MUSEUMS OF THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES

Edited by
Sarina Wakefield

Museums of the Arabian Peninsula

Museums of the Arabian Peninsula offers new insights into the history and development of museums within the region. Recognising and engaging with varied approaches to museum development and practice, the book offers in-depth critical analyses from a range of viewpoints and disciplines.

Drawing on regional and international scholarship, the book provides a critical and detailed analysis of museum and heritage institutions in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Yemen. Questioning and engaging with issues related to the institutionalisation of cultural heritage, contributors provide original analyses of current practice and challenges within the region. Considering how these challenges connect to broader issues within the international context, the book offers the opportunity to examine how museums are actively produced and consumed from both the inside and the outside. This critical analysis also enables debates to emerge that question the appropriateness of existing models and methods and provide suggestions for future research and practice.

Museums of the Arabian Peninsula offers fresh perspectives that reveal how Gulf museums operate from local, regional and transnational perspectives. The volume will be a key reference point for academics and students working in the fields of museum and heritage studies, anthropology, cultural studies, history, politics, and Gulf and Middle East studies.

Sarina Wakefield is Lecturer in Museum Studies and Programme Director of MA/MSc Museum Studies by Distance Learning at the University of Leicester. She is also Founder and Director of the Museums in Arabia conference series.

Cultural Heritage, Art and Museums in the Middle East
Series Editors: Sarina Wakefield and Sabrina DeTurk

Cultural Heritage, Art and Museums in the Middle East book series includes volumes that address the ways in which representation and identity are connected to and implicated within cultural practice, broadly defined, in the global Middle East and provides in-depth studies that critically discuss and analyse this issue within the region. The series offers scope for emerging scholarship that takes a wider view of Middle Eastern Studies, by addressing Central Asia, Iran and the Middle Eastern diaspora. By doing so, the series aims to attract and support new directions in scholarship and provide a venue for those areas marginalised within this literature.

The series includes works that provide examples and interpretations of Middle Eastern cultural heritage, art and museums situated within a broader, global context. By highlighting these global connections, it aims to challenge the marginalisation of studies of the Middle East into the realm of regional studies. Further to this, the series critically explores how representation and identity are connected to cultural developments in the Middle East at various levels – local, national, regional, and transnational – in the fields of cultural heritage, art and museum studies. Titles in the series will provide much-needed resources and reference points for academics and students working in the fields of art, art history, anthropology, archaeology, cultural studies, critical heritage studies, Gulf Studies, Middle East Studies and museum studies. They will offer valuable insights for arts, heritage and museum practitioners; cultural policymakers; and others who have an interest in cultural production and practice within the Middle East.

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Museums of the Arabian Peninsula
Historical Developments and Contemporary Discourses
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Museums of the Arabian Peninsula

Historical Developments and Contemporary Discourses

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Marjorie Kelly was Associate Professor of Anthropology at the American University of Kuwait, where she was one of that institution's founding faculty. More recently, she consulted on contemporary culture exhibits for the National Museum of Qatar. She has published numerous international, peer-reviewed articles and reviews on the presentation of culture for museum and tourist audiences, as well as editing a volume on Islamic civilisation. The latest of her several dozen media productions is *Kuwait at 50*, a visual ethnography of Kuwait in its 50th year of independence. Her current research interest is Gulf women and photography.

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Stephen Steinbeiser is a cultural heritage specialist who has supervised numerous projects across the Arabian Peninsula, most recently as Cultural Director of the Atturaif Project in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Atturaif in Ad Diriyah, Saudi Arabia. From 2009 to 2014, he lived and worked in Sana'a, Yemen, where he oversaw the construction of a four-storey mud brick tower house using the traditional architecture and building methods of al-Qa'a, Sana'a's Old Jewish Quarter. He also acquired a grant from the US State Department to renovate an historic watchtower and repurpose it as Yemen's first Children's Museum. He holds a degree in law, and his research focuses on the intersection of legal philosophy and cultural heritage preservation, particularly in sites of conflict and contestation.

Acknowledgements

1 Museum trajectories in the Gulf States

Sarina Wakefield

Introduction

Since the early 2000s, developments within the cultural heritage and museums sector in the Arabian Peninsula[1] have attracted unprecedented interest from the international media, particularly in relation to large-scale, state-led museum projects such as the National Museum of Qatar in Doha, Qatar and the Louvre Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These large-scale developments have attracted international criticism and debate due to their reliance on international partnerships and western brand connections (see Cachin *et al.*, 2006; Herlory, 2008; Ajana, 2015; Ponzini, 2011; Riding, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Wakefield, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2020 on Abu Dhabi; Al-Mulla, 2013, 2014; Exell, 2016 on Doha). Yet the presence of museums in the Arabian Peninsula is not necessarily new. Instead, the growing importance and diversity of these institutions socially, economically and politically represents a major re-alignment that is dramatically affecting the ways that cultural heritage and museum institutions are viewed and presented, and new audiences imagined. By focusing on the emergent role of museums in the Arabian Peninsula as both a historical and contemporary process, *Museums of the Arabian Peninsula: Historical Developments and Contemporary Discourses* seeks to contextualise more fully the breadth of museum developments in the region through time and space.

The volume questions and engages with issues that relate to the institutionalisation of past, present and future identities through an examination of the establishment and growth of selected museums and cultural heritage organisations in the region. This book does not claim to trace the entire history of museum development in the region; instead, it seeks to encourage more nuanced and critical understandings of museum development in the Arabian Peninsula. The authors in the volume aim to generate new understandings and new lines of enquiry in order to understand more fully the longer-term processes of museum development within the Gulf. This book contributes to contemporary debates within the interdisciplinary field of critical museum and heritage studies by considering and analysing museum

developments in the Arabian Peninsula through time, using a critical and reflexive lens.

The growing focus towards materialising and representing the past within museums has had, and continues to have, significant ramifications on how the past is preserved, presented and engaged with by institutions such as museums in the Arabian Peninsula – state-sanctioned and private, professional actors such as museum and heritage practitioners and local residents. Yet the role of the museum as a repository for both tangible and intangible aspects of the past is still, to many in the region, a relatively new concept. This growing interest in documenting and presenting the past is arguably shaping and re-shaping perceptions of the past through the creation of officially sanctioned state-crafted narratives about the past.

Historicising Gulf museology

Museum (*matāḥif*) initiatives have been in development within the Gulf States since the late 1950s, the earliest being the Kuwait Museum which opened in 1957. Since then the region has witnessed the emergence of new mega-museums such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Qatar National Museum and more specialised museums focusing on particular topics and communities such as Qatar's slavery museum Bin Jelmood House (see Al-Mulla, 2017) and Bahrain's archaeology museum, Qal'at al-Bahrain Site Museum (see Lombard and Boksmati-Fattouh this volume). As noted earlier, burgeoning museum developments have often served to overshadow the history of museums in the Gulf States; however, this history goes back several centuries (see discussions by Al-Ragam, 2014; Erskine-Loftus, 2010; Bouchenaki, 2011, 2016; Hirst, 2011, 2012) and has varied depending upon the different social, political and economic circumstances of each nation. Hirst (2011, 2012) has mapped out the historical development of museums within the six-member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, noting that by 1978, each state had one or more government sanctioned museum. She argues (2011) that museum development in the Arabian Peninsula is an emergent and continuing process of nation building, which has accelerated and evolved alongside the GCC's oil wealth and increasing global presence.

The early museums of the Arabian Peninsula served an important role in the construction of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, [1983] 2006), which were based on national identity and belonging. The museum played an important role in the 'invention of traditions' (Hobsbawm and Ranger, [1983] 2010) through the display of cultural practices and objects that served the national imaginary, which was controlled and produced by the state. Ethnographic museological approaches have dominated the national narratives, which have predominantly focused on pearling (Penziner-Hightower, 2014; Thabiti-Willis, 2014), Bedouinity (Prager, 2015) and the central role of the ruling elite in nation building and national identity. Since Abu Dhabi

has developed from a predominantly oral-based society, the intangible past is a significant source of heritage and as such events and performances are also significant elements of national heritage practice (see for example Prager, 2015). In addition, the museum serves an important function as a national symbol, which is explicitly used to reinforce the legitimacy of the ruling elite (see Al-Mulla, 2014; on Qatar and Wakefield, 2012; Penziner-Hightower, 2014; Simpson, 2014; Prager, 2015 on the UAE, and the edited volume Erskine-Loftus *et al.*, 2016).

Alongside these developments privately run museums have emerged (Aubry, 2014; Exell, 2013, 2014; Kelly, 2016). In her examination of the Sheikh Fasial bin Qassem Al-Thani Museum in Qatar Exell (2013, 2014) argues that the development of the museum and its collection represents a counter-narrative to official heritage discourses. Yet as I have argued elsewhere (Wakefield, 2020) her argument fails to account for the positionality of the collector as a member of the ruling elite and for the elitist nature of the collection. As such Exell overlooks the political aspects of private collecting. Aubry (2014) has argued through his analysis of traditional costume collections in the Arabian Peninsula that the role of the collector and their choices regarding what to collect is fundamental to understanding their socio-politico role. Private collecting therefore represents new agencies of action and new forms of power-knowledge dynamics that need more indepth and critical analyses.

Although the early museums of the Arabian Peninsula were explicitly connected to a national past, the interconnections between the local and the global are often overlooked (Wakefield, 2020). Importantly, these early museums were not devoid of globalising practices and influences. A limited number of authors have considered the globalising practices and influences that enmesh within constructions of cultural heritage and museums in the Arabian Peninsula (Fox *et al.*, 2006; Fibiger, 2011; Al-Ragam, 2014; Wakefield, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2020). Bouchenaki has observed that the region's earliest museums 'were originally modest institutions focusing on national identity and relying on structures and models inherited from Western European and North American museums' (2016: xv). Museums in the Arabian Peninsula have therefore used development models based on consultation and partnerships with international museum and heritage practitioners for several decades. Furthermore, as Wakefield argues in Chapter 8 international collaboration and exchange has served a fundamental role in international museum practice for centuries.

