

Potentials of Dumat al-Jandal, Saudi Arabia for UNESCO World Heritage List Requirements

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Abstract

Dumat al-Jandal is an ancient site in the north of Saudi Arabia. Several civilizations have left their footprints and impacts on the urban and architectural components of this site. In general, Dumat al-Jandal consists of 3 components. The first is a castle which is dated back to the Roman time, while the second is a mosque that is believed to be constructed in the 8th century AD. The third part of the site is al-Dar'i district, whose date of emergence is uncertain though physical evidences indicate that it is 400-700 years old.

This research analyses the urban and architectural aspects of the three components of Dumat al-Jandal. It also discusses their construction materials and the modifications occurred to each building or component throughout history. The historic and architectural characteristics of this site are then tested against the registration criteria of the UNESCO World Heritage List as well as similar examples that are already on the List. The research has found that Dumat al-Jandal meets at least 2 criteria to be inscribed in the List.

Keywords: Dumat al-Jandal, UNESCO World Heritage List, ancient Arabia, al-Jouf, al-Dar'i, Marid Castle, Umar Mosque

1. Introduction

Realizing that tourism has become a major source of national income, many countries have focused on developing and providing touristic attractions, one of which is historic or heritage sites (Nypan, 2003). Saudi Arabia, which is very rich with heritage and history, is not an exception. For the last 15 years or so, Saudi authority represented by Saudi Commission for Tourism and Nation Heritage (SCTH) has restored many local historic sites and even registering some of them in the UNESCO World Heritage List (UNESCO, 2015). Evidences show that inscription of a site on the UNESCO List boosts its tourism.

While Saudi Arabia has succeeded in promoting its historic sites, especially the UNESCO listed ones, more sites are still not recognized or presented enough. One of these sites is Dumat al-Jandal. This research aims to prove that Dumat al-Jandal embodies historic and heritage ingredients and potentials to be turned into a world-class tourist destination and even inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List. The methodical procedures followed to achieve this objective are as following:

- Data collection and literature review of any written material on the historic and architectural or urban importance of the archeological site of Dumat al-Jandal. This is in addition to using data collected by the author during a field trip to Dumat al-Jandal

in 2014, where he surveyed elements of Dumat al-Jandal's archeological site (Marid Castle, the Souq, Umar Mosque and al-Dar'i Quarter.) The survey led to production of architectural drawings (plans, sections, etc.) based on measurements taken by the author as well as photography.

- Analyzing and applying UNESCO World Heritage List inscription requirements, which are 12 criteria, on the distinctive architectural, urban and historical characteristics and outstanding universal value (OUV) of the archeological site of Dumat al-Jandal. This means that the result will be either this site meets the UNESCO requirements or not.

It should be noted here that since this research is based on a fieldwork carried out by the author, almost all the illustrations and information included in this paper are a result of this investigation activities. However, references of others are used to support a related information or an argument.

2. The Significance of Dumat al-Jandal

The Saudi town of Dumat al-Jandal is located in the southwestern part of al-Jawf basin, and to the southwest of the city of Sakaka (Fig. 1). It is the most famous and oldest settlement of al-Jauf region, and is named after Douma bin Ismail (Al-Soudairy, 2005). Also, the word Jandal means huge and very hard stones, including those used in the construction of Marid Castle and most of the old houses in Dumat al-Jandal. The city's importance and fame lie in its significant location on the intersection of several ancient trade routes. It is located on the direct road between Syria and Mesopotamia, where ancient civilizations existed (Al-Shamary, 2004). Dumat al-Jandal is characterized by its fertile land and fresh water. It is one of the most important archaeological sites in Saudi Arabia. Its existence dates back to several centuries BC (Al-Meagel, 2001) (Fig. 2).



