Baz Library in Makkah, which is known for its distinctive holdings and modern facilities.<sup>(57)</sup>

The Library of the Holy Mosque of Makkah has also grown through endowment and donations. Today it is overseen by the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Great Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque. Its foundations can be traced back to the second century AH when many Qur'ans and scholarly books were gathered in the Great Mosque. Thereafter the collection grew until it took its modern form in 1955. Today, the library includes many departments that serve students and visitors from all parts of the world. It contains more than 5,000 original manuscripts, 2,000 facsimilies,

more than 100,000 printed books and tens of thousands of audiovisual materials (with the latter dedicated to recitations, sermons and lessons given at the Great Mosque). The library also provides many services, from photocopying to manuscript processing and preservation.<sup>(58)</sup>

Finally, the libraries of the Two Holy Mosques also benefit from endowments, as evidenced by the establishment of the Library of the Prophet's Mosque after a proposal by the Director of Endowments in Al-Madinah, Obaid Madani, in 1933. Today, the library is affiliated with the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Great Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque, although it was historically affiliated with the Ministry of Hajj and Endowments. The Library of the Prophet's Mosque includes many facilities, including a reading room, a manuscripts department, a rare books department, an audio library, a digital library, a periodicals section, and facilities for indexing, classification, and distribution, all of which are available to scholars from around the world.<sup>(59)</sup>

## Key Moments in Saudi Libraries

**1933**

The establishment the Library of the Prophet's Mosque.



**1955**

Organization of the Library of the Holy Mosque of Makkah in its current form.



**1957**

The establishment of the King Saud University Library, King Saud University being the first Saudi university.



**1959**

The cabinet decision to establish public libraries in various provinces of the Kingdom.



**1960**

The first library specifically for women was opened in Unayzah, under the auspices of the Al-Salihya Charitable Society.



**1982**

The start of mobile libraries as part of a Saudi Aramco community initiative.



**1985**

The establishment of the King Abdulaziz Public Library in Riyadh.



**1989**

King Fahad Library in Riyadh was approved to be the national library of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.



**1997**

The decision to make school libraries learning-resource centers.



**2010**

The establishment of the Saudi Digital Library.



**2014**

The inauguration of the King Fahd Public Library in Jeddah.



**2016**

The establishment of the King Abdulaziz Complex for waqf libraries in Madinah.



**2016**

The announcement of an initiative for "developing public libraries" by the Ministry of Culture.



# Infrastructure for Libraries and Literary Projects

One of the greatest challenges facing the library sub-sector as a whole today is the digital revolution and the need to link libraries through networks. These in turn require policies for digitization and standardized criteria for cataloging. The sub-sector still lacks these key components despite efforts, including the Arab Unified Catalog and the Saudi Unified Catalog projects, made to address them.

Interlibrary projects are seen as pivotal to the development of the library sub-sector because they help distribute resources, reduce costs, improve accessibility for all members of society, and provide support for the most under-developed parts of the sub-sector. Networking between the 84 public libraries remains a challenge because resources and motivation are lacking. However, in this digital age, all libraries will be faced with the challenge of processing huge quantities of data in addition to the digital indexing of existing materials and the compilation of online databases for their patrons and those of other libraries. To meet these needs, cataloguing and library services must be automated.



## Interlibrary Projects and Unified Catalogs

A key project today is the initiative to establish the Unified Arab Index, sponsored by the King Abdulaziz Public Library. The Index is a collaborative project that works to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and data between various social and cultural institutions across the Arab world, to ensure a standardization of practices and infrastructures. The Index will also promote knowledge-sharing and provide an inexpensive, centralized space to collect knowledge in Arabic. The Unified Arab Index project began in 2007, and for over a ten-year period, it partnered with over 5,000 libraries from 500 institutions across 27 different countries to develop a standardized bibliographic database containing 2,000,000 records. During this time, the Index also oversaw the publication of dozens of bibliographies and authority control catalogs for newly authored works and translations. In 2017, the Index entered its second phase, in which it will be transformed into a knowledge platform that can directly contribute to the production of knowledge and the cultural impact of its partnering institutions.<sup>(60)</sup>

In 2020, the Committee of Librarians (which is composed of library officials from universities and higher education institutions in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council) approved a project, proposed by the Unified Arab Index Center of the King Abdulaziz Public Library, to establish a unified index for Gulf universities. The Gulf Index of Academic Libraries seeks to enhance cooperation amongst Gulf universities by fa-

cilitating the sharing of knowledge. The project also aspires to support scientific research and encourage free-access initiatives.<sup>(61)</sup> At the local level, the King Fahd National Library seeks to establish a Unified Saudi Index that collates Saudi intellectual production and documents the holdings of Saudi libraries of all kinds. In addition to building a Saudi bibliographic index that complies with the newest technical standards, the Library also seeks to incorporate the collections of all Saudi libraries and other data collecting institutions in this index. Further, it seeks to offer 11 different electronic services for patrons to access the data.<sup>(62)</sup> By 2020, 59 of the Saudi Unified Index projects had been completed, its regulatory and standardization frameworks had been established, and about 700,000 bibliographic records had been transferred.<sup>(63)</sup>

## University Libraries and Knowledge Sharing through the Saudi Digital Library

University libraries in Saudi Arabia have kept pace with global technological developments. Currently, 100% offer electronic services, and 38.3% have a presence on social media. University libraries have also made important contributions in sharing knowledge through initiatives like the Saudi Digital Library (SDL), which was established in 2010 to serve researchers and associates of Saudi universities and institutions of higher education, including students, faculty members, and employees of the Ministry of Education. This was done through the digitization and provision of data sources,



articles, and university dissertations. The digital library has achieved success and continues to increase the number of digitized titles, especially in Arabic and English. Its statistics indicate that patrons have access to 446,044 electronic books, 123,670 full-text journals, 5,224,410 university texts, 6,548,350 conference papers, 3,061,669 reports, and 461,004 multimedia files.

This trailblazing digital library received the Arab Federation for Libraries and Information "A'rif" award for distinguished projects in the Arab world in its founding year and won the fifth "Knowledge Summit" award from the Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Knowledge Foundation in 2018 for its contributions to the transfer and dissemination of knowledge. It also won the Global Exhibition of Education Supplies and Solutions (GESS) award for the best provider of higher and post-secondary education services in 2019. The Saudi Digital Library established the Excellence Award for Scientific Production for Saudi Universities in 2019.

## Digitization and Interlibrary Efforts

The creation of the Unified Saudi Index is an opportunity for Saudi libraries to collaborate and improve

the quality of their work. This applies especially to insufficiently supported libraries, such as private libraries, which are important to the preservation of national, Arab, and Islamic heritage. Although all libraries are important bastions of cultural preservation, private libraries suffer from outdated collections and a lack of reliable support, in addition to the challenges posed by an absence of digitization capabilities at the national level.

There have been limited attempts to index the holdings of private libraries and integrate them into the broader library sub-sector, but these attempts have been restricted to a small number of private libraries selected by the King Fahd National Library and the Madinah Region Development Authority. For example, the holdings of the Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdulaziz Al-Mani'a Library and the Sheikh Abdullah bin Khamis Library have been included in the King Fahd National Library index. The King Fahd National Library has also indexed 1,391 books for a private Saudi library in 2015–2016. In total, it has acquired 16,790 books from private libraries through

purchases or donations.<sup>(64)</sup> In early 2020, the Principality of Madinah Region launched a comprehensive indexing project to register the holdings of private libraries in a unified central system. Such a system will facilitate the management of the holdings and make them publicly available via modernized electronic means.<sup>(65)</sup> In the future, these projects will come to include even more private libraries, with the goal of promoting knowledge-sharing and facilitating public access.

### Training Professionals

The foundation for any progress in the library sub-sector and the realization of the ambitious projects outlined in this report is the presence of professionals who possess the necessary skillset to work in modernized libraries. In Saudi universities, many departments equip graduates with the necessary skills to manage the technologies and technical systems of modern libraries.

Many departments in Saudi universities train information science

majors who go onto work in the library sub-sector. Given that these specializations must keep pace with the continuous technological advancements in information science and management, the library sub-sector remains in need of professionals, such as graduates of computer science and information science departments, with computer skills. Additionally, professionals with a high degree of technological capability are required for digital content management, automation, electronic provision of data, and information services in libraries and elsewhere.

### Regulatory Frameworks and Guidelines

The public library sub-sector currently lacks regulatory frameworks to standardize its operations and facilitate its development. These would include weeding (or deselection) policies and policies to address intellectual property rights. There is also a need for policies related to library infrastructure, such as standardized rules for library buildings and facilities, material usage and lending policies, and collection management both within a single library and between libraries. There is an absence of standardized technical procedures for indexing, classifying, and describing data sources, and a need for the regulation of activities related to human resources, including recruitment and training. Finally, there is a lack of technical and ethical standards to shape and guide librarians.<sup>(66)</sup>

It is not possible to develop and implement regulatory frameworks and policies without delineating the scope of the library sub-sector

**Table 12-5:** Data and library science departments in Saudi universities

Department	University
Information Science	Umm Al-Qura University
Information Science	King Abdulaziz University
Information Science	King Saud University
Library and Information Sciences	Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University
Information and Learning Resources	Taibah University
Library and Information Sciences	Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University
Information Systems	Jeddah University
Information Systems	Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University

to the entities, institutions, and libraries associated with it. Regulation also requires cooperation with other bodies and institutions that interface with library or community services. Reorganizing the library sub-sector will require the creation of an updated directory of all Saudi libraries, to be made available online to all patrons, including institutions and individuals. Although the King Fahd National Library has created such a guide, its content and presentation require an overhaul. It would also benefit from more accurate and detailed information about the libraries and their resources.

### The Ministry of Culture and Future Goals

In order to achieve the goals of Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Program, the Ministry of Culture and Information in 1438 AH

launched a strategic plan for the advancement of public libraries. (Since 1439 AH, the plan has been overseen by the Ministry of Culture.) It aims to promote public libraries as sources of intellectual and social capital by reinvigorating their infrastructure, organizational policies, training, materials, and technological capabilities while encouraging community participation.<sup>(67)</sup>

Today, the Ministry of Culture, established on June 2, 2018, is preparing to lead the sub-sector and continue the process of developing libraries to expand their cultural role. The Ministry's strategy, unveiled in March 2019, includes an initiative to develop public libraries, modernize the public library sub-sector to meet contemporary community needs and increase use, and redesign public libraries to serve a leading role in the cultural life of their communities.

The initiative specifically aims to:

- Provide access to the knowledge and resources needed to maintain an educated society.
- Stimulate cultural participation and intellectual production to promote positive changes in behavior.
- Facilitate life-long learning to contribute to the development of a skilled community.
- Enhance interaction, coexistence and cohesion in society.
- Preserve culture and heritage to secure a Saudi national identity.

The Ministry also announced the establishment of a specialized entity for libraries, the Libraries Commission, led by chief executive Abdul-Rahman Al-Asem, which will take over the relevant development initiatives and work on building a cultural environment that encourages literacy.

## Key Figures in Saudi Libraries

# 479773

Book titles within the holdings of the King Fahd National Library (2019).



# 35%

The percentage of Saudi families with private libraries in their homes.



# 1400

Learning resource centers at schools.

# 2329

Libraries in the Kingdom's schools (of all types: primary schools, universities, public, private, and national).



# 38.50%

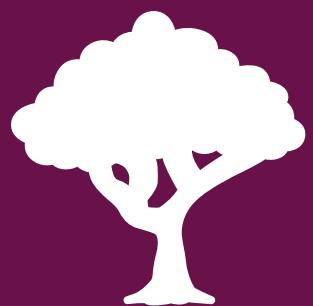
The percentage of citizens and residents who have visited a library in the past twelve months.

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# Natural Heritage

- Natural Heritage of Saudi Arabia:  
Historical Overview
- Natural Heritage in Saudi Arabia Today
- 2019 Cultural Participation Survey
- Infrastructure and Investment

# Natural Heritage of Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview



## Topography and Ecology of Saudi Arabia

One cannot put a price on natural treasures, especially in a world facing the growing dangers of desertification, pollution, water scarcity, and climate change. In protecting the natural world from these dangers, we simultaneously protect the source of plant, animal, and human life. Failure means that trees will die, species will become extinct, and humanity will forfeit its greatest heritage: the natural world that is our home. UNESCO's Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted in 1972, defines natural heritage as a composition of topographical and environmental formations, biodiversity, the habitats of living creatures, and all of the material, scientific, and aesthetic value associated with these elements.<sup>(1)</sup> Natural heritage does not draw its exceptional value solely from the fact that it makes a comfortable life feasible for human beings. It also provides the diverse habitats necessary to support vegetation, marine life, land animals, and all other living things. Varied habitats are needed to support the biodiversity that environmental scientists value so highly. This biodiversity is also integral to the beauty that we sense in relating to nature, both close to home and far afield.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which covers two-thirds of the Arabian Peninsula, occupies a unique geographical position at the confluence of Eurasian and Afrotropical climates. Tropical climates are known for their biodiversity, so it is no wonder that in the southwestern high-

lands and around Aseer we find 2.7 million hectares of forests. These forests contain ancient trees such as silk trees (*Albizia*), which provides fruit and timber used in local cooking and traditional crafts.<sup>(2)</sup> In places, the banks of the Red Sea, which runs parallel to the Hijaz, Aseer, and Sarawat Mountains, are lined with forests made up of two types of mangrove, *Avicennia* and *Rhizophora*. The Red Sea itself reaches depths up to 2,500 meters, and contains 250 species of coral as well as 1,280 species of fish. It stands in contrast to the shallow Arabian Gulf, which borders the Kingdom to the east. Although it contains 524 species of corals that ought to support biodiversity, oil pollution during the First and Second Gulf Wars has reduced the size of its fisheries. Another important but sensitive aquatic ecosystem is the system of mangrove wetlands that extend along the Saudi coast. In addition to mountains and seas, the Kingdom contains plateaus, such as the highlands of Najd, Dibdiba, Hajrah, Al-Hammad, Widyan, Hijaz, Aseer, and Najran; deserts such as the Rub' Al-Khali, the Great Nafud, Al-Dahna, and Al-Jafurah; dunes such as Nafud Al-Thuwairat, Al-Sir, Iqr Al-Madhus, Al-Dahi, and Uruq Al-Subay'; and sabkhas (salt flats) of the coastal variety along the Red Sea and Gulf coasts as well as the Subway inland variety, found in Al-Qasab, Al-Shaqqa, and Aran.

The Kingdom boasts 2,284 species of wild plants, which provide food and shelter to numerous species of terrestrial and amphibious animals, including snakes (55 species), lizards (44 species), and mammals (86 species), the latter in turn providing food for humans. There are also over



500 species of birds, 250 of which breed in Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom is also a principal stopping point for numerous migratory birds on their journeys between Asia, Europe, and Africa.<sup>(3)</sup>

## Environmental Conservation

The word "natural" in the phrase "natural heritage" refers to different geographical formations and the significantly biodiverse wildlife that inhabits them. The word "heritage," however, refers to the human relationship with nature, including our responsibility to preserve its diversity and guarantee its future. In the past, this relationship was governed by forces beyond human control: as they adapted to their surroundings, human beings had only a limited impact on the environment, similar to that of other natural factors. However, modern technological and industrial development has given people the power to manage the environment and harness it for their own ends, making humans the major determinants of the environment we will inhabit in the future. Nevertheless, international recognition

of the environment as an aesthetic and natural heritage that must be preserved came about only recently. The UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage was adopted in 1972 and then ratified by Saudi Arabia as an amendment to the Law of Antiquities in Royal Decree No. M/26, which had previously lacked any mention of natural heritage.

It was not until a few decades ago, however, that Saudi Arabia came to fully grasp the necessity of conserving its natural heritage by es-

tablishing environmental laws and agencies, creating nature reserves, supporting scientific research, and raising public awareness. This shift came with the 1981 reorganization of the Presidency of Meteorology and Environment (PME), which was established in 1950 as the General Meteorology Administration. (It has had two minor name changes since.) The PME was charged at that time with keeping abreast of environmental efforts both locally and globally.<sup>(4)</sup> This was followed by the founding of the Saudi Wildlife Authority (SWA) in 1986 as the Nation-

al Commission for the Conservation and Advancement of Wildlife.<sup>(5)</sup> A comprehensive survey of the treasures of Saudi natural heritage was then begun, along with the development and execution of plans for their future. In 1991, the Kingdom invited the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to help process this information, which gave rise to today's network of protected areas, twelve land reserves and three marine reserves (see Table 13-1).<sup>(6)</sup> Roughly two-thirds of these areas were selected according to the criteria developed by the IUCN.

**Table 13-1:** Network of nature reserves in KSA<sup>(7)</sup>

Protected Area		Year Announced	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )
1	Jandaliya	1994	1188.9
2	Jabal Shada	2001	68.62
3	Saja Um Al-Rimth	1994	6528.2
4	Al-Taysiyah	1994	4272.2
5	Nafud Al-Urayq	1994	2036.1
6	Uruq Bani Ma'arid	1992	12787
7	Majami Al-Hadb	1992	2256.4
8	Al-Tubayq	1988	12105
9	Farasan Islands	1988	5408
10	Raydah	1988	9.33
11	Ibex Reserve	1987	1840.9
12	Umm Al-Qamari	1987	4.03
13	Mahazat Al-Sayd	1987	2553
14	Al-Khunfah	1986	19339
15	Harrat Al-Harrah	1986	13775
16	Jubail Marine Life Preserve	Not officially announced	2410.69
Total area with protected status			86582.37 km <sup>2</sup>
Proportion of Kingdom's area made up of Protected Areas			4.33%

In addition to these protected areas, there are nature reserves belonging to the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu. Sabkhat Al-Fasl, Gurmah Island, and Al-Fanatir Island, with an area of 13 km<sup>2</sup>, are overseen by the administration of the Royal Commission for Jubail, while the Royal Commission for Yanbu is responsible for three mangrove reserves totaling 3.62 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>(8)</sup> Five nature reserves in Al-Ula Governorate were also approved: Wadi Nakhlah, Harrat az Zabin, Harrat 'Uwayrid, Al-Gharamil, and Sharaan, all of which are to be administered by the Royal Commission for Al-Ula. There are also several other sites that have been nominated for protection by the Saudi Wildlife Authority and other entities.<sup>(9)</sup>

Since the founding of the SWA around two decades ago, its natural heritage has benefited from official institutional attention. This is indicated by a series of international agreements and by the presence of local organizations that have entered the field to protect biodiversity and combat environmental threats. In 1991, Saudi Arabia became party to the Bonn Convention: that is, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, concluded in Bonn, Germany, in 1979. This convention seeks to protect migratory wildlife and natural habitats, support research on migratory species, and raise awareness of their importance.<sup>(10)</sup> This was followed in 1995 by the promulgation of the Wildlife Reserve Law, which seeks to "protect, strengthen, and conserve wildlife, reintroduce endangered species to their native environments, and regulate the utilization of wildlife for purposes including tourism and environmental aims."<sup>(11)</sup> The next year, the Kingdom joined



the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which was opened for signatures in Washington, DC, in 1973. This convention is based on a recognition that trafficking in certain plants and animals endangers their survival in the wild. As a result, they must be protected for future generations, and we must cultivate awareness of their aesthetic, scientific, cultural, recreational, and economic value.<sup>(12)</sup>

In 1999, the Saudi government instituted the Law of Hunting Wild Birds and Animals,<sup>(13)</sup> followed by the Law of Trade in Endangered Species & Their Derivatives in 2000.<sup>(14)</sup> These laws expanded the powers of the Saudi Wildlife Authority by instituting a system of licensing for hunting and trade. Likewise, they prescribe consequences for the violation of regulations. In 2001, the Kingdom signed the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, which was issued in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. This convention aims to regulate the new biological technologies that arose

around the turn of the twenty-first century in order to safeguard biodiversity and create a sustainable future with equitable access to biological resources.<sup>(15)</sup> One of the Aichi Target 11 convention's goals requires at least 17% of terrestrial and inland water, and 10% of coastal and marine areas (especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity) to be protected by 2020.<sup>(16)</sup> As for the Gulf region, the Kingdom joined, in 2004, the Convention on Wildlife and Natural Habitats in the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which was originally signed in Muscat, Oman, in 2001. This convention seeks to conserve the environmental resources shared by the Gulf countries through coordinated efforts to enact the regulations needed to manage habitats, and shield them from pollution and environmental degradation. The convention also stresses the importance of environmental education in building a society that appreciates the close link between the environmental and economic aspects of natural heritage.<sup>(17)</sup>

# Natural Heritage in Saudi Arabia Today



## Towards New Awareness of Natural Heritage: Laws and Strategies

In 2018, Saudi Arabia participated High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, under the theme "transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies." UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 focuses on preserving marine natural heritage and protecting natural areas, including beaches and islands,<sup>(18)</sup> while Goal 15, "Life on Land," directly addresses the conditions needed to prevent Saudi natural heritage from being destroyed. It calls for "protecting and restoring ecosystems, sustainable use of natural resources, sustainable forest management, combating desertification, halting and reversing land degradation, and halting biodiversity loss."<sup>(19)</sup> This participation was accompanied by a restructuring of

governmental bodies related to the environment. In 2019, the Council of Ministers decided to relieve pressure on the PME and SWA by establishing five specialized environmental centers: the National Center for Meteorology, the National Center for Plant Covering and Combating Desertification, the National Center for Environmental Compliance Control, the National Center for the Development of Wildlife, and the National Center for Waste Management.<sup>(20)</sup> On the cultural side, the vision of the Ministry of Culture that was launched in 2019 adds natural heritage to the list of cultural sub-sectors.<sup>(21)</sup>

These institutional changes have been accompanied by a series of agreements, memoranda, and announcements that have helped highlight the current efforts to preserve and develop natural heritage.

