



Proposal For Converting Major Archaeological Sites Of Pakistan Into On-Spot Museum To Enhance Preservation

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Abstract

Pakistan has the privilege of having numerous archaeological sites spanning from prehistoric to historic eras, which hold great significance in understanding the legacy of our ancestors. These sites not only enrich our historical knowledge but also serve as valuable attractions for tourists. This research aims to explore the concept of on-spot museums and their possible application to archaeological sites in Pakistan. We argue that transforming sites into museums would emphasize the importance of Pakistan's archaeological heritage and foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among the public to preserve these sites for future generations. This collective effort towards preservation would represent a step towards the betterment of the nation, ensuring the conservation and appreciation of its rich cultural heritage. As a result, this research seeks to underline the potential benefits of converting archaeological sites into on-spot museums to promote historical understanding, tourism, and national pride.

Keywords: Museology, Heritage Sites, On-Spot Museums, Site Preservation, Tourism of Pakistan.

Introduction

At the beginning of the present research, it is very significant to understand the concept and the difference between the site museum and the on-spot museum, as these two are different terminologies. In the concept of a "site museum," museums are constructed near excavated sites, where the unearthed artifacts are displayed for public visitation. Notable examples of such site museums include the Harappa Museum, Mohenjo-Daro Museum, and Taxila Museum, etc. These museums are built adjacent to their existing sites.

The concept of an "on-spot museum" refers to the practice of converting an archaeological or historical site, typically one where significant discoveries have been made, into a museum. Instead of constructing a separate museum building adjacent to the excavated site. The concept of on-spot museum integrates the excavated site itself into the museum.

The concept of an "on-spot museum" involves transforming an archaeological or historical site, typically one with significant discoveries, into a museum. This type of museum is enclosed and securely sealed, with artifacts preserved in their original positions within the trench where they were found. The main excavated area (trench) is bordered and equipped with a raised platform, allowing visitors to view the entire site from a safe distance. Instead of constructing a separate museum building nearby, the on-spot museum incorporates the excavated location as part of the museum experience. Another concept is the open-air museum, which is designed to showcase large monumental structures. The open-air museum is a different concept from the on-spot museum.

The documentation of archaeological excavations offers compelling evidence that underscores the significance of Pakistan in the domain of archaeological discoveries. Of notable importance is the excavation of Mehargarh, which dates back to 5000 BCE and is situated in the Kacchi Plain, south of Bolan Pass in Balochistan. This momentous evidence has solidified Pakistan's standing as the custodian of the oldest urban civilizations in South Asia. In addition to Mehargarh, there are numerous sites associated with the Indus Valley Civilization, dating back to 3300 BCE, such as Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, and early Buddhist sites, including the Dharmarajika at Taxila in Punjab and Takht-e-Bahi in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). Furthermore, Mughal landmarks in Thatta, Multan, and Lahore, as well as Sultanate period monuments in Makli Tomb, Thatta, Multan, and Uch Sharif, and Hindu sanctuaries in Tharparkar (Sindh) and Punjab, captivate the interest of countless individuals globally. These sites serve as subjects of study and engender vibrant discussions surrounding these invaluable archaeological treasures.

Review of Literature

The preservation, conservation, and protection of archaeological sites have long been subjects of discussion among archaeologists, art historians, and scholars. In Pakistan, conservation projects for these sites and monuments have been undertaken both independently and in collaboration with foreign archaeological missions, guided by the primary legislation of the "Antiquities Act 1975" (The Antiquities Act, 1975, Act No. VII of 1976 – as amended in 1992 – Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan). Scholars have identified factors contributing to the rapid deterioration of these sites and have suggested ways of preservation for the archaeological excavations. Saeed asserts that various factors, including meteorological conditions such as temperature, weather conditions, intense light, dampness, humidity, air pollution, and rain, increase the risk of deterioration of cultural heritage (Saeed 2022: 26-27). Another research study highlights that heritage sites and monuments are vulnerable to natural disasters such as rain, storms, excessive vegetation growth, fire, flooding, climate fluctuations, droughts, and earthquakes. These natural hazards have the potential to partially or completely damage the monuments (Khan et al. 2022: 10). Additionally, another study indicates that the aero mycoflora, specifically the various species of fungal spores, is a major cause of biodeterioration

in the world heritage site of Taxila. The detection of fungal spores in six archaeological sites over the course of one year, influenced by seasonal variations, highlights the complex interactions among physical, chemical, biological, and environmental factors contributing to the biodeterioration of stone monuments in Taxila (Author et al., 2023).

