



The Challenges and Risks that Yemeni Cultural Heritage faces

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I has wished to attend the meeting and listen to your experiences in the field of preservation of antiquities and heritage, and how to stop illicit digging and trafficking in antiquities but the difficulty of obtaining a visa precluded that , so I am happy to talk with you through this recording.

Abstract :

This paper presents what Yemen has lived, as all know, a situation of war that entered its fourth year, which has had a great impact on all fields, including the field of antiquities and heritage, where many archaeological sites has been targeted directly or indirectly by airstrikes of Arab coalition, and terrorist organizations have exploded a number of shrines, other sites have been damaged by exchange of fire. The situation reflected on processes of illicit digging, smuggling and trafficking of antiquities, which were and still are in most countries but it expands further as a result of the war.

Introduction:

The value of cultural heritage and its importance lies in being a human heritage that embodies the genius of a people and constitutes a cycle of cultural and civilizational development of man, and what confirms this importance that loss or absence of any antiquity is a great loss can be irreplaceable not only for the State owning the antiquity, but for humanity as a whole, as heritage of any state is a ring in a connected series of man story since he appeared on the surface of the earth so far.

Introduction:

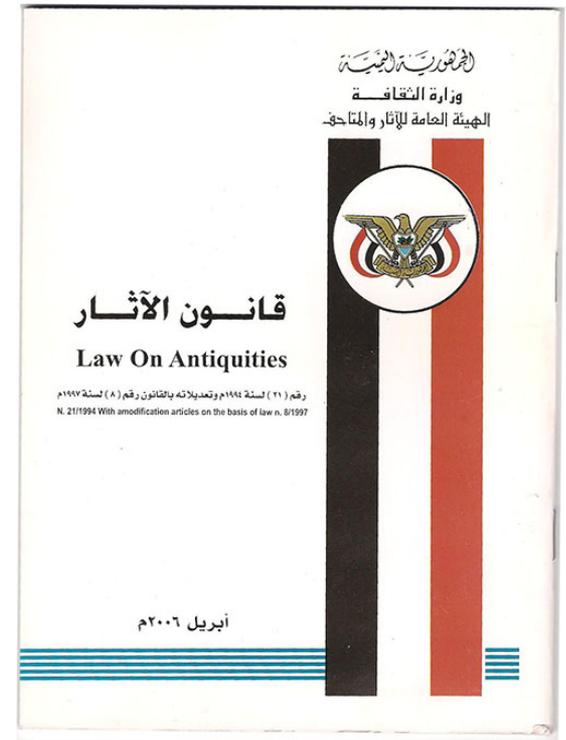
The antiquities represent the material aspect of civilization and an important material source of national income through tourism, where the state in the modern era has paid attention to them through setting the laws and regulations to protect them ,and caring of the importance of material antiquities has not been limited to the national level only, but extended to the international level as the culture of nations is the most valuable of human property

Yemen has become a victim of looting its cultural heritage, which has become more acute during the current crisis in the country, looting and illegal smuggling of its cultural property have become common practices that targeted firstly our archaeological sites.

The cultural activity of ancient Yemen has resulted in the appearance of numerous and varied artifacts in different areas, some of them were found by the research and excavation works of foreign missions and national teams. Most of them are archaeological artifacts currently displayed in museums in Yemen and abroad. Among these artifacts are inscriptions, Decorative tools and religious symbols made of clay and various types of stones (limestone, calcite, marble), bronze, wood, bone, glass and iron.

Many of the archaeological sites in Yemen are currently subjected to a process of arbitrary excavation and destruction without a legitimate right and contrary to the provisions of the Antiquities Law (No. 21 of 1994), amended (No. 8 of 1997), considering all the fixed and movable antiquities on the surface or in the interior of the ground in the Republic of Yemen owned by the state, represented by the

General Organization of Antiquities and Museums authorized to control , protect , preserve, register and document the antiquities . Ownership, possession or use of the land does not give the owner the right to dispose the antiquities ,and not authorized to excavate in it.



These archaeological sites are going through a critical period today especially we are in an urgent need to establish and consolidate the foundations that bind us to this homeland and confirm its continuity and unity. At a time when the history writing of this country has not yet been completed, where there are no enough pattern of its reserved antiquities available for us.

In spite of the continuous efforts and coordination among the General Organization of Antiquities and Museums, public and private institutions, bodies and development projects and the security and local authorities in the country, we have been unable to reduce this phenomenon, and preserve the archaeological sites from those dangers.

If we allow the disappearance of such archaeological and historical sites, that would mean the loss of landmarks that bear witness to the Yemeni creativity and civilization.



This means a great loss of roots of the knowledge needed to build the future and that loss of such cultural heritage is irreplaceable.

The fact that works of looting and smuggling the antiquities abroad are an old and continuous issue, particularly if we know that the archaeological sites in Yemen are many and need more care and awareness of the importance of each antiquity, and that its loss or presentation or retention in other spots of the world is a lack of its scientific and cultural significance for researchers and interested.

Since the beginning of the expeditions in the 18th century, the scientific institutions and international museums have been interested in possessing Yemeni inscriptions and antiquities. Selling and smuggling of the antiquities abroad during the British colonial rule were carried out by means of networks of collecting antiquities and transferring them to Aden, the headquarters of the merchants and brokers of antiquities, then abroad.

This is why we now find large quantities of inscriptions and artifacts in the possession of international museums and the heads of private archaeological collections. The process of illicit trafficking and smuggling of antiquities has continued from those periods until today, where it has developed by using modern methods and techniques.

