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ABSTRACT

Until recently, Algeria sustained itself and covered all its expenses and consumption through revenues generated from oil sales, supplemented by various levies and taxes. However, with the decline in the international market price of oil and the absence of any viable alternative sources, especially after years of neglect, confusion and doubt arose regarding policies planned to achieve comprehensive developmental progress. It became impossible to continue on the same path, prompting attention to the agriculture and industry sectors. Yet, it quickly became apparent that there was no feasibility in this without genuine capital to drive these sensitive sectors forward. Meanwhile, the focus remained on the tourism sector, considered a modest service sector barely holding its ground despite its strategic importance in providing additional direct revenues in hard currency. Algeria is rich in the tourism field with precious resources that vary across different forms and diverse spaces, from maritime to mountain tourism, from spa tourism to desert tourism, and other classifications of tourist activities. Through this article, we attempt to explore one of the jewels and treasures of this field, examining a valuable model within our extensive desert society.

Keywords: Tourist activity, desert society, communal life, palaces, human heritage, urbanization.

INTRODUCTION

Societies in the desert regions have witnessed various forms and patterns in their ways of life, settlement, and migration, influenced by the prevailing geographic climate characterized by winter coldness and aridity and summer heat. These societies have also been shaped by different historical experiences, including periods of colonization and foreign invasion, forming a framework in which they organized their lives, thus creating artistic masterpieces in the realms of human architecture and social interactions. These masterpieces serve as a testament to their adaptability to environmental and historical conditions, ensuring stability and balance throughout their evolutionary stages and serving as nuclei for subsequent societies.

In this context, the vast Algerian desert is home to several desert communities and local societies with diverse communal life patterns, influenced by environmental and historical factors. The geometric architectural patterns and forms of these societies, particularly exemplified by the palaces, signify their natural, political, economic, cultural, and religious functions. These palaces are considered cultural landmarks distinguishing North Africa in general and the southern Algerian region in particular. Over time, they have served as crucial trade routes known to historians as the "Palace Route," evolving into residential centers that have undergone numerous social, political, and economic changes, ultimately shaping their present-day appearance.

Some may commonly refer to these palaces as "common expressions among the desert inhabitants," structures built on elevated plateaus with uniform-shaped and colored houses surrounded by double high walls. These walls often feature round towers on either side of the palace entrance. Noteworthy is their ability to provide warmth in winter and coolness in summer, attributed to the construction of sturdy mud molds, some of which are multi-story dwellings. This architectural knowledge suggests an early understanding of building techniques, with roofs supported by palm trunks and thatch, and tiny windows overlooking narrow alleys. Despite their openness in various areas, these features ensure gentle summer ventilation, temperature preservation in winter, and protection from sandstorms and seasonal winds in autumn.

This architectural warmth and functionality reflect the adaptability of the desert dwellers to nature, showcasing their intelligence, resourcefulness, and creativity. Simultaneously, it underscores the social cohesion within the palace community, as its overall geometric structure forms a cohesive unit seamlessly integrated with the valley. Anthropologists and sociologists recognize this morphological unity as a representation of organic solidarity in the prevailing social life within these palaces. Additionally, it can be interpreted that these palaces symbolize a relatively settled life, as inhabitants often own adjacent farmlands, wells, or flowing valleys to irrigate their livestock and crops, forming the basis of their socio-economic stability.

In contrast, the nomadic lifestyle of the Bedouins, characterized by constant movement based on seasonal availability of pastures and fodder, represents a completely different way of living. This dynamic lifestyle contrasts sharply with the settled communities, with some families preferring stability, passing this lifestyle through generations, thus forming the sociological nucleus and structure of the city in the future. On the other hand, others favor constant mobility, driven by seasonal climatic factors related to their primary pastoral activity. This nomadic class, still present in these regions, is commonly known today as "Al-Mowali or Al-Qibala."

Moreover, in reality, the phenomenon of palaces among the desert dwellers requires comprehensive research involving multidisciplinary teams with expertise in sociology, economics, architectural engineering, history, archaeology, and other relevant fields. In this specific context, we aim through this research paper to unveil one of the ancient palaces associated with the desert environment, serving as a unique model considering the region's history. This palace, Teout's ancient palace, is located in the southwest of Algeria, precisely in the state of Naama, approximately 18 kilometers from the city of Ain Safra. The significance of this study extends beyond architectural and historical aspects to include rock engravings reminiscent of those found in Tassili (The Written Rocks). These engravings provide evidence of the longstanding human presence in the area. Additionally, the study explores the sociological and cultural peculiarities that set Teout's ancient palace apart, contributing to a deeper understanding of the region's unique characteristics.