Several scholars have identified factors that impact cultural heritage and archaeological sites in Pakistan. However, some researchers have put forth ideas for the preservation and conservation of these sites. One such idea is the concept of digital preservation for architectural heritage sites in Pakistan. Asma Khalid proposed this idea, emphasizing that digital preservation offers a fast, cost-effective, and easily accessible resource for safeguarding archaeological and historical monuments (Khalid, 2021: 26-37). Similarly, another study suggests that media can play an essential role in the preservation and conservation of archaeological and historical monuments (Umer, 2023: 25-37). These scholars suggest documenting sites through video recordings, images, and virtual tours, especially as some sites have been lost over time due to deterioration. According to these proposed suggestions, an individual can engage with digital virtual cultural heritage, although it is widely believed that the virtual experience can never fully replicate the tangible and immersive encounter with natural heritage. Addressing this, the present research article introduces the concept of on-spot museums at various archaeological sites in Pakistan. Such on-spot museums can be found in China. These ancient sites, integral to our tourist destinations, attract visitors from around the world. However, the respective communities have struggled effectively to preserve them, leading to a decline in public interest in history and heritage, particularly within Pakistan. With over 5,000 sites scattered across the country, many of which remain unexcavated and unattended, Pakistan possesses many archaeological sites that have been neglected due to a lack of attention. Consequently, these unexcavated sites are now on the brink of destruction. Recognizing the evolving demands of the 21st century and the inclusion of diverse typologies of heritage monuments and sites, it becomes imperative to implement sustainable preservation and conservation measures.

Research Methodology

This study draws upon both primary and secondary sources. Data was collected through a qualitative approach, which included an on-site visit. During this stage of the research, visual inspections and detailed photographic documentation served as essential methods. In addition, face-to-face and semi-structured interviews were conducted with local archaeologists and art historians to obtain expert insights on the concept of an on-site museum. The research also made use of published articles, research papers, photographs, and historical records.

Evidence of On-Spot Museums in China and Egypt

This section of the paper examines the evidence of on-site museums in China and Egypt; the concept of on-spot museums are very common in these countries. In the context of studying archaeological tourism and its preservation, the author of "Archaeological Museums and Tourism in China: A Case Study of the Sanxingdui Museum" explores the conversion of archaeological sites into on-spot museums to enhance the understanding of past civilizations

(Lai 2015). The author specifically focuses on the case of the Sanxingdui Museum in China, highlighting the growing trend of embedding museums directly over archaeological sites. The earliest example of an on-spot museum in Sichuan province, planned in the 1980s, is discussed by Lai. In addition to emphasizing the importance of sustainability in managing on-site archaeological on-spot museums, the author points out that the concept of converting archaeological sites into on-spot museums was introduced to the world years ago.

1.1 The Site Zhengguo Chemakeng (Chariot and Horse Pit of Zheng State)

The site of Zhengguo Chemakeng is situated in XinZheng City, Henan Province. Here in 2001, Chariots and Horses belonging to noble families of the Zheng State were discovered. The dedicated efforts of archaeologists and researchers have led to the excavation of the Zheng State tombs and the surrounding 20 hectares of land, unearthing eighteen horse and chariot pits, as well as over 3,000 tombs, while some areas have been interpreted as residential pits (as shown in Fig. 3). The site was transformed into an on-spot museum: the excavated material was left on-site and properly covered to be protected from rainwater and sunlight. (see Fig. 1). The museum features various pits, including burial pits for humans and animals accompanied by lavish grave goods (see Fig. 2 and 4). Similarly, within the same on-spot museum, there is a pit dedicated to animal burials, showcasing four houses facing the same direction (see Fig.5). Some pits also contain a significant number of chariots (see Fig. 6 and 7). Minor artifacts are displayed in showcases located along the sides of the pits (see Fig. 2), the pits themselves are protected by glass railings (see Fig. 1 and 2), and the floor of the museum is designed with wooden panels.



