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# *THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN PROTECTING THE YEMENI CULTURAL HERITAGE ON THE LIGHT OF INTERNATIONAL TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS*

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**Dr. Abdulghani Ahmed Ali Al-Hawri\***

## **ABSTRACT:**

The Yemeni Cultural Heritage faces numerous risks, including looting, sabotage, and destruction across Yemen's governorates. UNESCO reports an ancient graveyard found in the Al-Jawf Governorate, where an entire cemetery with over 600 gravestones was excavated and sold in local and Arab markets.

This research aims to assess the damage and losses suffered by Yemeni cultural heritage, outline key international conventions regarding cultural heritage protection, and examine the role of international organizations in safeguarding Yemen's cultural heritage.

Employing an analytical-descriptive approach and content analysis, this study delves into literature and reports from international and regional organizations dedicated to cultural heritage and historical monuments. It uncovers the efforts of these organizations in protecting Yemen's cultural heritage.

The research uncovers extensive damage to Yemeni antiquities caused by looting, theft, illegal trafficking, warfare, terrorist attacks, and natural disasters.

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\*Associate professor of Education Foundation- Psychological and educational Guidance Center Sana'a University, Yemen- E-mail: alhaweri555@gmail.com



It identifies prominent international conventions relevant to cultural heritage protection and highlights the crucial role of international organizations, particularly UNESCO. These organizations provide financial and technical support, conduct renovations, host seminars and workshops, offer training courses, issue statements and condemnations, and collaborate with stakeholders to impose bans on Yemeni antiquities importation.

In conclusion, cultural heritage belongs to all humanity, representing national identity, fostering communication, and bearing witness to civilization. Its preservation is vital for the nation's economy and requires collective efforts from individuals, institutions, and organizations to prevent looting, tampering, and trafficking.

Keywords: role, international organizations, protection, cultural heritage, international conventions.



## INTRODUCTION:

Cultural property stands at the crossroads of numerous risks, imperilling its continuity as a testament to human civilization across epochs. Among these hazards, systematic destruction and damage loom large, particularly amid armed conflicts and illicit trafficking (Al-Hayaji, 2016). It's crucial to highlight that cultural heritage transcends individual or national ownership, representing a shared legacy of humanity (Ramadan, 2012).

Yemen's antiquities epitomize this collective human heritage, yet they have borne the brunt of extensive damage through indiscriminate excavation and illegal trafficking. The ravages of war have further exacerbated this plight, leading to the destruction of monuments, archaeological sites, and historic cities, with some completely razed and others partially damaged. Alarming reports indicate that over 417 archaeological sites and historical monuments have been decimated, with countless Yemeni artifacts pillaged and smuggled abroad for auction, regardless of the devastation caused by natural calamities and terrorist acts (Al-Barkani, 2022).

Addressing this crisis demands global concerted efforts. It necessitates the engagement of international institutions, governments, and civil society to halt the plunder, excavation, and illicit trade while devising solutions to end the conflict and support Yemen in rehabilitating its ravaged archaeological sites and historic landmarks (Al-Barkani, 2022). Foremost among these institutions is the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), recognized as the preeminent global authority safeguarding heritage.

Nevertheless, international organizations have faced criticism for their perceived negligence and inertia in safeguarding cultural heritage. Critics argue that their response has been insufficient, with attention often limited to issuing laws while

heritage continues to be imperilled by destruction, theft, and trafficking (Al-Hayaji, 2016).

A plethora of conventions and recommendations exists to protect heritage, including the Athens Charter for the Protection of Historic Monuments (1931), the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property during Armed Conflict (1954), and the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), among others.

Reviewing prior studies, such as Al-Hayaji (2016), emphasizes the urgency of understanding the roles of international and regional organizations in safeguarding cultural heritage. However, a conspicuous absence remains in the literature concerning Yemeni cultural heritage protection and the role of international organizations therein. Hence, driven by this research gap and a profound awareness of the peril facing Yemen's cultural heritage, this study seeks to assess the damage incurred by Yemeni cultural heritage, elucidate key international conventions, and unveil the contributions of international organizations to its protection.