Literature discussing cultural heritage and museology in the Arabian Peninsula has begun to emerge in the last decade, alongside cultural developments in the region, presenting new challenges and opportunities for the development of professional practice and critical academic analysis. This volume differs from previous edited collections that have primarily focused on the relationships between museums and identity – regional and transnational (Exell and Wakefield, 2016), representation and collecting practices

and policies (e.g. Erskine-Loftus, 2013, 2014; Mejcher-Atassi and Schwartz, 2012), the theorisation of cultural heritage narratives in the region (e.g. Exell and Rico, 2014), and the relationships between national identity and Gulf museology (Erskine-Loftus *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, these titles pre-date more recent contemporary developments such as the opening of the Louvre Abu Dhabi in 2017 and the opening of the National Museum of Qatar in 2019.

   This book is unique in its analysis of both the historical development and contemporary growth of museums in the Arabian Peninsula. The volume explicitly explores the purpose of the museum in identity construction and audience engagement using an analytical and reflexive lens. This volume contributes to the development of key critical works in this area, offering high-quality analysis and discussion by leading academics and experts in the field of cultural heritage museums in the Arabian Peninsula. The chapters in this volume discuss, taking varied methodological and theoretical approaches, both the historical and contemporary development of museums and heritage institutions in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the UAE. The individual authors illustrate how museum development is intricately connected to the individual states' socio-cultural contexts and their differing engagements with global processes and international relations.

   This volume brings both new empirical data and critical evaluation by exploring the emergence of museums in the Gulf, their role in shaping and re-shaping material and immaterial practices, the global circulation of professional practices in the field, and the processes of facilitating learning for both visitors and museum practitioners. This publication recognises and engages with varied approaches to museum development and practice, offering in-depth critical case-study analyses from a range of viewpoints and disciplines. As such, the volume draws together contributions by established academics as well as museum and heritage practitioners working in and on the region offering fresh insight and perspectives on the role and development of museums in the Arabian Peninsula.

Structure of the volume

The book is divided into four parts, addressing the themes of museum trajectories, development models and policies, cross-border practices, and community engagement and professional practice. In the 'museum trajectories' section, authors provide a critical discussion of the development and institutionalisation of cultural heritage through the development of different forms of museum and heritage institutions and their role as distinctive 'apparatuses' (Bennett 1995; Harrison, 2013) of state and emergent nation-building processes. The next section explicitly engages with the implications of varying 'development models and policies' on the shaping and re-shaping of museums and practice within the region. The section 'cross-border

practices' contributes further understanding to the processes of global museology and trans-border practice from different perspectives, including the histography of transnational processes, patronage, soft power and bilateralism and global communicative practices. The final section 'community engagement and professional practice' examines the role of communication in engaging various stakeholders including both museum institutions and their professionals in Saudi Arabia and visitors to museums in Sharjah. The authors address how museums have played a central role in constructions of power, identity and cultural policy, which is shaped by regional dynamics, conflict and international 'best' practice through time.

The first section of the book, 'museum trajectories', analyses and traces the emergence of museums in the region, particularly as they relate to the politics of power and national identity formation, and broader economic and political developments in the region. Irene Maffi (Chapter 2) maps the historical trajectory of museum developments in Jordan. She examines key museum trends from the second half of the 20th century up to the present in order to understand the context in which the Jordan Museum was created. Maffi argues that the role of museums in the Hashemite kingdom is politically laden and complex by tracing the development of state-led museums from the ancient Levant to contemporary times. Maffi contextualises the development of specific national and regional representations of the past within shifting regional and domestic concerns and colonial and postcolonial identity politics. The result, she argues, has been a shift away from state-run museums and the emergence of new narratives, which challenge and bring forward previously marginalised materialities. In doing so, Maffi presents an ideological trajectory that is explicitly linked to the political and economic landscape of the Arabian Gulf, a trajectory that is politically laden and transient.

In the next chapter, Stephen Steinbeiser (Chapter 3) historicises the role that museums have played in the development of Yemeni cultural heritage, which he critically interrogates through his analysis of contemporary regional conflict and its effects. The chapter offers a detailed examination of museum development in Yemen by analysing how cultural heritage has been produced by Yemeni actors, at state and individual grass-roots levels, through the establishment of officially sanctioned museums and private museums and collections. In doing so, he examines the role of collecting and collections and the limits of international efforts towards the protection and preservation of cultural heritage in Yemen. Steinbeiser goes on to reflect on the practical issues that continue to affect Yemen's cultural heritage and suggests ways of addressing these shortcomings as they relate to contemporary museology in Yemen.

Amal Sachedina (Chapter 4), drawing on extensive ethnographic and archival research in Muscat and Nizwa in Oman from 2009 through 2017, traces the development of museums in Oman from the 1970s to the present. She argues that Omani museums have been used to produce a singular

national narrative that legitimises and supports the Sultanate of Oman as a political and historicised entity. She argues that the development of cultural heritage and museum practices has been used to support contemporary nation-building and the formation of 'an idealised form of historical consciousness', which has altered the politics of time and space in the Sultanate.

The second theme of the book explores the role of 'development models and policies' in shaping national identity formations and local community engagement. Serena Iervolino opens this section (Chapter 5) by examining Qatar's museum developments as an 'accelerated developmental model'. She critically reflects on the key actors and policy-makers who have driven this 'accelerated' model since the early 2000s. In particular, she examines the central role of the Al-Thani family within the construction of elite-led cultural policy frameworks, critically reflecting on how they have influenced contemporary museum practice by asserting their authority over both local and international actors. Iervolino argues that Qatar's accelerated developmental model prioritises and reinforces Qatar's conservative identity politics, which ultimately serve to marginalise more 'local' identity formations.

Pierre Lombard and Nadine Boksmati-Fattouh (Chapter 6) provide an analysis of Bahrain's cultural diffusion policy and its effects on the development of the nation's museum landscape. The chapter traces the trajectory of archaeological discoveries since the 19th century and emergence of museums in response to the burgeoning collections of materials. Lombard and Boksmati-Fattouh, drawing on their extensive experiences as archaeologists and museum practitioners in Bahrain, provide a critical examination of the emergence of a 'network of site museums and visitor centres' in the Kingdom. Their analysis argues that Bahrain's 'diffusionist' approach has resulted in the production of 'varied narratives reflecting a shift in cultural policies in Bahrain', which has produced specific challenges and potentials for the expansion of museums in the nation.

Marjorie Kelly (Chapter 7) explores the role of national identity in three Kuwaiti museums – the Red Fort at Jahra, the Dickson House and the Al-Qrain Martyrs Museum[2] – which she defines as 'in-situ' indigenous museums. Kelly argues that in-situ museums serve as authentic sites of national imagining, which serve to present localised narratives that are 'intelligible, historically meaningful, and politically legitimating', which is in direct contrast to the essentialised and global narratives of the spectacular new museums being developed around the Arabian Peninsula. Kelly goes on to argue that while in-situ museums have the potential to produce and promote 'a shared sense of history and identity' they fail to engage adequately with Kuwaiti audiences. In this sense, Kelly identifies a disconnect between exhibitionary practices and community engagement.

The third theme of the publication 'cross-border practices' investigates how global practices have influenced museum developments within the region. Sarina Wakefield (Chapter 8) opens the section with an analysis of transnational museum practices in the Gulf. She examines transnational practice and

cross-border exchange through the development of two franchise museums, the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, in the UAE. She historicises these practices through a consideration of global museological patterns. She argues that rather than being neutral, global museologies have been fraught with difficulties and criticism, and the Orientalised discourses around the Gulf, and the broader Middle East, need to be challenged so that analyses can move beyond western vs eastern paradigms. In doing so, she offers a more critical and grounded view of global cultural developments in the region.

Alex Aubry (Chapter 9) then examines the links between museum practice and cultural diplomacy in Bahrain. He explores how cultural diplomacy has been activated within the context of Gulf museums by examining the methods and processes employed by the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities (BACA) and the Bahrain National Museum. In doing so he reflects on the practices and opportunities that exist for museums in building and developing cross-border relations. In addition, Aubry sheds light on the unique role played by high-profile elite museum leaders in the development of cross-border practices and cultural diplomacy politics.

Sabrina DeTurk (Chapter 10) discusses the development of Alserkal Avenue as a contemporary arts hub in Dubai and its role as both a global cultural centre and a local arts hub. She traces the development and evolution of Alserkal Avenue from 2007 to 2019, which she links to globalising processes and the positionality of Dubai as a global art destination. DeTurk argues that Alserkal's exhibitionary practices are dominated by an artistic diaspora drawn from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon, which serves to exclude emerging Emirati artistic talent in the United Arab Emirates. She goes on to suggest that these cultural processes further reinforce and perpetuate international identity politics, over grassroots Emirati cultural practice.

The fourth and final theme 'community engagement and professional practice' examines critical questions around public engagement in relation to museum visitors, the training of museum professionals and communicative practices, with data and case studies drawn from the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Mona Al-Ali (Chapter 11) examines museum visitor motivations in the Emirate of Sharjah, UAE. Al-Ali provides a case study analysis of three museums in Sharjah – Sharjah Archaeological Museum, Sharjah Art Museum and Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization – drawing on her experience as a local museum practitioner and an academic researcher. Through her analysis of the factors that influence museum visitation, Al-Ali suggests that psychological, learning, socialising and identity, and external factors, such as location of the museum, influence an individual's decision to visit a museum. In doing so, Al-Ali introduces an under-researched area, providing a platform for further questions and analyses to emerge.

In Chapter 12, Catherine Cezeaux, Genevieve Fisher and Joseph A. Greene provide a practitioner account of cross-border museum partnerships in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They critically examine the process of

introducing international models and methods, based on western understandings and interpretations, into the region, which is of significant interest due to the limited published and critically reflective work in this area to date. The chapter examines the partnership between the Harvard University's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology and Saudi Aramco's King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. The authors' analyses draw on their professional experiences of delivering object-focused workshops through the series *Telling Stories, Preserving Culture: The Importance of Cultural Institutions in Modern Society*, and provides an insightful and critically reflexive discussion of the challenges of devising and delivering transnational museum partnerships in the Arabian Peninsula. The chapter draws attention to the way in which regional and international actors are actively engaged in 'vocabularies of cultural sharing', which shed light on how local and global understandings enmesh and the potential for international practitioners to develop a more 'appropriate museology' (Kreps, 2003, 2008, 2015). The discussion furthers our understanding of the complexity and diversity of cross-border museum practice in the Arabian Peninsula and the challenges that emerge within transnational environs.