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Fig. 1 The location of Dumat al-Jandal and its archeological site
 (Source: Mortada, 2014)

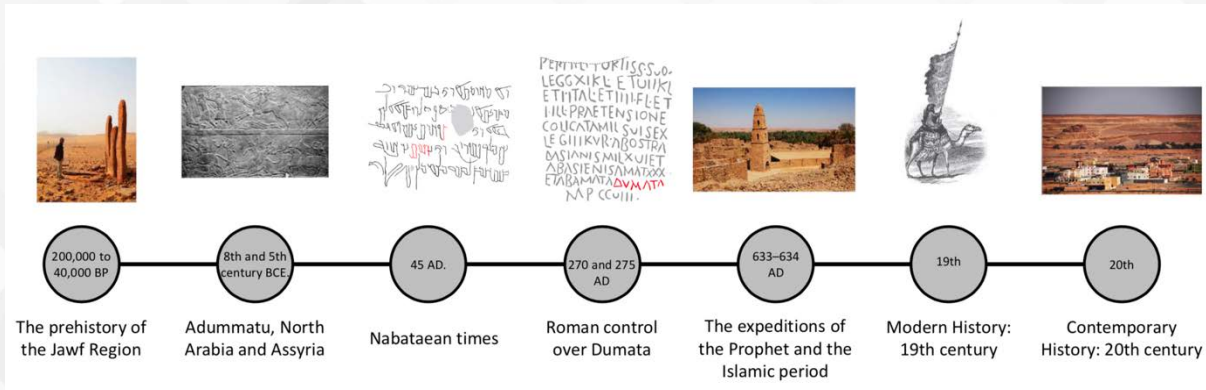


Fig. 2 Timeline of the history of Dumat al-Jandal
(Adapted from Charloux, 2014)

3. Archaeological Sites of Dumat al-Jandal

Dumat al-Jandal consists of several archaeological sites, the most historically important are Marid Castel, the Souq, al-Dar'i neighborhood (including al-Nassar house) and Umar bin al-Khattab Mosque (Fig. 3). Below is a discussion and analysis of the historic and architectural features of these sites.

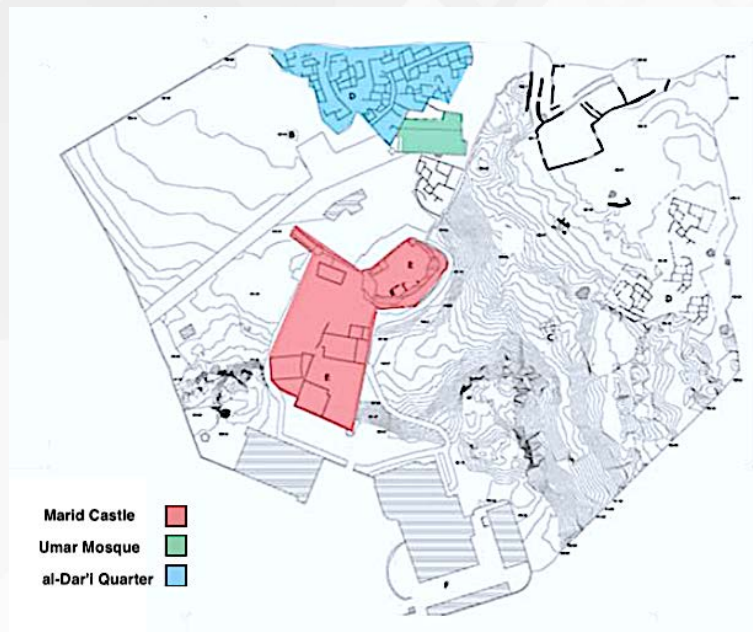


Fig. 3 Major components of the archaeological site of Dumat al-Jandal
(Source: Mortada, 2014)

3.1 Marid Castle

Marid Castle is located in the southern end of the old town of Dumat al-Jandal. It is built on a rocky hill overlooking the town from the south side, where the elevation of the Castle is around 25 meters above the level of the city. The construction of the Castle dates back to several centuries before the Islamic era, the earliest of which was the Nabataean period (Al-Meagel, 2001). It is believed that Queen Zenobia (240-274 AD) of Palmyra attacked the Castle in an attempt to control Dumat al-Jandal along with Tayma.