Figure 1: Henan province, “Zhengguo Chariot and Horse Pit” (Zhengguo Cemakeng), means “the Museum of Vehicle and Horse Pit of Zheng State” Photo by Dr. Aqsa Rehan during the site visit.



Figure 2: Henan province, “Zhengguo Chariot and Horse Pit” (Zhengguo Chemakeng), means “the museum of vehicle and horse pit of Zheng State” Photo by Dr. Aqsa Rehan during the site visit.



Figure 3: Henan province, “Zhengguo Chariot and Horse Pit” (Zhengguo Chemakeng), means “the museum of vehicle and horse pit of Zheng State” Photo by Dr. Aqsa Rehan during the site visit.



Figure 4: Henan province, “Zhengguo Chariot and Horse Pit” (Zhengguo Chemakeng), means “the Museum of Vehicle and Horse Pit of Zheng State” Photo by Dr. Aqsa Rehan during the site visit.



Figure 5: Henan province, “Zhengguo Chariot and Horse Pit” (Zhengguo Chemakeng), means “the Museum of Vehicle and Horse Pit of Zheng State” Photo by Dr. Aqsa Rehan during the site visit.



Figure 6: Henan province, “Zhengguo Chariot and Horse Pit” (Zhengguo Chemakeng), means “the Museum of Vehicle and Horse Pit of Zheng State” Photo by Dr. Aqsa Rehan during the site visit.



Figure 7: Henan province, “Zhengguo Chariot and Horse Pit” (Zhengguo Chemakeng), means “the Museum of Vehicle and Horse Pit of Zheng State”. Captured by Dr. Aqsa Rehan during the site visit.

1.2 The Site Emperor Qin's Terracotta Warriors and Horse Museum, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, China.

The tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of China, yielded the remarkable discovery of the Terracotta Warriors. Unearthed in 1947, this find stands as one of the most significant archaeological revelations of the 20th century. Presently, the terracotta warriors and horses are housed in a vast on-spot museum in China and hold the esteemed title of being recognized as the "Eighth Wonder of the World." With over 2 million annual visitors, the museum attracts a substantial number of tourists. To ensure a safe and comprehensive viewing experience, the site features pathways on all four sides, allowing spectators to observe and appreciate the archaeological marvel from a secure aerial vantage point (see Fig. 8). The preservation of the site is made in a way that it is covered from all the side and at the same time glass panels are installed above the pathway to provide natural life to the site, even the roof is covered but it has glass panels for natural sunlight which make the site more alluring. The whole site is surrounded by a pathway for visitors so that visitors can roam around and enjoy viewing the site from every corner.



Figure 8: Henan province, "Terracotta Warriors and Horse Museum", Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, China. Source: <https://smarthistory.org/the-terracotta-warriors/>

1.3 The site San Al-Hagar in Egypt

Around the world, individuals who possess a strong sense of ownership towards their heritage have explored diverse, innovative, and cost-effective methods to preserve these invaluable assets for future generations. An example highlighting the significance of such endeavors is the archaeological site of San Al-Hagar in Egypt (see Fig. 9, 10), which serves as compelling evidence to motivate similar actions in Pakistan. In an article titled "San Al-Hagar Archaeological Site's Conversion to Open-Air Museum of Ancient Egyptian Art Making Progress," Nevine El-Aref discusses the historical significance of this site. El-Aref explains that the discovered Egyptian artifacts, which had been scattered randomly on the surface since their initial detection in the 19th century, encompassed blocks, statues, columns, and obelisks. These precious artifacts portray the life stories of the ancient Egyptians. Through the implementation

of technical assistance and machinery, efforts were made to organize and preserve these artifacts by constructing boundaries to demarcate the designated area (El-Aref, 2018). Inspired by the success of such initiatives, archaeologists working at the site proposed transforming this rich archaeological treasure into an open-air museum, allowing people to visit and immerse themselves in the past. This example reinforces the argument that Pakistan, as the custodian of numerous ancient archaeological sites, should undertake preservation efforts by converting these sites into museums, offering residents and tourists an opportunity to experience and appreciate their historical authenticity. Such initiatives would not only safeguard the cultural heritage but also yield economic benefits for the country.