First and foremost among these is the nomination in early 2019 of two nature reserves (Uruq Bani Ma'arid<sup>(22)</sup> and the Farasan Islands)<sup>(23)</sup> to be added to the list of UNESCO Natural World Heritage Sites through an ambitious nomination program launched by the SWA.<sup>(24)</sup> This is a key step towards gaining global recognition for Saudi natural heritage, which previously had not been forthcoming as UNESCO had only recognized a few Saudi cultural sites.<sup>(25)</sup>

Locally, Royal Decree No. A/219, issued in 2019, announced a number of royal reserves covering 13.4% of the Kingdom (see Table 13-2).<sup>(26)</sup> This was an important step towards bringing the area of reserves and parks up to the 17% level set by international agreement. These nature reserves present an opportunity to implement environmental protection standards in the future.<sup>(27)</sup>

**Table 13-2:** Network of Royal Reserves in KSA<sup>(28)</sup>

Reserve		Year Announced	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )
1	Imam Abdulaziz bin Muhammad Reserve (Rawdat Khuraim)	2018	11,300
2	Imam Saud bin Abdulaziz Reserve (Mahazat Al-Sayd)	2018	2,553
3	Imam Turki bin Abdullah Reserve (Al-Taysiyah)	2018	91,500
4	King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Reserve (Rawdat Al-Tanhat & Rawdat Al-Khafs)	2018	15,700
5	King Salman bin Abdulaziz Reserve (Al-Khunfah, Al-Tubayq, and Harrat Al-Harrah)	2018	130,700
6	Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Reserve	2018	16,860
Total area of reserves			268,613 km <sup>2</sup>
Proportion of Saudi land in royal reserves			13.3%

This expansion in the network of Saudi nature reserves was accompanied by reviews of the Wildlife Reserve Law, the Law of Hunting Wild Birds and Animals, and the Law of Trade in Endangered Species and Their Derivatives. In 2015, the new Wildlife Reserve Law was released, replacing the 1995 regulations, which sought to "protect, strengthen, and conserve wildlife, reintroduce endangered species to their native environments, and regulate the utilization of wildlife for purposes including tourism and environmental aims."<sup>(29)</sup> The Saudi Wildlife Authority also participated in the drafting of comprehensive environmental regulations under the auspices of the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture (MEWA).<sup>(30)</sup> The SWA has been active on the regional and global stage, concluding memoranda of understanding relating to environmental protection with various countries, including Lebanon, Mauritania, Tajikistan, and Russia.<sup>(31)</sup>

These efforts have all contributed to the preservation of biodiversity throughout the Kingdom, which contains 87 species of amphibians and reptiles.<sup>(32)</sup> In 2004, the Shura Council ratified the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia, which had been signed in Bonn, Germany, in 2001.<sup>(33)</sup> Before that, the Kingdom was party to the 1982 Jeddah Convention, which created the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA).<sup>(34)</sup> Saudi Arabia is also a member of the Gulf Regional Organization for Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME). There are also 250 species of breeding birds and 86 species of mammals

in Saudi Arabia.<sup>(35)</sup> Some of these species are endangered, but they are part of captive breeding programs, which are effective in conserving endangered species (see Table 13-3).<sup>(36)</sup> The SWA is collaborating with Birdlife

International to survey the Kingdom's most important bird habitats for conservation. It is also working with the United Kingdom's Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh to survey the most important areas of vegetation.

**Table 13-3:** Animals in the Saudi National Wildlife Center's breeding program<sup>(37)</sup>

	Species	Number
1	Arabian tiger	14
2	Arabian oryx	257
3	Nubian ibex	340
4	(Idmi gazelle (mountain gazelle	290
5	Goitered gazelle	1,196
6	Neumann's gazelle	43
7	Red-necked ostrich	23
8	Houbara bustard	1,256

The Kingdom has also cultivated a number of plant species in order to increase plant cover and rehabilitate marine environments such as mangrove forests (see Table 13-4).<sup>(38)</sup> Planting trees is one of the most important ways to increase plant cover and combat pollution, particularly in urban areas located in desert environments. To this end, the

Kingdom has launched a number of tree-planting projects in cities, including Al-Khobar,<sup>(39)</sup> Jazan,<sup>(40)</sup> Taif,<sup>(41)</sup> Al-Madinah,<sup>(42)</sup> and Riyadh, as a part of the Green Riyadh project for Vision 2030.<sup>(43)</sup> MEWA also launched an online tree-planting portal as part of its initiative to sustainably manage forests and grassland while combating desertification.<sup>(44)</sup>



**Table 13-4:** Species included in planting programs in KSA<sup>(45)</sup>

Common or local name		Scientific name
1	Loop-root mangrove	<i>Rhizophora mucronata</i>
2	White mangrove	<i>Avicennia marina</i>
3	Saxaul	<i>Haloxylon salicornicum</i>
4	Arfaj	<i>Rhanterium epapposum</i>
5	Firs	<i>Salsola tetrandra</i>
6	Rawthah	<i>Salsola villosa</i>
7	Arad	<i>Salsola cyclophylla</i>
8	Figwort	<i>Schrophularia hypercifolia</i>
9	Shrubby sea-blite	<i>Suaeda vera</i>
10	Damran	<i>Traganum nudatum</i>
11	Yarrow	<i>Achillea fragrantissima</i>
12	Ujrum	<i>Anabasis articulata</i>
13	White wormwood	<i>Artemisia herba-alba</i>
14	Judean wormwood	<i>Artemisia judaica</i>
15	Fourwing saltbush	<i>Atriplex canescens</i>
16	Mediterranean saltbush	<i>Atriplex halimus</i>
17	Rughl	<i>Atriplex leucoclada</i>
18	Arta	<i>Calligonum comosum</i>

### Local Responses to Global Challenges

Tree-planting programs in Saudi Arabia are one of the ways the Kingdom is confronting the greatest threat to natural heritage and biodiversity: climate change. Combating climate change is one of the main goals of Saudi Arabia's sustainable development program, which complies with international treaties such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement.<sup>(46)</sup> Threats to biodiversity in Saudi Arabia include the following: pasture degradation, excessive firewood collection, urban sprawl, chronic drought, unauthorized expansion of agricul-

ture, misuse of modern agricultural technology, diminishing plant cover, overgrazing, overfishing, shrinking natural habitats, water and air pollution, and the harmful effects of invasive species like mesquite (*Prosopis juliflora*) and prickly pear (*Opuntia spp.*).<sup>(47)</sup> One of the greatest challenges in preserving biodiversity in Saudi Arabia's most arid and semi-arid climates is protecting sources of fresh water. This includes natural sources such as wells, springs, and surface water, as well as man-made sources such as wastewater treatment plants and reservoirs.

Marine natural heritage is also linked to aquatic ecosystems, which must be protected from pollution, ocean

acidification, and marine plastics. To this end, the SWA has been working to implement the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs and their Habitats since 2013.<sup>(48)</sup> Of all marine wildlife in Saudi Arabia, invertebrates are one of the largest sources of biodiversity.<sup>(49)</sup> MEWA recently began to comply with Annex VI of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), as well as the IMO's International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments. The Ministry also ratified the Minamata Convention on Mercury, an initiative of the UN Environment Programme.<sup>(50)</sup> In 2019, the Kingdom participated in the UNESCO World Heritage Marine Managers Conference in the United States.<sup>(51)</sup> General interest in marine biodiversity and fisheries is further evidenced by the creation of specialized centers, such as the Fisheries Research Center, the Saudi Aquaculture Society, the Faculty of Marine Sciences at King Abdulaziz University, the Fisheries Research Center at King Faisal University, and the Red Sea Research Center at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology.<sup>(52)</sup>

### Public Awareness Campaigns

In addition to these institutions' role in ensuring the conservation of natural heritage, they also play a role in environmental public awareness campaigns that involve people from all backgrounds in the conservation of wildlife and the unique natural heritage that it represents for Saudi Arabia. MEWA has announced more

than 60 initiatives related to environmental action, biodiversity, increasing plant cover, and combating desertification.<sup>(53)</sup> It also launched the first Saudi Environment Week in 2019.<sup>(54)</sup> The most important of these projects is the Environment and Sustainability Awareness Initiative, a transformative campaign organized by the PME.<sup>(55)</sup> The PME also grants the Award of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for Environmental Management in the Islamic World every two years.<sup>(56)</sup> Local environmental awards include the annual

Student Environmental Competition organized by the PME in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, which began its third round in 2020.<sup>(57)</sup>

One indicator of increased environmental awareness is the growing number of community groups dedicated to environmental issues and volunteer work (see Table 13-5). Even more important, however, is the role of individuals in the absence of longstanding institutional experience to pave the way. Some of these

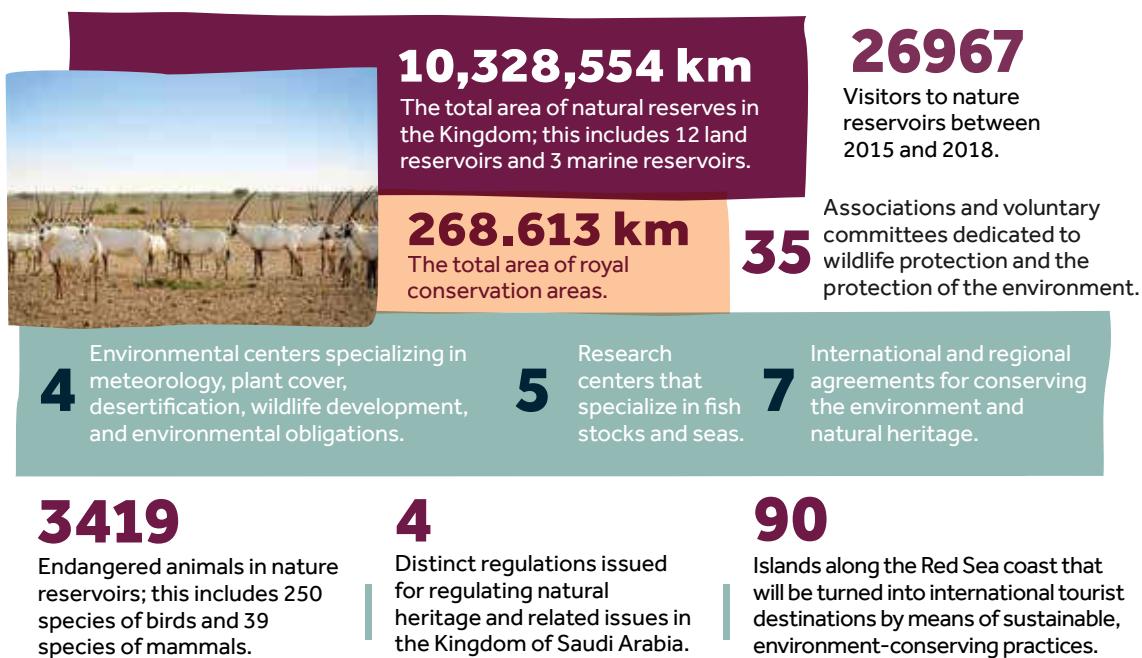
individuals have been internationally recognized by organizations such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature.<sup>(58)</sup> But while institutional and community efforts have provided a framework for the preservation of Saudi natural heritage, this heritage is still in need of more attention. It should be seen as an independent sector of national culture worthy of concerted efforts to highlight and sustain its biological, scientific, and aesthetic value. This is the role that the Ministry of Culture seeks to play.

**Table 13-5:** Environmental community groups in KSA<sup>(59)</sup>

	Community Group	City
1	Saudi Society for Environmental Sciences	Jeddah
2	Saudi Environmental Society	Jeddah
3	Cooperative Association for Yusr and Desert Plants	Riyadh
4	Saudi Biological Society	Riyadh
5	Prince Sultan Chair for Environment and Wildlife	Riyadh
6	Saudi Arabian Boy Scouts Association	Riyadh
7	Environmental Green Horizons Society	Riyadh
8	Environmental Society of Aseer	Al-Abha
9	Cooperative Association of Fishermen	Safwa
10	Environmental Scouts Association	Al-Lith
11	Albrari Association	Riyadh
12	Madinah Eco Society	Al-Madinah
13	National Society for Human Rights	Jeddah
14	Wildlife Society (Green Tabuk Association)	Tabuk
15	Ertiqa	Khobar
16	Saudi Organic Farming Association	Riyadh
17	Oxygen Environmental Society	Al-Madinah
18	Mawakeb Alajer	Jeddah
19	Saudi Diving Association	Jeddah
20	Beautiful Umluj Association	Umluj

	Community Group	City
21	Saudi Green Building Forum	Riyadh
22	Social Responsibility Committee of the Arab Federation for Youth and Environment Chamber of Commerce (part of the Arab League)	Al-Madinah
23	Environmental Committee of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce	Jeddah
24	Environmental Committee of the Al Faisalya Women Welfare Society	Jeddah
25	Sidr Volunteer Association	Riyadh
26	Jeddah Divers League	Jeddah
27	Salaam Volunteer Search and Rescue Team	Jeddah
28	Moments Volunteer Team	Jeddah
29	Green Schools Team at the Al Faisaliah School for the Gifted	Jeddah
30	Ematah	Jeddah
31	Al-Nabtah	Jeddah
32	Wildlife Volunteer Team	Hafar Al-Batin
33	Friends of the Environment	Jazan
34	Diving Star Encyclopedia of Marine Life	Jeddah
35	Faseel	Riyadh

## Key Figures in Natural Heritage



# 2019 Cultural Participation Survey

## Tourism and Natural Heritage

The total number of visitors to the Kingdom's nature reserves, which are the cornerstone of the country's natural heritage, is quite small. From 2015 to 2018, only 26,967 people visited these reserves, with the Farasan Islands as the top destination, drawing 12,592 visitors (see Table 13-6).<sup>(60)</sup> These low numbers can be traced to the lack of publicity for nature reserves as a part of

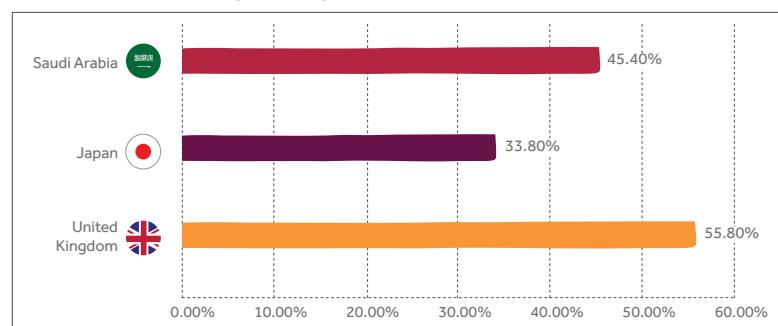
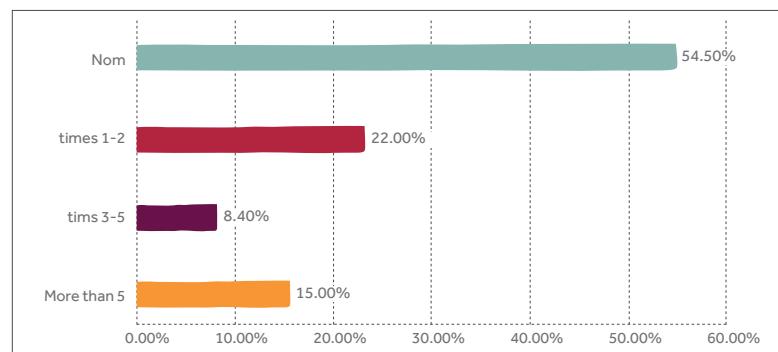
natural heritage, which in general has become a major draw for local and international ecotourism. In fact, it is inaccurate to treat visitor numbers at remote nature reserves (whose protected status itself creates barriers to visiting) as an indicator of the public attitude towards natural heritage. Other monuments to natural heritage, such as parks on the outskirts of cities, remain a common destination for Saudis during their leisure time. The Cul-

tural Participation Survey indicates that 45.40% of the representative sample visited a natural site at least once in the past 12 months. This is a greater proportion than in Japan (33.80%), but lower than in the United Kingdom (55.80%), as shown in Figure 13-1. Additionally, 15% of respondents reported that they had repeatedly visited nature reserves or parks in Saudi Arabia in 2019 (see Figure 13-2).



**Table 13-6:** Number of visitors to nature reserves in KSA (2015-2018)<sup>(61)</sup>

Year	Number of Visitors
2015	5,905
2016	7,197
2017	6,597
2018	7,268

**Figure 13-1:** Percentage of people who visited a natural site at least once in the past 12 months, by country**Figure 13-2:** Number of visits to nature reserves or parks among Saudis (past 12 months)

Saudi ecotourism today faces a number of challenges. While there is a pressing need to undertake tourism projects related to natural heritage, there is no way around the negative impact that this development has on the environment. Significant challenges include waste management, water pollution because of insufficient wastewater treatment systems at tourist facilities, and the burden placed by large numbers of visitors on the water resources of

remote areas.<sup>(62)</sup> The dilemma becomes evident when we take into account that the Kingdom is lagging in environmental performance. It is ranked 86 out of 180 countries on the Environmental Performance Index, 122 out of 180 for Ecosystem Vitality, and 143 out of 180 for Biodiversity and Habitat.<sup>(63)</sup>

An underdeveloped ecotourism infrastructure is also a barrier to making natural heritage a more promi-

nent part of domestic tourism. There has been little effort to increase community participation in tourism planning. Meanwhile, regulators and sector leaders have not succeeded in developing tourism according to a long-term strategy that takes into account social, economic, and environmental interests. There is also a lack of ongoing development at natural heritage sites.<sup>(64)</sup> Another barrier is that, due to the Kingdom's vastness, many sites are quite remote. This makes them difficult to reach as they lack transportation infrastructure and tourist facilities. The only exception to this is those natural heritage sites that benefit from being located near material cultural heritage sites.

In this context, the "Leave No Trace" program was launched to get local communities more involved in efforts to improve the indicators of environmental performance. The program was originally run by the SWA before being taken over by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) in 2004. A number of governmental and community organizations have participated in this program, including the PME and the Saudi Arabian Boy Scouts Association.<sup>(65)</sup> The General Authority for Tourism and Antiquities (now the Ministry of Culture) also launched the "Live Saudi" program, which aims to strengthen ties between Saudi citizens and their natural and cultural national heritage.<sup>(66)</sup> The SWA has also held a number of exhibitions and workshops for public and private entities as part of the programming at the Natural Resource Conservation Training Center in 2018 and 2019, which reached 4,815 people.<sup>(67)</sup> Saudi Telecom Company has also played a role in educating citizens about their heritage through their public awareness campaign "This is Saudi Arabia."<sup>(68)</sup>

# Infrastructure and Investment

In an academic context, natural heritage falls under many different fields that all contribute to the knowledge necessary to preserve and develop it. These include fields concerned with cultural heritage more generally; scientific disciplines like biology, earth science, and the life sciences; disciplines concerned with the environmental sciences and relevant policies; and specialized programs in wilderness leadership, outdoor and environmental education, and recreation ecology. The Saudi education system lacks many of these specializations, especially as they relate to natural heritage, due to a shortage of educational professionals with training in these relatively new fields. However, among Saudi academic institutions, there are associations interested in the environment, even if they do not focus on natural heritage specifically and lack practical experience. These include the Saudi Biological Society, the Saudi Society for Environmental Sciences, the Saudi Geographical Society, and other groups listed in Table 13-5.

## Centers for Protecting Natural Heritage

There are numerous research centers in the Kingdom whose work is relevant to wildlife conservation, one of the most important aspects of natural heritage. In 1986, the same year the SWA was founded, the Prince Saud Al-Faisal Wildlife Research Center, which comprises an area of 35 km<sup>2</sup>, was established in Taif. The Center aims to restore the habitats of endangered species and track them after breeding and reintroduction programs. It also supports scientific and administrative wildlife conservation programs.<sup>(69)</sup> 1987 saw the creation in Thumamah of the King Khalid Wildlife Research Center, which oversees the Prince Mohammed Al-Sudairi Gazelle Breeding Center in Al-Qassim. The King Khalid Center today has breeding programs for the goitered gazelle, mountain gazelle, Neumann's gazelle, Nubian ibex, and Arabian oryx. It also serves as the genetic repository for wild Arabian ungulates in order to reduce their risk of extinction due to a loss of genetic diversity.<sup>(70)</sup> The joint Wildlife Research Center at King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology is also working towards this goal.<sup>(71)</sup>

While these centers focus their efforts on preserving rare species and

protecting habitats, others address the effects of climate change on biodiversity and the conservation of natural heritage sites with aesthetic value. One such center is the King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center, which was founded in 2016 as a non-profit institute dedicated to studying the effect of the energy sector on the environment and meeting the challenge of climate change.<sup>(72)</sup> Another contributor is the Saudi Investment Recycling Company (SIRC), which was founded in 2017 with backing from the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia, in order to work towards the ambitious goal of recycling 81% of all waste. Meeting this goal will substantially improve the Kingdom's environmental performance.<sup>(73)</sup>

## Investment Opportunities and Support Funds

As a part of the National Environmental Strategy announced in 2018, the year 2019 saw the founding of the Environmental Fund, which has both governmental and investment aspects. This fund aims to provide backing for environmental programs, education, and other initiatives in order to improve the country's environmental performance.<sup>(74)</sup> The Environmental Fund will organize the finances of entities

such as the SWA's Wildlife Support Fund, which was replaced in 2019 by the National Center for the Development of Wildlife.<sup>(75)</sup> The National Environmental Strategy focuses on empowering the environmental sector using revenue from levies and fines, as well as strengthening its relationship with research centers and relevant firms in areas such as meteorology and waste management.<sup>(76)</sup>

As for tourism, the Kingdom's rich natural heritage is chief among its unexploited resources. It presents an opportunity for enterprises like the Red Sea Project, which was launched in 2017 by the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia. The project aims to transform 90 islands along the Red Sea coast, from Al-Wajh to Umluj, into a global tourism destination using environmentally conscious, sustainable methods.<sup>(77)</sup> Alongside this massive project, other ecotourism destinations are being carefully developed, such as AlJabal Al-Abyad in the Al-Madinah region, the Farasan Islands in Jazan, and Jabal Al-Souda in Aseer. These last two have always been destinations for domestic tourism, but they will now be accessible to visitors from all over the world thanks to the new tourist visa program launched in 2019.

## Key Moments in Natural Heritage


**1972**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia signed the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.


**1981**

The Department of Meteorology and Environmental Protection was established to track environmental work both locally and internationally.


**1982**

The Kingdom signed on to the Jeddah Regional Convention for the Conservation of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Environment (PERSGA).


**1986**

The Prince Saud Al-Faisal Center for Wildlife Research in Taif was established with a perimeter of 35 km dedicated to the rehabilitation of the wildlife habitats of endangered animals.


**1999**

The adoption of a regulation on trading endangered fungal species and related products.


**1995**

The promulgation of the Wildlife Protected Area System to protect, promote, and preserve wildlife.


**1991**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia signed on to the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).


**1986**

The Saudi Wildlife Authority was established and its regulation was announced on behalf of the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.


**2007**

The Kingdom contributed \$300 million at the OPEC summit for the creation of a research fund for energy and the environment.


**2004**

The Kingdom committed itself to the convention, signed in the Sultanate of Oman, for preserving wildlife and natural habitats in the countries that constitute the Cooperation Council for the Arab Gulf States. This convention was intended to protect the mutual environment of the Gulf countries and to institute appropriate regulations together for managing the environmental habitat and to protect it from the threats of pollution and environmental degradation.