2. Teout and the Ancient Palace

Studying the palaces of the Ain Safra region is a relatively new endeavor, serving as a preliminary exploration for more in-depth research. The archaeological aspect of the region exhibits a historical sequence highlighting the stages the area has undergone. This paper aims to shed light on the architectural and archaeological aspects of Teout's ancient palace, located approximately 18 kilometers southwest of Ain Safra in the state of Naama.

Purpose of the Study

The phenomenon of palaces among the desert dwellers necessitates interdisciplinary research involving various scientific fields such as sociology, economics, architectural engineering, history, archaeology, and more. In this specific context, this research paper aims to unveil one of the ancient palaces associated with the desert environment, representing a unique model given the region's history. Teout's ancient palace serves as a case study, revealing rock engravings reminiscent of those found in Tassili (The Written Rocks). These engravings indicate the ancient human presence in the area. Furthermore, Teout's palace showcases sociological and cultural peculiarities that set it apart.

Teout and the Ancient Palace

The study of the palaces in the Ain Safra region is a relatively new endeavor and serves as an introduction to further in-depth research. The archaeological aspect of the region features a historical sequence to highlight the stages the area has undergone, starting from general conclusions. The study aims to emphasize the architectural and archaeological aspects of the palace, involving fieldwork and analyzing the urban structure to extract general principles of architectural patterns. The study then compares these patterns with desert palaces in general and the palaces of the Jebel al-Qasr region specifically, examining their social, cultural, and artistic functions. The goal is to highlight the similarities and differences between the studied palace's architecture and the neighboring palaces.

On this basis, the purpose of this study is to introduce the region's archaeological sites and encourage both archaeologists and local residents, particularly those from Ain Safra, to pay greater attention to these archaeological landmarks. The study aims to prompt urgent efforts to preserve these remnants as material evidence of civilizations that developed and flourished in these places. Additionally, considering them as attractive elements for tourism in our country if utilized effectively. Regarding the model under study, Teout Palace, the city of Teout itself boasts a reputation for the hospitality of its inhabitants. They welcome tourists and guests alike, whether for leisure or exploration, given the region's captivating sites and views shaped by both nature and the hands of ancestors who once inhabited the area.

Palaces, in general, are considered architectural phenomena that distinguish the far southwest of Naama province, serving as important cultural symbols indicative of the region's deep history. These landmarks have undergone numerous developments since ancient times and have played a significant role in human life. They represent a facet of stability, just as the tent symbolizes a nomadic way of life. It is likely that the man residing in the palace is referred to as the "palatial" due to his limited travel. He does not embark on journeys or roam with his family and possessions from one area to another in search of pastures and fodder. He cannot abandon his farm or his place of work, in contrast to those living in tents, referred to as "sons of the thread" because the tent is made of thread. This nomadic class still exists in these regions, often known as "Al-Mowali or Al-Qibala."

Teout Palace, the subject of this research paper, stands as one of the most significant palaces in the southwest of Algeria. Recently, it has become a destination for some foreign tourists. The palace is distinguished by captivating natural landscapes, surrounded by colorful rocky mountains, sandy dunes, and freshwater springs. This diversity in the natural environment is complemented by cultural richness, featuring traditional dishes and products. Moreover, the region boasts rock engravings that bear witness to its long-standing human habitation, dating back to prehistoric times. The rock art depicts scenes from daily life, diverse animals, and reflects a climate vastly different from the current arid conditions. Some researchers believe that the roots of human civilization in North Africa, particularly in the Sahara, trace back to the adaptation efforts of the ancient desert dwellers during a period of more favorable climatic conditions.

Regarding the palace itself, its construction is attributed to the Roman invasion era. When the Romans seized the city of Tlemcen, many residents sought refuge in this area, named "Al-Ahlaaf." They built a palace atop a rock on the left bank of the valley. Later, the Ouled Rahmoun tribe, migrating from Saqiyat al-Hamra on the right bank of the valley, settled in the region and established their own palace in the current location of Teout. This historical background indicates that the inhabitants of the area have roots from two different migrations – those who fled Roman occupation from Tlemcen and those who arrived from Saqiyat al-Hamra. The valley, dividing Teout into two parts, supported agriculture on both banks, demonstrating harmony and coexistence. The water level in the valley was notably higher than it is today, according to historical sources.