In the final chapter (Chapter 13) Pamela Erskine-Loftus interrogates the relationship between globalisation and the communicative role of museums in the Gulf. She argues through her analysis of cross-cultural communication theory that cultural understandings, communication patterns and group solidarity are culturally specific and as such cannot be considered as either neutral or global processes. Instead, drawing on the work of Roland Robertson (1995, 2006) she argues for a more 'glocalised' communicative process, which accounts for multiple ways of communicating and engaging with visitors in the Gulf Museum.

Overall, this publication demonstrates the diversity of approaches to museum development and professional practice in the Arabian Peninsula, which are historically situated and culturally specific. Collectively, the authors of this volume call for a more critical and reflective analysis of museums and cultural production in the Arabian Peninsula. The authors demonstrate, using a diverse range of case studies, that Arabian Peninsula museology has emerged through distinct local, national, regional and global processes, which connect to broader identity concerns at various scales and in varying ways. By doing so authors offer new critical inquiry and insight into the history and development of museums within the Arabian Peninsula.

Notes

1 The authors in this volume employ the terms 'Arabian Peninsula', 'Gulf States' and the 'Gulf' to denote the area of western Asia, also known as Arabia, which includes: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen, along with areas of Jordan and Southern Iraq.
2 The spelling used within this volume, Qrain as opposed to Qurain, reflects local use.

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Part I
Museum trajectories

2 Repositioning the past in the present

Notes on the development of Jordanian museography

Irene Maffi

Foreword

Some years ago the well-known Jordanian anthropologist Seteney Shami wrote an article in which she asked: 'How does one explain the lack of national monuments, a national museum and other spatial markers of national time and space in Amman?' (2007: 212). She echoed the opinion of several members of the Kingdom's elite, such as Bilal Tal who, already in 2000, had publicly expressed his discontent for the absence of national institutions (Tal, 2000). Tal's interpretation of the lack of national symbolic places was that the state intentionally did not want to nurture national feelings among Jordanian citizens. In many ways, his opinion conveyed the frustrated aspirations of this section of the population claiming to descend from the original inhabitants of Transjordan that feel frustrated by the insufficient emphasis the monarchy has put on local identity, endorsing instead a pan-Jordanian identity created by the state[1] (Abu Odeh, 1999). The ambiguity resides in the fact that it is not clear what constitutes the 'national' (*watanī*) identity in Jordan, since there exists at least three different interpretations of it: the 'Transjordanian' identity which is rooted in the history of the Jordanian National Movement (Anderson, 2005), the tribal identity claimed by some Transjordanian leaders (Shryock, 1997) and the synthetic Jordanian identity created by the Hashemite monarchy (Maffi, 2004; Massad, 2001).

Despite the difficulty of defining the national identity because of the presence of a large component of citizens of Palestinian origin, the beginning of King Abdullah II's reign in 1999 seems to have marked a turning point not only in the economic domain (Corbett, 2011; Daher, 2008), but also in the cultural and political environment characterising the Jordanian society. In 2002, shortly after acceding to the throne, Abdullah II issued a royal decree stating the establishment of a 'National Museum' (Jordan Museum). After a long story of unsuccessful projects dating back at least to the early 1980s (Maffi, 2004), a national museum in Jordan eventually was established and opened at the end of 2012.

In order to understand the context in which the Jordan Museum has been created, I will briefly outline the history of local museums and then come back to the present time to show how the reign of Abdullah II has seen the emergence of new museographic trends, which reveal an implicit ideological turn that is connected to the changing political and economic regional situation (Curtis, 2010).

Archaeological and museological developments in Jordan

The evolution of Jordanian museography is to be understood in relation to the changes in the cultural heritage paradigms that have dominated the various phases of the Kingdom's history. Like in most countries of the Levant, the first Jordanian museums were founded by European archaeologists and colonial officers to shelter the pieces excavated in the numerous archaeological sites of the country. Jordanian historians often identify the first archaeological museum with the small repository used since 1923 by the British archaeologists digging the Hellenistic-Roman site of Jerash (Gerasa). The Kingdom had to wait until 1951 to witness the creation of the first museum, when Gerald Lankester Harding, a well-known British archaeologist who at the time was the General Director of Antiquities,[2] established it on the top of the *Qala'a* hill in Amman. Until 1947, all the pieces found during archaeological excavations in Trans-Jordan were transferred to the Museum of Palestinian Archaeology in Jerusalem. This is because during the Mandate period the sites and the objects discovered in the Emirate were considered as part of the Palestinian civilisation and its history as a section of the glorious Palestinian past. Transjordan was regarded as a kind of periphery of more important flourishing civilisations like that of Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia. The administrative structure of the Mandate also played a role in the subordination of Trans-Jordan to Palestine, since the former was part of the British Mandate of Palestine whose headquarters were situated in Jerusalem. As a consequence, Trans-Jordanian archaeological heritage was considered as part of the Palestinian cultural heritage rather than as a separate property of the Emirate. Furthermore, museums were not a priority for British officers who were more interested in settling the nomadic population, pacifying the country and struggling against epidemic illnesses[3] (Wilson, 1987).

In a certain way, the foundation of the Citadel's museum in 1951, a few years after independence, was a political act whose meaning was clear: it intended to demonstrate that Jordan has its own historical dignity and is an independent country, which deserves its own cultural institutions.[4] Despite the desire to assert the Jordanian autonomy from Palestine, the model of the Archaeological Museum of the Citadel was the Museum of Palestinian Archaeology in Jerusalem (Maffi, 2004). While the conceptual organisation of the exhibition was similar, though on a smaller scale, the majority of the pieces came from the excavations conducted on the East Bank.[5] The display

was strictly chronological from Prehistory to Islamic time – Umayyad, Abbasid, Ayyubid and Mameluk – and each chronological section contained smaller subdivisions dedicated to the various excavated sites. The museum's display was meant to emphasise the originality of the civilisations that flourished on the Jordanian soil, stressing the antiquity and the continuity of the 'national history'. The Citadel Museum was also built to symbolise the importance of Amman, which was a new regional capital in need of political and cultural legitimacy. Indeed, because of its recent origin and its lack of 'Orientalist' landscapes, many Europeans and Arabs regarded Amman as having less dignity than ancient urban centres like Jerusalem, Damascus or Beirut (Daher, 2011).

The political instability of the 1950s hindered the construction of new museums until the 1960s when three new archaeological museums were created in Jordan: the first one at the University of Jordan (1962), the second one in Petra (1963) and the third one in Irbid, an important city in the northern part of the country (1964). These were small local museums and were meant to exhibit pieces coming from the excavations conducted respectively in the three mentioned areas. Several other archaeological museums were founded in the following decades in various region of the country where important excavations had been conducted such as Umm Qays, 'Irāq al-'Amīr, Madaba, Karak, Petra. Indeed the social and economic development plans implemented throughout the 1970s and 1980s inaugurated a new policy aimed to decentralise museums in order to develop cultural tourism and reinforce the state's presence in peripheral areas.

Popular traditions

Another category of museums developed throughout the 1970s and 1980s, becoming very popular among large groups of the Jordanian population: the museum of popular traditions or of folklore. The first museum of popular traditions was founded in 1971, immediately after the tragic events of Black September,[6] and the meaning it assumed was largely determined by the domestic situation. Despite its conceivers' initial intention to create a museum depicting the diversity of Jordanian popular culture in which both banks of the Kingdom were to have their place, the armed conflict between the Jordanian army and the Palestinian militias based in the Kingdom turned this institution into an attempt to reconcile the fracture between the Trans-Jordanian and Palestinian components of the Kingdom's population. The history of the museum's collection is worth mentioning in order to understand the spirit behind its creation. During the 1960s, a group of Jordanian ladies of Palestinian and Trans-Jordanian origin belonging to the elite had been visiting rural villages, Bedouin encampments and refugee camps to buy costumes, plates, pottery, utensils, furniture, carpets, rugs, etc. with the aim of collecting objects representing the popular culture of the various groups forming the Jordanian population (Maffi, 2004). After the creation of this

museum, three new folkloric museums were established: the first one inside the Roman Theatre of Amman in front of the already existing Museum of Popular Traditions (1975); the second one at the Jordan University (1977); and the last one in Madaba, a city situated few miles south of Amman (1978). The Madaba Museum is particularly worth mentioning since it is the first example of a mixed museum of archaeology and popular traditions in Jordan. This museum typology is present in several Arab countries and reveals a particular view of the past that aims to emphasise both the antiquity and the continuity of the nation (Baram, 1991; Davis and Gavrielides, 1991; Montigny, 1998). Within this discourse, the material vestiges of the past stand as a synecdoche of the uninterrupted chains of civilisations testifying the continuity of the nation from antiquity up to modern times. Thus the juxtaposition of archaeological pieces and folkloric objects is used to legitimise the existence of the postcolonial state, drawing on the rhetoric of European origin according to which the modern nation-state is based upon its civilisational continuity (Poulot, 2006; Anderson, 1991). In the vast majority of these archaeological-folkloric museums, in Jordan as elsewhere, the so-called popular traditions are a creation of the urban elite who fabricate an idealised universe where the rural and the pastoral traditions refer to the idyllic image of a world that never existed (Garcia Canclini, 1990). Because the recent past is too much fraught with social divisions and contentious memories that might threaten the political order, modern history is transformed into a 'pastoral allegory' deprived of its potential destabilising elements (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). The museographic representation of popular culture is thus the result of a narrative fabricated by the political elite and the folkloric collections, regarded as the material vestiges of a vanishing – or already vanished – culture, are in fact symbolic assemblages created from above. To forge this folkloric world several elements of the local past are elided: in the Jordanian museums of the 1970s, urban history is almost completely absent, except for some rare stereotyped and Orientalist *mise-en-scènes* of the urban Arab house, and the rural culture plays a minor role, while the emphasis is put on the nomadic and pastoral heritage. Furthermore, the Palestinian and Trans-Jordanian objects are displayed in a way that allows merging the stories of the two groups of the population into a unique narrative where differences and specificities are erased in accordance with the official ban, in operation since the 1950s,[7] on the use of the words Palestine and Palestinian.