**2001**

The Kingdom signed on to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in Brazil.


**2000**

The adoption of a regulation on hunting wild animals and birds.


**2019**

The establishment of an agency in the Ministry of Culture for the natural heritage sector that can oversee the development of this sector and ensure the implementation of the vision entrusted to it by means of specialized activities.


**2017**

The Saudi Investment Recycling Company (SIRC) was established.


**2016**

the King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center, a non-profit center for research on all that is related to energy, its economy, its impact on the environment, and the crucial climate challenges that it presents.

**Endnote:**

- (1) This concept of natural heritage centered on the material, scientific, and aesthetic value of geological formations and biodiversity is drawn from the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (adopted 1972), which was ratified by Saudi Arabia in 1978. See UNESCO, "The States Parties: Saudi Arabia," <http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/sa>.
- (2) "Report on the ancient trees of Aseer and their deep connection to people," Saudi News Agency, March 21, 2019.
- (3) For further details on Saudi wildlife, see: Saudi Wildlife Authority, "Biodiversity," <<https://www.swa.gov.sa/Ar/Wildlife/Biodiversity/Pages/default.aspx>>.
- (4) Presidency of Meteorology and Environment, "About Us," <https://www.pme.gov.sa/Ar/About/Pages/AboutUS.aspx>.
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- (6) Ibid.
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- (8) Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu, "Yanbu Industrial Guide: Fourth Edition" [Dalil Yanbu' al-Sina'iyah] (Yanbu: Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu, 2014).
- (9) Saudi Wildlife Authority Annual Report (Saudi Wildlife Authority, 2018), 18.
- (10) "National Report of Saudi Arabia (COP8)," Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (November 20, 2015), <https://www.cms.int/en/document/national-report-saudi-arabia-cop8>.
- (11) Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers, "Wildlife Reserve Law," <https://laws.boe.gov.sa/BoeLaws/Laws/LawDetails/415d80f3-d9f9-4def-92d9-a9a700f25799/1>.
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- (14) Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers, "Regulations on Trade in Endangered Species & Their Derivatives," <https://laws.boe.gov.sa/BoeLaws/Laws/LawDetails/233c2b64-6824-4d1a-bd38-a9a700f24fc5/1>.
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- (16) Convention on Biological Diversity, "Aichi Target 11," <https://www.cbd.int/aichi-targets/target/1>.
- (17) Gulf Cooperation Council, "Convention on Wildlife and Natural Habitats," <https://www.gcc-sg.org/ar-sa/CognitiveSources/DigitalLibrary/Pages/Details.aspx?itemid=329>.
- (18) Ibid., 132-134.
- (19) Saudi Vision 2030, "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies: the first National Voluntary Report," (2018), 136.
- (20) "In the Age of Salman, 5 historic decisions to safeguard the environment," Saudi Press Agency, March 30, 2019.
- (21) Ministry of Culture, "Our Cultural Vision for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" (Riyadh: Ministry of Culture, 2019), 18.
- (22) UNESCO, World Heritage Centre, 'Uruq Bani Mu'arid Protected Area (January 3, 2019), <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6369/>.
- (23) UNESCO, World Heritage Centre, Farasan Islands Protected Area (January 3, 2019), <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6370/>.
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- (28) Ibid., 17.
- (29) Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers, "Wildlife Reserve Regulations," <https://laws.boe.gov.sa/BoeLaws/Laws/LawDetails/415d80f3-d9f9-4def-92d9-a9a700f25799/1>.
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- (31) Ibid.
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- (40) "Jazan branch of Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture launches tree-planting campaign," Saudi News Agency, October 30, 2019.

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- (44) "Vice Minister of Environment, Water, and Agriculture inaugurates tree-planting program," Saudi News Agency, December 9, 2019.
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- (46) Saudi Vision 2030, "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies: the first National Voluntary Report" (2018), 128.
- (47) National Strategy for Preserving Biodiversity in Saudi Arabia (Saudi Wildlife Authority, 2010), 30-53.
- (48) "Saudi Arabia protects 'sea brides' from extinction," Al Eqtisadiah, March 21, 2013.
- (49) 2016 Environmental Status Report: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Presidency of Meteorology and Environment, 2018), 161.
- (50) "Al Fadley: 65 initiatives as part of the Environmental Strategy to support regional efforts in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden," Saudi News Agency, May 22, 2019.
- (51) "KSA participates in the UNESCO World Heritage Marine Managers Conference in the United States," Ministry of Culture, September 8, 2019.
- (52) Saudi Vision 2030, "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies: the first National Voluntary Report" (2018), 134.
- (53) "Al Fadley: 65 initiatives as part of the Environmental Strategy to support regional efforts in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden," Saudi News Agency, May 22, 2019.
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# 14





# Food and Culinary Arts

- Food and Culinary Arts in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview
- Saudi Cuisine and Culinary Arts Today
- Awards and Achievements
- Saudi Cuisine in the World
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# Food and Culinary Arts in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview

## The Roots of Saudi Cuisine

The history of Saudi cuisine reflects the Kingdom's cultural and ecological diversity. The fundamental staples of Saudi cuisine are local grains, meat, vegetables, and fruit. These ingredients are prepared and combined in various ways based on their abundance in every region of the geographically vast Kingdom in accordance with local resources. This heritage has produced diverse dish-

es that are still part of Saudi cuisine. These dishes include jareesh and ha-rees, saleeg, aareekah, and kleicha, as well as seafood such as majboos fish, shrimp, and sayadiah, for which the coastal regions are renowned.

Thanks to the long-standing commercial trade along the Kingdom's western and eastern coasts and the desert caravans from the Levant and Iraq (the central and northern regions, in particular, have been af-

fected by tribal caravan trading),<sup>(1)</sup> Saudi cuisine adopted new ingredients that became fixtures of everyday recipes. Foremost among these is rice, which is now fundamental to traditional dishes frequently found on Saudi tables, such as kabsa, saleeg, and haneeth.

Likewise, the borderlands have been influenced by the culinary culture of surrounding countries with which they share cultural roots and geographic proximity. This influence is evident in the similarity of popular foods in eastern Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf countries. It is also notable in the southern region, where some dishes resemble Yemeni foods. The same is true of mansaf, for example, which is considered a staple in the northern regions of the Arabian Peninsula. The cultural diversity of the Hijaz has enriched different local foods with discernible Asian, Eastern European, and Middle Eastern elements. Perhaps the most famous of these foods is Bukhari rice, which has spread to all of the regions of the Kingdom and has become a fixture of traditional entrées.

## Cookbooks and the Internet

Recipes for Saudi dishes have been passed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next for decades. Even though these recipes have maintained their traditional character, they have also been modified in the course of oral transmission. This makes tracing their roots a difficult task that has not been seriously pursued. Nevertheless, the last three decades have produced Saudi cookbooks that seek to doc-



ument these recipes in detail. Examples include *Origins of Saudi and Middle Eastern Cuisine*<sup>(2)</sup> and *The Best of Saudi and Middle Eastern Cuisine*.<sup>(3)</sup> Some English books that deal with cooking in the Gulf and in the Middle East more generally have also appeared.<sup>(4)</sup> The importance of these scattered individual efforts lies in their having made an inventory of community-based and orally transmitted recipes and used them as primary sources. Despite their importance, however, these efforts have yet to achieve the criteria for systematic documentation because they are commercial in nature and target the consumer. Many are also insufficiently precise.<sup>(5)</sup>

Since its proliferation, the internet has played an important role in expanding this inventory of recipes. Internet platforms such as YouTube, blogs, and specialized websites teem with culinary content, drawing in aficionados eager to collect Saudi recipes and diverse cooking methods. The internet has provided a quick and easy way for anyone interested to learn how to prepare these dishes. Nevertheless, scattered online sources and the cookbooks available lack high quality production. More importantly, they lack a documentary component that discusses the essence of the dish, its origins, roots, and the popular narratives surrounding it. Instead, these sources focus exclusively on how to prepare food.<sup>(6)</sup>

### Saudi Cuisine in the Context of Heritage

Festivals have helped to consolidate the features of Saudi cuisine in

the Saudi collective consciousness. Indeed, food is one of the biggest draws for festival attendees, who consider popular food to be one of the essential elements of Saudi heritage. Several festivals have featured popular food and Saudi cuisine. First among them is the Janadriyah Festival, inaugurated in 1985, when it was organized by the Saudi National Guard. Village festivals have included designated spaces for different regions of the Kingdom, which display elements of cultural heritage for each region. These displays, in addition to attracting media coverage, have allowed visitors from Riyadh and beyond to learn about the identities of different parts of the Kingdom through the dishes on display. Other local festivals in different regions of the Kingdom have provided space for popular food displays, which have drawn a significant turnout. These include the Flowers and Fruits Festival held in Tabuk<sup>(7)</sup> and the Heritage Festival of Najran,<sup>(8)</sup> among many others.

### The Beginnings of a Professional Outlet for Culinary Arts

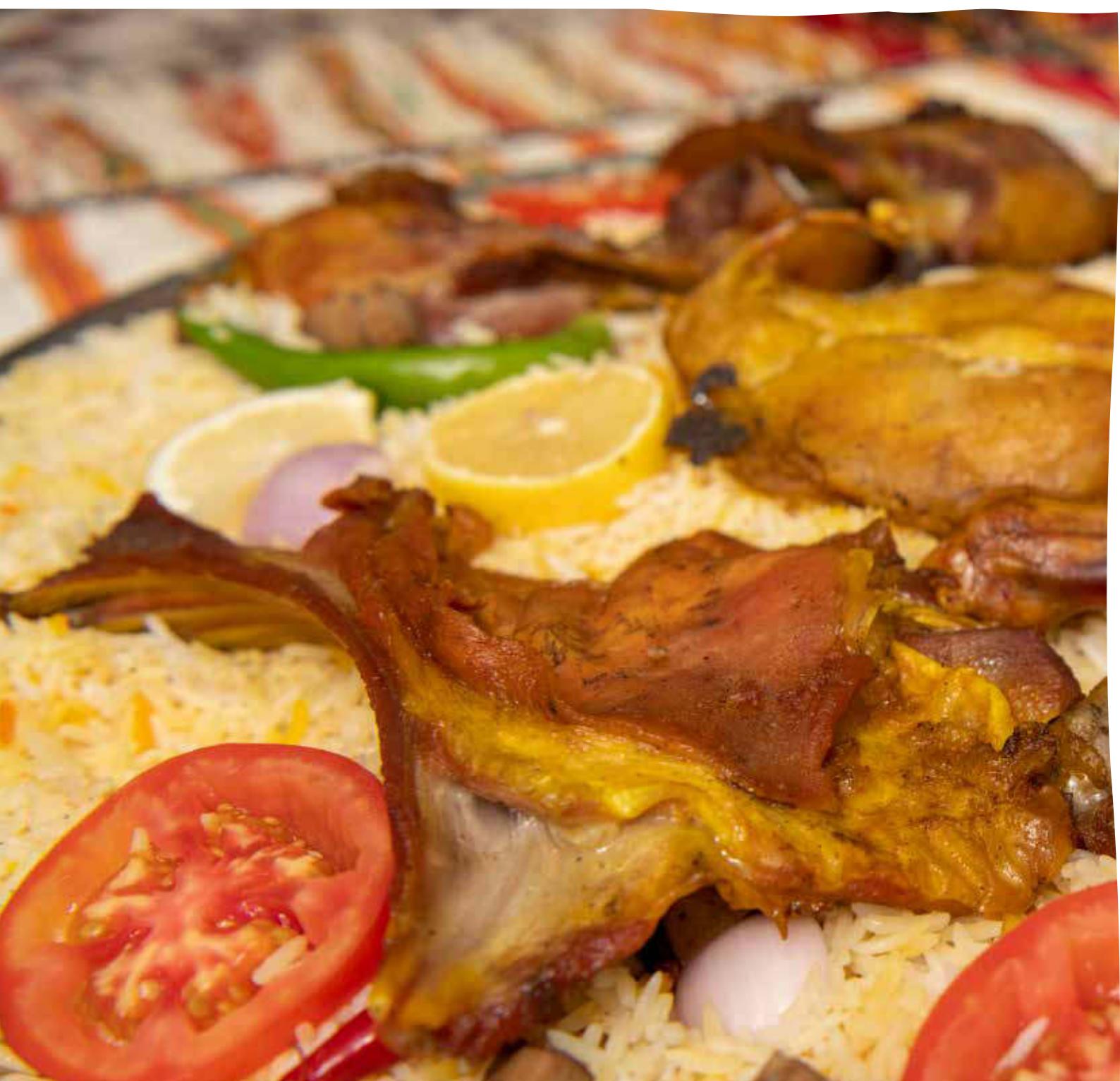
Some culinary education has existed in the Kingdom. Many female students have learned food-preparation skills and the relevant knowledge and etiquette through the curricula of schools and colleges under the jurisdiction of the then-General Presidency for Girls' Education. Though Saudi cuisine has not had its own course within these curricula, they have still contributed both directly and indirectly to the enrichment of culinary culture.<sup>(9)</sup>



These scattered components (daily practices both at home and in restaurants as well as festivals and modest efforts to codify cooking methods) have not been enough to create a distinct, fully-fledged Saudi culinary identity. One of the primary reasons that Saudi cuisine remains relatively humble is the longstanding absence of a culinary milieu where professional Saudi chefs can assume the crucial task of highlighting and preserving it. A lack of community appreciation for culinary professions may be one reason for this absence.<sup>(9)</sup> Moreover, there have been few quality training or educational programs for professional practice in food production and catering services.

Despite these stumbling-blocks, the situation began to change around the end of the 2000s. In 2009, the efforts of a group of chefs culminated in the establishment of the Saudi Arabian Chefs' Association (SARCA), a professional civil-society organization within the World Association of Chefs' Societies (WACS). SARCA focuses on holding local cooking festivals and competitions.<sup>(10)</sup>

# Saudi Cuisine and Culinary Arts Today



Features of a distinct Saudi culinary identity have started to take form over the last few years, during which the industry has witnessed notable institutional activity in the form of two separate, yet intersecting, lines of development: one cultural, concerned with documenting heritage, and one economic, funded by the tourism and hospitality sector. Since then, a group of professional Saudi chefs have started to focus their efforts on creating programs and community groups to invigorate the field and respond to the present needs that have arisen because of these developments.<sup>(11)</sup>

### Community Initiatives and the Activity of Saudi Chefs

Recently, initiatives by non-governmental agencies and Saudi chefs have begun to enliven the field. In 2011, a number of chefs in the city of Jeddah founded the Artistic Food Lab (Saudi Arabian Chefs Development Society), whose work has since expanded to the southern, eastern, and central regions of the Kingdom. Artistic Food Lab has implemented several initiatives, the most important of which is "Saudi dish diplomacy," through which licensed Saudi chefs participate in competitions held by international culinary arts agencies. In 2019, there were 26 licensed Saudi chefs in the Artistic Food Lab. There is also an academic initiative called "Louloua's Kitchen Academy," which was inaugurated in 2013 in Jeddah, specializing in teaching young women the culinary arts through courses and workshops. Although this initiative is not limited to Saudi cuisine, it has helped to spread culinary culture and practical training for women hoping to refine their skills.<sup>(12)</sup> This was followed by the 2015 establishment of the Saudi Arabian Chefs Table, with support from the Nestlé corporation, to strengthen professional ties between chefs in Saudi Arabia.

Subsequently, in 2019, ZADK Culinary Academy was established in

Al-Khobar in the Eastern Province. It aims to produce qualified chefs trained in various international cuisines, while also allocating part of the curriculum to Saudi cuisine. The academy relies on support from local crops and farmers which increases the presence of Saudi identity. In addition to a number of intensive programs and specialized training sessions, the academy offers the Saudi-Swiss Diploma in Culinary Arts in collaboration with the Academy for Culinary Arts in Switzerland.<sup>(13)</sup>

Recently, there have also been a number of individual commercial initiatives, in which restaurants have attempted to modernize Saudi cuisine without diluting its distinct identity, in hopes of shifting it from the local to the international stage. One of these restaurants is Takyia, which made a noticeable impression at Diriyah Season, where it reinvented a number of famous Saudi dishes with a modern, compelling twist for attendees from the Kingdom and beyond.<sup>(14)</sup>

Chef Ahmad Mesawa, in a step towards increasing Saudi food writing, published a book called Tasting, which explains in simple terms how to critique and evaluate foods. He has since established a tasting club by the same name and registered it with Artistic Food Lab to bring together gourmet diners within the



Kingdom. Despite the importance of such initiatives in and of themselves, they are also symbolic of the greater need for governmental and institutional support of Saudi cuisine and its practitioners.

### The Ministry of Culture and the Culinary Arts Commission

To lead and strengthen an expanding interest in the culinary arts as a cultural practice, the Ministry of Culture, at its vision launch gathering in March 2019, announced that the cuisine sub-sector, along with other cultural sectors, would be placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture. At the same meeting, the Ministry inaugurated the National Cooking Festival, which will take place annually to spread awareness of Saudi cuisine and its cultural significance.<sup>(15)</sup> A few months later,

the Council of Ministers agreed to establish 11 cultural commissions and to appoint chef Mayada Badr as president of the Culinary Arts Commission. She emphasized that the commission would focus on spreading the culture of Saudi cuisine around the world, while underscoring the great interest that Saudi food has generated as it expands into fine dining. Through their personal and commercial initiatives, many new Saudi chefs have tried to emulate the fine-dining experience.<sup>(16)</sup>

### Festivals and Competitions

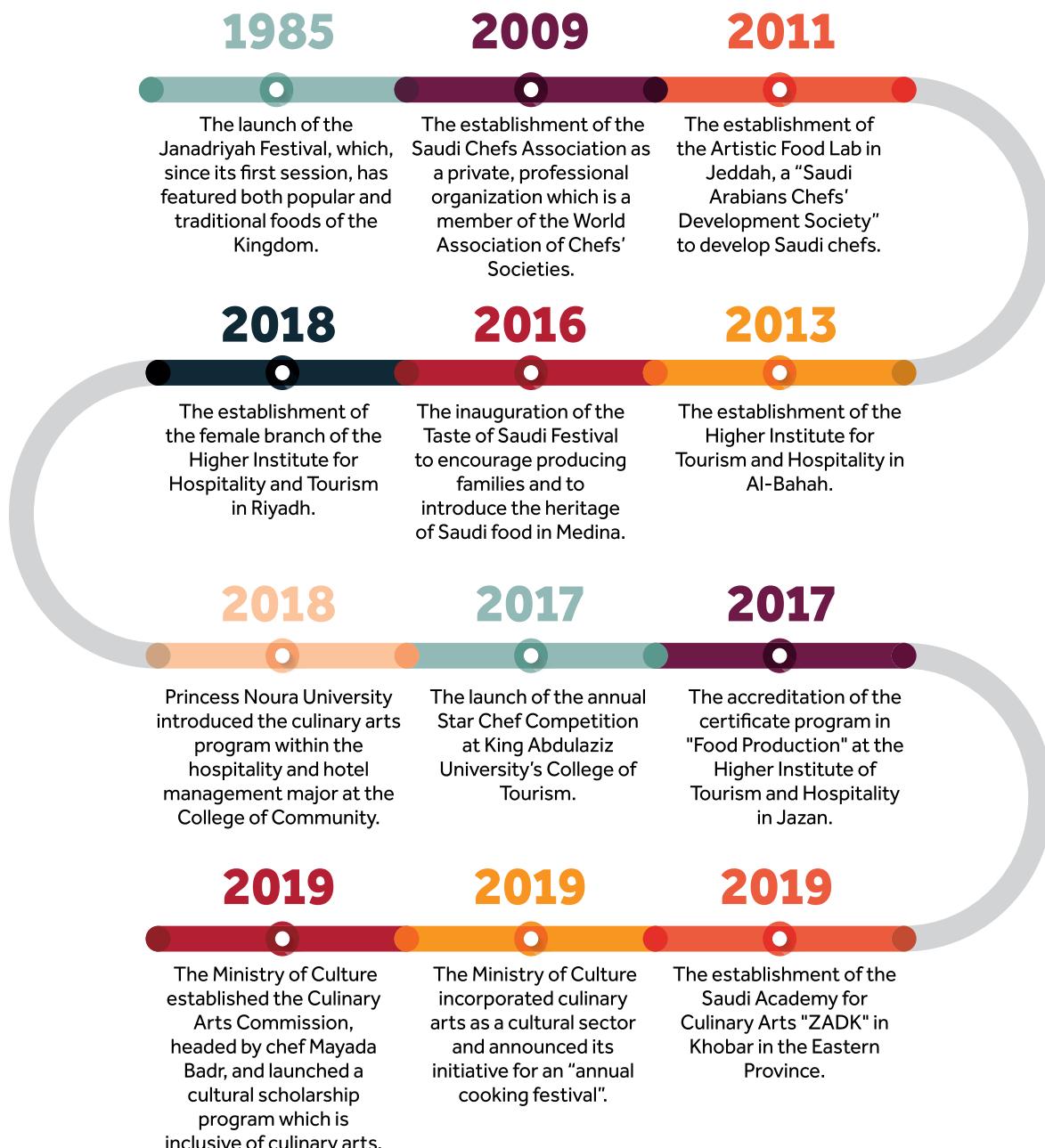
As mentioned above, festivals have been one of the most important factors in strengthening food culture and Saudi culinary identity because of the presence of food on the sidelines of various festival activities. In the past year, festivals have made a stronger contribution than ever, as certain festivals have been dedicated

specifically to food and the culinary arts, even as the former practice of serving food continues at other events. Though some festivals have been concerned primarily with hospitality and tourism activities, others have taken the interest in heritage and preservation as a driving force. Among these are culinary festivals and competitions organized to encourage cooking enthusiasts as well as professionals. These include "Culinnaire," an international competition for professional chefs held at the Foodex exhibition; "Ultimate," a competition held for professional chefs during the Saudi International Bakery and Pastry Expo, organized by the Saudi Grains Organization; and the Jeddah Open Competition for Cooking and Table Decoration, held during the Saudi Food, Hotel, and Hospitality Exhibition. Additionally, the College of Tourism at King Abdulaziz University has regularly held the Star Chef Competition since 2017.<sup>(17)</sup>

**Table 14-1: Well-known festivals and events dedicated to Saudi cuisine**

Name	Purpose / Goal	City	Year
Taste of Saudi Festival <sup>(18)</sup>	Encouraging productivity, and introducing Saudi culinary heritage	Al-Madinah	2016
Foodex <sup>(19)</sup>	Networking, exchange of expertise, and exhibiting the latest products	Jeddah	2013 - 2019
The Pour! Festival <sup>(20)</sup>	Exhibiting heritage foods	Riyadh	2017
The Food First Festival <sup>(21)</sup>	Commercial entertainment festival	Jeddah	2017
Jeddah Food Festival <sup>(22)</sup>	Commercial entertainment festival	Jeddah	2017 - 2019
Saudi International Bakery and Pastry Expo <sup>(23)</sup>	Strengthening professional networks, exchanging food industry experience	Riyadh	2019
Saudi Food, Hotels, and Hospitality Expo <sup>(24)</sup>	Expanding commercial activity in the hotel and hospitality industry	Jeddah	The 23 <sup>rd</sup> iteration was held in 2018; not held in 2019
HORECA Expo <sup>(25)</sup>	Networking, exchange of expertise, and exhibiting the latest products in the hospitality industry	Riyadh	2009 - 2019
Taste of the World Festival <sup>(26)</sup>	Bringing the most famous local and international chefs together	Riyadh	2019
Golden Whisk Competition <sup>(27)</sup>	Encouraging amateur bakers	Jeddah	2019

## Key Moments in Culinary Arts



## Awards and Achievements



Many cooking competitions are held at multiple levels. Below are some of these contests and their winners.