Figure 9: “San Al-Hagar Archaeological Site’s Conversion to Open-Air Museum of Ancient Egyptian Art Making Progress”, Source: <http://tiac.qau.edu.pk/journal-of-asian-civilizations-vol-42-no-2-december-2019/>, Saturday 15th Sept 2018



Figure 10: “San Al-Hagar Archaeological Site’s Conversion to Open-Air Museum of Ancient Egyptian Art Making Progress”, Source: <http://tiac.qau.edu.pk/journal-of-asian-civilizations-vol-42-no-2-december-2019/>, Saturday 15th Sept 2018

Suggestions of Various Renowned Archaeologists

Dr. Rafique Mughal, in the context of a discussion on the many natural disasters due to global warming that affected Pakistan (especially rural areas), narrated an incident that took place in Mohenjo daro in 1994 when due to excessive rain the excavated houses and streets were drowned which resulted in the acceleration of the decay process of the bricks which were already affected much due to salinity and salt (Mughal, 2011). This indicates a clear imperative

that any major site that has undergone or is undergoing excavation must be subject to appropriate conservation methods and materials to prevent deterioration. In a recent interview by (an author, Mohsin, 17th June 2023), the expert also emphasized that several significant factors contribute to such unfortunate occurrences, including a lack of awareness, insufficient financial resources, a dearth of trained conservators, and a general lack of interest and education at all societal levels regarding cultural heritage and national history. These issues have been persistently neglected over time. Considering these challenges, the expert proposed an alternative approach, suggesting that rather than converting all sites into on-spot museums immediately, it would be more feasible and practical to begin with small portions that can be effectively managed and conserved.

In a conversation with Dr. Ashraf Khan (by author Mohsin, 20th June 2023), a senior archaeologist and Professor at Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Islamabad, it was observed that Pakistan possesses ambitious aspirations but lacks the necessary manpower to effectively implement novel ideas. Dr. Khan specifically discussed the practice of archaeological excavations, highlighting that the trend of preserving archaeological sites is more established in the West than in South Asia. This disparity arises from the relative lack of awareness and understanding of technicalities and proper procedures in the region. According to Dr. Khan, fully covering an entire archaeological site may be challenging, but addressing it in portions while considering the geographical conditions could be a viable approach. However, he emphasized that such endeavors may not yield significant benefits without the implementation of appropriate measures and protocols. In addition to the technical challenges, Dr. Khan pinpointed security concerns as another significant impediment to preservation efforts. He recounted an incident of the robbery that occurred in 1980 at the Mohenjo-Daro Museum, where a gang of looters stole valuable artifacts, subsequently impacting the museum's integrity and operations. In conclusion, Dr. Khan underscored the imperative for Pakistan to safeguard its archaeological treasures, as such preservation would undoubtedly benefit the country. Nevertheless, being an underdeveloped nation, Pakistan faces limitations in terms of resources and funding for these preservation initiatives.

The present study incorporates a comprehensive examination of archaeological perspectives at both national and international levels, achieved through a series of interviews with esteemed archaeologists. One of the scholars, Ahmad Nawaz, emphasized during an interview (by author Mohsin, 2023) that Pakistan has made significant steps by adding itself to the roster of nations that have effectively conserved excavated sites within museums. Specifically, he cited the Taxila Museum and Harappa Museum as exemplary instances of site museums that have been successfully established and maintained. Nawaz further quoted that Pakistan's ability to expand its efforts in converting and excavating additional sites is constrained due to limited resources. Nevertheless, he highlighted the potential benefits of exploring untouched sites and safeguarding existing ones through the implementation of protective measures, such as enclosing them within boundaries and transforming them into on-spot museums. According to

Nawaz, such proactive preservation endeavors have the potential to yield fruitful outcomes, not only in terms of conserving the national historical heritage but also by positively impacting Pakistan's economy through an increase in tourism.