Jordan's dynastic history

The folkloric museums are only a part of the cultural machine created in order to fabricate and legitimise a specific Jordanian identity, characterised by a strong accent on its Bedouin component (Massad, 2001). Further museums were created during the same decades focusing on: modern art, military, philatelic, numismatic, Islamic and natural sciences. Overall,

they were meant to celebrate the achievements of the Hashemite state and encourage the rituals of modern citizenship (Appadurai and Breckenridge, 1992; Duncan, 1991). A new category of museums that appeared in the early 1990s is particularly interesting to examine in order to understand the cultural policies of the monarchy that were predominantly used to reinforce and legitimise the Hashemite power in the country. These institutions were created to fill in the empty space left by the folkloric museums, insofar as they re-inscribe the recent past allegorised in the latter into a more historical and concrete dimension. I am referring to the museums of modern history that narrate the events which led to the creation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, covering the period from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire up to the present. The 'Hashemite museums', as I prefer to call them, narrate the story of the Dynasty, a story that constitutes the pivotal element of official Jordanian historiography, rather than the history of Transjordan.

The originality of these museums resides less in the content of their display than in the fact that they constitute the first attempt to create a museographic representation of the official historiographical narrative.[8] The basic assumption of the state-sponsored historiography is that the existence of modern Jordan is the result of the Hashemite epopee and therefore the Jordanian history is part of the dynastic narrative. In these museums, the modern history of the local population – tribes, peasants and city-dwellers – is almost completely erased to leave room for the Hashemite past. One effect of this *mise-en-scène* is the effacement of the historical period preceding Emir Abdullah's arrival in Transjordan (1920). When the period before the foundation of the Emirate finds a place in the museographic representation, its main actors are the Hashemites rather than the indigenous inhabitants, and the stage is the Arabian Peninsula rather than Trans-Jordan. Only the decision of the tribes living in the south of Transjordan to join the Hashemite army during the Great Arab Revolt is mentioned, reducing local events to mere appendices of the dynastic narrative. The history of the country between 1850 and 1918, when the Ottoman domination became again effective in the region after some centuries of nominal rule, is an empty space, which has long waited to be filled up. One of the main reasons for this amnesia is the dynasty's fear to give voice to local narratives showing the existence of an indigenous elite who might claim the right to govern Jordan and threaten the monarchy's legitimacy (Anderson, 2005). Moreover, narrating the history of the late Ottoman period would also mean acknowledging the role the British played in the creation of modern Jordan. Almost completely absent from the museographic representation of the national history, the Mandate period is a very sensitive historical moment, because it is strongly connected with the accession to the throne of the Hashemites. Indeed, the British not only created the Emirate of Transjordan, but they took the decision to confer the power upon Prince Abdullah, one of the sons of Sheriff Hussein bin Ali, their former ally against the Ottoman Empire.[9]

New museographic trends: an ideological turn?

Since the beginning of King Abdullah II reign (1999-present), the situation has started to change: a sort of 'ideological shift' has emerged in various social and cultural fields, among which it is possible to count the projects of several museums (Maffi, 2002). Today, as in the previous decades, Jordanian museums mirror the larger political and cultural context, expressing and creating new representations of the past as well as new ways of imagining the present and envisaging the future. Various political and economic factors have contributed to this ideological shift including public investments in the tourism sector supported by various foreign cooperation agencies, the emergence of a new 'urban creative class' (Daher, 2008, 2011), various forms of patronage (Daher and Maffi, 2014) and cultural policies promoted by the monarchy in search of new forms of legitimacy within a dramatically changing regional and domestic context.[10] The new museographic orientations are geared towards the achievement of two main objectives: to provide Jordan with the previously missing 'national markers' mentioned earlier and to leave room for the story of the Trans-Jordanian population during the 19th and 20th centuries before the foundation of the modern state.

To conclude, I will shortly give two examples revealing the re-orientation of museography that has taken place in Jordan over the last decade. As mentioned earlier, a national museum, the Jordan Museum, has been established in Amman, in the area of Ra's al-'Ayn an area located not far from the historical nucleus of the city where the new complex of the municipality was built in the late 1990s. The English website states that the museum's objective 'is to be an educational facility and an important vehicle for explaining and facilitating a greater understanding of the unique history and cultural heritage of Jordan'[11]; it specifically aims to educate 'the young generation of today' allowing its members to 'become more aware of their own identity'. The layout of the museum display seems to reveal several elements of continuity with previous museographic concepts insofar as it includes three main areas dedicated respectively to 'Archaeology and History', 'Traditional Life' and 'Modern Jordan'.

Though I could not visit the museum, since it was still to be inaugurated during my last stay in the country, the thematic areas described on its website reproduce the already existing division between archaeological, popular traditions and modern history museums. The museum's website is instructive because it contains a virtual tour, which enabled me to analyse the official discourses it contains. It has to be noted that both in the Arabic and English texts of the museum's website, 'Jordan' or 'Kingdom' are the only terms used to refer to the country, excluding any reference to the 'Jordanian identity' which, as mentioned earlier, is an ambiguous and controversial notion. The avoidance of the term 'Jordanian' replaced by the more neutral and concrete 'Jordan' is meaningful since the old fracture between citizens of Trans-Jordanian and Palestinian origin is still or perhaps

once again an important issue in the country (Ababsa, 2011; Jungen, 2011). These terminological features are not accidental but correspond to a larger political design that has found its main expression in the political campaigns 'Jordan First' and 'We are all Jordan'. These slogans circulated by the Jordanian monarchy over the last decade constitute an attempt -- at least at the rhetorical level -- to overcome the domestic fractures dividing the various components of the population through the common reference to the country (Curtis, 2010).

Moreover, while the term 'national museum' (*al-mathaf al-wāṭanī*) is used in the text of the website, the institution's official name is Jordan Museum, expressing the idea that, despite their origin, all citizens can identify with the institution and the story it narrates (Jordan Museum, n.d.). The museum becomes a sort of miniaturised space of the nation where geography and history conflate producing an idealised image of the national community. It also becomes a heterotopia 'that is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible', while the place 'is itself outside of time' (Foucault, 1986: 25–26). The Jordan Museum can thus be considered a 'heterotopia of compensation' (*ibid.*) where order, consensus and harmony dominate in opposition to the contentious and fragmented memories characterising the political and social space of the Kingdom. This museum is part of a larger project aimed to create a cluster of national spaces, among which are for example King Hussein Gardens and its Historical Passageway whose aim is to display the country's story from prehistory to the present. The long wall constituting the Passageway is a public monument representing the country's historical itinerary in a way that seems to correspond to the galleries of the Jordan Museum in which the history of the monarchy and that of the nation intertwine (Corbett, 2011).

Besides, the Jordan Museum shelters a special room, called *makānī* (my place), which is an educational area where children can have 'hands-on experiences that are geared towards Jordanian history and cultural heritage'. *Mākanī* is thus a very allusive place that is meant to trigger the visitor's feelings of belonging inviting children to appropriate the space of the museum and metaphorically that of the nation through manual and artistic activities related to the exhibition.

The second example I will rapidly tackle is the Historic House Museum of Abu Jaber in Salt, a city located northwest of Amman that has been the most important Ottoman administrative centre in Transjordan between the 19th and 20th centuries. This museum, which was recently opened to the public, includes the first display representing the evolution of urban life in Transjordan before the foundation of the Emirate. The originality of this museum is that it depicts the social, economic and cultural life of Salt and its population, showing the existence of an important network of relationships linking it to the other regions of *Bilād al-Shām* (Syria, Palestine and Lebanon) through commercial and matrimonial exchanges as well as administrative

bonds. Rather than replacing local history with an ahistorical folkloric past or with the Hashemite narrative, this museum emphasises the regional insertion of Salt and the Balqā area in a broader context in which people circulated freely nurturing a rich web of relationships. Precise chronological references, names of local personalities, carefully documented social habits and cultural details about health, education, religion, architecture, clothing, and so on contribute to turning this museum into a lively and colourful portrait of the inhabitants of Transjordan that is impossible to be found in museums of the past decades. It is worth noting that, while there were no Jordanian museums narrating the local story during Ottoman time, an important number of historiographical works have been published on this topic in the Kingdom, and several initiatives have been taken especially by the research group led by 'Adnan al-Bakhit (Maffi, 2004; Daher and Maffi, 2014).

The Abu Jaber Museum constitutes in some way the materialisation of a historiographical trend that has characterised the Levant and the Maghreb since the 1980s. The latter has been nurtured by several historians working in various Arab countries who have engaged with the negative images of the Ottoman Empire produced by both Arab nationalist and European historiographies in order to gain a more accurate and rich insight into the modern history of the region. These scholars also intend to emphasise the common story of the various Arab populations presently separated by geopolitical borders, tying the various local histories to a larger narrative capable of uncovering forgotten relationships, exchanges and commonalities. While in Jordan this kind of narrative can possibly weaken the official discourse meant to highlight the peculiarity of the national past, it can also unintentionally trigger the creation of a consensual story in a society characterised by the antagonistic memories of different groups. Finally, the Abu Jaber Historic House Museum gives a representation of the past in which tribal, urban and rural stories meet, creating a place which is very different not only from other government museums dominated by the dynastic narrative, but also from the *madāfa*s, guest houses displaying tribal memories. In fact, in recent decades, many *madāfa*s have become places of memory where various objects, photographs and texts are used to represent the tribal past (Husbani, 1997; Shryock, 1997). While the *mise-en-scène* mimics the language of public museums, its contents are very different. In the *madāfa*s, the state narration is rewritten from the vantage point of a particular leader or section of the tribe in order to emphasise the latter's role in the history of the country. While the Hashemite monarchs are always present in the *madāfa*s' displays, the other components of the Jordanian population are usually absent (Jungen, 2009; Maffi, 2010). Therefore, compared to other government museums and local places of memories, the Abu Jaber Historic House Museum reveals an original muscographic style conveying a new political and cultural message.

Conclusions

This very short and elliptic story of Jordanian museums reveals the complex role played by these institutions in the Hashemite kingdom and more broadly in the Arab region. Modern state-run museums were first introduced during colonial rule to display the civilisations of the ancient Levant whose past was directly linked with the history of European societies. The postcolonial state largely inherited the historical representations elaborated by British rulers and used museums as instruments of power to create a national narrative serving the political interests of the Hashemite monarchs. Political and military events marking the history of the Near East in the second half of the 20th century, the changing identity of the national population and the partial democratisation of local society allowed the emergence of new narratives. The latter did not replace the dominant Hashemite version of Jordan's past incarnated for example by the Jordan Museum or the Historical Passageway but were juxtaposed to it. The Abu Jaber House constitutes the materialisation of another past previously silenced that can now emerge together with the history of Transjordan before the foundation of the Emirate. The beginning of the new century has thus witnessed the complexification of historical narratives in the Kingdom's museums and elicited the display of previously hidden or neglected material remains that seem to have been incorporated in the constantly evolving assemblage of official history. Political changes in Jordan and in the region, attempts to diversify tourist attractions and the emergence of a cosmopolitan elite in academic and cultural institutions have all to be taken into consideration to explain the appearance of innovative museographic trends in the Kingdom.