- At the HORECA Expo hosted in Riyadh, November 26-28, 2019, Chef Hanadi Al-Sulahem won the bronze medal in the Healthy Dish category. Head Chef Muhammad Jameel won the bronze in the Seafood category, as well as the Boecker Award for Food Safety. Muhammad Jameel and Assistant Head Chef Bandar Al-Zahrani both received certificates of appreciation for their six-course menus.
- Chef Rakan Aloraifi won the Culinary competition put on by the General Entertainment Authority.
- At the annual Star Chef Competition hosted by the Tourism Faculty at King Abdulaziz University, Renad Al-Wadani won first place, Mayasim Al-Juhani won second, and Al-Anod Al-Ghamadi won third.



The sector is awaiting a dedicated annual award announced by the Ministry of Culture, namely a Culinary Arts Award, as part of the National Cultural Award Initiative.

# Saudi Cuisine in the World

Due to the lack of international cooking experience in the country, Saudi dishes have not made their mark on the international scene. Many food critics attribute this to the limited spread of Saudi dishes, which do not often travel beyond the region. Saudi restaurants outside of the Kingdom are limited. Perhaps the most famous are Aldeerah Saudi Restaurant in the state of Virginia (USA) and Saudi Kitchen in London (UK). This list expanded during Riyadh Season last year with the London opening of ZAAD Saudi Cuisine, which seeks to modernize traditional Saudi recipes from several different historical periods. The chefs there add a personal touch to these recipes while maintaining their distinctly Saudi identity.<sup>(28)</sup>

Interest in these experiments reflects the belief in the role that the cuisine could play in introducing the world to Saudi culture. An important effort to highlight this increased awareness of the role of food and the culinary arts is "A Saudi Journey," a cultural luncheon held by the MiSK Foundation during the Davos World Economic Forum held in the Swiss Alps in 2018. There, Saudi chefs Rakan Aloraifi, Duha Alotaishan, and Ali Alyousef worked together to prepare six dishes from five different regions to introduce guests at the forum to Saudi cuisine.<sup>(29)</sup> The General Authority for Culture held a similar event in New York to coincide with Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's visit to the United States of America,<sup>(30)</sup> during which Saudi cooks presented traditional Saudi food with a modern twist. In the same way, Saudi chef Mayada Badr became well-known during Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to France, during which she prepared innovative sweets inspired by the Saudi identity. The Ministry of Energy organized a similar cultural evening in Cape Town to introduce Indaba Conference attendees to Saudi culture.

As for awards, Saudi chefs on the competition team of Artistic Food

Lab (Saudi Arabian Chefs Development Society) have achieved a visible presence at international gatherings by receiving 17 international prizes in several different international competitions.<sup>(31)</sup>



# Infrastructure and Investment



Food is a key component of the tourism industry within the broader economic development plan. According to the General Statistics Authority, Saudi tourist facilities' operational revenue increased by 4.6 percent from 2017 to 2018. Catering revenues accounted for 43.441 million SAR, equivalent to 34.99% of cumulative operational revenues for tourist facilities in the Kingdom.<sup>(32)</sup> These numbers indicate a growing interest in food as a cultural showcase that can provide entrepreneurs and government entities with investment opportunities that will elevate the profile of Saudi cuisine in collaboration with Saudi chefs.

## Support and Regulatory Frameworks

Inclusion of the hospitality sector, including restaurants, in the list of important sectors for the Kingdom's Quality of Life Program, is a significant institutional step for developing Saudi food culture. Indeed, the sub-sector "has witnessed rapid growth recently as part of the Kingdom's goal to offer global services that transform the nature of recreation in the region."<sup>(33)</sup> In 2016, the relevant authorities began issuing food-truck permits for the first time, encouraging young Saudis to purchase and operate them outside of work hours as either primary or supplementary sources of income.<sup>(34)</sup> In 2019, the total number of registered food trucks throughout the various regions of the Kingdom was 1,301.<sup>(35)</sup>

## Work Force

The percentage of Saudis working in restaurants and catering services remains relatively low, but there is an effort to increase this figure. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, in coordination with the relevant authorities, is seeking to increase the number of restaurant employees by more than 30 percent, bringing their number to 86,542.<sup>(36)</sup> Licensed Saudi chefs in 2019 numbered 909 men and 867 women. Despite efforts to increase the number of workers in all industries related to food production, culinary practice associated with the cultural aspects of the industry still leads the way. As a

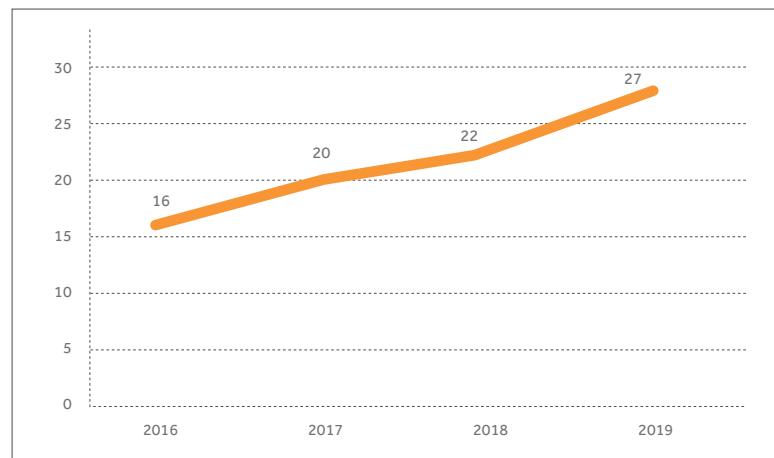
step towards the goals mentioned above, the Ministry of Labor (now the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development) collaborated with the Four Seasons Hotel in Riyadh to hold a job fair to attract Saudi graduates from tourism and hospitality colleges as well as art academies to work in different fields in the relevant industries, such as culinary arts and food service. This followed an increase in the demand for human capital in the tourism and hospitality sector thanks to an expansion of international restaurant openings in the Kingdom. The following table displays the number of licensed Saudi citizens working in culinary professions over four years.<sup>(37)</sup>



**Table 14-2:** Number of licensed Saudis working in culinary arts professions (2016–2019)

Profession	2016			2017			2018			2019		
	Male	Female	Total									
Line Chef	808	900	1,708	927	1,120	2,047	985	1,024	2,009	909	867	1,776
Executive Chef	14	2	16	14	6	20	17	5	22	17	10	27

**Figure 14-1:** Growth in registered Saudi executive chefs





## Education and Vocational Training

Culinary studies programs exist at some universities in the Kingdom. At King Abdulaziz University, for example, culinary instruction falls within the curriculum for the hospitality major. This is also the case at the College of Tourism and Hospitality at the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation, which graduated more than 500 food service majors in 2019. The Culinary Arts Academy in King Abdullah Economic City, which opened in April 2018, also collaborates with the MiSK Foundation to provide study and training grants for 500 students who are eligible to complete their education and training at the academy.<sup>[38]</sup>

The strategic partnership between Al-Hokair Group for Tourism and the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation resulted in the establishment of the Hotel and Tourism Management Institute. The institute offers certificates for different majors related to hospitality and tourism and allows graduates to continue their education at HTMI in Switzerland. The institute has three branches:

1. The Hotel and Tourism Management Institute in Al-Bahah,

which was established in 2013 for female students.

2. The Hotel and Tourism Management Institute in Jazan, which was established in 2014, and inaugurated a certification program in food service in June 2017. The program includes a one-year culinary-arts curriculum for training chefs. The number of beneficiaries so far has reached 51 (with 27 graduates in 2018: 27 graduates and 21 in 2019).

3. The HTMI Female Institute for Hospitality and Tourism, which was established for female students in Riyadh in 2018.

At the Community College, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University also introduced programs in hospitality management, culinary arts, and facilities management, all of which fall under the hospitality and hotel management major. Additionally, the Department of Hospitality and Hotel Management at the same university offers short training sessions to teach Saudi culinary arts. The Culinary Arts Academy in Saudi Arabia (ZAADK) also offers a joint certificate in the field with the Culinary Arts Academy in Switzerland. The Saudi Arabian Chefs' Development Society (Artistic Food Lab) offers several accredited developmental and vocational programs for different culinary arts professions.

The culinary arts sector has also launched a number of exchange programs over the last few years. In July 2019, the Mohammed bin Salman Foundation (MiSK) sent 20 students of both genders to study culinary arts at Le Cordon Bleu in France.<sup>[39]</sup> In September of the same year, the Royal Commission

for Al-Ula sent 24 young men and women from Al-Ula Province to learn the culinary arts at FERRANDI Paris.<sup>[40]</sup> Finally, the Ministry of Culture inaugurated the Cultural Scholarship Program in December 2019, which offers culinary arts as one of its majors. This development underscores official appreciation for cuisine as a staple of Saudi culture and tourism.

## Culinary Arts and the Hospitality Industry

Academic and vocational tracks indicate that the culinary arts are primarily associated with the hospitality industry. This may explain why the profession is often treated as a sub-specialty within that industry, and why colleges and institutes that offer culinary arts as a major do so through the faculties of hospitality and tourism. Because the hospitality sector upholds strict standards for professions linked to hotel kitchens, many chefs aspire to work in this sector in order to hone their craft. Although the number of hotels has increased in different regions, they still suffer from a shortage of chefs who can produce local dishes that meet international standards. Still, the hospitality industry has helped to groom a number of trailblazing chefs, such as Duha Alotaishan, who was the first executive chef at one of Riyadh's top hotels and prepared Saudi dishes at the Jeddah Economic Forum. The overlap between the culinary arts and the hospitality industry has lent prominence to Saudi cuisine and its potential to provide new investment opportunities, thanks to the expertise and high standards maintained by international hotels, and the increasing number of tourists visiting the kingdom from all over the world.

**Table 14-3:** Selected festivals for local products in KSA

Festival	Region	Date
Al-Hareed Cultural Festival	Jazan	2004-present (in its current form)
Coffee Beans Festival	Jazan	2013-present
Date Festival	Al-Qassim	Annually in August
Olive Festival	Al-Jawf	2008-present
Kleicha Festival	Al-Qassim	2009-present
Honey Festival	Jazan	2014-present
Mango Festival	Jazan	2005-present

### Strengthening Tourism and Fine-Dining Experiences

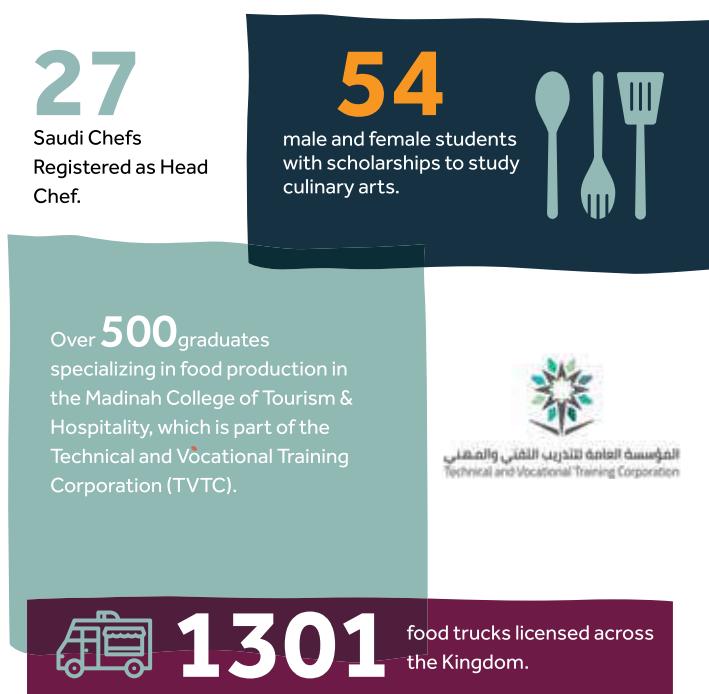
Cultural heritage plays an important role in stimulating domestic and international tourism and could be integrated into this industry in a meaningful way. Such integration might include investment in model restaurants, resorts, farms, and desert spaces offering world-class tourist experiences. Viewing culture in this manner has generated some original, entrepreneurial ideas that can be seen in emergent local projects, such as the Taif Farms. These farms have been transformed into a health-food restaurant that offers visitors the choicest livestock and agricultural yield. Additionally, some local festivals based around the hunting and harvest seasons have been modernized, providing new opportunities to develop unique "modern" dishes from local ingredients. Some Saudi chefs have already developed various products using local ingredients like dates. With support, local festivals can become international spectacles that focus on local production in conjunction with the participation of chefs and specialists from around the world. Such events would support food tourism, which would, in turn, become one of the most im-

portant tributaries for developing Saudi cuisine and documenting the relationship between agricultural products and national cuisine. Finally, this would also increase the visibility of Saudi cuisine throughout the world.

It is notable that the development of the tourism industry in general, including food tourism, has a positive effect on the culinary sector as

a whole, which falls within the hospitality sector. The introduction of tourist visas will doubtless encourage improvement in the quality of services offered, as will the Ministry of Culture's efforts to present Saudi cuisine to the rest of the world<sup>[41]</sup> as a fine-dining option alongside other popular cuisines. The world will be able to get to know the Kingdom through its traditional and modern dishes alike.

### Key Figures in Culinary Arts (2019):



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- (38) Saudi Culinary Arts Academy, "Your Perfect Opportunity to Become a Licensed International Professional Chef," King Abdullah Economic City's (July 15, 2018).
- (39) MiSK Le Cordon Bleu Program for Professional Culinary Arts, <https://misk.org.sa/fellowship/ar/services/le-cordon-bleu-ar>.
- (40) "Thaqafi / Royal Commission of Al-Ula Delegates in Paris Show Their Culinary Skills," Saudi Press Agency (October 9, 2019).
- (41) Ministry of Tourism Press File, "Al-Khatib visits a French institute for the culinary arts," October 9, 2019.



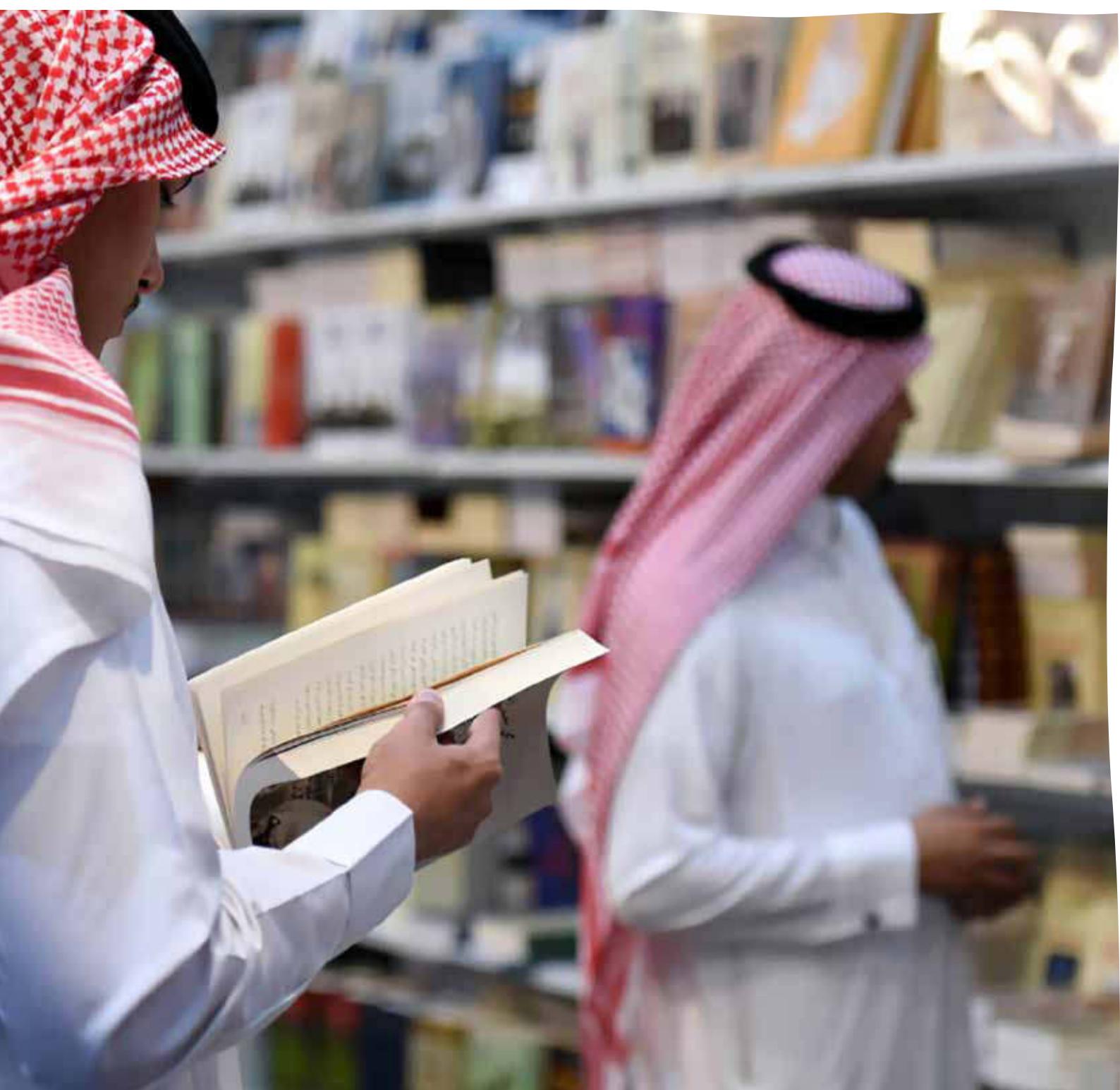




# Books and Publishing

- **Books and Publishing in Saudi Arabia:  
Historical Overview**
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# Books and Publishing in Saudi Arabia: Historical Overview



## Printing and Publishing at the Beginning of the Saudi Era

The history of the printing press in the Arabian Peninsula dates back to 1882, when the Al-Miria Press (or the Amiria) was set up in Makkah.<sup>(1)</sup> Three decades later, in 1909,<sup>(2)</sup> Muhammad Majid Al-Kurdi founded the first commercial printing press. In the same year, Al-Falah School in Jeddah, the first formal school at that time, founded and operated the Islaah Printing Press. The al-Saqyyah Press in Jeddah and the al-'Imiyah Press in Madinah were founded some time later.<sup>(3)</sup>

At the beginning of the Saudi era, the name of the Al-Miria Press was changed to the Umm Al-Qura Press, taking its name from the official newspaper that began publishing in 1924.<sup>(4)</sup> The Saudi government used it to issue communications, announcements, and official ordinances. To that end, the state improved printing equipment and later sent citizens abroad to receive training in printing. Guidelines for the government press were issued, along with the first law regulating printing press and publications in 1927.<sup>(5)</sup> Later, in 1939,<sup>(6)</sup> these regulations were amended to permit private presses and to exempt printing paper from customs duties. Printing presses began to appear in Makkah, Jeddah, and Madinah. These included the Salafi Press, the Arab Company Press for Printing and Publishing, the Holy Quran Printing Press in Makkah, the al-Fayeha Printing Press in Madinah, and the al-Fatah Press in Jeddah.<sup>(7)</sup>



In addition to their commercial role, these printing presses had an impact on culture and society. First, they facilitated the establishment of infrastructure for the Saudi news media, including three newspapers, namely Umm Al-Qura, Sawt Al-Hijaz ("Voice of the Hijaz"), and Al-Madinah Newspapers, and three cultural magazines, namely Al-Islaah, Al-Manhal, and Al-Nida' Al-Islami. Second, the press led to the emergence of new authorship activities. The magazine Al-Manhal, for example, in 1959 produced a Silver Issue which surveyed authoring and publishing activity in the Kingdom, and listed 200 works written between 1925 and 1959 by title and author. The Silver Issue notes that these books, mostly of a religious nature, were completed under the patronage of King Abdulaziz and some of his sons. Their patronage also supported the publication of works by prominent voices in the religious, so-

cial, cultural, and economic spheres, among them Sheikh Muhammad Nasif, Sheikh Yusuf Zaynal, Sheikh Hasan Sharbatli, Sheikh Muhammad Surur Al-Sabban, Sheikh Abbas Qattan, Sheikh Muhammad al-Naman-gani, and the sons of Sheikh Abdul Fattah Feda, among others. Al-Manhal did not include all the Saudi publications during this period.<sup>(8)</sup>

The first decades of the Saudi era were characterized by an expansion of genres in publication. Works grew to include everything from religion and heritage to history, Hajj rites, fatwas, short essays, comments, marginalia, and some poetry, though the dominant themes were religious studies, history and biography. Government-issued informational books were the fourth most published. Over time, works on politics, travel, and agriculture appeared. In addition to this expansion of topics and fields, writ-

ing styles also changed. Creative writing in poetry collections, short stories, novels, and literary criticism gained some prominence. On the production side, the printed book started to abandon styles associated with manuscripts, including writing methods, scripts, and the formatting of such elements as the title page, introduction, index, etc.<sup>(9)</sup>

### Saudi Printing and Publishing in the Mid-Twentieth Century

The number of Saudi presses, either governmental or private, remained generally unchanged until the early 1950s when some new presses were established.<sup>(10)</sup> Riyadh Magazine, the first with photos, was issued by the Press, Printing, and Publishing Co. of Jeddah in 1954. In the same year, Muhammad Hussein Al-Isfahani founded Jeddah's Isfahani Press, which continued printing newspapers until the 1990s.<sup>(11)</sup> Its productions included newspapers and magazines such as Hira, al-Adwa', Arafat, Al-Ra'id, Al-Rawda, Al-Idha'a, and the magazine of the Ministry of Agriculture magazine, as well as other publications, such as The Gulf Weekly (published in Dammam). It also printed governmental and private publications in the 1960s and 1970s before being incorporated into the Al-Madina Printing and Publishing Co., a subsidiary of the Saudi Research and Marketing Group, in 1992.<sup>(12)</sup>

At the beginning of the 1960s, printing houses began to appear in Riyadh. Hamad Al-Jassir, founder of Al-Yamama Magazine, used presses within and outside of the Kingdom, including in Makkah, Jeddah, Egypt and Lebanon, to print the magazine.