During a subsequent interview (by author Mohsin, 1st July 2023), Dr. Sadeed Arif, an Assistant Professor at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, provided insights into Pakistan's significant archaeological heritage. Acknowledging Pakistan's status as a fortunate nation concerning archaeological excavations, he emphasized the presence of numerous unexcavated sites, which historically received consistent attention from the Department of Archaeology since the British colonial period. Dr. Arif concurred that the preservation of Pakistan's archaeological sites holds substantial benefits for the country. He cited examples such as Takht-e-Bahi, which has well-preserved sites and has established a site museum that illustrates the successful preservation efforts. However, he highlighted the prevailing challenge of limited resources, impeding further preservation endeavors. Discussing the imperative of safeguarding untouched sites, Dr. Arif specifically mentioned Sarai Khola, a Neolithic period site, and Hathiyaal as areas requiring meticulous attention. He underscored the necessity of undertaking comprehensive scientific studies to identify prospective areas and formulate strategic plans for the discovery and preservation of ancient civilizations. In Dr. Arif's view, such systematic and scholarly approaches are essential to safeguard Pakistan's rich archaeological history and heritage.

Dr. Badshah Sardar, a professor at the Department of Pakistan Studies, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, expressed his perspective in a jovial and sarcastic manner, remarking on the excavation procedures, noting that authorities often prioritize salvage operations, seeking maximum results in minimum time, which unfortunately leads to the destruction of artifacts and yields unsatisfactory outcomes. Dr. Sardar emphasized the importance of preservation. In conclusion, Dr. Badshah highlighted the potential benefits of converting excavated sites into on-spot museums, but he emphasized that such a preservation process would only be highly beneficial for Pakistan if executed with proper care and attention.

In the context of archaeological preservation, Muhammad Hassan, representing the Directorate General of Archaeology, Tourism, Archaeology, and Museums Department, stated in a recent interview (by author Mohsin, 8th June 2023) that the concept of conserving Pakistan's archaeological sites has not been long-standing, and it has not been effectively practiced in the past. Consequently, this neglect has led to the destruction of several excavated sites, some of which have also been inadequately managed. In his advocacy for on-spot museums, Hassan proposed a practical approach to initiate preservation efforts by focusing on small portions of sites that are currently facing imminent destruction. By implementing measures to safeguard these vulnerable areas, they can be protected from further harm. Hassan emphasized the timeliness of taking such steps, as he believes it will have positive economic implications for Pakistan.

Considering the economic feature of tourism, another scholar narrates, in an article entitled "The Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites – A Twenty-Year Perspective"

that the archaeological sites of any country are treasures which is very beneficial for the nation (Williams, 2018). William acknowledges that archaeological site conservation has now turned its direction towards an advanced route over the past two years. He explained the importance of the methods practiced for the conversion and conservation of the archaeological sites, in which the idea of converting the site into a museum is a plus point for the nation's economy. Pakistan, though in this aspect is an underdeveloped country, considering the examples of other countries that have taken steps to preserve their archaeological identities, are the best example to contemplate.

Another discussion in the article, "Contributions of Open-Air Museums in Preserving Heritage Buildings: Study of Open-Air Museums in Southeast England" discussed the benefits of on-spot museums, as according to the opinion of the authors, it is the most beneficial step for the nation's Cultural Heritage. According to the authors, open-air museums and on-spot museums are a step to preserve and showcase a threatened aspect of regional or national culture, and if we see it under the terms of archaeological sites, they act as a base to let people feel the core of the previous people (Ali & Zawawi, 2010). The authors claimed that open-air museums and on-spot museums play an important role in tracing the historical background of the archaeological sites as they provide researchers and scholars with the required context for a better understanding of the area. Not only the required information, but it also gives an interactive experience that helps the visitor get engaged with the past directly. Ali and Zawawi, while providing the audience with their opinion, claimed that this idea of converting the archaeological sites is supported by many scholars, but respective departments should take some steps as other than ideation; other countries have already taken a step to implement it.

Unlike the scholars mentioned in the literature above, another article entitled "Open Museums as a Tool for Culture Sustainability" declares that the idea of converting heritage sites of a country into an on-spot preservation tool, that is, through an open-air museum, is a way more beneficial to preserve the heritage and culture of any country (Shehata & Mostafa, 2017). They, considering the case study of Makkah, argued and recommended that the heritage sites present in Makkah should be converted into open-air museums sustainably for a sustainable tourism industry in the city. To promote sustainable tourism, the authors provided their suggestions to maintain sustainable tourism, which requires a comprehensive, balanced approach to economic growth, environmental conservation, and socio-cultural considerations.