Notes

1 The issue is extremely complicated especially concerning the status of Jordanian citizens of Palestinian origin which are subject to different treatments according to their status (Ababsa, 2011).
2 Lankester Harding played a fundamental role in the formation of the archaeological heritage in Jordan from his arrival in the region in 1936. Between 1939 and 1956 Lankester Harding was the Jordanian Director of Antiquities. He is the author of *The Antiquities of Jordan* (1967), which was also translated into Arabic in the 1940s with the title *Athar al-Urdun* (1942).
3 The Museum of Palestinian Archaeology in Jerusalem was created because of the donation of the Jewish millionaire John D. Rockefeller. For this reason, after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, this institution was also called the Rockefeller Museum (Silberman and Small, 1997).
4 Even after the annexation of the West Bank, the Jordanian government concentrated its investments in the East Bank trying to improve the social and economic conditions of this area of the Kingdom. The majority of the cultural institutions founded during this period were situated east of the Jordan (Goichon, 1972).
5 One of the reasons for this similarity is perhaps that Lankester Harding worked at the Archaeological Museum of Jerusalem before coming to the Emirate of Transjordan.

6   Hussein's relations with the PLO, which under the chairmanship of Yāsir 'Arafāt openly challenged the king's control in East Jordan, reached a crisis in September 1970. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a radical Marxist Palestinian group, hijacked four international airliners and blew up three of them in Dawson's Field, a deserted airstrip in the Jordanian desert. Hussein declared martial and civil war (later remembered as Black September). When 250 Syrian tanks entered northern Jordan in support of the PLO, Hussein was forced not only to call upon military assistance from the United States and Great Britain but also to allow overflights by Israel to attack the Syrian forces. The Syrian forces were defeated, and a peace agreement, in which Hussein made concessions to the PLO, was signed by Hussein and 'Arafāt in Cairo on Sept. 27, 1970; by July 1971, Hussein had forced the PLO guerrillas out of Jordan' (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.).

7   When the West Bank was annexed to the Kingdom, the terms Palestine and Palestinians were banned in official discourses and documents to hinder the formation of a specific Palestinian identity among the population.

8   This is not completely true since the military museum called Martyrs' Memorial founded in 1977 anticipated the conception of the modern history museums created in the 1990s.

9   During the First World War, Sheriff Hussein found an agreement with the British in order to struggle against the Ottoman Empire and gain the independence of the Arab provinces.

10 A significant example is the campaign *Al-urdun awalan* (Jordan First) launched in 2002 by King Abdullah 'to consolidate the spirit of belonging among citizens, all acting as partners in building and developing Jordan' (King Abdullah, n.d.).

11 In Arabic: *'markaz wātaniyyi shāmil lil'ilm wa al-mā'rifa ia'kis tārīkh wa hadāra al-urdun bi uslūb ta'līmi mubtakir'.*

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3 Heritage in the crosshairs
Can Yemen's museums survive?

Stephen Steinbeiser

Introduction

Over the past four years, a coalition of Arab countries, led by Saudi Arabia, has conducted a brutal war on Yemen. The political morass and military bombardments have had catastrophic humanitarian consequences, conservatively estimated to have killed over 10,000 Yemenis, though the true figure may be nearer to 80,000 (Cockburn, 2018). The broader humanitarian effects are beyond the scope of this chapter, except insofar as they have intentionally targeted cultural heritage sites and museums. Shortly after the Saudi-led bombing began in March 2015, Yemen's cultural heritage and museums became intentional targets for destruction by all sides in the conflict. The two most prominent opponents in this war are the Saudi-led coalition and the Iranian-backed Ansar Allah (the Houthi rebel movement), but aggressors also include allies of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and Islamic extremist groups, including the remnants of Al Qa'eda in the Arabian Peninsula, Ansar al Sharia and ISIS, who remain in certain areas of the country. The Saudi-led coalition, however, is the only entity with significant aerial bombardment capacity and the tacit approval of Western powers, and Yemeni cultural heritage and attendant institutions have been conspicuous victims of their belligerent actions. As such, Yemeni heritage sites are becoming places of 'negative heritage', that is, 'a conflictual site that becomes a repository for negative memory in the collective imaginary' (Meskell, 2002). All parties to the current conflict have exhibited remarkable indifference to the targeting of heritage and museums, to the Yemenis who worked for generations to preserve these organisations and their collections, and to the threats posed to the bedrock of present-day national identity.

There has been limited international recognition of the dire situation in which Yemeni heritage finds itself as a result of this war. A 2015 ICOMOS statement expresses 'deep concern' for the cultural heritage of Yemen, 'a unique and irreplaceable witness of [the country's] rich and diverse history' (ICOMOS, 2015). Other organisations, such as UNESCO and the Archaeological Institute of America, have likewise expressed concern about

the destruction (Bokova, 2016; Archaeological Institute of America, 2015). Yet these statements have had no appreciable effect since aerial bombardments and skirmishes around cultural heritage sites have continued with disastrous effects. As a result, cultural heritage in Yemen has become a political object, 'a symbol of something else . . . a touchstone around which people can muster their arguments and thoughts' (Harrison, 2009).

Similar situations have arisen over the past two decades in other Middle Eastern countries, notably Syria and Iraq. However, in Yemen there is currently no occupying power like the US Army in Iraq, nor a central government retaining territorial control of most of the country, as in Syria. Around 75 percent of the damage and destruction to culturally significant sites has come from the Saudi-led coalition's aerial bombardment (Khalidi, 2017). This is markedly different than the modalities of destruction used by extremist groups in Syria and Iraq, which were conducted with land-based instruments, 'by using sledgehammer [*sic*], explosives and bulldozers' (Ristoldo, 2017). Most strikingly, though, the war in Yemen is referred to as the 'forgotten war' (see McGarry, 2018). While Western media covered the wars in Syria and Iraq frequently and deeply, the calamitous events in Yemen, a country where few Western interests are at stake, have not made daily appearances in news media.

This chapter contrasts the current state of heritage destruction in Yemen with the ways in which Yemenis have attempted to study, preserve and convey present cultural heritage, at both national and individual levels. Historically, Yemeni organisations have also occasionally partnered with international institutions on heritage projects (e.g., the successful inscription of three Yemeni cities to UNESCO's World Heritage List in the late 20th century), but this paper focuses primarily on grassroots efforts which have attained some success despite social and political upheaval. This chapter considers the nature and intent of such initiatives and investigates the degree to which they have been effective in protecting or preserving heritage amid overwhelming difficulties. State-sponsored museums, which I will refer to as 'public museums', and 'private museums'– those arising from private citizens' initiatives not controlled or funded by the Yemeni government – have flourished throughout the country, acting as repositories that chronicle the past and present unique contemporary histories. Institutions funded by the government, along with individuals' private attempts at collecting, have persisted despite rampant poverty, a dearth of resources and isolation on the world stage. Many of these institutions emerged relatively unscathed after the chaotic events of the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, helping to safeguard the nation's cultural heritage. However, as this chapter aims to demonstrate, if and when Yemen surmounts the dire challenges it currently faces, the risks to heritage may not cease. Although existing heritage preservation efforts can be significantly improved by better training, coordination and regulation, and by the mobilisation of local and international partnerships, the long-term survival of the nation's considerable legacy will depend

on whether Yemenis themselves can execute and replicate the types of local models of preservation represented in the following examples.

Assaulting national identity: strikes on cultural heritage and museum sites

Yemen's archaeological record dates back to the Bronze Age (Khalidi, 2017), and Yemenis see themselves as 'pure Arabs, living descendants of the original Arab tribes', despite historically categorising themselves into social groups of varying status (Caton, 2013). Some Yemenis identify more with the tribal and historically religious-indoctrinated North, while others seek a return to the secularism and worldliness of Aden in the South. Knitting these tribal, ethnic, social and cultural identities together into a cohesive national identity has been the challenge of the Republic of Yemen for almost the past three decades.

Museums have played a key role in attempting to forge a national identity for the unified state that overrides regional, tribal, or class affiliations. Even if they have not prevented internecine conflict, they have arguably been more successful than other institutions in furthering a national narrative based on history and common tradition, rather than one prizing tribal or sectarian affiliation. Generations of Yemenis have learned about their cultural heritage through museums. Today's Yemeni university professors recall childhood field trips to archaeological sites and interviews with elders about local history (Abdullah, 2012: Interview). In the 1970s, many village elementary schools had small museum-style exhibitions to educate students about the past and display locally discovered artefacts, illustrating the 'educative role' of the museum within the nation state (see Harrison, 2009 on the educative role of heritage). As the unified state matured, museums began to showcase narratives about the ancient archaeological record, early Islamic history, military adventures, or folklore and popular culture, narratives broad enough to appeal to all Yemenis. The National Museum in Sana'a (Figure 3.1) plays an important role in presenting a narrative of the nation's identity that avoids the potential for political and religious divides (Almotamar, 2007). Housed in an Ottoman compound that existed before the creation of the unified Yemeni state in 1990, it evolved to tell the ancient story of Yemen through a collection of 30,000 archaeological artefacts. Yemenis are 'proud of the Ma'in, Sabean, and the Himyarite civilisations that are featured in their national museum in Sana'a' (Caton, 2013). Celebrating the ancient history of Yemeni civilisation had the added advantage of eliding contemporary religious and political differences.