Later, he moved to the National Printing and Publishing Co. (NPPC) in Riyadh. NPPC played an essential role in cultural life in the central region of the Kingdom, as it was the only one in that area until the 1960s. Besides Al-Yamama Magazine, it printed all of the regional newspapers and magazines, including Rayat Al-Islam, Al-Jazirah, Sahifat al-Qassim, Al-Ma'rifa, Ma'had Al-Anjal, and

the King Saud University's periodical, in addition to dozens of books. Subsequently, in 1960, the Al-Jazirah Printing Co. was founded, followed by the Najd Printing Press in the early 1970s.<sup>(13)</sup>

There were no printing houses in the Eastern Province until 1954 when Abd Al-Karim Al-Juhayman, Abdullah Al-Malhuq, Abdulaziz Al-



Isa and others founded the Al Khat Printing Press Co., which assumed responsibility for the newspaper Akhbar al-Dhahran. The poet Khalid Al-Faraj established the Saudi Press and undertook the printing of Al-Faraj Al-Jadid, Al-Isha'a, and Al-Khaleej Al-Arabi.<sup>(14)</sup> In the south, the historian Muhammad bin Ahmad Al-Aqili filed a license application to operate a printing press in 1965,



and within two years was operating one brought from the city of Aden. In Abha, there was no press until 1968, when Ibrahim Al Yahya established Al-Wadi'a Press, followed by the Aseer Press founded by Abdullah Al-Mani'i in 1971.<sup>(15)</sup> By the year 1976, the number of licensed private presses was up to 197, eventually jumping to 573 by the year 1983. "These printing houses vary from small presses that produce personal cards or invitations to large ones employing more than 250 workers."<sup>(16)</sup> Riyadh was home to 168 presses and Jeddah 109, while the Eastern Province was home to 65, Makkah 23, and Al-Madinah 12. The rest were spread out among the cities of the Kingdom.<sup>(17)</sup>

The Umm al-Qura Press oversaw all of the printing of government publications until 1967 when the Stamps and Valuable Papers Press of the Ministry of Finance (then called the Government Security Press) was established in Riyadh. This press oversaw the printing of secure documents such as passports, national identity cards, postage stamps, and license plates.

The expansion of the printing press contributed to the growth of publishing houses. At the center were the publishing houses of Hijaz, as they were among the few in operation when the literary movement emerged. The Hijazi Publishing House was established in 1345 AH,<sup>(18)</sup> followed by a number of other professional publishing houses, first Dar Al-Madani in Jeddah in 1956, and then the Makkah Publishing House in Riyadh in 1963. The number of publishing houses grew annually, reaching nearly 100 by 1983. By 1988, there were more than 116.<sup>(19)</sup>



The growth of printing presses also led to an increase in the number of Saudi authors printing domestically instead of abroad. It had a similar effect on magazine publication: the Aramco-affiliated Qafilat Al-Zayt ("Oil Caravan"), for example, was founded in 1953 and printed in Beirut until 1965, when it moved to Dammam.<sup>(20)</sup>

These statistics concretely demonstrate the tangible growth of publishing since the 1950s. Saudi publishers have contributed to this growth by publishing and marketing Saudi literature in local bookstores in Makkah, Madinah, and Riyadh. During this period, Riyadh, despite its relatively late adoption of the printing press, began to play a pivotal role in printing and publishing. Encouraged by the support of universities, ministries, and government institutions, presses and publishing houses continued to expand in Riyadh. From 1956 to 1988, national publishing houses produced an average of 142 books annually, totaling 4,709 over those three decades.<sup>(21)</sup>

# Books and Publishing in Saudi Arabia Today



In recent years, books and publishing have been one of the areas most affected by technological progress and other changes in Saudi society. As a result, the sub-sector has experienced two seemingly opposing developments. On the one hand, access to information has increased the demand for books. On the other hand, digitally formatted books, such as e-books and audiobooks, have begun competing with printed books, and online piracy has also posed significant challenges to the publishing industry.

### Publishing and Authorship

In recent years, many young Saudi writers have entered the publishing world, both inside and outside of the Kingdom. At the same time, marketing has changed from book advertisements in newspapers and magazines to online applications and social media. Online stores, too, have joined the effort in marketing and selling books, combining simple content with attractive visual elements and e-marketing.

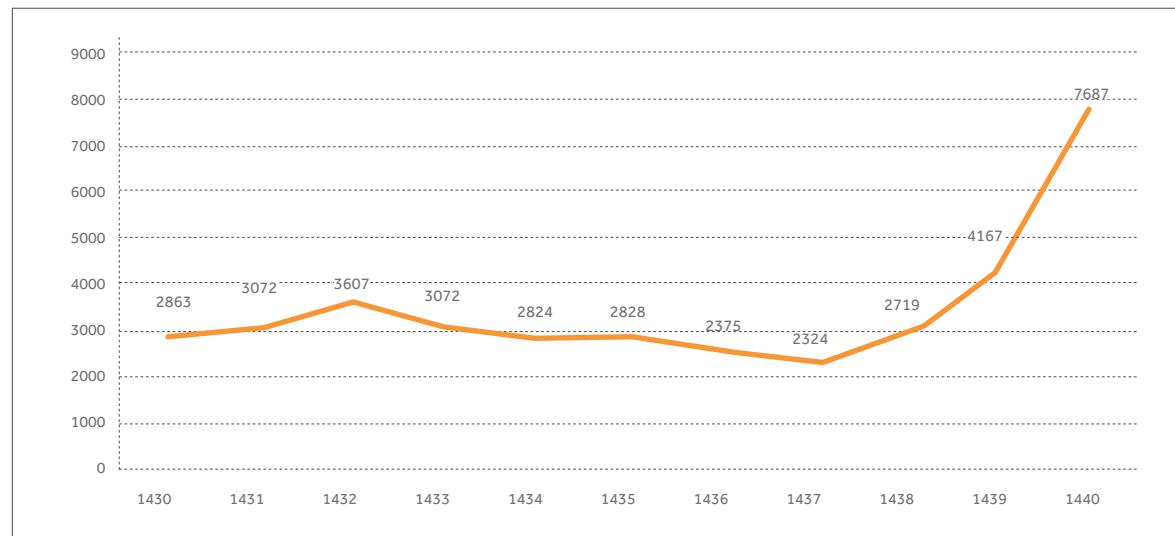
The impact of these trends can be seen in some of the publishing statistics offered by the King Fahd National Library, which show a significant jump in the number of new books deposited in libraries over the last two years (see Figure 15-1). There have

been 19,272 books deposited over the last five years (1436-1440 AH), 749 of which are children's books.

Figure 15-1 does not include books published by Saudis outside of the Kingdom and thus not registered with the King Fahd National Library. Even at its peak in 1440 AH (2018-2019), the number of books published in Saudi Arabia does not compare to that published in other countries. During the same period, France published 82,313 books,<sup>(23)</sup> and South Korea published 90,620,<sup>(24)</sup> over ten times the number of Saudi publications. Over the last two years, the Kingdom has, however, published more extensively than other Arab countries, including Morocco, which only produced 2,932 titles in 2019.<sup>(25)</sup>

Extensive translation activities in the Kingdom have led to a revival in the field of publishing translated books.<sup>(26)</sup> From 1435-1441 AH, for example, the percentage of books deposited in the King Fahd National Library that had been translated into Arabic was 18.26%, for a total of 4,224 books. This surpasses the percentages of translated books in Europe, even in productive countries like Germany (12.28%) and France (15.90%).<sup>(27)</sup> The growth of published translations is even more evident when compared with previous internal statistics, such as those published by the Translation Center of King Saud University, which reports that only 5,364 books were translated from 1932 to 2016, an exceedingly small number given the length of that period. In its last update to the

Figure 15-1: Number of books deposited in the King Fahd National Library<sup>(22)</sup>



UNESCO translation database (Index Translationum), the Kingdom only registered 995 translated books, well behind Syria and Egypt, the latter of which produced five times that number over the same period.<sup>(28)</sup>

The current increase in translation requires additional financial support and encouragement of national translation projects, as these types of initiatives have been successful in other sectors of the Arab world.<sup>(29)</sup> It also requires professional accreditation initiatives for translators, so that the quantitative growth of the field is matched by high-quality translations. To this end, the Ministry of Culture announced the Tarjim Initiative for translation in March 2019, which will provide support for several programs on translation to and from the Arabic language.

The growing number of new publishing houses and authors registering their books at the King Fahd National Library for the first time is an indicator of new blood in the publishing sector over the past five years. As Table 15-2 shows below, publishing houses demonstrated a steady increase in registering books over the last three years, while the number of new authors reached 1,961 in 2019-2020 alone.

Even though these numbers demonstrate a rise in local publications, a portion still comes from individuals or institutions abroad, whether from Saudi-owned publishers outside the Kingdom, or from non-Saudi publishers who publish for Saudi authors.<sup>(32)</sup>

This trend in external publications is perpetuated partially by regulatory barriers but most conspicuously by factors related to the local marketplace, such as high costs and poor distribution when compared to other, more efficient publishing houses

Statistics also indicate that a growing number of Saudi publishing houses and independent authors

are registering their books with the King Fahd National Library (see Table 15-1).

**Table 15-1:** Number of publishers and registered books in King Fahd National Library (1436-1440 AH)<sup>(30)</sup>

	Year	Number of Publishers	Number of Authors
1	2014-2015 (1436 AH)	374	1,960
2	2015-2016 (1437 AH)	366	2,005
3	2016-2017 (1428 AH)	430	1,866
4	2017-2018 (1439 AH)	458	1,920
5	2018-2019 (1440 AH)	522	3,252
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,150</b>	<b>11,003</b>

**Table 15-2:** Number of book registrations by first-time publishers and authors at King Fahd National Library (1436-1440 AH)<sup>(31)</sup>

	Year	New Publishers	New Authors
1	2014-2015 (1436 AH)	56	1,397
2	2015-2016 (1437 AH)	58	1,391
3	2016-2017 (1428 AH)	72	1,182
4	2017-2018 (1439 AH)	92	1,169
5	2019-2020 (1440 AH)	76	1,961
	<b>Total</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>7,100</b>

in the Arab world.<sup>(33)</sup> There are currently no published statistics for online-only books. Beyond the online bookstores, practices of book digitization seem to be widespread, with copies circulating on the internet legally or otherwise.

Access to the internet brings more than challenges and internet piracy. It has opened new doors for the publishing movement and expanded access for readers and authors alike, since readers have access to pub-

lication titles, and publishers have the advantage of online marketing. Most recently, authors have taken to marketing their books on social media platforms.

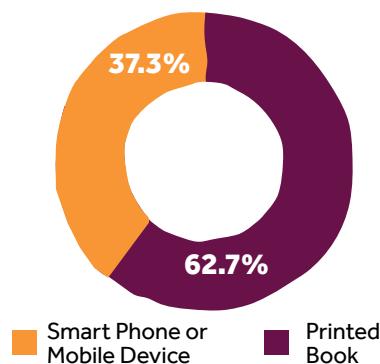
### E-Books and Audiobooks

The most important recent technological development in publishing is the advent of e-books and audiobooks. The publication of digital books has seen continual growth

in the number of users, which has reached 983 million worldwide as of 2019. The lack of Arab commercial applications to support e-books has not hindered the Saudi readership of 3.5 million.<sup>(34)</sup> The 2019 Cultural Participation Survey indicates that

37.30% of participants preferred to read on their smart phone or mobile device, a number larger than the 25% indicated in US surveys. Still, paper copies are the preferred method for reading, favored by 40.71% of women and 33.23% of men.

**Figure 15-2: Preference for book format (physical vs. digital)**



Currently, there is no catalog of all the digitally-published books in the Kingdom. While a lack of data poses a challenge to assessing the state of the sub-sector, it does not mean that digital books are not thriving. In fact, digital reading platforms are widely used. Saudi readers, for example, can access media applications or international platforms that offer Arabic versions of Saudi-published books.<sup>(35)</sup> Hence, initiatives that support people working on digital book platforms, such as the International Book Fair in Riyadh, are increasingly important. In addition to digitized books, audiobooks, which convert written content into recorded audio, have become a phenomenon across the Arab world. Some commercial applications have been made available to consumers, such as the Daad platform, launched in June 2014, and the podcast Warraq. This podcast, which was established in partnership with New Media in Riyadh, offers abridged audio summaries of books in episodes under 20 minutes.

### The Ministry of Culture and the Publishing Sector

Since its establishment in June 2018, when the Ministry of Culture assumed responsibility for books and publishing, structural changes have been made to the sub-sector. This is in line with the Ministry's goal of creating regulations and implementing strategies to combat challenges to its growth. In March 2019, the Ministry announced the launch of the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission a month earlier. Under the leadership of Mohammad Hassan Alwan, the Commission is charged with overseeing licensing, resources, strategies, creativity, and investment.

Since its founding in 2003, the Saudi Publishers Association has played an active role in this sector and taken on the task of expanding publication, representing publishers' interests, and fostering collaboration.<sup>(36)</sup> Despite the magnitude of this chal-



lenge, the Association has made strides in protecting the intellectual property of Saudi publishers whose rights have been violated by foreign publishers. As of 2015, it also gained full membership to the International Publishers Association, after a ten-year process.<sup>(37)</sup> At the end of 2019, Minister of Culture Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan Al Saud issued a resolution to form a committee to conduct the affairs of the Saudi Publishers Association until there are sufficient non-governmental organizations to take up this mantle, and to forge a relationship between the Association and the Literature, Publishing and Translation Commission.

The Ministry of Culture's interest in publishing is not confined to production and distribution, but includes strengthening book culture and associated creative activities. To this end, the Ministry has announced the "Books for All" initiative, which provides a platform to exchange and share interests in books and read-

ing. Other initiatives, like the Tarjim initiative mentioned above, also serve this end.

### Community and Youth Contributions

There have been several public and non-profit programs and initiatives to bolster free reading activities and raise the status of books in the community through increased access to books and public places for engagement. For example, the National Book Renewal Project, which began its efforts in 2003, hosts events and reading fairs. The King Abdulaziz Public Library is the entity responsible for the project.<sup>(38)</sup> In 2013,<sup>(39)</sup> the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture launched the National Reading Program (Iqra, "Read"), which features an annual contest subdivided into three competitions. The first, at the start of

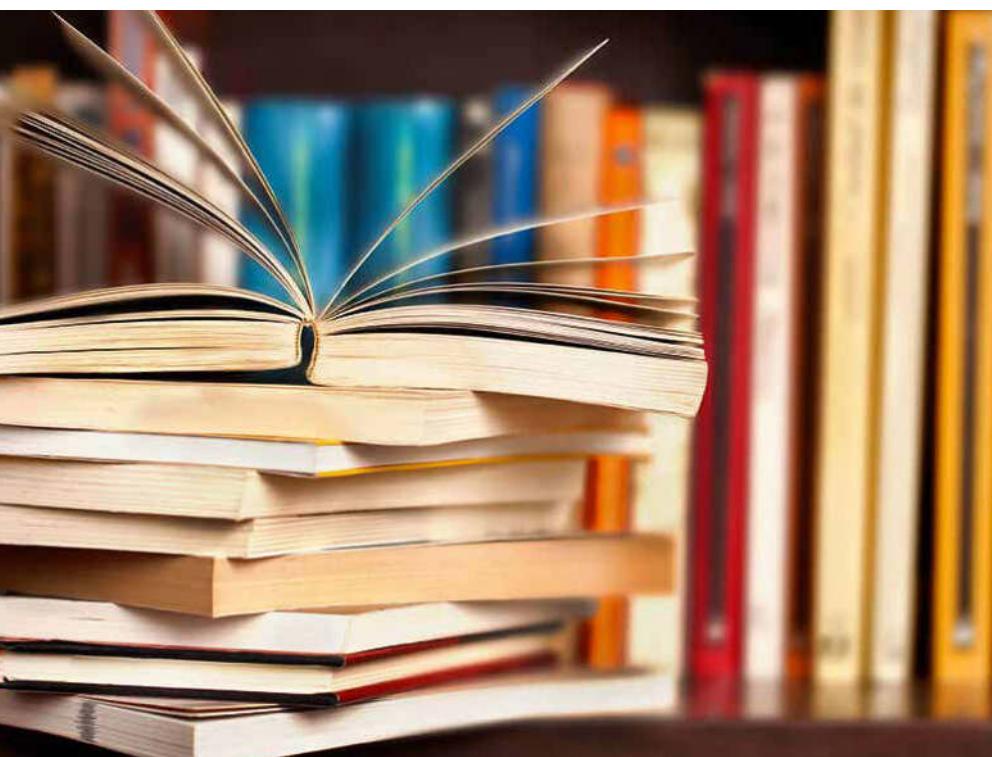
each academic year, is called "Reader of the Year," and aims to develop reading skills (writing, revising, publishing) among male and female students from the upper primary, intermediate, and university levels of general education. The other two competitions are for teachers and Arabic-language content developers.<sup>(40)</sup> In 2019, the Mana program was launched with the support of MiSK Foundation. In collaboration with prominent international publishing houses, Mana offers 100 book titles at non-profit rates. This initiative includes paper, digital and audio books from various fields.<sup>(41)</sup> It also includes children's books, which have seen increased interest due to the rise of children-specific programming, such as the Kid's Club at the King Abdulaziz Public Library. Here, children's books for a wide range of ages can be checked out. The library also held a free marathon in the summer of 2019 to

promote healthy reading habits in the younger generations.

In addition to programs set up by cultural institutions, many grassroots initiatives for young people center around reading and have contributed to the ubiquity of reading in the lives of youth today. Among these initiatives is the convening of book clubs, which have popped up around different cities, in universities and elsewhere.<sup>(42)</sup> One example is the volunteer-based book-exchange club Iqra'ni ("Read Me"), which has a strong presence both at cultural events and within commercial markets. Likewise, the Reading Friends Project, which had nearly 350,000 Twitter followers at the time of writing, promotes reading by encouraging followers to post what they are reading and writing and also poses 15-minute reading challenges.<sup>(43)</sup> These are just two examples of organically formed groups promoting reading. The Ministry of Culture and Information recognized these efforts with an award for reading initiatives at the Riyadh International Book Fair in 2018, which was awarded to the Young Reader project, the Kutubji project, and the Kan Ya Ma Kan ("Once Upon a Time") project,<sup>(44)</sup> along with other initiatives that serve to foster reading among youth.

### Free Reading and the Cultural Participation Survey

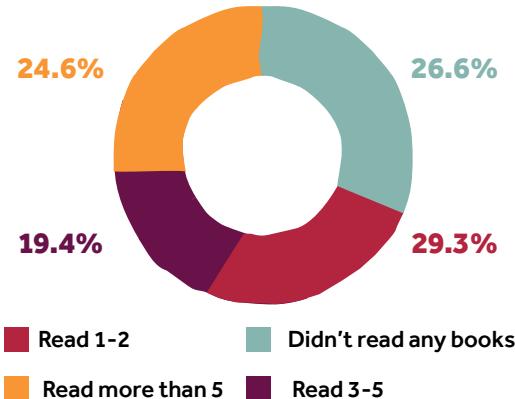
Research and surveys have demonstrated that, in recent years, Saudis have been reading more for pleasure in their free time. Among these surveys was the one commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and Information and carried out by the Studies and Research Unit of Arabic Magazine. The results of this study were



published in a 2012 book entitled *The Reality of Reading for Pleasure* in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study surveyed ten thousand individuals from different regions of the Kingdom, a majority (70%) of whom spend 20 minutes reading digital or print texts on a daily basis, and half (50%) of whom read for pleasure in their free time.<sup>(45)</sup> In 2015, just two years later, the King Abdulaziz Center for International Culture (Ithra) concluded a related large-scale related study, the results of which were published in *Reading and Society: Reading Patterns and Trends in Saudi Society*. The study polled 15,000 Saudi individuals and librarians and found that 75% of adults read at least one book per year. The survey also documented an increase of interest among parents in encouraging their children to read, as 63% said that this was a top priority for them, while 31% found it to be of middling importance. These numbers are higher than those among adults, which were reported at 38% and 50%, respectively. The difference signifies that parents are prioritizing children's reading.<sup>(46)</sup>

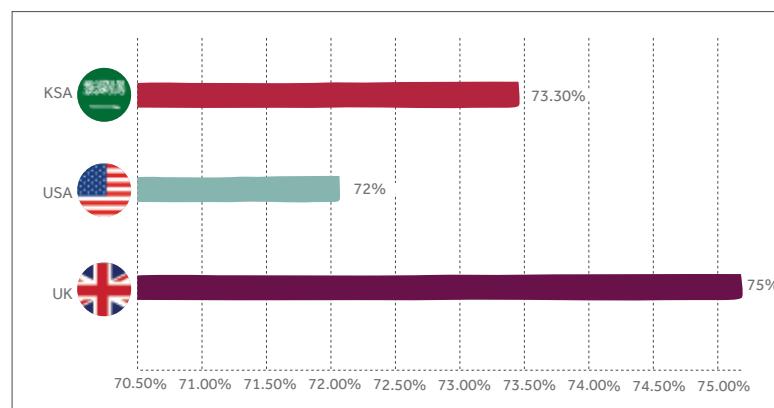
The 2019 Cultural Participation Survey was administered to a representative sample of 3,137 individuals from all regions of the Kingdom.<sup>(47)</sup> This survey, like the one carried out by the Studies and Research Union, showed that 73.30% of adults read at least one book per year (excluding books read for work or study), and nearly 25% read five books or more (see Figure 15-3). These surveys demonstrate consistency across the years and are close to global figures (see Figure 15-4). There are some gender disparities, however, as 76.81% of women read at least one book, compared to 70.60% among men (see Figure 15-5).