From the fieldwork conducted by the author, the construction of the Castle apparently went through five stages, each of which has its architectural characteristics. The first stage is represented by the foundations of the southern part of the Castle, especially the entrance area and the lower part of the southern wall. This stage features the use of large cut stones and mortar plaster. The second stage is signified by the high western wall overlooking a square. Parts of the wall are attached to rooms. The wall was constructed using medium-sized stones carefully cut and well-coordinated. The third stage implies the lower parts of the round towers and the stone block linking the three towers located on the eastern and southern sides, which are constructed with irregular stones of varying sizes. The fourth stage appears in the stone upper parts of the towers and the southern and eastern walls, which were constructed with small stones and clay as a coating material. The fifth stage, represented by the clay structures, concentrates on the upper parts of the towers and three mud-brick rooms located in the eastern and northern sides of the Castle site. These mud parts were added during the restoration of the Castle at the beginning of the 20th century (Al-Shamary, 2004).

The design of the Castle is divided into two sections, one is civilian for housing and administration, and the other is military for surveillance, warning, and war (Figs. 4-7).

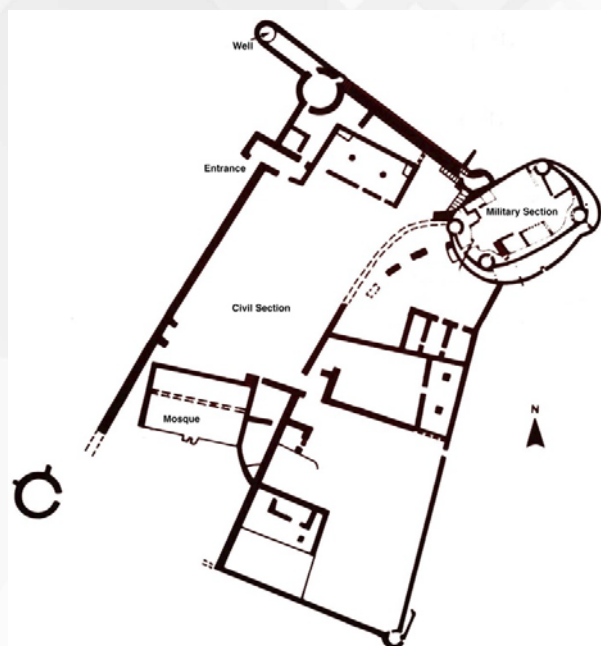


Fig. 4 Floor plan of major sections of Marid Castle
 (Source: Mortada, 2014)



Fig. 5 Views of Marid Castle from outside the fence walls
(Source: Author)



Fig. 6 The castle's western fence where the entrance is located
(Source: Author)



Fig. 7 The Castle's entrance and its lobby
(Source: Author)



3.1.1 Civil Section

The section comprises a large rectangular courtyard that is accessed by a broken entrance on the north side. The entrance is covered with a roof of tree trunks and branches. On the east side of the courtyard, there is a number of integrated rooms around a secondary courtyard. The western wall of the main courtyard is entered from a direct entrance, which is roofed with massive wooden beams. Also, in this section, there are remains of a small mosque consisting of a single alcove for qibla (Mecca) direction. This civil section is structurally secured by four round and conical corner towers built of stone and mud bricks.

3.1.2 Military Section

This section is a large mass constructed on a high plateau of a rocky hill rising 620 m above sea level (Al-Shamary, 2004). It is visible from all sides of the town of Dumat al-Jandal. It includes towers and is surrounded on the south-east side by a defensive moat. The Castel itself is encircled by a fence of a length of 48 meters, connecting its outer and inner walls. The interior part of the fence is accessed by a medium height entrance with a straight stone lintel.