Public museums across the country have been especially hard hit by the war. In Taiz, the highland city that served as the last capital of the Imamate period in North Yemen (which preceded the Yemen Arab Republic), two museums were attacked. The Taiz Museum, previously the residence of the last Imam of North Yemen, was completely destroyed by coalition
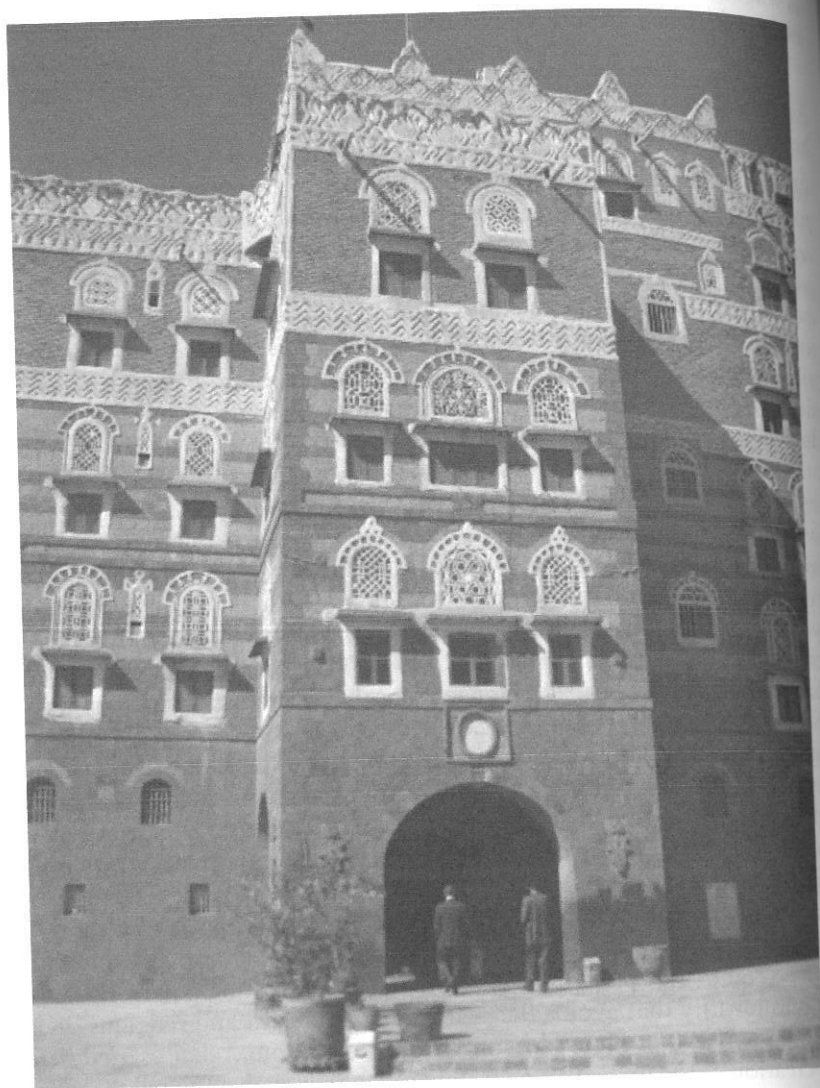
Figure 3.1 National Museum, Sana'a (2010)

air strikes. In addition to the Imam's personal possessions, it contained his-
toric manuscripts and copies of the Quran (Neuendorf, 2016). The National
Museum of Archeology in Taiz was also shelled by local resistance fighters,
during a battle to unseat Houthi rebels who had commandeered the space
as storage for munitions. Members of the local resistance destroyed rooms
and took 'three bags of silver coins and antiquities and three other bags of

antique bronze items' (Mwatana, 2018). Further north, Saudi-led bombing instantly wiped out much of a collection of 12,500 artefacts in the Dhamar Museum. At least 5,000 objects were lost, although 7,300 have since been recovered from the site (Global Research, 2017). Similarly, in the south of Yemen, the Military Museum in Aden, once a British school, was an early casualty of the war. Houthi rebels attempted to control the area and shelled the museum, and the coalition forces conducted an airstrike on it in 2015, resulting in its abandonment and subsequent looting (Mwatana, 2018). Yet another museum in the south, the Zinjibar Museum in Abyan province, has been looted and turned into a refugee camp (Cultural Property News, 2018). As the experience of the National Museum of Iraq has shown, once artefacts are looted, they are unlikely to be repatriated. In a period of 36 hours during the US advance on Baghdad, the Iraq Museum lost 15,000 objects, despite the efforts of staff who had already safely stored over 8,000 artefacts (Barker, 2018). Remarkably, the museum re-opened in 2014, and 8,000–9,000 of the looted pieces have been recovered, but it is 'highly unlikely' that it will receive all of the stolen objects back (Dziadosz, 2014). In the case of Yemen and its forgotten war, the probability of returning objects is likely slimmer, especially if a unified state does not emerge from the conflict.

Estimates state that 78 heritage sites have been destroyed in the current conflict, including eight museums and ten archaeological sites (Khalidi, 2017). One official from the General Organization of Antiquities and Museums (GOAM) suggested that 2,000 cultural and historical sites across the country and 'dozens' of museums have been damaged (SputnikNews, 2017). All three of Yemen's UNESCO-listed cities, Shibam, Zabid and Old Sana'a, have sustained damage and were still under threat at the time of writing. Attacks have been committed from the air, such as on June 12, 2015, when the Saudi-led coalition aerially bombarded the Al-Qasimi neighbourhood of Old Sana'a. The strike killed five people, destroyed four homes and caused damage to surrounding homes (Mwatana, 2018). Heritage sites have also sustained collateral damage from active war zones, such as in Taiz, where the medieval fortress Qaliyat al-Qahira, situated atop a high mountain peak, was used as a military post, drawing fire from both the Saudi-led coalition and opposing popular resistance groups (Taylor, 2015). Newspaper reports suggested that the popular resistance group handed the site over to the local government in mid-August 2018 (Mwatana, 2018), but owing to the site's strategic position on the mountain, it has repeatedly changed hands between competing groups and is dangerously close to collapse. Whether the local government will continue to retain control of it and whether they have the resources to conduct emergency work to prevent its collapse is questionable.

Religious extremism has also factored into the storm of destruction besetting Yemen. Mosques belonging to rival Islamic traditions, such as the Qubbat al-Mahdi in Sana'a (Khalidi, 2017) and al-Hadi in Sa'ada (Mwatana, 2018), have been targeted, as have churches, relics of Britain's colonial past

in Aden run by missionary religious sisters until the war (Figure 3.2). Extremists have smashed statues and icons in two Adeni churches and set fire to one of them (*ibid.*). This recalls the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan by the Taliban in 2001, an act of iconoclasm, 'literally "image-breaking" [in] opposition to the religious veneration of images', likely accelerated by global calls for preservation of the statues (Harrison, 2009).[1] It is ironic, however, that such iconoclasm occurred in Aden, a historically tolerant, even secular part of Yemen, at a time when the northern-based

Figure 3.2 St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Aden (2009)

and non-religious-extremist government led by President Hadi took refuge there.

Yemen's case is substantively different from that of Afghanistan under the Taliban, however. To the Taliban, the Buddhas had become symbols of international attention to the history of Afghanistan, rather than the challenges facing the Afghani people in the present. By contrast, much of Yemen's heritage resonates with Yemenis themselves who are proud of the iconic symbols of power and wealth of the past. The bombing and obliteration of these sites destroys more than irreplaceable cultural property. It rends the basic sense of national pride Yemenis have in their civilisation. The targeting of museums is particularly devastating since they were one of the few institutions that successfully advanced narratives instrumental to the creation of a unified national identity – narratives that transcended political and other divisions. Destroying and looting these institutions could irreparably devastate the most successful tools for forging national identity across Yemen's lengthy history and diverse peoples.

Yemen's public museums before the war

Yemen was not always synonymous with a grim catalogue of destruction. Recent research has highlighted the extensive risks that natural degradation, looting and smuggling, and urban development pose to preserving cultural heritage,[2] but there was no threat directly targeting Yemeni cultural institutions and heritage *per se* before the current war. The country faced increasing political extremism, an inextinguishable terrorist movement in the form of al-Qa'eda and more imminently, preventing a breakdown of government after the events of 2011. Heritage conservation, and management, including museum development, were known concerns and accepted as ongoing.

Before the current conflict, Yemen possessed a total of 27 public museums, 12 of which were still in operation after 2011. The capital, Sana'a, had three functioning government-sponsored museums: the National Museum, the Museum of Popular Heritage and the Military Museum. The use of these museums to tell the story of a unified state with an ancient history was a fairly innovative concept at that time in the Arabian Peninsula, and their location suggests their potential significance as public institutions: all three cluster around the main public space in the city centre, Tahrir Square. The large square is located between Old Sana'a and the historic Jewish quarter, at the end of the main shopping street, a location that became an epicentre of Yemen's 'Arab Spring' protests in 2011. Like many of Yemen's museums, all three closed temporarily during the extended political crisis that year; their reopening, though cautious and contentious, indicated a determination to return the country to normalcy.

The museums' collections range from archaeological artefacts of Yemen's Sabean past in the National Museum to displays showing daily life across the country's diverse regions in the Museum of Popular Heritage. For the

occasional foreign visitor, these displays can be particularly illuminating. For example, the National Museum contains a scale model of al-Baraqesh, a temple from the Ma'in dynasty located in al-Jawf. Even before the current war, no tourist would have been able to travel to the actual temple site, as al-Jawf was too unpredictable to visit. Now that the site has been hit twice by coalition air strikes (Khalidi, 2017), destroying parts of the structure dating from the 4th century BCE, the model may serve not only as an illustration of the site for those who cannot access it but also as a valuable tool for reconstruction. The Military Museum's collection focuses primarily, as its name suggests, on Yemen's modern military apparatus, including its origins and role in the 1962 revolution in North Yemen which overthrew the Imam. The museum contains larger items such as tanks and antique cars, as well as bloody clothes and implements used during the revolution.