**Figure 15-3: Reading habits of outside of work and study (past 12 months)**



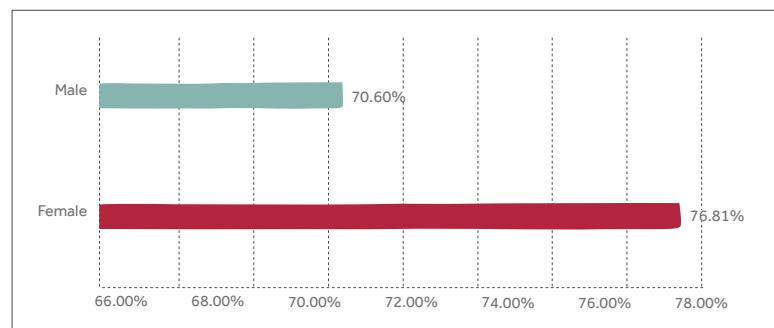
[Legend translation: Didn't read any books, Read 1-2, Read 3-5, Read more than 5]

**Figure 15-4: Proportion of people who read at least one book per year, by country<sup>(48)</sup>**



[X axis translation left-to-right: KSA, USA, UK]

**Figure 15-5: Proportion of people who read at least one book per year, by gender**



[X axis translation: Female, Male]

## Book Fairs

In general, book fairs serve as a gauge for the popularity of reading in the Kingdom. These events are large, and they attract a sizeable audience of those interested in Saudi cultural affairs. Statistics have shown that young people, regardless of gender, attend at the highest rates. Young people are the backbone of the book and publishing sector, and their high level of interest gives the book industry a competitive advantage. The most prominent book fair is the Riyadh International Book Fair, which has become the most eminent publishing event in the industry in the Kingdom and perhaps in the Arab world. King Saud University launched and organized the first Riyadh International Book Fair in 1978, which was subsequently organized by the Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University until the Ministry of Higher Education took it over in 2006.<sup>(49)</sup> From 2006 to 2019, The Ministry of Culture and Information arranged

the fair, and in 2020, the Ministry of Culture announced that it would assume control of the operation.

The Riyadh International Book Fair's total attendance has increased from 400,000 individuals in 2015 to 900,000 in 2018 and then 1,000,000 in 2019. These numbers demonstrate the economic appeal of these publications and translate into a large volume of sales, which makes the event attractive to publishers across the Arab World.<sup>(50)</sup> In the last few years, the event has grown to provide initiatives and services like those offered in other Arab international exhibitions, such as online bookstores and the ability to purchase books and have them shipped to local or international addresses. In 2019, 913 publishing houses, agencies, institutions, and public and private bodies from more than 60 countries participated. The exhibition included nearly half a million book titles, and 200 accompanying cultural events, the latter of which drew in 22,000 attendees, including primary school students.<sup>(51)</sup>

Another notable fair is the Jeddah International Book Fair, with an average of 400,000 to 500,000 attendees each year. In 2019, 400 publishing houses, government organizations, and NGOs from 40 countries were present, and 58 cultural events were held on topics including culture, poetry, and heritage, in addition to 66 youth-oriented workshops and 55 activities aimed at children. Of the participants, 117 were writers, intellectuals, artists, and officials, and there were authors of both genders from Saudi Arabia. These Saudi authors exhibited their books in the Saudi Author Pavilion.<sup>(52)</sup>

Something these book fairs have yet to offer is the opportunity to pursue commercial transactions between publishing houses. Other book fairs, such as those in Frankfurt and London, are advertised as a networking opportunity for publishers and stakeholders. Connecting authors and translators with store owners and libraries can assist in building a more robust economic publishing industry.<sup>(53)</sup>

In addition to international book fairs, some institutional bodies hold local or regional events, such as the Book and Information Fair held by the Islamic University of Madinah. This fair is the longest running in the Kingdom, having hosted 36 sessions as of April 2019.<sup>(54)</sup> The Saudi Publisher's Association, in association with the Principality of Al-Qassim Province, launched the first Al-Qassim Fair in 2018 and the second in 2019.<sup>(55)</sup> The Children's Book Fair was hosted in Riyadh at the King Fahd Cultural Center in March 2019. Organized under the auspices of the Ministry of Media, it was attended by 36 publishing houses.<sup>(56)</sup>



## Key Moments in Publishing

**1882**

Al-Miria Press (or Al-Amirya) was established in Makkah.



**1909**

Islaah Printing Press was established, which was run by Al-Falah School in Jeddah, one of the first organized schools at the time.



**1924**

The name of Al-Miria Press was changed to Umm Al-Qura Press, which was the name of the newspaper that it printed at the time.



**1927**

The first printing and publications guidelines was issued.



**1939**

The printing and publications guidelines were amended to allow the establishment of private presses and to exempt printing presses from customs duties.

**1960**

The establishment of Al-Jazirah Printing Co. in Riyadh.

**1959**

Al-Manhal Magazine published its Silver Issue, which contained a brief study of copyrights in the Kingdom.

**1956**

The first publishing house in Jeddah, Dar Al-Madani, was officially established.



**1954**

The printing presses entered the eastern region with the Al-Khat Printing Press Co.

**1954**

Isfahani Press was established by Muhammad Hussein al-Isfahani in Jeddah.

**1967**

The establishment of the Stamps and Valuable Papers Press (Matba'at Al-Tawabi' wal-Awraq dhat Al-Qimah) in Riyadh, which was affiliated with the Ministry of Finance. It was later called the Government Security Press and was tasked with printing secure government papers.

**1968**

The first printing press in Abha, Al-Wadi'a Press, was established.

**1978**

The launch of the first session of King Saud University's International Book Fair in Riyadh.

**1992**

Isfahani Press was merged into the Saudi Research and Marketing Group's Al-Madinah Printing and Publishing Co.

**1963**

The first publishing house in Riyadh, Makkah Publishing House, was established.

**2006**

The King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Prize for Translation was established.



**2006**

The Ministry of Culture and Information organized the Riyadh International Book Fair until its transfer to the Ministry of Culture in 2019.

**2003**

The launch of the national cultural project under the auspices of the King Abdulaziz Public Library to increase links with the book.

**2003**

The Saudi Publishers Association was established.

**2013**

The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture launched the National Reading Program (Aqra, "I Read").

**2018**

The Saudi Authority for Intellectual Property issued a regulation that includes copyright protection.

**2019**

Publishing became one of the Ministry of Culture's cultural sectors with the establishment of the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission.

## Book Awards

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia offers a number of awards for authorship and translation. The awards are mainly sponsored by ministries, government bodies, local festivals, and charitable foundations. The private sector also offers financial support for a number of these awards. Since the creation of literary clubs in 1975, they too have offered book awards to bolster local literary and cultural production.

In terms of specialized awards, King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives (Darah) grants an annual award called the King Abdulaziz Book Award. Eligible to win are individuals writing in one of eight categories dealing with Saudi Arabian culture: Islamic history, Islamic civilization, the history of King Abdulaziz and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the history of the Arabian Peninsula, foreign-language books on Saudi history, geography of the Arabian Peninsula, antiquities, and literature. The award is worth 800,000 SAR.<sup>(57)</sup> In 2019, Dalal Al-Harbi won in the history of King Abdulaziz and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia category

with her book, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Global Economic Crisis: Reflection and Solutions, 1929-1933*; Muhammad Al-Rabdi won the geography category with his book *The Demographic History of Buraydah*; Ahmad Al-Tayhani won the category of literature on the Kingdom with his Poetry in Aseer 1351-1430 AH; Abdulrahim Al Shaykh Mubarak and Zayd Abu Al-Haj won the antiquities category with their *Heritage Educational Institutions in Al-Ahsa and Architecture and History: Al-Hofuf City as a Model*; Dr. Salih Al-Ruba'i won for history on the Arabian Peninsula with his *Illumination in the Two Holy Mosques from the Advent of Islam to the Mamluk Era*; and Reem Al-Sabih won the category of Islamic history and heritage with her book



Employees of Al-Masjid An-Nabawi and their Influence throughout the Mamluk Era. The awards for the history of Saudi society and the history of the Arabian Peninsula in a foreign language were not issued because the nominated books did not meet the appropriate requirements.

The Ministry of Media also honored the winners of the annual book prize at the 2019 Riyadh International Book Fair. Muhammad Al-Sari'a won the religion, society, and law category with his book *Identifying Authorial Hands*; Salih Al-Nafisa and Muham-



mad Al-Nadhir won in the category of psychology and education for their book, Professional Teaching Guidance; Abdullah Al-Muflih won the linguistic and critical theory category for his book, Thinking, Language, and Psychological Interaction; Maqbul Musa Al-Alawi won the narrative category for his book, Van Gogh's Flowers; and poet Hasan Al-Salhabi won the poetry award for his poetry collection Hidden in The Shadows Between Lamps.<sup>(58)</sup>

In 2006, an international award for translation from and into Arabic was launched, entitled the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Award for Translation, which is awarded every year to distinguished works of translation.<sup>(59)</sup>

The Ministry of Culture announced three annual awards valued at 650,000 SAR for publishing projects across three categories. The Saudi Book Award is for Saudi authors, the Publishing House award is for local or other Arab publishers, and the Best Pioneering Project is for digital entrepreneurship in the field of books, publishing, and media. These will be issued for the first time at the 2020 Riyadh International Book Fair.<sup>(60)</sup>

In 2019, the Ministry (as part of the National Culture Awards initiative) announced fourteen different awards celebrating Saudi creatives in a variety of cultural fields, including one for publishing and another for translation. In 2019, the Prince Muhammad bin Salman Al-Saud Award for bilateral cooperation between Saudi Arabia and China, which includes translation as a category, was also announced.<sup>(61)</sup>

## Key Figures in Publishing:



# The Saudi Book Globally

## The Saudi Book at Book Fairs

Books by Saudi authors maintain a continuous presence in Arab book fairs and also, more modestly, in international book fairs, particularly through the participation of Saudi publishers. The limited presence of Saudi books in these fairs might be linked to the comparative weakness of the Saudi Publishers Association. The most prominent institutional presence in non-Arab international

fairs is that of government institutions. In particular, the Ministry of Education (previously "Higher Education"), which supervises Saudi cultural attachés abroad, has played a significant role, in conjunction with the Department of International Cooperation, in organizing the Kingdom's participation in these fairs. Over the past ten years, the Kingdom has been an honored guest in many Arab and international fairs.

Some of the Kingdom's embassies and attachés, along with the Ministry of Education, have translated a number of Saudi publications into other languages in order to participate in international book fairs and to provide copies to cultural institutions and foreign research centers. For example, in 2011, the Ministry of Education and its attaché undertook the translation of 53 books to exhibit at the Prague Fair in Austria.<sup>(62)</sup> The Ministry of Education also translated 52 books into Japanese and 162 into English to exhibit them at the Tokyo International Book Fair. The Ministry of Education, as a representative of the Kingdom, participates in approximately 32 Arab and international book fairs every year.<sup>(63)</sup>

At the end of 2016 in Moscow, the Center for Media and Arab-Russian Studies published a book of short stories by Saudi writers, translated into Russian by Mortada Syed Umarov and Alexandra Simonova, the latter a professor of Arabic at Moscow University. The book features 42 short stories by Saudi writers, selected as a representative sample of Saudi fiction through its historical development. In the last few years, selected articles from the Encyclopedia of Saudi Arabian Literature have also been translated into English, French, Russian, Japanese, and other languages.

Saudi books, especially those printed by foreign presses, have had a presence outside of the Kingdom for many years. One researcher estimated that about 1,261 books were authored and published outside of the Kingdom between 1901



and 2004.<sup>(64)</sup> This is likely an underestimation of Saudi publications abroad, as the study only considered a limited number of books for that time period. In light of the fact that so many books are published abroad, Saudi publishing houses have worked to establish exclusive or joint ventures outside of the Kingdom.

### The Saudi Book in 2019

In the Arab world, the Saudi Publishers Association was the guest of honor at the 2019 Baghdad International Book Fair. The Association was given a special pavilion where well-represented Saudi publishers could exhibit their publications. They were also allotted a space at an exhibition called Al-Aqilat—named after the camel merchants who used to trek to Iraq among other places—which displayed more than 300 documents and pictures of merchants. The Saudi Pavilion hosted poetry readings and discussions on Saudi-Iraqi cultural relations.<sup>(65)</sup> The Saudi Publishers Association also set up at events in five Moroccan cities—Casablanca, Rabat, Marrakech, Fes, and Tangier—in which many Saudi publishing houses participated.<sup>(66)</sup>

In terms of international collaborations, the Chinese-Saudi Publishing Library of the Chinese-Saudi Friendship Project was announced by Peking University Press in collaboration with the Center for Research & Intercommunication Knowledge in Riyadh and the Arabic Language Department of Beijing University of Foreign Studies. The

project entails the translation of Arabic books into Chinese and vice versa. The first translations were unveiled at the 2019 Beijing International Book Fair, where three Arabic books translated into Chinese were displayed: The Price of Sacrifice by Hamid Damnahury, A Hole in the Robe of Night, by Ibrahim Nasir Humaidan, and a collection of stories entitled Sweat and Mud by Abdulrahman Al-Sha'ir.<sup>(67)</sup>

### The Saudi Book and Arab Awards

Many Saudi authors, books, and academics have won numerous cultural, literary, and scientific awards in Arab contests. In the early 1990s, Abdul Rahman Munif won the second Sultan Al Owais Cultural Award for Best Theatre Script. In the contest's fourth year, Sheikh Hamad Al-Jassir won the cultural and scientific award. In the sixth year, he literary critic Abdullah Al-Ghadhami won the award in literary studies and criticism.

Additionally, in March 2010, two years after the launch of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (issued by the UAE), the novelist Abdo Khal won the award for his *Throwing Sparks*. In 2011, novelist Raja'a Alem won the same prize for her *Dove's Necklace*. Also, in 2011 Yousef Al-Mohaimeed won the Tunisian Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi Award for his novel *Pigeons Don't Fly in Buraida*.

In 2014, anthropologist Saad Al-Sowayan won the Sheikh Zayed Book Award for his book *The Epic of Human Development*. In 2015, Mo-

hammed Hasan Alwan won the Arabic Literature Award (originally founded in 2013 by the Arab World Institute and Jean-Luc Lagardère Foundation to promote works of literature) for his novel *The Beaver*, which was translated from Arabic into French in 2015.<sup>(68)</sup> Also, in 2017, Alwan won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction with his novel, *A Small Death*. That same year, literary critic and Professor of English Literature Sa'd Al-Baza'i won the Sultan Qaboos Prize for Culture, Arts, and Literature for his contribution to literary criticism.<sup>(69)</sup> In 2018, Novelist Umayma Al-Khamis won the Naguib Mahfouz Prize awarded by the American University of Cairo for her book, *Voyage of the Cranes in the Cities of Agate*, making her the first person from the Gulf to win the prize.

In 2019, Saudi authors were included on the long and short lists for the Sheikh Zayed Book Award. For example, Manal Al-Muhaymid made it on the short list for the Young Author's category for her study "Dialogue in the works of Abu Hayyan Al-Tawhidi." The long list for the Contribution to the Development of Nations category included Abdulwahhab Al-Sa'dun for *Path to the Forefront: How the Arabian Gulf Became a Global Center of Petrochemicals*; Salih Ziyas for his *Cultural Prisons*; and Turki Al-Dakhil for his book *Tolerance is the Beauty of the World and Religion*. Umar Al-Sayf made the long list in the Literary Art and Criticism category for his book, *Eggs in the Ostrich Nest: Towards the Understanding, Explanation, and Interpretation of Poetry*.<sup>(70)</sup>

# Infrastructure and Investment

## Challenges in the Publishing Market

The Saudi publishing market is one of the most sizeable in the Middle East in terms of sales volume, reaching an annual total revenue of 4.5 billion SAR.<sup>(71)</sup> This number is consistent with the high level of interest in reading across large swaths of Saudi society. However, the total revenue does not necessarily reflect the efficiency of the local publishing sector in terms of production and distribution. High demand from government and private entities and individual consumers does not guarantee success as the market depends on the quality and efficiency of presses, publication services, distribution centers, storefronts, and supply chains, in addition to post-publication services.

Despite having sufficient infrastructure in terms of printing facilities and technology, the sector lacks a skilled labor force to operate the presses. It also lacks access to printing materials, such as paper and ink, at prices comparable to those in Arab countries that produce their own materials. The Kingdom, meanwhile, imports materials from Japan, Russia, and Germany, and so makes printing more expensive.<sup>(72)</sup> However, the greatest factor influencing the cost of production is the inefficiency of the distribution networks. In some instances, publishers impose costs for sale and distribution that are more than half the production cost, and so drive up the final price of books.

This process might explain why Saudi authors publish with foreign

presses. Publishers in other parts of the Arab world (and elsewhere) offer more competitive deals than local printers and publishing houses. But the problem is larger than competition between publishing houses. To reduce expenses, literary clubs as well as some official government institutions have outsourced the publication of literary and cultural texts. Outsourcing to foreign publishers tends to eliminate regulatory obstacles, reduce the time of pre-print and post-printing production services, and facilitate wider international distribution and participation in international book fairs. These services are not always available from local publishers. Due to financial constraints, some Saudi authors

resort to self-publishing their work with an Arab publisher outside of the Kingdom.

## Publishing: Opportunities and Horizons

The Ministry of Culture's response to the challenges faced by the publishing industry is of great concern to the industry, particularly since the Ministry was established to create initiatives to address structural challenges. Developing a robust publishing industry requires support for publishing houses and database infrastructure, especially in the face of technological changes. The Ministry seeks to buttress pub-



lishing houses in order to expand their regional role and their role in the Arab marketplace. There is also a plan in place to establish a publishing house under the Ministry's supervision and position it in the publishing ecosystem as a supporter, promoter, and marketer of Saudi works locally, regionally, and internationally.

Additionally, the new publishing market offers promising opportunities for investment, as the digital transformation of the sector has opened the doors for entrepreneurship. For example, there are companies and e-publishing websites that offer both paper and electronic publications and market books locally and internationally on behalf

of their authors. Recently, electronic markets for paper books have been booming, and two popular Arab websites have paved the way for marketing and selling books online over the last few years. Today, a number of exclusive online stores are available domestically and are looking to capture a portion of the Saudi marketplace. This is also true for e-books, audiobooks, and children's picture books.

Despite the promising prospects for the development of the industry, publishers have expressed concern over a lack of support by government agencies, universities, schools, and public libraries. They have also expressed concern about a lack of support for small publishers to participate in local and international book fairs, which at present they cannot afford to do because of the high cost of staffing, transportation, accommodations, and renting space.

industrial and graphic design.<sup>(74)</sup> In 2018, for example, regulations for e-publishing, including rules, rights, and responsibilities of those working in the field of e-publishing (e.g., electronic publishing houses), were announced.<sup>(75)</sup> In 2019, the responsibility for reviewing violations of the Copyright Law was transferred from the Ministry of Media to the Copyright Department at the Saudi Authority for Intellectual Property.<sup>(76)</sup> A branch of the Saudi Authority for Intellectual Property, called the General Secretariat of the Committees for Resolution of Intellectual Property Disputes, announced that the quasi-judicial committees had taken up 127 intellectual property rights cases and ruled in favor of 65 of them.<sup>(77)</sup>

The strict implementation of the system for addressing intellectual property rights issues has assured publishers, authors, and investors that their rights will be protected and that the Kingdom is advancing in the right direction. The Authority for Intellectual Property constantly receives complaints and adjudicates cases involving intellectual property rights disputes, with the promise of swiftly and strictly enforcing the law.

Finally, it can be said that the publishing market in the Kingdom is fertile ground for investment opportunities. The publishing market has undergone advancements in protecting intellectual property; granting licenses to publish; offering equipment and space; providing electronic sales platforms; and participating in local and international fairs. These advancements provide an enticing opportunity for investment.