As already discussed in the content above, another discussion on the importance of archaeological sites and their revenue generation, scholars discussed that heritage and archaeological sites are the most beneficial elements in a country (Gould & Burtenshaw, 2020). In the article, "Heritage Sites: Economic Incentives, Impacts, and Commercialization" (Gould, Peter. G, and Paul Burtenshaw, 2020) that countries should commercialize their heritage sites, which has also increased in few years. They claimed that preserving and making it open for tourists and other people will directly benefit the economic state of a nation, which will mark the sense of ownership amongst individuals, and it will also help them to have an interaction

with the historical background. This revenue generation is only beneficial in terms of monetary aid, but it will also help a nation to rise and introduce its heritage and archaeological sites to the world. Considering this debate of preserving the heritage and archaeological sites, it has already been proven that Pakistan is one of the blessed countries that is home to many sites, and bringing them to the forefront of the world will be beneficial for our country in several aspects. Archaeological sites of Pakistan, without any second thought, are the most visited sites in the world, but still, many need to be excavated and preserved.

Discussion

Addressing the issue of preserving archaeological sites by converting excavation areas into on-spot museums is a strategy that has proven to be highly advantageous for countries like China and Egypt on multiple fronts.

Firstly, the transformation of archaeological sites into on-spot museums has significantly enhanced the overall visitor experience. By providing access to historical remains in their original context, visitors gain a deeper understanding of the past, creating a more immersive and enriching encounter. This may include informative signage, guided tours, or multimedia presentations.

Secondly, this approach has successfully cultivated conservation awareness among the public. By showcasing the importance of preserving cultural heritage, people become more conscious of the need to safeguard their historical legacy for future generations. Thirdly, the establishment of on-spot museums has transformed these locations into valuable research centers. Ongoing archaeological investigations conducted at these sites offer researchers and scholars unprecedented access to historical materials and contextual information. The benefits extend beyond increased tourism rates; these on-spot museums create an ambiance that allows archaeologists, scholars, and tourists alike to immerse themselves in the actual historical environment, fostering a profound connection with the past and enriching their understanding of history. Accessibility is a key point. Measures are taken to make the site accessible to the public while minimizing potential damage or disturbance. Walkways, viewing platforms, and other facilities may be added to ensure a safe and informative visitor experience.

The debate surrounding the preservation of architectural sites in Pakistan goes beyond merely conserving these sites; it also involves recognizing the importance of ongoing excavation procedures. Archaeologists should continuously explore different sites throughout the country to stimulate public interest in managing and preserving these sites for future generations. In support of this approach, the author of "Archaeological Site Management and Local Involvement: A Case Study from Abu Rawash, Egypt" (Fushiya, 2010) contends that local involvement is a crucial element in achieving successful archaeological site excavation and management. Through active engagement of the local community, barriers and limitations in the excavation process can be overcome. Fushiya asserts that the participation of the local community plays a vital role in breaking down these obstacles and improving the current critical condition of many archaeological sites. In conclusion, beyond preserving architectural

sites, it is imperative for archaeologists to continually explore and involve local communities in managing and preserving these sites. The case study from Abu Rawash, Egypt, cited by Fushiya, underscores the significance of local involvement in effectively addressing barriers and limitations, ultimately contributing to the betterment of archaeological sites.

Conclusion

Focusing on the archaeological sites of Pakistan and the shortcomings of preserving them, this study has highlighted the advantages of adopting the model of an on-spot museum. It has been proven that on-spot museums provide a sole opportunity for visitors to understand the historical background, improve the accessibility rate for the broader audience, enhance the visitor experience, support the field of research and conservation efforts, and finally act as a contributor to local economies by gaining the attention of the tourists. Since archaeological sites serve as tangible remnants of bygone civilizations, providing invaluable insights into our history, and raising pertinent questions about the present condition of archaeological sites in Pakistan. Converting all excavated sites into on-spot museums is not possible for several reasons (economic factors, security, specific conditions of preservation needed by some artifacts), but as the expert suggested, we could start from parts of those s. Overall, the concept of an on-spot museum aims to strike a balance between showcasing the historical and archaeological treasures of a site and preserving its integrity for future generations. It offers a unique and immersive way for visitors to engage with the past in its authentic setting.

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