The term "heritage" encapsulates the transmission of artifacts across time, embodying remnants of civilizations and preceding generations, be they immovable or movable (Haditha, 1999). The Hague Convention of 1954 recognizes three forms of heritage—movable and immovable property, museums and manuscripts, scientific collections, and book collections (Sinnawy, 2011). Meanwhile, the Athens Charter defines cultural heritage as both movable and immovable property, including buildings designated for protection, such as museums and cultural centres (Athens Charter, 1931). In this study, cultural heritage encompasses the tangible and intangible remnants of Yemeni civilization, including buildings, inscriptions, sculptures, and photographs, left behind by successive Yemeni generations.



The term "organization" refers to a collective of individuals or entities formed for the public good, devoid of profit motives (Farhan, 2012). In the context of this research, organizations are those institutions dedicated to preserving and protecting human cultural heritage, thereby serving as custodians of our collective legacy.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

The research methodology employed an analytical descriptive approach coupled with content analysis to scrutinize literature and reports disseminated by international organizations and bodies vested in cultural heritage preservation. This analytical framework enabled a comprehensive examination of the literature, elucidating the extent of damage inflicted upon Yemeni cultural heritage. Additionally, it facilitated the identification of key international conventions pertaining to the safeguarding of cultural heritage and illuminated the roles assumed by international organizations in protecting Yemeni cultural heritage.

The utilization of content analysis allowed for a systematic examination of the reports and literature, discerning patterns, trends, and key insights pertinent to Yemen's cultural heritage. By employing this methodological approach, the research aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by Yemeni cultural heritage and the efficacy of international interventions in mitigating these threats.

Through rigorous analysis and interpretation of the available literature, the research sought to contribute valuable insights into the state of Yemeni cultural heritage preservation efforts and shed light on the pivotal role of international organizations in safeguarding this invaluable heritage for future generations.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS:**



Addressing the first objective, which entails identifying the damage inflicted upon Yemeni cultural heritage, the research delved into reports, studies, and resources from various international institutions and organizations. The findings underscore a grim reality: Yemen's archaeological sites have suffered extensive devastation.

A comprehensive study by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) revealed alarming levels of destruction across numerous Yemeni archaeological sites. Disturbingly, sites in districts like Sawda, Baidha, Kharbeh, Kamna, Hamdan, and Mue'en in Al-Jawf governorate have been subject to vandalism, looting, and outright destruction. For instance, a complete cemetery containing over 600 gravestones was unearthed, only to be pillaged and peddled in local and international markets (Arish and Shtikat, 2006).

Further exacerbating this crisis, UNESCO reports severe damage inflicted upon several UNESCO-listed sites, including Taiz Castle, the historic city of Brakesh in Al-Jawf, and the Great Marib Dam. Tragically, the Dhamar Museum was completely razed, resulting in the loss of 12,500 artifacts (UNESCO).

The historic fabric of Sana'a, a UNESCO World Heritage site, has also been decimated by armed conflict. Notably, the Al Qasimi neighbourhoods and the Mahdi Mosque suffered extensive damage, with the distinctive architectural features of Old Sana'a—coloured doors, panels, and windows—being destroyed or damaged (UNESCO)

Moreover, numerous cultural landmarks have fallen victim to targeted attacks. The National Museum in Taiz was bombed, resulting in the complete destruction of invaluable manuscripts and artifacts dating back to pre-Islamic times. Similarly, historic sites such as the city of Kawkaban and the dome of Imam Shams al-Din were deliberately targeted (UNESCO)



Bringing these woes together, the International Council of Museums highlights the extensive damage wrought upon Yemen's archaeological sites and museums. Rampant illegal excavation and trafficking further exacerbate the plight of Yemen's cultural heritage (International Council of Museums, 2019).

Similarly, Yemeni researcher Al-Barkani (2022) documents the widespread destruction inflicted upon archaeological sites and monuments across various governorates. From the historic city of Saada to the Dar al-Haid in Sana'a, these sites have borne the brunt of armed conflict, with irreparable damage incurred.

Echoing these sentiments, the Yemeni Ministry of Culture laments the loss of numerous archaeological sites, churches, mosques, and forts across Yemen. From Aden to Hajjah, Abyan to Marib, the devastation is widespread and irreparable (Yemeni Ministry of Culture, 2018).