## Regulatory Framework

The regulatory framework responsible for protecting the intellectual property of a publisher or author is undergoing transformational developments. The Copyright Law, in effect since 1410 AH, was amended once in 1424 AH and again in 1440 AH (ca. 2019).<sup>(73)</sup> The Saudi Authority for Intellectual Property changed the course of intellectual property protections when it issued the 2018 order protecting against electronic piracy, illegal copying, and illegal printing of paper books. The order also provided protections for other types of intellectual property, such as patents, trademarks, and

**Endnote:**

- (1) Abbas Salih Tashkundi, *The Printing Press in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1300-1419 AH* (Riyadh: King Fahd National Library, 1419 AH), 36-39.
- (2) Muhammad Abdulrahman Al-Shamikh, *The Emergence of Journalism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia [nasha'a't al-sahafa fil-Mamlaka al-Arabiyya al-Sau'diyya]* (Riyadh: Dar Al-Ulum lil-Taba'ah wa-l-Nashr, 2402 AH), 20.
- (3) Ibid., 24.
- (4) Abbas Salih Tashkundi, *The Printing Press in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1300-1419 AH* (Riyadh: King Fahd National Library, 1419 AH), 80.
- (5) Ibid., 168.
- (6) Ibid., 221.
- (7) Ibid., 193-200.
- (8) Abd Al-Qaddus Al-Ansari, *Al-Manhal Silver Issue: 25 Years [Al-Kitab al-Fidi al-manhal fi 25 'aman]* (Jeddah: Isfahani Press and Co., 1970), 174.
- (9) Abbas Salih Tashkundi, *The Printing Press in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1300-1419 AH* (Riyadh: King Fahd National Library, 1419 AH), 245.
- (10) Abdulaziz bin Salih bin Salma, *Hamad Al-Jassir and Publishing and Printing in Riyadh* (Riyadh, 2002), 292-297.
- (11) Ibid., 292.
- (12) Ibid., 293.
- (13) Ibid., 297.
- (14) Abbas Salih Tashkundi, *The Printing Press in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1300-1419 AH* (Riyadh: King Fahd National Library, 1419 AH), 281.
- (15) Ibid., 286-288.
- (16) Ministry of Media of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: The Printing Press and Publishing* (Riyadh: Ministry of Media, 1413 AH), 26-27.
- (17) Ibid., 21-28.
- (18) Umar Al-Tayyib Al-Sasi, *A Concise History of Saudi Literature* (Dar Al-Jeddah lil-Nashr, 1405 AH), 74.
- (19) Ministry of Media of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: The Printing Press and Publishing* (Riyadh: Ministry of Media, 1413 AH), 22.
- (20) Muhammad Al-Qash'ami, "Qafila Al-Zayt," *Al-Jazeera*, issue 10465, May 24, 2001.
- (21) Ministry of Media of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: The Printing Press and Publishing* (Riyadh: Ministry of Media, 1413 AH), 26.
- (22) King Fahd National Library.
- (23) To make more accurate comparisons, the number of books deposited for these countries were used instead of estimates.
- (24) The World Intellectual Property Organization and The International Publishers Association, «The Global Publishing Industry 2018.»
- (25) Malik Abdulaziz Al Saud Foundation, Casablanca.
- (26) See the chapter on Language for more information on the activity, status, and institutions of translation in the Kingdom.
- (27) Alexandra Büchler and Giulia Trentacosti, "Publishing translated literature in the United Kingdom and Ireland 1990 - 2012 statistical report" (Wales, UK: Literature Across Frontiers, 2015).
- (28) These low numbers from the UNESCO database may not reflect the real numbers, which the Saudi Observatory on Translated Publications seems to provide more accurately, though its data is not comprehensive.
- (29) See the chapter on Language for more details.
- (30) King Fahd National Library.
- (31) King Fahd National Library.
- (32) One challenge the Saudi publishing industry faces is the lack of databases to indicate the numbers, but the combination of book titles of prominent Saudi authors who publish in Arab publishing houses and the names of publishing houses owned by Saudis can be easily tracked.
- (33) Interview with Muhammad, Publication Chief, Al-Farid at Obeikan Foundation, December 24, 2019; Interview with Abdulrahim Al-Ahmadi, Publisher at Dar Al-Mufradat, December 23, 2019.
- (34) Statista Global Consumer Survey.
- (35) Interview with Muhammad, Publication Chief, Al-Farid at Obeikan Foundation, December 24, 2019.
- (36) Bylaw of the Saudi Publishers Association.
- (37) Al-Hamdan: Saudi Arabia Obtains Full Membership in the International Publishers Association in Geneva [Al-Hamdan: Al-Sa'udiyya tahsul 'ala al-adawiyya al-kamila fi-itтиhad al-nashirin al-dawliyyin bi-Janif], *Al-Jazeera*, October 26, 2015.
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- (42) Ibrahim Al-Shayban, Read Me club in Khobar "brings boys and girls together at the book-exchange table," Al Riyadh, April 3, 2011.
- (43) Reading Friends, "The 15-minute Challenge," <https://rfriends.net/category/%d8%aa%d8%ad%d8%af%d9%8a-%d9%a1%d9%a5-%d8%af%d9%82%d9%8a%d9%82%d8%a9/>.
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- (48) Pew Research Center (2016, US) and YouGov (2014, UK).
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- (51) Ministry of Media.
- (52) Ministry of Media.
- (53) Interview with Arwa Khumayyis, Arwa for Publishing, Jeddah, September 1, 2019.
- (54) Islamic University (online), "News," <https://www.iu.edu.sa/News/Details/1843>.
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- (56) Al-Kinani, "The Children's Book" is a cultural phenomenon that develops childrens' reading skills and displays their talent, Ministry of Media, March 7, 2019.
- (57) King Abdulaziz Book Award, <https://www.kingabdulazizaward.org/index.php/about-prize-menu>.
- (58) Ministry of Media (online).
- (59) See the Language section for more information.
- (60) The Riyadh International Book Fair, Awards.
- (61) See the Language chapter for more information.
- (62) Abdulaziz Al-Shalahi, "Translating 53 Saudi books specifically for participation in the Prague Fair," Al-Madinah, May 8, 2011.
- (63) The Kingdom was guest of honor at the 2010 Tokyo International Book Fair, Ministry of Education. <https://www.moe.gov.sa/ar/news/Pages/an123.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>; "Choosing 1000 of 6000 Saudi books...and translating 53 books for the Prague Fair," Al Eqtisadiyah, May 17, 2011.
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- (65) "The Saudi Publishers Association is the guest of honor at the 2019 Baghdad International Book Fair," Saudi Press Agency, February 7, 2019.
- (66) "The launch of the Casablanca International Book Fair," Saudi Press Agency, February 8, 2019.
- (67) "Thaqafi/IInauguration of three Saudi books translated into Chinese at the 2019 Beijing International Book Fair, Saudi Press Agency, August 22, 2019.
- (68) Arab World Institute, Paris.
- (69) Al-Baza'i wins the Sultan Qaboos Prize for literary criticism, Al Riyadh, November 16, 2017, <http://www.alriyadh.com/1638444>.
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# Cultural Indicators

- **Indicators of Cultural Production**
- **Indicators of Cultural Proliferation**
- **Indicators of Cultural Participation**
- **Other Indicators**



## Indicators of Cultural Production

### The Number of Feature Films Produced

**20**



**Source:** The General Commission for Audiovisual Media (Saudi Arabia), British Film Institute (United Kingdom), Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (France), Finnish Film Foundation (Finland), The Motion Picture Association of America (United States of America), Motion Picture Producers of Japan (Japan), The Korean Film Council (South Korea), European Audiovisual Observatory (Morocco).

### The Number of Theatrical Performances During the Year

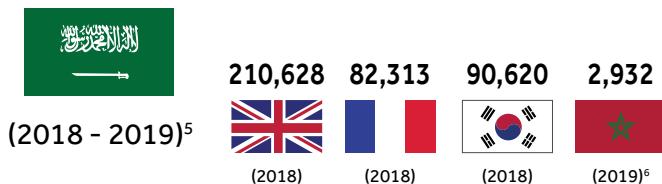
**169**



**Source:** UK Theatre (United Kingdom), Ministry of Culture (France), Statistics Finland (Finland)

### The Number of Books Published During the Year

**7687**



**Source:** General Authority for Statistics (Saudi Arabia), World Intellectual Property Organization (France), World Intellectual Property Organization (Finland), World Intellectual Property Organization (South Korea), Fondation du Roi Abdul-Aziz Al Saoud - Casablanca (Morocco)

(1) Licensed films only, not presented.

(2) This only includes films with a budget of more than one million dollars.

(3) This only includes performances of the General Entertainment Authority and the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA).

(4) According to the official record.

(5) Figures for the year 1441 AH.

(6) A statistic that is not based only on the official record.

## The Number of Theaters (Cinema)

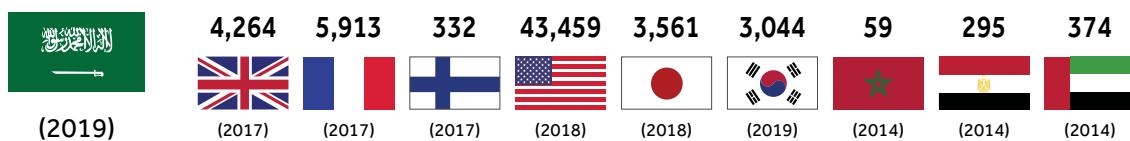
**12**



Source: The General Commission for Audiovisual Media (Saudi Arabia), British Film Institute (United Kingdom), Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (France), European Audiovisual Observatory (Finland), National Association of Theatre Owners (United States of America), Japan Statistics Bureau (Japan), The Korean Film Council (South Korea).

## The Number of Screens

**112**



Source: The General Commission for Audiovisual Media (Saudi Arabia), British Film Institute (United Kingdom), Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (France), Finnish Film Foundation (Finland), The Motion Picture Association of America (United States of America), Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan (Japan), The Korean Film Council (South Korea), Northwestern University (Morocco), Northwestern University (Egypt), Northwestern University (United Arab Emirates).

## The Number of Screens Per One Million People

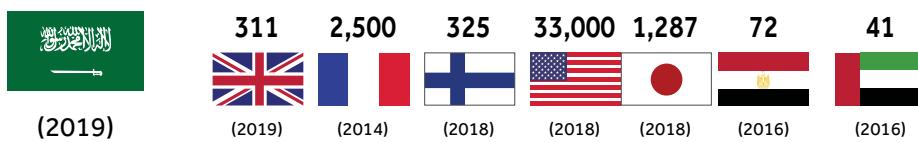
**3.3**



## Indicators of Cultural Proliferation

### The Number of Public Museums

**83**



Source: The Museums Association (United Kingdom), Ministry of Culture (France), Statistics Finland (Finland), Institute of Museum and Library Services (United States of America), Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology in Japan (Japan), Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (Egypt), GCC-Stat: Culture Statistics in the GCC Countries (United Arab Emirates).

### The Number of Private Museums

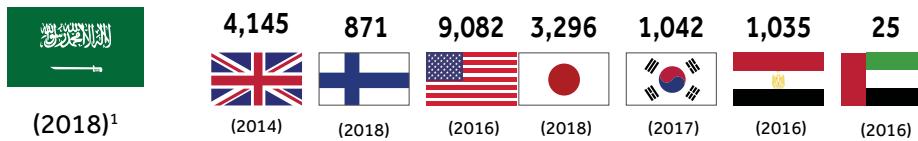
**217**



Source: Association of Independent Museums (United Kingdom), Statistics Finland (Finland).

### The Number of Public Libraries

**84**

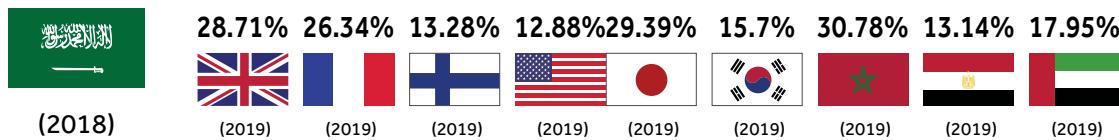


Source: General Authority for Statistics (Saudi Arabia), Loughborough University (United Kingdom), Statistics Finland (Finland), American Library Association (United States of America), Japan Library Association (Japan), Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (South Korea), Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (Egypt), GCC-Stat: Culture Statistics in the GCC Countries (United Arab Emirates).

(1) This does not include the public libraries which were previously under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Information.

## Indicators of Cultural Proliferation (continued)

## The Percentage of Protected Natural Areas (On Land)

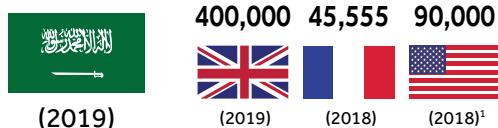
**4.27%**

Source: Saudi Wildlife Authority (Saudi Arabia), Protected Planet (Remaining Countries)

## The Number of World Heritage Sites Recorded with UNESCO

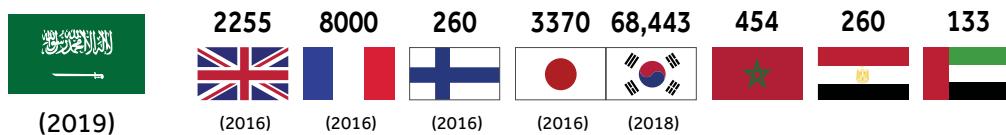
**5**

## The Number of National Heritage and Archaeology Sites

**8278**

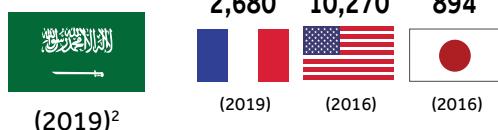
Source: Ministry of Tourism (Saudi Arabia), The National Heritage List for England (United Kingdom), Ministry of Culture (France), National Register for Historic Places (United States of America).

## The Number of Publishing Houses

**656**

Source: Ministry of Commerce (Saudi Arabia), The Publishers Association (United Kingdom), International Publishers Association (France, Finland, United States of America, Japan), Korean Publishers Association (South Korea), Fondation du Roi Abdul-Aziz Al Saoud - Casablanca (Morocco), Arab Publishers Association (Egypt), Emirates Publishers Association (United Arab Emirates).

## The Number of Art Exhibitions

**255**

Source: The Art Market 2017, Arts Economics (France, United States of America, Japan).

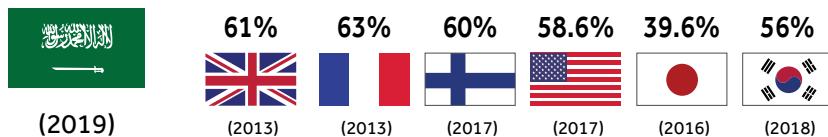
(1) This number is in addition to other smaller national lists.

(2) Incomplete number: compiled after contacting 18 organizations.

### Indicators of Cultural Participation

#### Movie-goers

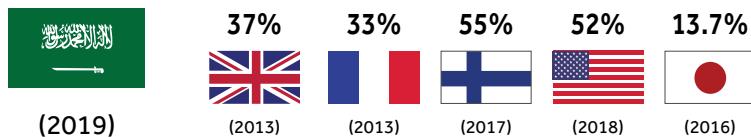
**27.3%**



Source: Eurobarometer by European Commission (France, United Kingdom), Statistics Finland (Finland), National Endowment for the Arts (United States of America), Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan (Japan), Tomorrow University Research Institute (South Korea).

#### Concert Attendees

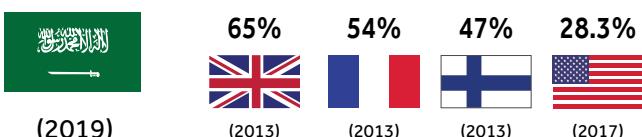
**18.9%**



Source: Eurobarometer by European Commission (France, United Kingdom), Statistics Finland (Finland), Nielsen Music Report 2018, The Nielsen Company (United States of America), Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan (Japan).

#### Visitors to Archaeological Sites

**34.8%**

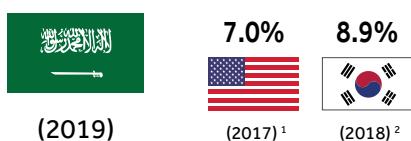


Source: Eurobarometer by European Commission (France, United Kingdom, Finland), National Endowment for the Arts (United States of America).

### Indicators of Cultural Participation (continued)

#### Poetry Reading Attendees

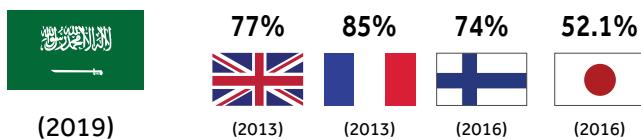
**5.3%**



Source: National Endowment for the Arts (United States of America), The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, South Korea (South Korea).

#### Online Viewing

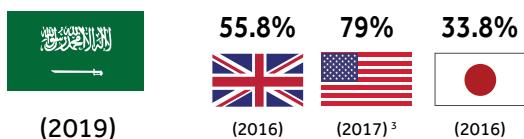
**50.6%**



Source: Eurobarometer by European Commission (United Kingdom, France), Statistics Finland (Finland), Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan (Japan).

#### Visits to National Parks and Reservoirs

**45.4%**



Source: The Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) (United Kingdom), National Geographic (United States of America), Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan (Japan).

(1) The question in this survey adds the term "and literary."

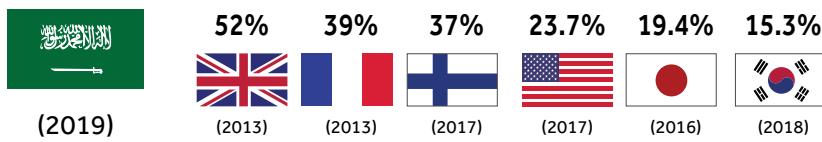
(2) The question in this survey includes literary meetings.

(3) The question in this survey was on the aggregate visits over the next twelve months not the past twelve months.

## Indicators of Cultural Participation

### Art Exhibition Attendees

**31%**



Source: Eurobarometer by European Commission (United Kingdom, France), Statistics Finland (Finland), National Endowment for the Arts (United States of America), Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan (Japan), The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, South Korea (South Korea)<sup>1</sup>.

### The Practice of Artistic Works as a Profession (i.e. Painting, Sculpture, etc.)

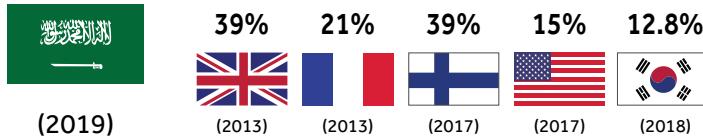
**22.2%**



Source: Statistics Finland (Finland)

### Theatrical Performance Attendees

**13.8%**



Source: Source: Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS); Office For National Statistics, UK (United Kingdom), Eurobarometer by European Commission (France, Finland), Pew Research Center (United States of America), The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, South Korea (South Korea).

(1) The questions in these surveys address them being general or including handicrafts, photography, or fine arts.

### Indicators of Cultural Participation (continued)

#### Readers of One Book per Year (at least) for Reasons Unrelated to Work or Study

**73.3%**



Source: YouGov (United Kingdom), Pew Research Center (United States of America).

#### Percentage of People who are Proficient with a Musical Instrument

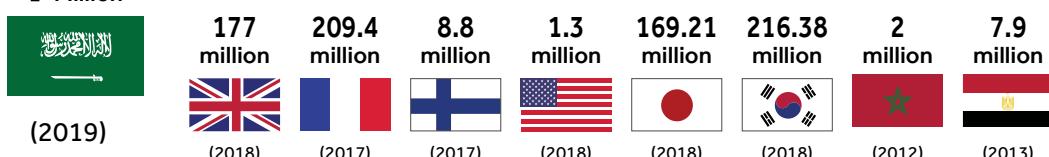
**10.6%**



Source: Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) (United Kingdom), Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, National Archive of Data on Arts and Culture (United States of America), Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan (Japan).

#### Annual Numbers of Movie-goers

**4** Million



Source: The General Commission for Audiovisual Media (Saudi Arabia), British Film Institute (United Kingdom), Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (France), Finnish Film Foundation (Finland), The Motion Picture Association of America (United States of America), Motion Picture Producers of Japan (Japan), The Korean Film Council (South Korea), European Audiovisual Observatory (Morocco), Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (Egypt).

(1) This survey's question was not limited to attempts in the last twelve months in contrast with the other countries surveyed.

### Indicators of Cultural Participation (continued)

#### The Annual Rate of Movie-going For Individuals

**0.12**



#### The Number of Visits to the National Museum (or Other Significant Museums)

**130.331**



(2019)<sup>1</sup>

**5.87 million**  
(British Museum)



(2018)

**10.2 million**  
(Louvre)



(2018)

**565.765**  
(National Museum of Finland)



(2017)

**3.8 million**  
(National Museum of American History)



(2018)

Source: The National Museum (Saudi Arabia), Themed Entertainment Association (United Kingdom, France, United States of America), Statistics Finland (Finland).

#### The Total Number of Visitors to Museums During the Year

**1.4 Million**



(2019)

**50 million**



(2018)

**6.6 million**



(2016)

**3.3 million**



(2017)

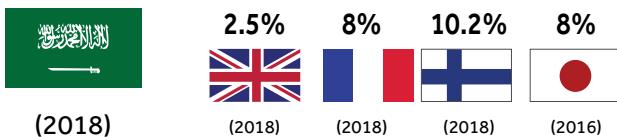
Source: The General Commission for Audiovisual Media (Saudi Arabia), Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) (United Kingdom), Statistics Finland (Finland), Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (Egypt).

(1) The data only covers 11 months.

## Other Indicators

### Monthly Expenditure on Culture and Entertainment — The Family

**2.9%**



### Monthly Expenditure on Culture and Entertainment — The Individual

**2.9%**



**Source:** The General Commission for Audiovisual Media (Saudi Arabia), Office for National Statistics (United Kingdom), OECD Stat (France, Finland, Japan), US Bureau of Labor Statistics (United States of America).



# Conclusion

The general overview of the current state of culture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as presented in this report highlights two major themes. The first is the structural and organizational activity that has expanded the institutional foundations of every cultural sector. The major change in this respect is the launch of the Ministry of Culture, which announced its vision and target goals roughly one year prior to the publication of this report, along with the establishment of 11 new commissions to preside over the cultural sub-sectors. This renewed activity on the part of the Ministry has generated optimism among those active in the field, especially those concerned with two vital tasks that demand institutional support: preserving the rich heritage of the Kingdom and stimulating creativity. Both tasks require new regulations and infrastructure as well as training and education. The second major theme is the broadening of cultural participation, exemplified by the qualitative growth of public interest in cultural activities and practices. This is a healthy indication that the community offers fertile ground on which to build.

These positive developments prompt a number of questions about prospective paths forward. As active cultural institutions are restructured, how will they relate to creative individuals? This is a question faced by all cultural



venues today. Even though institutions are an indispensable part of galvanizing creativity and providing a habitat for it to thrive, there must be a balance that leaves space for creative individuals and their spontaneous groupings, so that institutions can play the role of a facilitator, rather than a dominant player. As the report has documented, in many fields, informal cultural activity confers vitality and fosters innovation.<sup>(1)</sup> The "Houses of Culture" initiative announced by the Ministry of Culture will hopefully achieve this delicate balance between the institution and the individual, as the Houses are intended as open spaces for cultural groups to experiment and establish a presence for themselves outside the priorities set by major institutions.

The same principle applies to the balance between culture and the economy. Even though culture in our globalized age certainly contributes to the economy, future issues may arise regarding the balance between creative standards and the demands of the market, which may not always align. Indeed, the deficiency of cultural production that characterizes many local sub-sectors, as detailed in the report, might be resolved by creating an integrated production system that links creative activity to the market. This would have a positive impact in both economic and creative terms. However, there are forms of culture whose value goes beyond the economic dimension alone, touching on the core meaning of creativity and the deepening of identity. These include non-commercial theatres, independent movie houses, some musical and literary works, and libraries and museums. If subjected to the law of supply and

demand, such forms might change fundamentally to the point of losing their aesthetic and conceptual value. Such activities should therefore be supported, irrespective of profitability. A prime objective of the Ministry of Culture is to therefore to support culture as a way of life that synergizes with economic gain and international recognition to generate a healthy cultural scene.

Likewise, the welcome growth of participation raises questions about the relationship of quantitative growth in cultural practice to the quality of that practice. In other words, to what extent is it possible to turn increased cultural participation into high-quality cultural production? What makes this question urgent is the newness of institutions and art schools in several fields and the absence of established professional trajectories that can be used as a reference point. Another issue is the generational disparity in certain fields due to poor communication between cultural actors with different experiences. These challenges are likely to revive the old question of the role of the general public and the elite in the cultural realm, the answer to which depends on one's view of culture and its place in society. The Ministry of Culture's prioritization of long-term cultural education initiatives reflects an awareness of the importance of this issue.

Another necessary condition of creative excellence is responsive criticism, whether literary, aesthetic, cinematic, musical, architectural, or culinary. There has been a decline in criticism in some cultural fields in recent years. Alongside cultural awards, criticism crucially

contributes to stimulating and vetting cultural works and promoting artistic trends. In doing so, art criticism goes beyond considerations of supply and demand, which do not necessarily reflect how creative a project is and whether it is capable of competing on the regional or international cultural stage. This highlights the importance of maintaining platforms and spaces for criticism, whether through conferences or specialized publications, including magazines, newspapers, and websites. There is also overlap with other fields such as cultural studies and cultural policy studies, which have a mutual interest in supporting the cultural sector by documenting its development, deepening its contours, and handling potential obstacles that might stand in the way of ambitious development plans.

This year's cultural report has painted a preliminary picture of different cultural fields today and provided a precedent that can be built upon in future years to enable a more detailed understanding of the present state and ongoing transformation of Saudi culture. This process will continue as future reports treat particular areas in greater depth. It is hoped that this report will generate more studies and conversations among cultural actors, critics, and researchers, with the objective of enriching Saudi culture and highlighting and adjusting its trajectory, in tandem with a newly-launched ministry seeking to provide a rich environment for creativity.