The tampering and destruction of archaeological sites through the illegal digging and looting of their contents, illicit trafficking and smuggling them out of the country, lies in the followings:

1- The weakness of archaeological awareness

The weakness of the public's archaeological awareness and ignorance of the main reason beyond of its loss and many of its components, and when people realize that the antiquities are the property of generations and heritage of a nation, will not dare to trading or losing part of them and will prevent smuggling them abroad.

The protection and preservation of the heritage is not enough to be entrusted to specialized governmental bodies and institutions. Also, as that legislations are wise and powerful, can not replace morality and loyalty to cultural identity in deterring citizens from destroying heritage materials and urging him to protect them

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1- The weakness of archaeological awareness

In order for the citizen becomes aware of this responsibility, he should have long-term educational programs that explain this heritage and educate him on its love and attention, and help him to take that responsibility, which he may be only slightly aware of it.



2- Aggression "Air strikes":

Many realize the bitter reality of what many countries have been exposed to and what the ancient archaeological wealth of the ancient Yemeni civilizations has been subjected to destruction and vandalism by the aggression of the Arab coalition forces.

This aggression has led to the destruction and disappearance of many of these monuments and archaeological sites and the distortion and obliterate the little remaining.



more vulnerable to looting and smuggling Where many monuments and archaeological sites have been targeted directly and indirectly by air raids of the Arab Coalition led to the total or partial destruction for more than **66 monuments**, historical and archaeological sites, and museums hosting thousands of important artifacts.

3. Terrorist organizations :

They represent who so-called Ansar al- Shari'a, Da'esh or al-Qaeda existing in the Arabian Peninsula, who have exploited the lack of security caused by aggression and conflict, where they become heavily active in the southern regions of Yemen ,carried out systematic targeting and deliberate destructing for more than **25** mausoleums and religious shrines.



4. Illicit digging and excavating:

This threat began since long time and recently has intensified, where people of low spirit exploited the circumstances of the aggression against Yemen and the insecurity in many governorates of the Republic. They looted archaeological sites in



order to search for relics (and what they call the search for treasures) and in a clear attack on the Yemeni cultural heritage. The General Organization of Antiquities and Museums and its branches in the governorates, received many notifications about the digging and illegal excavation of archaeological sites and the looting relics from them, for example

4. Illicit digging and excavating:

Destruction of land tombs and rock tombs dating to the period of the ancient Yemeni kingdoms (1st millennium BC - the first three centuries AD). GOAM has recently uncovered illegal excavations in the old city of Sana'a by some citizens illegally digging inside their homes and shops in order to search for treasures. GOAM in its own right under the law on antiquities and fighting against destruction of archaeological sites and trafficking in Yemeni antiquities, by carrying out a field visit, discovering ancient buildings dating back to pre-Islamic times.



4. Illicit digging and excavating:

GOAM has referred all citizens involved in this work to the legal authorities to take their deterrent punishment under the law, will document these excavations and their results scientifically, when the financial possibilities become available to do so, and think in the future doing wide archaeological excavations and uncover a missing link from the history of Sanaa and establishing open museums.

There are acts of illicit digging and vandalism in a number of other governorates, including Shabwa, Jawf, Marib , Mahweet and so on.



And the development programs and large building projects in our country, rich in antiquities, made these antiquities in an unenviable situation, and as density of population, which urged a lot to establish modern buildings of concrete or iron or glass over the archaeological sites and in the archaeological sites nearby. The tampering and destruction of archaeological sites through the illicit digging and theft of their contents , trafficking and smuggling them out of the country happens unfortunately with high intensity under the current situation.

One of the most important measures that should be taken in order to implement local laws in the protection of heritage and in light of which international conventions can be applied in the restoration of cultural property is naming , recording and documenting the artifacts ,as without the name or identity card it becomes difficult to follow up stealing ,smuggling or knowing the artifact.

As for international laws, the International Law on Armed Conflicts contains specific rules for protecting cultural property. The most important of these is the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in Armed Conflict. However, this does not preclude the existence of other international conventions which, in turn, work on devoting a kind of legal protection for these property against the dangers

The International Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property, the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, Protocol No. 1 of 1954 and the UNESCO Convention of 1970, Concerning the measures to be taken to prevent illicit trade in cultural property and the 1972 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

We regret that the countries participating in the alliance against Yemen signed or ratified on those agreements concerning the preservation of cultural property during conflicts and wars

As international conventions contain the necessary legal framework for the States to which they have acceded, providing a framework and a set of technical principles and provisions at the international level that contribute to the protection of cultural property, constitute basic reference principles for national legislation and the principles and provisions contained in those conventions for the protection of cultural property, its circulation, transit and acquisition throughout the world will undoubtedly contribute to the legal framework for the problem of illegal trade.

The cooperation between UNESCO and its partners, led by INTERPOL, in this task has put a number of legal procedures and helped us to thwart operations of smuggling of many antiquities, the last one was announced by the Swiss authorities, seized a number of Yemeni artifacts at Geneva airport addressed and agreed to keep them until the conditions improve in YEMEN.

The protection of cultural property in time of war remains ineffective and vulnerable unless it is strengthened by effective mechanisms to ensure its application and respect at all times and places. In today's world of conflicts in which personal interests and military necessity prevail over humanitarian considerations, it is a must that the contracting parties work ,in time of peace as in time of war, to order of legal centers being more appropriate to the special situations of cultural property and the provision of mechanisms to ensure their enforcement on the ground, so the importance does not lie in arranging for greater protection for cultural property, the most serious and important of that, lie in embodying and applying articles of those conventions on the ground.