Additionally, extremist groups have targeted religious monuments, with over 28 religious sites completely destroyed. The domes of prominent figures and scholars, such as Imam al-Saqqaf and Sheikh al-Mu'ayni, were deliberately demolished (Al-Barkani, 2022).

The findings also shed light on the second objective, focusing on the pivotal international conventions and treaties governing cultural heritage protection. The research revealed a plethora of legal texts, conventions, and recommendations underpinning cultural heritage protection, with UNESCO at the forefront of promulgating many of these conventions.

Among these conventions, the Athens Charter for the Preservation of Historic Monuments stands out as the inaugural charter on cultural heritage and historical monuments, issued in 1931 in response to the cultural property damage incurred during the First World War (Attia and Alkafafi, 2003). Similarly, the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in Times of Armed Conflict (1954) represents the pioneering international treaty aimed at safeguarding



cultural property during armed conflicts (Al-Rahifa, 2012). This convention obligates nations to respect cultural property during times of armed conflict, refraining from any means of destruction and prohibiting theft, pillaging, embezzlement, or destruction of cultural property (UNESCO, 1985).

Another significant convention is the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), which stresses on the importance of safeguarding world cultural heritage and establishes the World Heritage Committee. This committee plays a pivotal role in identifying and protecting cultural and natural heritage sites worldwide (UNESCO, 1977).

Additionally, UNESCO has adopted recommendations aimed at protecting cultural heritage at the national level (1973), preventing illicit import, export, and transfer or possession of cultural property (1970), safeguarding historical sites, and facilitating the international exchange of cultural property (1976). These recommendations provide a framework for member states to coordinate efforts in preserving cultural heritage (UNESCO, 1985).

Moreover, the Washington Charter for the Preservation of Historic Cities and Areas (1987) emphasizes measures to protect, preserve, renovate, and maintain historic cities, while the UNIDROIT Convention (1995) obliges countries to restore stolen or illegally exported cultural objects and facilitates the recovery process through national courts (UNESCO).

Turning to the third objective of revealing the role of international organizations in protecting Yemeni cultural heritage, UNESCO emerges as a key player. UNESCO provides crucial support to countries, offering expertise, technical resources, and equipment for heritage preservation. It also publishes materials on cultural property maintenance and museum concerns and issues international conventions to combat illegal trafficking (Al-Hayaji, 2016).





With regard to the Yemeni situation in particular, UNESCO has implemented various projects to safeguard Yemeni cultural property and launched international campaigns to protect monuments under threat, such as the Old City of Sana'a and the city of Shibam Hadramout (Al-Hayaji, 2016). Notably, UNESCO's efforts have led to the inclusion of several Yemeni sites on the World Heritage List, including the ancient city of Sana'a, the city of Shibam Hadramawt, and the historic city of Zabid (Al-Barkani, 2022).

Moreover, UNESCO has undertaken numerous initiatives to preserve Yemeni antiquities, including funding projects for site preservation, artifact restoration, and rehabilitation efforts (Arish and Shethkan, 2006). UNESCO's interventions extend to architectural conservation, disaster risk management, and capacity-building initiatives, underscoring its commitment to protecting Yemen's cultural heritage (UNESCO, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1279/>).

In December 2016, UNESCO convened a meeting in Venice, Italy, focusing on Geographic Information Systems (GIS), museums, and awareness-raising activities pertinent to the protection of Yemen's cultural heritage. This gathering brought together experts from various archaeological missions in Yemen, UNESCO representatives, and specialists from institutions such as the British Museum and Oxford, resulting in the development of a roadmap for cultural heritage preservation (UNESCO, 2016).

Over the years, UNESCO has provided significant financial support, exceeding US \$500,000, for the implementation of protection and renovation projects across historical sites in Yemen. Additionally, UNESCO has allocated funds for plan preparation and training workshops related to cultural heritage. Noteworthy initiatives include financial support in 2014 for the preservation of the historic city of Zabid and the ancient city of Sana'a, along with the implementation of workshops on the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO,).



In 2018, UNESCO initiated the "Cash for Work" program, offering job opportunities for young people to contribute to cultural heritage preservation in Sana'a, Shibam, Zabid, and Aden. Funded by the European Union, this project aimed to survey historical buildings, renovate and rehabilitate structures, and conduct capacity-building workshops for archaeological workers. Moreover, UNESCO facilitated small grants to cultural civil society organizations (UNESCO,).