#### **Endnote:**

(1) As defined by the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (2009), distinguishing between formal and informal cultural spheres.

Chapter Sixteen

# 16





# Appendices

- **Methodology of the 2019 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Culture Report**
- **Cultural Participation Survey Data**

## Appendix 1:

# Methodology of the 2019 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Culture Report

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The 2019 Culture Report aims to document, monitor, and evaluate the Saudi cultural landscape to lay the groundwork for establishing a quantitative and qualitative reference point. Since the Report is the first of its kind, historical introductions are provided for each sub-sector to provide appropriate context and set a precedent for future reports.



## I. Methodology

### 1. Scope and Contents:

The Report adopts, with some modifications, the definitions and methodological standards used by the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (2009 revision). This standard is used to identify the components of the cultural cycle that the Report should monitor, document, and evaluate. The chapters of the Report cover these components without dedicating sections specifically to any one component. The components align with the three main objectives that define the scope of the Report:

#### 1.1 Documentation

The Report identifies the year's most prominent cultural activities and products with the purpose of documenting (1) community activities directly connected to cultural practice in a sub-sector (e.g., an art exhibition, studio opening, poetry reading), (2) activities linked to the support and organization of these sectors (e.g., artist-in-residence programs, Saudi cuisine documentation workshops, archaeological surveys), and (3) the most important creative works (e.g., an award-winning architectural design, novel, or play).

#### 1.2 Monitoring

The Report describes any change in the state of creative production, dissemination, and community participation. It monitors the following four aspects of cultural change:

Creation: the state of cultural innovation and creativity in various



fields, based on (1) surveying (as opposed to evaluating) new creative trends and (2) listing any awards or achievements.

Production: the state of cultural production as evidenced either by works produced (e.g., books published), or cultural products and services (e.g., library equipment). These may be tracked quantitatively (by noting, e.g., the number of feature films) or qualitatively (e.g., by reporting fashion designers' evaluations of the quality of existing production lines).

Dissemination: the availability and

accessibility of cultural activities and products. This may be tracked quantitatively (e.g., numbers of art exhibitions) or qualitatively.

Participation: the state of cultural participation, whether as a participant or as part of an audience. This may be measured quantitatively through the Cultural Participation Survey and attendance or visitation statistics (e.g., number of museum visits, cinema attendance), and qualitatively through descriptions of various kinds of participation (e.g., book clubs, e-initiatives for preserving heritage, etc.)

### **1.3 Evaluating the Cultural Ecosystem**

The Report describes the state of the cultural ecosystem, that is, what the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics defines as "transversal domains," including regulatory frameworks, facilities, equipment, labor force, education, training, and investment opportunities. These are covered in each chapter under the heading "Infrastructure and Investment."

### **1.4 Tracking Cultural Indicators**

The Report presents quantitative indicators of the state of culture in the Kingdom, with international comparison and benchmarking.

## **2. Chapter Organization and Content**

The chapters of the Report follow the divisions used by the Ministry of Culture for cultural fields, with acknowledgement that these fields often overlap. This overlap is handled by approaching similar cultural activities from different angles. For example, traditional performing arts are discussed in two chapters, Music and Heritage. The Music chapter places the activity of traditional performing arts groups' in its musical

context, while the Heritage chapter addresses how those activities are documented.

Each chapter follows the same template to ensure consistency, ease of reading, and ready access to information, with occasional modifications as required by the field. The template consists of the following components:

1. Historical overview. This section offers a general history of the development of the field and important milestones to provide context for the subsequent sections.
2. The field today. This is the main component of the chapter. It documents the activities carried out in the field in 2019, and then details changes that have emerged over the past two to five years.
3. Awards and achievements. This section enumerates local awards and their winners, and the most important achievements celebrated locally in 2019.
4. The field globally (e.g., Saudi literature globally). Like the previous section, this section enumerates cultural achievements in 2019, in this case outside of the Kingdom: (1) Saudi participation in regional or global forums, (2) awards won

by individuals or institutions regionally and globally, and (3) global recognition (e.g., registering World Heritage sites with UNESCO).

5. 2019 Cultural Participation Survey. This section contains an analysis of the survey and benchmarking data.

6. Infrastructure and investment. This section evaluates regulatory frameworks, facilities, equipment, labor force, education, training, and investment opportunities.

## **II. Data Sources**

In order to catalog cultural activities and products, the Report relies on the collection of qualitative and quantitative data as well as on secondary sources.

### **1. Quantitative Data**

This data comprises findings from the Cultural Participation Survey, statistics from relevant authorities, and comparative data.

#### **1.1: 2019 Cultural Participation Survey**

##### **1.1.1 Purpose and Design of the Survey**

The Survey aims to provide accurate and comparable data on the participation of Saudi citizens and permanent residents in different cultural fields by measuring two dimensions of community participation: consumption and practice. The Survey's standards are adopted and adapted from the European Community Participation Framework, a framework compatible with UNESCO's, to ensure a comparable standard of measurement. Modifications are made as appropriate for the local context. The Survey questionnaire comprises of 33 questions (variables) relat-





ed to 13 cultural fields defined by the Ministry of Culture, as well as 6 demographic questions. The questions deal with two dimensions: (1) consumption or attendance (e.g., reading a book, attending a play), or (2) practice (e.g., drawing, playing a musical instrument). Most of the questions include a specific time frame of the past twelve months. This conforms to similar surveys that measure levels of participation. In total, the questionnaire measures 25 cultural consumption variables and 8 cultural participation variables.

#### **1.1.2 Data Collection, First Cycle**

Data is collected from the period of October 27-November 1. The sample size is 3,137, with a margin of error of  $\pm 0.03$  and a confidence level of 95%. The sample is selected using stratified random sampling, dividing the population into strata based on the 13 administrative regions and gender. A random sample is taken from each stratum in a number proportional to its size when com-

pared with the total population. Data is collected through phone interviews in collaboration with the National Center for Public Opinion Polls. Subjects' responses are recorded digitally during the interview.

#### **1.1.3 Survey Population and Sample Characteristics**

The population the Survey covers consists of all individuals of both genders aged 20 years or older residing in the 13 provinces of the Kingdom, regardless of citizenship. The sample contains 55% males and 45% females, 89% Saudi citizens, and 11% non-citizens. The numbers are broken down in the following table:

Province	N	Percentage
Riyadh	706	23%
Makkah	717	23%
Eastern Province	501	16%
Aseer	286	9%
Al-Madinah	181	6%
Jazan	146	5%
Al-Qassim	132	4%
Tabuk	61	2%
Hail	82	3%
Najran	78	2%
Al-Bahah	78	2%
Al-Jawf	67	2%
Northern Borders	102	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,137</b>	<b>100%</b>

No weighting is applied to the sample.

#### **1.1.4 Statistical Treatment**

The data is analyzed using statistical techniques. Missing responses are dealt with by assuming they would have been similar to the responses that are given. The percentages displayed in tables and figures are calculated on this basis. All differences reported on the basis of gender, income, region, and education level are statistically significant ( $p \leq .05$ ).

#### **1.2 Statistics from Related Authorities**

The data is collected from 52 governmental, non-governmental, and private entities involved in some aspect of cultural affairs. This data is used after it is determined to be complete, sound, free from conflict with other sources or indicators, and generally of acceptable quality. Some of the statistics presented combine data from more than one entity and do not indicate comprehensive records but only the best available indicator.

Throughout the Report, when this occurs, it is indicated.

#### **1.3 Benchmarking Data**

To ensure a sound reading of cultural indicators in Saudi Arabia, they are compared with 9 selected countries: two from East Asia, three from the Arab World, and four from Western Europe and North America. Selections are based on three criteria: (1) global cultural influence, in terms of global trade in cultural commodities, soft power, and cultural influence, (2) success in developing cultural sectors, and (3) data available for comparison. Given these criteria, the following are chosen: for Asia, Japan and South Korea; for Western countries, France, the United Kingdom, Finland, and the United States of America; for Arab countries, Egypt, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates, despite the scarcity of available data for these last three countries.

Most of the data come from the relevant authorities in each country (e.g., European Commission, ministries of culture and tourism), or from the main national association for a given field (e.g., publisher's associations, national film institutes). In some cases, data have had to be collected from academic projects or global marketing companies. Because cultural statistics are often updated quite infrequently (in some countries only every 3-5 years), international comparisons rely on the most recent data available, even if it means comparing data from different years.

#### **2. Qualitative Data**

The Report seeks to present qualitative changes in the cultural landscape and to elucidate quantitative data or make up for data gaps. The Report also employs qualitative data that is collected from stakeholders in each field, including





experts, officials, and professional and amateur practitioners. 83 stakeholder interviews were conducted from October 2019 to February 2020. This data is used not as a source of objective fact but as supporting documentation to aid in the analysis of cultural changes and trends. In light of the meagre data in secondary sources, interviews are used as primary sources in the Historical Overview sections. Additionally, the Report's research team performed field visits to cultural events and institutions.

### **3. Government Reports**

The Report includes published and unpublished data from ministries, government agencies, and civil associations. This includes organizations' annual reports, statistical publications, and administrative and financial reports, in addition to

internal reports related to specific events.

### **4. Primary and Secondary Historical Sources**

The Report employs only a limited number of historical documents, instead relying heavily on interviews conducted with trailblazers who lived through the historical periods described in each chapter. The Report also draws on the fundamental works of history in each field.

### **5. Other Sources**

Given that the Report is not limited to officially-organized culture, it includes data from news reports, interviews, and (to a limited extent) social media. In some cases, field visits are undertaken to document spontaneous cultural activities that are not organized by institutions, documented in reports, or associ-

ated with the formal economy. This inclusiveness stems from a belief in the importance of these cultural practices, as detailed by UNESCO in its discussion of the formal-versus-informal dichotomy.

## **III. Cultural Indicators**

The cultural indicators presented in the Cultural Indicators chapter are based on the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (FCS). The indicators are selected from a list of 55 used across several countries. They are verified for meeting consistent statistical standards. If there is a discrepancy in methodology, the statistics are either excluded or flagged, as appropriate. The indicators are divided into four categories that reflect the components of the Report's methodology described above.

## Appendix 2:

# Cultural Participation Survey Data

### A. Cultural Participation Variables

Have you attended a poetry reading in the past 12 months?	No, not once	Yes, 1-2 times	Yes, 3-5 times	Yes, more than 5 times	Total
Percentage	94.70%	4.00%	0.80%	0.60%	100%
N	2,970	124	24	19	3,137

Have you visited an archeological site in KSA in the past 12 months?	No, not once	Yes, 1-2 times	Yes, 3-5 times	Yes, more than 5 times	Total
Percentage	65.30%	24.40%	6.20%	4.20%	100%
N	2,048	764	193	132	3,137

Have you attended any fashion events in KSA in the past 12 months?	Yes	No			Total
Percentage	6.7%	93.3%			100%
N	210	2,927			3,137

What were the fashion events in KSA that you attended in the past 12 months?	Fashion Week	Modern fashion show	Traditional fashion exhibition	Workshops on knitting, embroidery, or design	
Percentage	8.6%	26.7%	43.8%	6.2%	
N	18	56	92	13	
Cont'd	Other				Total
Percentage	14.8%				100%
N	31				3,137

Do you watch Saudi digital content on YouTube?		Yes	No	Total	
Percentage	50.6%	49.4%			100%
N	1,586	1,551			3,137

How many times have you gone to a movie theatre in KSA in the past 12 months?		Not Once	1-2 times	3-5 times	More than 5 times	Total
Percentage	72.70%	14.60%	6.60%	6.10%	100%	
N	2,282	458	206	191	3,137	

How do you prefer to watch movies?		In theatres	On TV	Streaming (e.g. YouTube and Netflix)	I do not watch any	Total
Percentage	19.10%	24.40%	42.00%	15.50%	100%	
N	600	764	1,318	455	3,137	

How many times have you visited a nature reserve or park in KSA in the past 12 months?		Not Once	1-2 times	3-5 times	More than 5 times	Total
Percentage	54.5%	22%	8.4%	15%	100%	
N	1,710	691	265	471	3,137	

Have you organized a private cultural event in the past 12 months?		Yes	No	Total	
Percentage	13.5%	86.5%			100%
N	424	2,713			3,137

**A. Cultural Participation Variables (Cont'd)**

Have you used any public cultural facilities (theatre, library, conference hall) to organize a cultural event in the past 12 months?	Yes	No	Total
	Percentage	12.8%	87.2%
N	400	2,737	3,137

Have you volunteered to organize a cultural event or work at an archeological site, museum, or public library in the past 12 months?	Yes	No	Total
	Percentage	14.4%	85.6%
N	452	2,685	3,137

Did you attend an exhibition of photography, fine arts, or handicrafts?	No, not once	Yes, 1-2 times	Yes, 3-5 times	Yes, more than 5 times	Total
	Percentage	68.9%	24.2%	4.2%	2.7%
N	2,162	759	131	85	3,137

Do you practice any arts such as painting or sculpture as a hobby?	Yes, professionally	Yes, as an amateur	No, but I would like to	No, I've never considered it	Total
	Percentage	4.2%	18%	13.3%	64.6%
N	131	564	416	2,026	3,137

Have you visited a museum in KSA in the past 12 months?	No, not once	Yes, 1-2 times	Yes, 3-5 times	Yes, more than 5 times	Total
	Percentage	71.2%	22.5%	4%	2.2%
N	2,235	707	125	70	3,137

Have you attended an event or lecture organized by a public library in the past 12 months?	No, not once	Yes, 1-2 times	Yes, 3-5 times	Yes, more than 5 times	Total
	Percentage	81.9%	12.9%	3.2%	2%
N	2,568	406	100	63	3,137

How many times did you visit a public library in KSA in the past 12 months?	Not Once	1-2 times	3-5 times	More than 5 times	Total
Percentage	61.5%	23.4%	6%	9.1%	100%
N	1,929	734	187	287	3137

Did you attend any of the festivals or events held in KSA in the past 12 months?	No	Yes, 1-2	Yes, 3-5	Yes, more than 5	Total
Percentage	45.2%	31.4%	13.1%	10.3%	100%
N	1,417	985	412	323	3,137

Have you attended a concert or other musical event in KSA in the past 12 months?	No, not once	Yes, 1-2 times	Yes, 3-5 times	Yes, more than 5 times	Total
Percentage	81.1%	13.6%	3.3%	2%	100%
N	2,543	427	105	62	3,137

Do you listen to music?	Yes, daily	Yes, several times a week	Yes, once a week	Yes, 1-3 times a month	Total
Cont'd	Yes, even less than that	No			
Percentage	33.7%	19%	8.1%	5.9%	
N	1,058	597	254	186	

Have you visited a book fair in the past 12 months?	Yes	No			Total
Percentage	34.3%	65.7%			100%
N	1,075	2,062			3,137

**A. Cultural Participation Variables (Cont'd)**

Do you write as a hobby (regularly) in your free time?		Yes	No	Total	
Percentage	36.1%	63.9%			100%
N	1,131	2,006			3,137

How do you prefer to read?		On a mobile device	Printed books	Total	
Percentage	37.3%	62.7%			100%
N	1,070	1,799			3,137

How many books did you read in the past 12 months, excluding reading for work or school?		None	1-2	3-5	More than 5	Total
Percentage	26.6%	29.3%	19.4%	24.6%	100%	
N	834	920	610	773	3,137	

Do you practice a handicraft?		Yes, professionally	Yes, as an amateur	No, but I would like to	No, I've never considered it	Total
Percentage	6.1%	15.6%	12.5%	65.8%	100%	
N	191	489	393	2,064	3,137	

Do you play a musical instrument?		Yes, professionally	Yes, as an amateur	No, but I would like to	No, I've never considered it	Total
Percentage	1.3%	9.3%	13.8%	75.6%	100%	
N	42	291	433	2,371	3,137	

Have you visited archeological sites outside of KSA?		No, not once	Yes, 1-2 times	Yes, 3-5 times	Yes, more than 5 times	Total
Percentage	52.8%	21.2%	9.8%	16.3%	100%	
N	1,657	664	306	510	3,137	

Have you visited museums outside of KSA in the past 12 months?	No, not once	Yes, 1-2 times	Yes, 3-5 times	Yes, more than 5 times	Total
Percentage	67.3%	22.3%	5.8%	4.6%	100%
N	2,111	699	183	144	3,137

Would you like more festivals and events to be held in KSA?	Yes	No	Total	
Percentage	77.7%	22.3%		
N	2,433	698		3,131

What type of event would you like to see more of?	Festivals	Theatre	Poetry and literature	Music	Total
Percentage	23.8%	13.2%	19.2%	8.6%	
N	536	297	433	194	
Cont'd	Discussion panels	Lectures	Heritage	Other	Total
Percentage	9.9%	10%	11.8%	3.5%	100%
N	224	225	267	79	3,137

In general, how satisfied are you with the available festivals and events?	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Total	
Percentage	5.6%	13.5%	29.4%		
N	176	424	923		
Cont'd	Satisfied	Very satisfied		Total	
Percentage	40.3%	11.2%			100%
N	1264	350			3,137

## B. Demographic Variables

Gender	Male	Female	Total
Percentage	54.6%	45.4%	100%
N	1,714	1,423	3,137

Nationality	Saudi	Non-Saudi	Total
Percentage	88.9%	11.1%	100%
N	2,788	349	3,137

Province	Riyadh	Makkah	Eastern Province	Aseer	
Percentage	23%	23%	16%	9%	
N	706	717	501	286	
Cont'd	Madinah	Jazan	Al-Qassim		
Percentage	6%	5%	4%		
N	181	146	132		
Cont'd	Tabuk	Hail	Najran		
Percentage	2%	3%	2%		
N	61	82	78		
Cont'd	Al-Bahah	Al-Jawf	Northern Borders	Total	
Percentage	2%	2%	3%		100%
N	78	67	102		3,137

Education Level	Secondary school or less	Bachelor's degree or certificate	Advanced degree	Prefer not to answer	Total
Percentage	27%	59.8%	12.4%	0.9%	100%
N	846	1,875	389	27	3,137

Income (monthly)	Under 5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-15,000	15,000-20,000	
	SAR	SAR	SAR	SAR	
Percentage	19.1%	20.8%	19.3%	11.6%	
N	600	652	607	363	
Cont'd	Over 20,000 SAR	Prefer not to answer			Total
Percentage	11%	18.2%			100%
N	345	570			3,137

Employment Status	Government employee	Private-sector employee	Businessman/ woman	Student	
Percentage	36.4%	27%	3.9%	9.1%	
N	1,143	846	121	285	
Cont'd	Homemaker	Retired	Prefer not to answer	Seeking employment	Total
Percentage	9.5%	8%	0.7%	5.5%	100%
N	297	250	21	174	3,137

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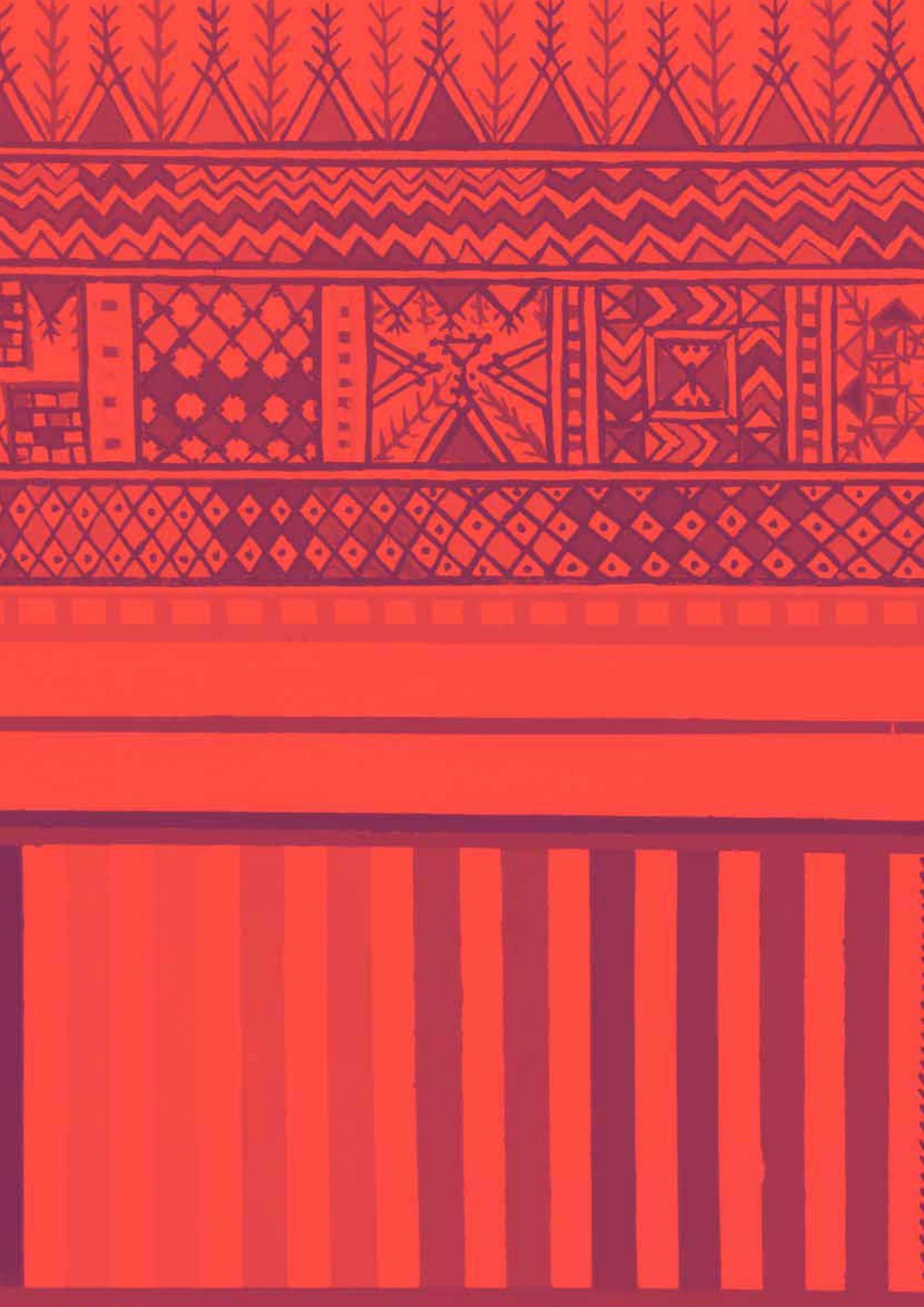
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Our culture, our identity