The design of the section is based on a semi-elliptical floor plan of 42 m and 28 m wide. The southern, eastern and northeastern sides are connected by a wide corridor constructed from a solid rock block that reaches via a stone staircase located to the right of the Castle. This corridor connects the three towers with each other and makes the movement of the defenders of the Castle among the three towers accessible. There is also a courtyard surrounded by a group of rooms of thick mud walls in the north-east, south-east and west. It is believed that these rooms have been added to the Castle at a later date as the original construction material was stone (King, 1998). The external walls feature small openings for watching, and shooting. That is in addition to other holes scattered in the upper parts of the walls (Figs. 8 and 9).



Fig. 8 The Military Section from outside
 (Source: Author)



Fig. 9 Towers and external staircases of the Military Section
 (Source: Author)

The north-western façade of this section is constructed of stone, and is about 21 meters high. This facade is one of the original parts of the Castle and the highest of its walls. In the western part there are four rectangular openings on the lower and upper levels, and the thickness of the wall about 70-100 cm. There is an opening below that appears to have been for drainage. There are also eight irregular openings that tend to be elongated. On the western façade there is an entrance that is blocked by stones, and has an upper threshold next to six pieces of stone that have Arabic inscription. The western façade of the Castle, which is located in the west of the annexes, has the remains of a staircase up to the upper entrance to the southwest, which opens directly onto the courtyard. Some parts of the southern side, built mainly of stone, have fallen and topped by a number of mud rooms. The

eastern façade is based on stone foundations, with a mud wall of a thickness between 45-90 cm.

The Castle's facades are characterized by conical towers, which are one of the most important elements of the building. Yet, it is noticeable that these towers do not protrude to the outside. These towers are built within the Castle's walls and above the block corridor which connect three towers, while the fourth tower, located in the northwest corner, is just above the rocky block. The first tower, located in the southwest corner, is the largest and most important. Its foundations are of stone and upper sections are of mud. Stone and mud are also the same materials used in the construction of the second tower located on the southeast side. The third tower is located in the north-east. These three towers are constructed above the stone corridor. The fourth tower is located in the northwest corner of the building and built over the rocky high site. The towers are of two levels separated by a roof that is punctuated by an opening to cross into the upper part where the lower part is believed to have been used for housing or storing weapons and security supplies (Al-Meagel, 2001).

The southern, eastern and northern sides of the Castle's main wall are surrounded by another wall separating it by a corridor, and extends from the entrance of the Castle on the south facade until it connects to the western tower above the highest point of the rocky site. The construction of the second wall is due to the nature of the high rocky site that descends towards the south and east, making this side of the building area vulnerable to be easily accessed or penetrated. Therefore, this 8-meter high wall has been added to protect the weak side of the Castle, while the western and northern parts are significantly high, thus difficult to breach (Mortada, 2014).

The restoration of the Castle underwent two phases. The first phase included the reinforcement of the northwest wall, the south tower and some stone buildings in various parts. Also, in this phase, the staircase leading up to the highest level of the Castle has been rebuilt, that is in addition to reconstructing the rooms within the Castle courtyard. The second phase is the completion of the previous phase, where the construction of some walls has been finished. The falling walls have been disassembled and rebuilt. The rest of the towers were rebuilt and the roofing inside the Castle courtyard was completed (Al-Shamary, 2004).

3.2 The Souq

In the past, the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula had ten markets to meet for trade, including the market of the Souq of Dumat al-Jandal. The location of this souq was between Marid Castle and Umar bin al-Khattab Mosque. This souq has been completely removed but part of it has been restored to be used as an artisan center. This restored part was originally the ruins of old stone-built shops within the historic area beneath Marid Castle (Mortada, 2014) (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10 The souq below Marid Castle
(Source: Author)

