



# Green Arabia

## Arabian Peninsula ... Cross road of continents

### Introduction:

The Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) in collaboration with Oxford University in UK had held «Green Arabia Conference-2014» in the Oxford City from 24- April, 2014. A select group of archeologists and ecologists from the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in addition to several scientists from a number of other countries had participated in the conference. The objective was to explore the relationship between the human history and the climate change in the Arabian Peninsula.



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The conference was officially inaugurated by His Royal Highness Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdul Aziz, President of SCTA. In his speech, the President of SCTA highlighted the deep rooted history and culture of the Arabian Peninsula since the prehistoric periods, and the impact of climate change on the land of the Arabian Peninsula, which was once abound with lakes, orchards and rivers, and not devoid of civilizations.

## *Saudi-British Cooperation*

The initiative of «Environment of Arabian Peninsula» is an important part of the Saudi-British joint cooperation efforts for highlighting the works of researchers from different cultures as they tend to ignore the differences between them and focus on the issues of mutual concern.

There is an existing cooperation between the researchers from the two kingdoms for more than a decade of research into the history of the Arabian Peninsula. These efforts aim to link scientifically between the research and studies on climate changes and environmental shifts within the project of “Ancient Deserts” based in the Oxford University, which is considered a valuable opportunity for collaboration and discussion of the important research and global issues, and bridge the link between different cultures.

## *Green Arabia Project:*

Green Arabia Project is a study on the relations between the successive climate changes the Arabian Peninsula has passed through across lengthy

periods, and the beginnings of the early human settlements on the land, and the migration of man across continents of the ancient world. So far, the project has revealed evidences of the presence of hundreds of lakes, rivers and forests, and the organisms that lived in these forests and the ancient environments, around which several successive civilizations had originated, as the mild climate of the Arabian Peninsula in those turbulent eras, had made it a suitable place for early human settlements.

## *Event’s importance:*

The importance of this conference lies in its role in bringing together scientists of archeology and environment from the Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom, in addition to scientists from several countries around the world to discuss interrelationships between, human history and climate change in the Arabian Peninsula.

Scientific evidences have indicated that, the Arabian Peninsula was one of the first human settlements in the world, and that it was filled with green plains and flowing rivers. This confirm the Prophet Mohammad’s saying in this respect (peace be upon him).

## *Why Oxford:*

In light of the number of conferences, forums and workshops that have been held in Saudi Arabia to announce the most outstanding archeological discoveries and outcomes of national and international excavation missions across several locations in the Kingdom,



and driven by these efforts, Oxford University (which is one of the most prestigious universities in the field of antiquities studies and human history in the world), has organized the Green Arabia Conference 2014, in an attempt to highlight the outputs of field work that has been done by the joint scientific missions.

Oxford University is a key partner of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) in the «Green Arabia» project will be implemented in five years period, started in 2012.

Besides, the relations between SCTA and Oxford in scientific research of the history of the Arabian Peninsula go back more than a decade in an effort to connect scientifically between the research and studies on climate changes and environmental shifts within the project of “Ancient environments”, it is great opportunity for cooperation and discussion on important research and global issues, and bridging a link between different cultures.

## *Prince Sultan’s speech*

«I wish to extend my thanks to HRH the Prince of Wales, who was kind enough to contribute his insightful opening remarks to our conference.

I also thank Oxford University for its valuable cooperation with the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, and Professor Michael Petraglia, Green Arabia’s Principal Investigator and his able collaborators for their tireless efforts in helping us explore our country. The Prophet said:

The hour [of resurrection] shall not come until the Arabian Peninsula returns to being gardens and rivers.» (Musnad Ahmad).

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
I would like to start by pointing out that the Green Arabia Project is now an important component of a larger “Cultural Heritage Initiative”, an initiative launched by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities under the



patronage of King Abdullah, recognising that antiquities are the seeds in the evolutionary continuum that is the civilisation of the Arabian Peninsula. The initiative is intended to bring to life the history of our country from prehistoric times through pre-Islamic Arabia, Islam and the founding of the modern Saudi state, bringing it closer to the hearts and minds of the people of Saudi Arabia, especially the young, for although Our antiquities are a part of the world's heritage, they are an essential part of Saudi Arabia's national identity.

In my talk today I will attempt to show that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is generally defined by Islam, its economy and its international status, yet all of

these facets did not emerge from a vacuum—they are bound together by a deeper correlation: the history and culture of the Arabian Peninsula.

The historical heritage of the Peninsula is a dimension, not often mentioned, that underlies all the others and binds them together, providing them with a unifying foundation: there is an intimate relationship between time, place and people; in short, to comprehend all aspects of Arabia, we must embark from its deep history.

With the support of our King and our Crown Prince, I have made it my mission to bring into focus this aspect of our country and to bring it to the fore.

## *Islamic Component*

Let me turn first to the Islamic dimension: Islam is the main unifying principle of our nation and its people—while it emanated from the Arabian Peninsula, it spread across civilizations, and is today one of the fastest growing religions, because it was an enlightened, adaptable religion, rising as a culmination of what preceded it.