As for the name Teout, it is traced back to the Amazigh word "Tiyut," "Titaouin," which means a region rich in wells, springs, or fountains. Teout Palace is situated on the right bank of Wadi Teout, on a slope in the northwest, specifically between Deir Jebel Issa and Wadi Teout, next to the oasis covering an area of approximately 4 square kilometers. The palace's estimated area is around 20 hectares. Different accounts suggest varying construction dates for Teout Palace, with some attributing it to the year 1200 or 1390 by the Ouled Rahmoun tribe, who arrived late from Saqiyat al-Hamra. Others connect its origin to the migration of Al-Ahlaaf from Tlemcen to Teout in the 13th century AD.

Teout Palace has historical significance associated with the visit of Sheikh Sidi Ahmed ben Youssef, the son of Sidi Ahmed ben Youssef Al-Melliani. Impressed by the palace, Sheikh Sidi Ahmed ordered Sheikh Sidi Issa to settle and stay in Teout. Sidi Issa, known for his political acumen, successfully unified tribes and overcame challenges, firmly controlling the surrounding regions of Teout. The palace experienced remarkable development during the 15th century, evolving into a residential complex with interconnected houses, narrow streets, and alleys. The palace featured three main gates:

- Hilal Gate on the northern side.
- Al-Khenaq Gate on the southern side.
- Sidi Ahmed ben Youssef Gate on the eastern side.

These gates led to various pathways and alleys, all converging at an ancient mosque at the center of the palace. Not far from the mosque, there was a public square called TASFALT, designed for relaxation, gatherings, celebrations, and addressing the concerns of the palace's residents by local dignitaries. Additionally, the palace complex included a bathhouse and a Quranic school. The construction materials comprised local mud, stones, palm wood, palm trunks, and *araar* and *dafla* (types of wood) for roofing. The use of mud and lime contributed to maintaining internal coolness. Each dwelling consisted of two floors:

- Upper floor allocated for the family and guests.
- Lower floor reserved for storing provisions and livestock.

Before entering the city of Teout and visiting its palace, it was customary to first visit the inscribed or engraved chamber located across from the youth hostel and facing the city of Teout along National Road 47, connecting El Bayadh and Bechar. These rock engravings, discovered relatively recently, captivated the French General Cavaignac and his troops when they approached the beautiful oasis. The red hues of the sands and stones blending with the greenery of pristine nature, depicted by palm oases and fields along the banks of the abundant water valley, left a lasting impression. According to the French, the discovery coincided with General Cavaignac's arrival in the area, and he was particularly enchanted by the beauty of the region.

3. Intellectual Production Regarding the Region

The region of Jebel Al-Qusur in general, and the area of Ain Sefra in particular, like other desert regions, suffers from a lack of resources and a scarcity of serious studies that could unveil the dust surrounding these landmarks. Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun, in his book "Al-Ibar," briefly mentions these palaces without detailing their architectural and archaeological features. However, he provides information primarily related to some tribes migrating to the area. Abu Abdullah al-Bakri, in his book "Al-Masalik wa Al-Mamalik," dedicated to the Maghreb, is a geographical composition, often pinpointing the locations of tribes, including Zanata, and recording some useful historical news. The Moroccan traveler Al-Ayashi, in his book "Ma'a Al-Mawaid," includes important news during his journey through the region, aiding researchers in understanding the political, economic, social, and cultural situations in southern Algeria. Despite the generality of these sources, they are essential for studying these palaces.

Regarding foreign publications, notable are the research works authored by French leaders about the region. René Reynier's "Le Sud Oranais" is a geographical, historical, and natural study. Jacques Jacquinet Felix, in his work "La Campagne du Général Cavaignac dans le Sahara Algérien," addresses the social, political, and economic life in the desert. Maurice Ménisier's book "Le Territoire Militaire d'Ain Sefra" is a geographic and historical attempt. Not to be overlooked is the contribution of journalist and writer Isabelle Eberhardt, covering events in what was then called Southern Oran, including popular resistance led by Sheikh Bouamama. These events are embedded in the region's memory following a flood in Ain Sefra, known for its passion for the Algerian Sahara and its adobe palaces stretching from the Wadi Souf region to Bechar, Bani Wannif, passing through Bou Saada. This is in addition to its influence by the prevailing popular culture among the tribes of these regions and the traditional adobe palaces' inhabitants.