3.3 Umar Mosque

Umar bin al-Khattab Mosque of Dumat al-Jandal is considered as one of the most important historic mosques in Saudi Arabia. Its architectural elements represent a continuation of the style of early mosques. The layout is a reflection of the first mosque built by the Prophet in Medina (Figs. 11-13). The historic architectural simplicity of this mosque has not changed over time. The mosque is located in the center of the old town of Dumat al-Jandal, just north of Marid Castle at the foot of the hill above which the Castle is built. A few houses separate the mosque from the Castle. Although this mosque is attributed to the second caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab, other sources do not confirm this as al-Jawf population that time were not Muslims. Al-Jawf became part of the Islamic Caliphate when it was conquered by Khalid bin Walid in 633 AD. As a result, other suggest that the Mosque was built during the Umayyad Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz (Al-Meagel, 2001). Also, the presence of a mehrab and a minaret, which became typical elements of any mosque after Umar bin al-Khattab's era supports the possibility of the construction of the mosque at a later date.

The mosque plan is a rectangular shape 32.5-meter-long from west to east, and 18-meter-wide from south to north, and consists of three important spaces. The first space is the praying hall, which is the largest part of the mosque and parallel to the qibla wall. The second is the open space or courtyard, and the third is a small prayer building that is located at the rare side of the courtyard.

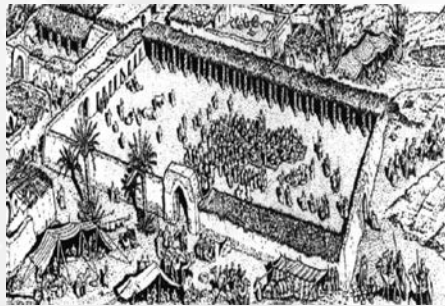


Fig. 11 The Prophet Mosque of Medina as built during by the Prophet
 (Source: Mortada, 2011)

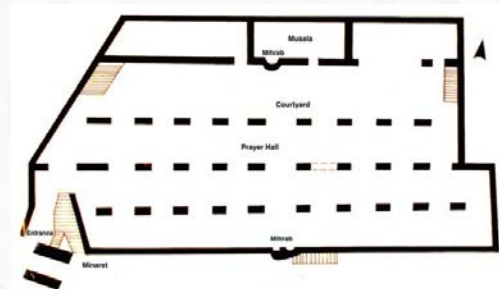


Fig. 12 Ground floor plan of Umar Mosque, Dumat al-Jandal
 (Source: Mortada, 2014)

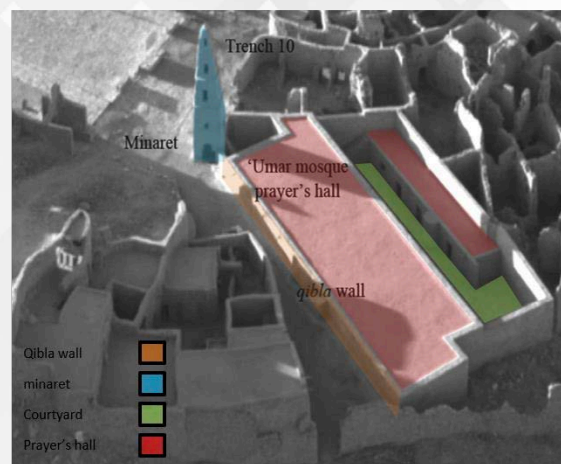


Fig. 13 The components of Umar Mosque, Dumat al-Jandal
 (Source: Mortada, 2014)

3.3.1 Prayer Hall

It is the most important part of the mosque, and consists of three rows of stone pillars parallel to the *qibla* wall. The first row consists of ten pillars, and the second of nine pillars as the third pillar is attached to the fourth wall. The third row, overlooking the courtyard consists of nine pillars, and the third row is thought to have been added at a later date due to the emergence of the first and second rows above the wall and third row (Mortada, 2014) (Fig. 12). At the center of the *qibla* wall there are a *mihrab* and a *minbar*, with a number of square cavities used to preserve copies of the Qur'an or to place saddles. The internal parts of the mosque have been plastered with gypsum while the exterior façade is mud-bricked (Fig. 14).