Outside the capital, government-run museums exist in urban areas such as Aden (Figure 3.3), Taiz and Seyoun (Figure 3.4). These museums mainly contain archaeological artefacts under the management of GOAM in Sana'a. GOAM has struggled to support its museums, given the country's chronic poverty and the decentralised nature of its government, accentuated by the political fault lines exposed in 2011. It is hardly surprising then that government-supported museums, including the National Museum, lacked even basic museum functions like proper security for exhibits. The robbery

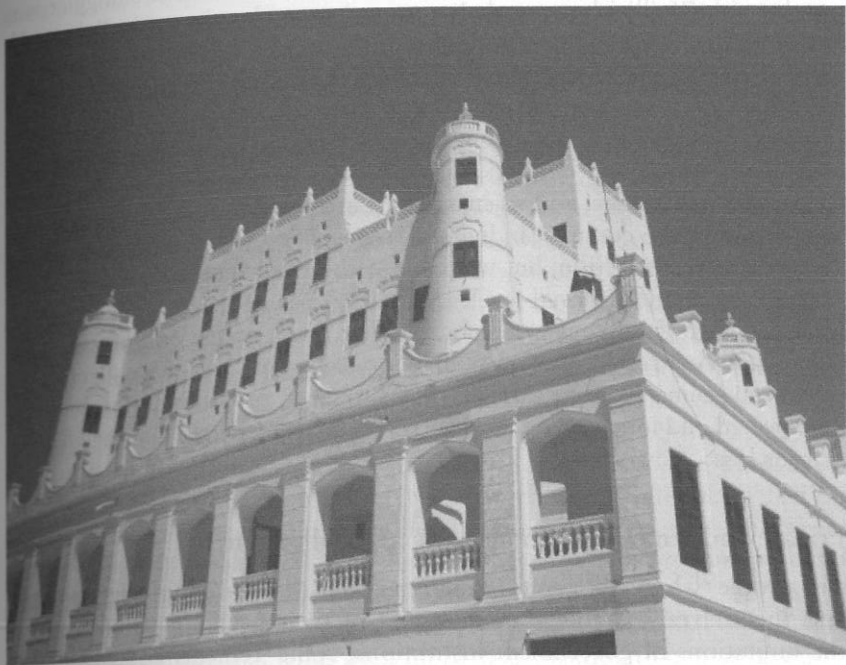*Figure 3.3* National Museum, Aden (2013)

Figure 3.4 Seyoun Museum (2010)

of the National Museum in Sana'a in October 2013 resulted in the theft of antique swords and pages from a historic copy of the Qur'an (Al-Jubari, 2013) and exposed weaknesses in the security of the collection. Placing objects in any museum, let alone the National Museum in the heart of the capital city, should ensure a certain level of security both to protect the objects themselves and to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the institution as a repository for cultural effects. Yet those basic protections were lacking in the climate of political upheaval and general confusion at the time in Yemen.

Looting and smuggling were (and still are) persistent problems confronting Yemen's heritage, and the economic situation was so dire after 2011 that individuals sought to profit from looting and smuggling artefacts. For example, representatives of Meel Al-Dhahab, a cultural organisation in Sana'a, uncovered the existence of a group of young Yemeni men who, in the chaos of 2011, amassed a horde of ancient treasures for illegal sale. When asked why, the response was 'to buy iphones, ipads, laptops, and the like' – ironically selling their tangible past to acquire a digital future (Al-Baydhani, 2012: Interview). Legal enforcement of Yemen's antiquities law[3] was also sorely lacking – either because there was no police presence in areas such as tribal hinterlands, rich in antiquities but with limited allegiance to the central government, or because officials like judges did not strictly punish smuggling (Al-Barakani, 2013: Interview). Yet, successes did occasionally

occur in enforcement: in May 2012, for example, a Yemeni smuggler was caught with 76 illicitly smuggled manuscripts at the airport in Beirut (Al-Sayed, 2012). Eventually, these manuscripts found their way back to Sana'a, through the cooperation of the Yemeni and Lebanese governments.

In retrospect, the years from 2012 to 2015 – after the Arab Spring and before the current crisis – may have been a more critical time than any other in Yemen's history to bulwark museums, document and inventory landscapes and collections, and to ensure that artefacts of all kinds remained in safe spaces in the country. Individual Yemenis led the initiatives described in the subsequent section, but were met with insufficient support and a lack of foresight at the national level. Unlike the case of the National Museum of Iraq, where staff sent artefacts to other areas of the country for safekeeping, no concerted effort was made to safeguard Yemen's collections in public museums (Barker, 2018). That situation, in combination with the unexpected and intense Saudi-led aerial bombardment, set the stage for disastrous loss.

Private and semi-private museums and collections

The people 'who value [cultural heritage] most (often intuitively) are Yemenis themselves' (Khalidi, 2017). Proud of their patrimony but aware of the limitations of government institutions, some Yemenis endeavoured to showcase heritage themselves in their homes and occasionally in private collections and museums, even before the current conflict. This type of private collection has always been beyond the reach of the state apparatus and continues to be out of the reach of military assault for now, and therefore places the property in a safer locale than that of public museums. The term 'private' is used in this paper to refer to a place or a setting where an individual assembles a collection of intangible or tangible, fabricated or natural effects, of either historic or contemporary importance, with the intent to display them for either private or public benefit.[4] Such collections are usually distinct from public museums that are government-run, although overlap can occur. Occasionally, these private museums arose from projects funded by foreign NGOs, which generally passed into ministerial administration upon their completion.[5]

Some private collections and museums may be found in the *diwans* of individual homes, and thus are usually not intended for public consumption; others are found in separate, dedicated spaces, ranging from villas to re-purposed classrooms, that welcome all kinds of visitors. They differ from 'semi-private' museums, which are spaces in government-affiliated agencies that do not have a dedicated mandate to function as a public museum, but which exhibit objects related to their official purpose and which may receive some material benefit from the state to do so. Examples of such semi-private spaces include the *Dar al-Makhtutat* in Sana'a (the official agency for acquiring and preserving ancient manuscripts in Yemen) and university museums, which can offer a particularly vibrant space for museum development. Often

such museums begin with archaeological discoveries displayed in the office of a local municipal director, expanding through acquisition to larger collections and more spacious locations (Bataya, 2012: Interview). The collection of archaeological treasures from pre-Islamic and Islamic periods at the Aden University Museum began in 1999 through a series of gifts from the tribes of Shabwa (*ibid.*), as did the Sana'a University Museum, which contains over 1,000 objects acquired through gifts and purchase. Both previously functioned as teaching and tourist museums, mainly serving the archaeology students at the universities. These museums and collections primarily serve the interest of the ministry or agency but are theoretically open to the public.

Even prior to the current conflict, the lack of official registration and oversight made determining the number of private museums difficult. According to literature from GOAM, there were 27 public museums in Yemen in 2012 (GOAM, 2012). Independently, however, Dr Abd al-Hakim Shayf, a professor of archaeology at Sana'a University, compiled a list of 53 private and public museums in Yemen, with collections ranging from pre-Islamic and Islamic periods to the modern past (Shayf, 2012: Interview). Shayf's research suggests that private museums are at least equivalent in number in Yemen to public ones. Shayf notes, however, that Yemenis tend to be good collectors, but not good preservers or presenters of treasures. The Yemeni tradition of defending real and tangible property, including that of heritage, has created a culture that lends itself more to acquisition than management. In the north of the country, Yemenis have a long tradition of either keeping private or privatising, usually unilaterally, certain important elements of cultural heritage, such as manuscripts and artefacts. This system has roots in a robust tribal tradition that generally distrusts central authority and strongly prefers that inherited objects remain within a certain tribe.[6] Such a tendency is potentially problematic in light of the need for 'collection management' and not simply 'collection building'. As Gorman and Shep (2006) have noted, museums in the West originally aimed to execute 'custodial functions', i.e. to gather and preserve artefacts from damage or destruction; as collections develop, however, the need for astute management becomes crucial, to ensure both financing and access. The majority of Yemen's museums, especially private ones, are still in 'building' rather than 'management and development' phases. There is a precedent for private collections in Yemen that move to more public venues, particularly private libraries and manuscript collections. Thousands of ancient and contemporary manuscripts are held privately by Yemeni citizens, and occasionally, efforts are successfully made to digitise them and make them publicly available.[7]

Benefits and pitfalls of private and semi-private museums

Private collections and museums have potential benefits, particularly in the current climate of state-led targeting and destruction of cultural property, but drawbacks are significant because of their unregulated status. They could offer a model of how to preserve heritage from potential destruction,

but even before the Saudi-led war, such museums had mixed results. Semi-private museums are often on the end of complicated and/or politicised efforts due to their connection to government agencies. Such initiatives, vulnerable to a lack of funding and mercurial politics, motivate some Yemenis to operate private collections independently so as to avoid government interference – a potentially controversial practice, especially when the collection includes ancient artefacts. Yet, Yemen's private museums are difficult to access, especially in areas outside of the capital. Near the town of Dhamar, south of Sana'a, one *shaykh* collected artefacts from the tribal area he represents, as a way of preserving the village's history and preventing looting and smuggling (Al-Wajih, 2012: Interview). The shaykh wishes to collect artefacts primarily to ensure they stay in his community, though there is no viable plan for the fate of the collection after the *shaykh's* death.

Diminishing resources, damaged collections

The House of Folklore Museum (sometimes translated as the Museum of Traditional Arts and Crafts) began through the initiative of Arwa Othman, who began purchasing traditional clothing in the old city of Taiz. Her collection then expanded into photos, traditional cooking implements, carpets and the like. None of the objects in her collection are particularly old, but she sees value in the collection and display of authentic Yemeni cultural heritage from the recent past as a method to instruct Yemenis, especially Yemeni women, about their history and culture. For example, the current fashion trend on Sana'ani streets for women is a black robe, black *hijab* and black face veil. That was not always the case, even until the 1980s, and Othman's collection documents an era when Yemeni women wore colourful robes and no face veil (Figure 3.5).

Almost two decades ago, Othman opened a private museum in Sana'a where people could learn about traditional Yemeni dress, cooking and house decoration. She sold tickets for a nominal fee and admitted anyone with an interest. Due to continual rent increases, she had to move around the city and eventually landed in the historic Jewish quarter of Al-Qaa', in an old home of traditional mud brick. She received some assistance from the Ministry of Culture for rent, but not enough for the restoration of the historic house, which was literally falling apart. After the violent clashes of 2011, some of which occurred on the doorstep of her museum, Othman closed it. Her collection became a nest for vermin, and the following year she was forced to throw away, donate to government museums or store what remained of her collection. She has since moved to a smaller, less expensive series of rooms in a nearby, though not historic, part of the city. Othman is a consummate optimist, and although her collection is still in boxes, she does plan to re-open her museum when circumstances permit.

A similar effort in Thulla, Yemen's most-visited tourist town after the capital, functioned for about six years, from the mid- to late 1990s. A group

Figure 3.5 Display from House of Folklore (2012)

of local residents created a museum dedicated to popular cultural heritage where visitors could learn about the recent past of this picturesque village not far from Sana'a. The initiative, led by Khaled al-Zeyri, a local community organiser, worked well, welcoming tour companies and individuals to the historic two-storey house, with exhibitions on daily life and a small café. Regrettably, however, when their lease finished in the sixth year, the landlord of the house increased their rent to a point where they could no longer operate.