However, it appears that most of these works are general references containing observations made by their authors during visits or stays in these areas. Despite their comprehensive and neutral perspective and the lack of logical analysis, these studies are immensely beneficial to scholars in the field. A careful reading enables them to understand the significant changes these landmarks have undergone over time.

4. Tourism Reality and Development in the Region

Despite attracting the curiosity of tourists, both foreigners and Algerian citizens, the region lacks any structural tourist infrastructure except for the youth hostel, which cannot accommodate all reservation requests. Although it provides only lodging services, many seek it for basic comfort. Additionally, some local residents have started renting their homes to tourists in an organized manner, coordinated with associations overseeing the visits. However, there is no tourism infrastructure to provide services for tourists. Despite its potential to attract a large number of tourists due to its archaeological sites and nearby palaces (such as Qasr Maqarar, Bou Smghoun, Asla, Safsifa, and others), the region lacks proper facilities.

Moreover, the region's strategic location, only about 200 km from Bechar and Taghit, and 40 km from the mineral baths of Hammam Righa, indicates its potential to become a tourist destination. However, the absence of proper attention and development reflects a decline in its tourist value and the waste of natural financial resources in a time of fluctuating fuel prices.

The archaeological sites face a critical situation due to human-caused vandalism and distortion of some of their features. In addition to the erosion they experience, it is crucial for authorities to protect them. The local population must also seriously consider preserving these historical and cultural treasures to breathe life into the palace and contribute to the region's tourist dynamics. Authorities need to expedite the restoration of the palace, considering it a valuable historical and tourist asset, representing the living memory of the people and the region.

In conclusion, many focus on superficial decorations in this matter, neglecting the social and economic impact of tourism on the local population. The development of tourism contributes to creating tourism-related job opportunities, lifting the local population from the poverty and social hardship they face. It also prevents the deterioration of the cultural value of the region and its human heritage.

5. Historical Irony

While historical evidence persists, our perception and interest in it are influenced by historical unconsciousness about our care and focus on stone palaces—Roman, Byzantine, and French—singling them out, while neglecting the local adobe palaces crafted by Saharan locals, challenging both natural phenomena and colonial influence. susceptible to colonization and glorification. This bias leads to a distinction between global human heritage, perpetuating a condescending view of ourselves across generations. We inherit this perspective, raising questions

This preferential policy towards cultural heritage is a global endeavor to glorify a particular historical view, including the colonial era. This bias is perpetuated through various global development programs, becoming embedded in individual and collective unconsciousness.

All political and tourism stakeholders, as well as anyone associated with the tourist space, must be vigilant about schemes that seek to cement a biased view of elements of human cultural heritage. This heritage is a pure human product and a global cultural property that cannot be used to serve self-centered agendas, reducing it to mere human experiences in historical and civilizational epochs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Equal Treatment of Palaces

Notably, there is a disparity in the classification and treatment of palaces. Comparing Qasr Tiout and Qasr Bou Smghoun reveals that the former is still used by some residents, even as a stable for livestock. It lacks shops for traditional industries or tourism offices. In contrast, the latter has been evacuated, preserved as local heritage with traditional industry shops, and features an administrative office representing tourism interests in the region. Such distinctions do not serve our cultural properties or our cultural heritage.

2.Preservation Efforts

The deteriorating condition of Qasr Tiout calls for immediate attention, preservation efforts, and repurposing it for tourism. It should be safeguarded and registered as part of UNESCO's World Heritage, along with other Algerian Saharan palaces. Additionally, establishing traditional industries and providing local shops for young people and families in the area can contribute to promoting the local tourism product for the entire region.

3.Preservation of National Identity

The real challenge lies in preserving national identity and memory through these cultural acquisitions. Many of these palaces are at risk of collapse or have already succumbed to harsh natural elements. They symbolize our cultural heritage and traditions, and their neglect reflects a lack of concern for our cultural achievements. Foreign tourists often appreciate the cultural value of everything related to global human heritage more than we do.

In conclusion, it is essential to shift our perspective and approach towards our local cultural heritage, giving it the same respect and care that we extend to globally recognized monuments. This requires a conscious effort to preserve our identity, history, and cultural richness for the benefit of current and future generations.

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