Fig. 14 Mosque entrance and prayer hall
(Source: Author)

3.3.2 The *mihrab* and the *minbar*

The *mihrab* and the *minbar* are similar in shape, in the middle of the *qibla* wall, and each is surmounted by a triangle of two stone beams, but the *mihrab* is larger than the *minbar* on the right. The location of the *mihrab* on the outside of the *qibla* wall can be distinguished due to irregular projection on the outer wall. The *minbar* consists of a cavity with three stone steps, and the *mihrab* is connected to the *minbar* by a small rectangular opening in the common wall. As it is known, *mihrab* and *minbar* in mosques were not known until the beginning of the Umayyad period, so it is believed that these two elements have been added in the restoration phase during the first Saudi State in the 18th century (Al-Meagel, 2001).

3.3.3 The Courtyard

It is in the northern part of the mosque. It occupies third of the mosque area and is parallel to the *qibla* wall from the north. It is accessed through the corridor of the entrance which is parallel to the *qibla* arcade from the west. The floor of the courtyard is covered with mud, and during a recent excavation a water well was found in the eastern part of the courtyard.

3.3.4 The entrance

The mosque is accessed through a wooden door on the south side of the building and from there to an uncovered corridor and then to the prayer hall. Next to the corridor is a stone staircase leading to the minaret and the roof of the mosque, adjacent to the wall of the western *qibla* hallway. A wooden staircase with rafters leads to the entrance of the minaret. A second stone staircase is located in the corner of the northwest courtyard and adjacent to the wall of the western courtyard leading to the roof of the small mosque (Musala).

3.3.5 The *Musala*

Attached to the mosque is a small building, locally called *Musala*, and located on the north side of the mosque, adjacent to the northern wall. This *Musala* occupies a large part of the courtyard, and the height of its ceiling up to 2.5 m. The *Musala* includes a half-round *mihrab*

that stands out from the level of the qibla wall, and it seems that this Musala was used during winter times. It also contains a section for women.

3.3.6 The *Minaret*

It is located at the southwest corner of the mosque, standing slightly above the qibla wall and slightly skewed. It has a square base and its walls narrow inward as it rises up to the top. Its top ends in a semi-pyramid shape. It is about 15-meter-high and consists of five levels. The corridor that runs through the minaret was connected to a smaller corridor connecting al-Dar'i Quarter to the souq and the eastern parts of the old town. There is a stone ladder connecting the ground level to the second level, which is a square in shape. On the southern and eastern walls there are two small windows. The inner rib of the second level occupies a stone ladder carried on a stone tuft that protrudes from the inner wall of the minaret and leads to the third level. The interior space of the minaret narrows as it rises upwards as it was impossible to build a complete stone staircase inside the minaret. The minaret itself represents a unique architectural style that is not found in the Arabian Peninsula. There is no doubt that the design of this minaret was influenced by minarets constructed in the Levant during the Umayyad period.

The mosque has undergone several renovations that included all parts, such as rebuilding the destroyed walls, complete repair of the roof, cleaning and paving the floors with stones, filling the spaces between the stones, restoring the mosque's retreat and roofing, and renovating the doors.

3.4 The Fence Wall

The fence wall of old Dumat al-Jandal is not part of the archaeological sites (the Castle, the Mosque, the Souq, and the Quarter) that are built next to each other. It is located in the north-west side of the city, and its ruins can be found in the west, north-west, and east sides along the palm farms. The wall rises in the parts discovered between 2 to 5 meters and a thickness of one meter. It is built with carved stones, and supported by another wall of clay from the inside as well as are square or rectangular towers of different sizes. The fence was built to protect parts of Dumat al-Jandal. Some of its parts are still buried in the sand and others are dilapidated. Archaeological studies did not specify the time when the wall was built, but the archaeological significance of the site is likely to date back to the Nabataean period, during the 1st century AD (Charloux, 2014) (Fig. 15).