Although we are identified with the Islamic tradition and its values, we must consider that Islam did not arrive into a void; rather, it was founded over layers of civilisations, and flourished in a culturally disparate society, completing existing monotheistic religions.

To be a true Muslim, one must believe in all the great prophets through the ages.

The Qur'an states in Surah Baqara verse 136 [2.136]:

Say, [O believers], We have believed in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Descendants and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.

Islam emerged at a critical time in a critical place: Mecca was a unique economic power and cultural, spiritual centre in Arabia, having risen to prominence because of the Ka'ba, rebuilt by the Prophet Abraham some twenty four centuries before Islam, and

having become a destination of pilgrims and trade caravans that followed; the Quran, in what is known as Abraham's supplication in Surah Ibrahim, verse 37, states [14:37]:

Our Lord! Lo! I have settled some of my posterity in

a barren valley near Thy holy House, our Lord! that they may establish proper worship; so incline some hearts of men that they may yearn toward them, and provide Thou them with fruits in order that they may be thankful.

The resulting pilgrimage gave rise to Mecca as a hub of trade routes and culture. Our Prophet Mohammad (God's Peace and Blessings upon him) is reported to have said: "I was sent to perfect noble ethics," clearly implying the pre-existence of ethical values. Islam had come to a people who had a noble system of ethics and values. Out of the many kingdoms that existed in Arabia, there arose a cultural and social unity that coalesced into one civilisation. Islam brought with it a system of values that informs everything we do and that characterises us. Islam acknowledged the great civilisations of Arabia, and respected the great religions that preceded it, while consolidating existing noble Arab values.

## *Economic Component*

Economically, the Peninsula, a strategic geographic location since ancient times, has always been at the crossroads of civilizations and economic activity. The wealth of artefacts we are finding in



our explorations today, as witnessed, among other things, by our Roads of Arabia exhibit that is now touring the world, is a result of Arabia's strategic geographic location at the centre of civilizations and economies, with resources and commodities traveling the trade routes, much as oil does today. The astounding discoveries being made of art, sculpture, monuments and jewellery show a sophisticated level of craftsmanship confirming a proliferation of wealth.

Thus one can say that Arabia was rich long before the discovery of oil; this positively makes it clear: we, the people of Arabia, are not nouveaux riches.

Such flourishing of economies based on trade and caravan routes could not have been possible without the people—the same people who today are embracing modernity and applying wealth to their development: they are the descendants of those who traded with and protected caravans throughout the history of Arabia, and are predisposed and receptive to building a great civilization.

## *Political Component*

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is also present on the international stage as a voice of stability and peace, as it plays a focal role in international affairs and diligently discharges its humanitarian responsibilities. The initiatives advanced by King Abdullah—Dialogue of Religions and Dialogue of Civilizations—did not emerge from nothing: As heirs to a long history of interaction between civilizations and cultural exchange, we in the Arabian Peninsula are inherently enabled to lead. Dialogue is needed for mutual understanding and peace, and the future of humanity. To quote the Quran Al- Hujurat verse 13 [49.13]:

O mankind! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct.

We are predisposed to seek stability and peace, for stability is the foundation of great civilizations, while geography and history naturally compel us to play a central role in the world and in human affairs today.

Green Arabia is significant in that it is the first multidisciplinary scholarly exploration of its subject. The Arabian Peninsula was the first destination of human migration, not merely a transit point. New archaeological research shows that the Peninsula had human settlements for long periods, before spreading from there to other parts of the world.

We are very excited that studies such as Green Arabia show successive climatic changes ranging from arid to wet periods that prevailed in Arabia, as well as uncovering ancient lakes and rivers. Such studies are only the beginning of Green Arabia, which holds the promise of other exciting results in the collaboration between Oxford University and the other partners in this project, and Saudi antiquities experts, while building on the pioneering work of Professor Norman Whalen of Texas State University, who led some of the most important archaeological surveys and excavations in Saudi Arabia in the 1980s and 1990s.

The Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities greatly values such collaboration in the field of research, and, with the full support of King Abdullah, places great emphasis on archaeological surveys and exploration: in an unprecedented collaboration we now work with thirty teams at various sites in cooperation with archaeological missions from many countries, including Great Britain, France, Italy, the United States, Germany, Japan, Belgium, Poland, Finland and Austria, in addition to our own academic institutions.

In our collaborations to explore our past with distinguished institutions such as Oxford University, we are uncovering the layers of history and shedding light on our place and destiny among the world's civilizations and nations.

To build on the solid work already done, I would like to announce today that the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities—in collaboration with Saudi institutions and Oxford University and others—is creating a dedicated research unit to be named the “Green Arabia Centre” to specialize in the study of ancient climates and their relation to man as he adapted to the changing ecology.

## *Closing*

In conclusion, and based on what discovery and history has revealed, we firmly believe that the role Saudi Arabia is playing now, and will be playing in the future, is not contrived nor invented; rather, it arises from our natural place as heirs to a procession of great civilisations, and the focal point of the Islamic world,»

*Prince Charle's Speech*

