

YEMENI HERITAGE WEEK MUSEUMS UNITED FOR YEMEN

APRIL 24–30, 2016



ART
THE
WALTERS
MUSEUM



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



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The cultural heritage of Yemen carries the soul of the Yemeni people, reflecting a millennial history that it belongs to all humanity.

Yemen is home to unique heritage sites and monuments from both pre-Islamic and Islamic period—including four UNESCO World Heritage sites, three cultural (Old Walled City of Shibam, Old City of Sana'a, Historic Town of Zabid) and one natural (Socotra Archipelago), recognized for their outstanding universal value. I see all of these as an open book on humanity's cultural diversity.

The conflict that erupted in Yemen in March 2015 has caused immense suffering and the tragic loss of human lives. It is also placing unique heritage at the risk of total destruction. The Old City of Sana'a has suffered severe damage as a consequence of shelling and explosions. Sana'a has been inhabited for more than 2,500 years and bears witness to the wealth and beauty of all Islamic civilization. I am convinced that this destruction exacerbates human suffering, undermining societies over the long-term, weakening the ground for reconciliation and peace.

Whenever culture is attacked, we must stand together and respond with even more culture and knowledge, to foster mutual understanding and safeguard the heritage shared by all humanity. This is the purpose of UNESCO's global campaign #Unite4Heritage. As part of this campaign, together with 10 leading museums around the world, UNESCO has launched the Yemeni Heritage Week—Museums United for Yemen, to raise awareness about the wealth of Yemen's culture and history. Partner museums will highlight their collections of Yemeni artefacts and introduce us to their unique beauty, knowledge and wisdom.

I thank you all for sharing and appreciating the outstanding universal power of Yemeni culture—and I call on you all to stand with us to defend the power of heritage for peace. Protecting culture is not about caring for stones—it is about saving and defending the meaning people ascribe to their lives.

Irina Bokova

*Director-General of UNESCO for the
Yemeni Heritage Week—Museums United for Yemen*

Historians of the Greek and Roman world named ancient South Arabia, centered in present-day Yemen, Arabia Felix ("Happy Arabia"). They praised South Arabia's fertile lands, which yielded grains, vegetables, fruits, and other commodities that were exported throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Between 1000 BC and the 6th century AD, South Arabian kingdoms prospered through a sophisticated economy based on long-distance trade. One such kingdom was Saba, the land of the Queen of Sheba, who, according to biblical traditions, traveled to Jerusalem to present King Solomon (10th century BC) with gold, precious stones, incense and other goods carried on Arabian camels.

Rich in natural resources and famed for its artistic traditions, Yemen is now a center of international concern. Since conflicts erupted in March 2015, nearly 3,000 civilians have died, and Yemen's cultural heritage has been irreparably damaged. Under the sponsorship of the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO), museums around the world are highlighting Yemeni heritage.

The collection of ancient Yemeni art at the Walters Art Museum is the generous gift of Dr. Giraud and Carolyn Foster. In the early 1960s, Giraud Foster served as the personal physician to Imam Ahmed ibn Yahya, king of Yemen (r. 1948–62). During his service, Giraud was gifted with Yemeni works of art, which he continued to collect in subsequent years of world travel. These ancient Yemeni alabaster artifacts, which date from the sixth century BC to the fourth century AD, are now displayed at the Walters for all to enjoy.

In 2010 Mr. Derek Content and Mr. Benjamin Zucker bequeathed a superb collection of Yemeni silver, assembled from 1960 to 1980, to the Walters and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Pieces in this collection include female headpieces (diadems), bracelets, necklaces, and belt fittings, as well as daggers made exclusively for the Muslim male elite. These masterful works record the names of the Jewish artisans who created them as well as their Muslim rulers.

According to oral traditions, a Jewish presence in the Yemen dates back to the reign of King Solomon, who is believed to have sent artisans with the Queen of Sheba when she returned to her Arabian kingdom. The earliest historic evidence for Jews in the Arabian Peninsula, however, dates to the initial centuries of the Common Era. From the inception of Islam in the seventh century, Jewish and Muslim communities co-existed in Yemen, although few Jews live there today.

Here we present a selection of the Walters ancient, early modern, and modern Yemeni works of art.

Yemeni Heritage Week—Museums United for Yemen
Participating Museums







Stela with a Female Bust

South Arabia, 1st century BC–1st century AD

Calcite-alabaster

21.73, gift of Giraud and Carolyn Foster, 2008



Stela with a Seated Woman

South Arabia, 2nd–1st century BC

Calcite-alabaster

21.48, gift of Giraud and Carolyn Foster, 2007





A Lion and a Leopard Attacking Animals

South Arabia, 5th–3rd century BC

Calcite-alabaster, traces of paint

21.71, gift of Giraud and Carolyn Foster, 2008; gift of Imam Ahmed, king of Yemen, to Dr. Foster in 1961

Fragment of a Pediment with a Goddess

South Arabia (Mārib), 2nd century AD

Calcite-alabaster

21.74, gift of Giraud and Carolyn Foster, 2014

Frieze with Oryx Heads

South Arabia, 5th–3rd century BC

Calcite-alabaster

21.65, gift of Giraud and Carolyn Foster, 2007





Belt Fitting

Silversmith: Yahya Tayyib (?)

Yemen, reign of Imam al-Mansur al-Husayn

(AH 1139–61 [AD 1727–48])

Silver, gilding

57.2326, joint gift to the Walters Art Museum,

Baltimore, and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Mr.

Derek Content and Mr. Benjamin Zucker in honor of

Mrs. Amanda Content and Mrs. Barbara Zucker, 2010



Belt Fitting

Silversmith: Yahya Kassar

Yemen, second half of the 19th century

57.2329, joint gift to the Walters Art Museum,

Baltimore, and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Mr.

Derek Content and Mr. Benjamin Zucker in honor of

Mrs. Amanda Content and Mrs. Barbara Zucker, 2010



Woman's Headband

Silversmith: Shm[uel] Sharayan
Northern Yemen (possibly Sana'a or Raydah),
dated AH 1287 (AD 1870/71)
Silver, gilding
57.2310, joint gift to the Walters Art Museum,
Baltimore, and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Mr.
Derek Content and Mr. Benjamin Zucker in honor of
Mrs. Amanda Content and Mrs. Barbara Zucker, 2010



Pair of Pendants from a Female Headpiece

Silversmith: S[alim] S[alim] Habshush

Northern Yemen (probably north of Sana'a),

dated AH 1215 (AD 1800/1801)

57.2312 (A and B), joint gift to the Walters Art Museum,

Baltimore, and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Mr.

Derek Content and Mr. Benjamin Zucker in honor of

Mrs. Amanda Content and Mrs. Barbara Zucker, 2010

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