Fig. 15 The remains of Dumat al-Jandal's wall
(Source: Author)

3.5 Al-Dar'i Quarter

The Quarter is adjacent to Umar Mosque from the north side, and north of Marid Castle. It is the oldest neighborhood in Dumat Al-Jandal, and characterized by a compact urban fabric that features attached dwellings and narrow streets and corridors. This fabric has produced houses of irregular floor plans. All the streets and alleys of al-Dar'i are oriented towards the Mosque. As the Mosque was constructed before the houses, the entrances of the houses that are adjacent or attached to the Mosque do not face that of the Mosque (Figs. 16 and 17). The physical irregularity of the streets and alleys to which these houses are open has contributed to this entrance arrangement in order to maintain the indoor privacy of the houses. Moreover, the presence of cul-de-sacs in this Quarter was important to trap and arrest thieves who may enter the Quarter (Al-Shamary, 2004). The streets and alleys are similar in width and height as well as the intersections which are open spaces (*Barhat*) of various sizes, depending on their function and location. *Al-Barha* (plr. *Barhat*) acts as a center for a group of houses where men gather and children play. Some alleys (*sabat*) are roofed to protect pedestrians from the sun and expand the upper floors of the houses or connect two houses of an extended family. These upper rooms provide a sense of security to the users of the alleys as their small longitudinal windows (called *taqat*) are used to monitor the alleys below. Each *sabat* is an extension of the house and useful when the inhabited family size expands.



Fig. 16 Plan of al-Dar'i Quarter
 (Source: Al-Shamary, 2004)



Fig. 17 The relationship between Umar Mosque and al-Dar'i Quarter
 (Source: Author)

Due to the large area of Al-Dar'i Quarter, it was necessary to create several gates or entrances to serve the residents and facilitate their movement in different directions inside the Quarter. The Quarter, therefore, contains five gates connecting it to the various parts outside. The main gate is located on the south side, topped by circular arches and linked to a narrow corridor or alley that extends from the central square and heading south, where the *minaret* of Umar Mosque is located, and then heads south until it ends with a semicircular arch. The second and third gates are located on the eastern side of the Quarter. The fourth is a wide square covered with wood and located on the west side. It connects the middle

square with the farms that surround the Quarter. The fifth gate is a branch of the alley that runs from the central square and leads to the fourth gate.

In the middle of Al-Dar'i Quarter, there is a major open space of an area of about 72 square meters. It is the central open space from which all streets and alleys of the Quarter branch out, connecting different parts of the Quarter. This open space is called *al-Rahiba* Square and opens to two wide entrances, one to the west with a semicircular arch, and another to the east with a two-pointed arch. It played a social role as it was the space where the residents of the Quarter met and guests and visitors used for resting. This space still retains its form.

The Quarter consists of a large group of houses called *Dour* of different sizes. The size of each *Dar* (plr. *Dour*) depends on the size and economic conditions of the residing family. Likewise, the height of the houses varies between one to three floors. As the case with most of the houses of al-Jouf Region, the basic spaces of the houses of Al-Dar'i Quarter are typical in each house. The common spaces are the courtyard (*Howsh*), the male guests' reception section (*al-Qahwa*), and the private spaces for sleeping, cooking and bathing for the residents. There is also a small room in the ground floor called *Matban*, used to store the feed of the livestock. The circulation inside the house takes a zigzagged pattern in order to maintain the privacy of the residents. Each house has a stone staircase to upstairs, and the space under the stairs is used for storage (Mortada, 2014) (Figs. 18 & 19).