High notes: *successful private efforts*

Another illustration of an individual collector's initiative is Dr Nizar Ghanem, whose interest in music led him to purchase antique instruments from around the country, including a *qambus*, a seven-stringed 'oud-type instrument unique to Yemen. Apparently, this *qambus* is the oldest example of its kind in Yemen, from probably around the middle of the 19th century (Ghanem, 2012: Interview). It also is unique in that it actually folds in half for storage. Ghanem kept this and other instruments displayed in a glass case in a room of his apartment on the campus of the University of Sana'a.

He did not expect payment to see these pieces, nor did he advertise them, although a range of people from professors to visitors to students could see and learn about the pieces during his weekly *qat* chews.[8] In the takeover of Sana'a, Houthi forces commandeered his apartment, but he was able to store the instruments safely at his sister-in-law's house, where they await his return (*ibid.*). Maintaining a private collection of these instruments has ensured their safety for the time being, unlike collections housed in public museums across the country.

Fatima Al-Baydhani is another Yemeni who has dedicated significant time and energy to the collection and preservation of Yemeni cultural heritage. The organisation she heads, formerly titled *Meel al-Dhahab*, now the *Ida-noot* Foundation for Folklore, collects intangible heritage, mainly in the form of stories and songs from all regions of Yemen. Until 2014, she routinely organised traditional performances of music and dance in Sana'a, such as the *dawdahiya*, a love song about a young couple from different classes whose relationship elicits the ire of the ruling Imam. Al-Baydhani explained to me her aim to open a museum to present these types of stories, songs and dance. Her museum would offer exhibits which contain portions of the many interviews she has conducted throughout the years, usually with community elders, often women: the displays would contain a large photo of the interviewee, a brief written biography and then an audio or video recorded example of the subject. This style of multimedia presentation is especially useful for Yemeni women, as it permits them access to cultural information despite illiteracy rates of 53 percent (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). Al-Baydhani also sees a special need to educate children in a creative and innovative way, to preserve the heritage of stories, songs and dances, as well as to inform them of how Yemenis have traditionally lived. Her own experience on Sana'ani streets has witnessed increasing extremism, even among children, which fuelled her ambition to create a space that could promote alternative, more open-minded views.

Initiatives like the aforementioned, while praiseworthy, remain isolated and discreet attempts at preserving Yemeni cultural heritage. There is little systemic methodology to private museums and no coordination with governmental efforts. So despite a wealth of impressive collections, good ideas and energy, attempts often dissolve through disinterest or lack of resources. A concerted public and private approach to cataloguing and conservation would enable local and international experts alike to inventory and better protect heritage in danger of vandalism, degradation or looting.

Conclusions

International outcry from museums and journalists about the risks to cultural heritage in Yemen has not stopped serious damage to or total destruction of collections of artefacts, museums and monuments. Major world powers have tacitly endorsed the war and ignored its concomitant cultural

annihilation, similar to the looting of the National Museum of Iraq, which the then-US Secretary of Defense infamously shrugged off with the phrase 'stuff happens' (Barker, 2018). Amidst the ruin of war, its population plagued by famine and disease, Yemen is at serious risk of losing the most meaningful vestiges of its ancient past, which are unique witnesses to ancient South Arabian culture, tribal custom, early Islamic tradition and modern political processes. Individual initiative is not lacking from Yemenis, both in terms of collecting objects and displaying them, but those efforts cannot overcome the deliberate targeting of heritage that Yemen has endured over the past four years of war. Private and public museums of cultural heritage in Yemen could have a vital role to play in preserving Yemen's ancient heritage, educating foreigners and Yemenis alike about the country's traditions of tolerance and diversity, and ultimately helping to forge a cohesive identity for a severely fractured country (Figure 3.6).

It is necessary and advisable for foreign organisations to work with the Yemeni government, and partnerships with public museums have yielded some results. A project at the University of Pisa has preserved and digitised over seven hundred (pre-Islamic) South Arabian inscriptions, including over 150 from the now-destroyed Dhamar Museum. In this case, the project literally saved these inscriptions from oblivion (Romey, 2015). The project also incorporated many objects from other museums, including the university
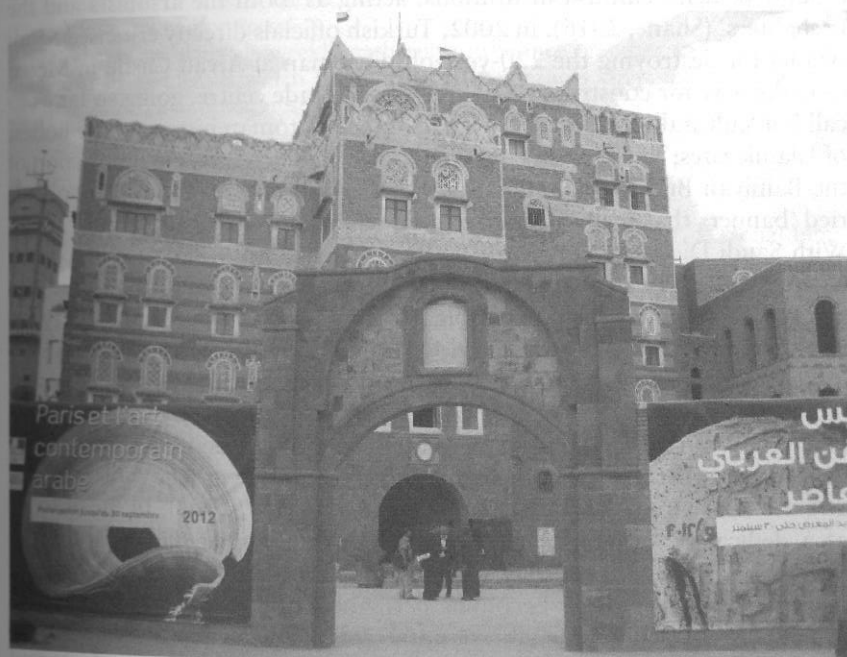

Figure 3.6 French-sponsored exhibition at National Museum, Sana'a (2012)

museums in Sana'a and Aden and the Zinjibar Museum (CSAI Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions, n.d.). This initiative demonstrates that the saf- est place for curating the country's treasures is currently outside of it. How- ever, given the deliberate targeting of public museums in the current conflict, private initiatives offer more hope for short-term preservation. In the inter- mediate term, they may be able to provide certain benefits that the govern- ment cannot, like greater economic efficiency and rising above the spectre of corruption generally presumed to exist at the governmental level. Yet, even before the current conflict, the drawbacks of unregulated personal collec- tions were manifest: controlled access that prevented individuals, especially foreigners, from visiting; lack of resources for housing, permanent displays and proper collection management and care; and sudden civil unrest forcing collections to move or risk loss, neglect or degradation.

Most importantly, though, who leads the reconstruction and restoration of Yemen and how they do so will have a major impact on whether Yem- enis will be able to express their traditions and histories as they see fit, or whether they will be forced to succumb to the pressure of political agendas which hold free or divergent forms of cultural expression in scant regard or entirely forbid them. Countries belonging to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) were major donors to Yemen before the Saudi-led coalition began its attack on the country (Steinbeiser, 2018). A worst-case scenario is one in which the Saudi-led coalition becomes the eventual arbiters of how to rebuild Yemen's cultural institutions, acting as 'both the arsonists and the firefighters' (Shane, 2016). In 2002, Turkish officials directly criticised Saudi Arabia for destroying the 220-year-old Ottoman al-Ajyad Castle in Mecca to make way for construction of a hotel and trade centre, going so far as to call it a 'cultural massacre' because it effaced Ottoman history at the holiest of Islamic sites; the Turkish cultural minister likened it to the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas (Meskell, 2002). Turkish protestors in Istanbul car- ried 'banners that read: "Osama bin Laden equals King Fahd" and "Down With Saudi Dictatorship"' (Associated Press, 2002). In the case of Yemen, where Saudi Arabia has a direct political interest in the outcome of the war and reconstructing a society suitable to its own regional needs, there is a real risk that cultural heritage destruction will continue after the war.

The current war has created a situation where cultural losses are poten- tially unrecoverable. These sites have become spaces of 'negative heritage', analogous to the site of the destroyed Bamiyan Buddhas: 'A permanent scar that reminds certain constituencies of intolerance, symbolic violence, loss and the "barbarity" of the Taliban regime' (Meskell, 2002). In the absence of a dedicated, sustained and concerted re-thinking of the roles cultural institutions and heritage play in restoring and preserving heritage in the country, Yemeni sites risk becoming permanent hollow shells of themselves, instead of representing the vibrant past. Only Yemenis themselves can truly fill these spaces, with new cultural production and with the artefacts and

effects many sought to preserve and valorise before the war through private collections and museums. For the short term, though, documentation and evaluation of the current destruction and access to preservation efforts of the country's heritage abroad, coupled with the commencement of a swift, peaceful and equitable resolution of the conflict in which Yemenis determine their own destiny, offer the only reasons for optimism for the future of heritage in Yemen. Private and public museums could contribute to this mission and resume their roles in transmitting Yemen's lengthy, complex and compelling story to the world.

Notes

1 For a nuanced discussion of how and where cultural heritage can best be preserved, see for example Cuno (2012).
2 See for example Teijgeler (2006), and Museum International (2003) on the subject of preserving cultural heritage amidst conflict and instability, especially the opening article by Brodie (2003).
3 See *Law on Antiquities* (2006).
4 Marie Malaro explores the complexities in the distinctions between private and public museums in terms of both financing and access (1998: 3–5).
5 A well-known example of this type in Yemen is the restoration of the Amiriya mosque in Rada'a (see al-Radi, 1997).
6 For nuanced discussion of tribalism in Yemen, see for instance Dresch (2001) and Weir (2007).
7 One example of this is the Yemeni Manuscript Digitization Initiative: https://ymdi.uoregon.edu/projects/.
8 *Qat* chews are daily or weekly gatherings in homes or other spaces, normally divided by gender, in which friends and acquaintances chew the stimulant leaf *Catha edulis*, a national obsession in Yemen.

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