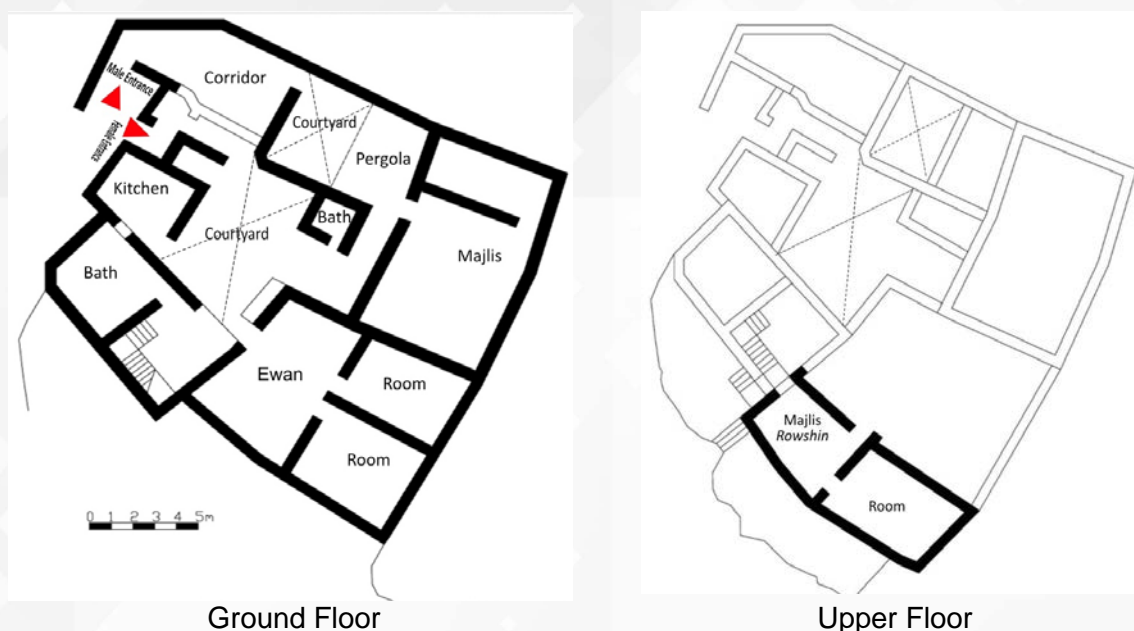


Fig. 18 Ground and upper floor plans of al-Nassar House, below Marid Castle as an example of al-Dar'i houses (Source: Author)



a. Females' Entrance leading to the courtyard



b. Males's entrance leading to visitors' courtyard



c. Staircase from the courtyard to upper floor



d. Private courtyard



e. Males Majlis (*al-Qahwa*)

Fig. 19 Spatial elements of al-Nassar House, al-Dar'i Quarter
(Source: Author)

Limestone is the main construction material of all houses of al-Dar'i Quarter. It is used in the construction of walls, lintels above the entrances, doors and windows, and in the pointed and round arches. Thin stones are used to roof the alleys of the Quarter as well as in the staircases of the houses. Mud is also used to build the upper parts (walls) of the houses. In latter times, mud was added as a construction material to the upper parts of foundations which were built from stone in order to maintain strength and rigidity as well as provide ease and beauty. A mixture of gypsum and clay was used as an adhesive to connect the limestones, or to cover the walls of the interior of the houses, especially the guest room (*al-Qahwa*). Trunks of palm trees, palm leaves, fronds and timber were used to cover the roofs of houses and the corridors of the Quarter, and to the threshold of some of the upper openings. Local palm products (especially wicker) have been used to cover some corridors inside the houses. It was also used in the construction of pergolas of the house courtyards to create shade, and in the door making.

4. Dumat al-Jandal and the UNESCO World Heritage List Requirements

As previously stated, there is no doubt that preservation urban heritage is extremely important for any nation. Urban heritage has become a major source of national income to many courtiers, especially if the site is registered in the UNESCO World Heritage List. According to UNESCO, a site must meet at least 2 out of 10 criteria in order to be inscribed in the list (Tayle, 2010) (Table 1).

2 out of 12 criteria set up by the UNESCO for any site to be registered in its list. Certainly, the authenticity and integrity of this historic site are also supportive. Hopefully, such a result would encourage local authority to consider and work for the registration of Dumat al-Jandal in the UNESCO List.

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