Addressing the illicit trade in antiquities, the UN Security Council, with UNESCO's coordination, issued Resolutions 2199 and 2253 in 2015, imposing a ban on the trade of antiquities of illicit origin. UNESCO also facilitated technical assistance for Member States in creating an auction model to detect and prevent Yemen's illegal exports, resulting in a decline in trafficking, theft, and antiquities sale (UNESCO, 2018).

In response to cultural heritage threats, UNESCO has strongly condemned deliberate destructions, such as the mosque and shrine of Ahmed Al-Faz in Hodeidah, and airstrikes on the ancient city of Marib. UNESCO's Director-General urged all parties in conflict to refrain from targeting Yemen's cultural heritage, providing coordinates of key archaeological sites to prevent damage (UNESCO,)

The Fund for Protection of Heritage in Conflict (ALIPH) has played a crucial role, creating lists of seized, smuggled, and illegally traded artifacts originating from Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. ALIPH has provided substantial financial support for heritage preservation projects in Yemen, including the protection of museums' holdings, renovation of historical sites, and training programs for heritage conservation (ALIPH,).

Furthermore, international organizations like the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the Arab Organization for Education, Culture, and Science

(ALECSO), and the Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) have contributed to heritage conservation efforts through various means, including publishing red lists of stolen items, organizing training courses, and promoting awareness of heritage issues (Al-Hayaji, 2016). These organizations have underscored the importance of financing, technical assistance, training programs, and awareness campaigns in safeguarding cultural heritage (Sultan, 2013).

## **RESULT ANALYSIS**

The analysis of the research findings indicates several significant points regarding the state of Yemeni cultural heritage, international conventions, the role of international organizations, and areas for improvement:

**Damage to Yemeni Cultural Heritage:** The study pinpoints the extensive damage suffered by Yemen's cultural heritage, attributing it to natural disasters, looting, and war. The findings highlight a lack of effective control mechanisms, often augmented by complicity among certain officials. This indicates a pressing need for heightened awareness regarding the importance of cultural artifacts as symbols of civilization and human heritage.

**Impact of Ongoing Conflict:** The ongoing conflict since 2014 has exacerbated the damage to Yemen's cultural heritage, aggravated by the country's perceived neglect of its preservation responsibilities. The diversion of funds towards military operations has further marginalized efforts to safeguard antiquities and cultural heritage, amplifying the urgency of prompt intervention.

**International Conventions and Recommendations:** While there are numerous international conventions and recommendations aimed at protecting cultural heritage, the study identifies gaps in addressing specific challenges, such as protecting antiquities from terrorist attacks and establishing accountability for



damage caused to archaeological monuments. There is a call for additional recommendations to address these gaps and enhance protection measures.

**Role of International Organizations:** The research acknowledges the significant role played by international organizations, particularly UNESCO, in preserving Yemeni cultural heritage through financial and technical support, restoration efforts, training initiatives, and advocacy. However, there is a suggestion that these organizations should expand their focus to include more Yemeni archaeological sites on the World Heritage List and intensify efforts during armed conflicts when state intervention is lacking.

**Enhanced Role of Regional Organizations:** The study points out the relatively weak role played by regional organizations like the Arab Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ICLESU) and the Islamic Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ISESCO) in protecting Yemeni cultural heritage. There is a call for these organizations to assume a more proactive role beyond awareness-raising and statistical functions.

**Collaboration and Support:** Finally, the research emphasizes the importance of collaboration among international organizations and highlights the need for intensive efforts to protect Yemeni cultural heritage, involving organizations such as the International Council of Monuments and Archaeological Sites (ICOMOS), the Arab Towns Organization, and the Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities.

Overall, the analysis asserts the critical importance of preserving Yemen's rich cultural heritage and calls for coordinated action at both national and international levels to mitigate further damage and ensure its safeguarding for future generations.

## **CONCLUSION:**



In conclusion, this research underlines the perilous state of Yemeni heritage, imperilled by the ravages of war, terrorist attacks, natural calamities, and illicit activities such as theft and trafficking. The absence of effective local safeguarding mechanisms, exacerbated by wartime conditions and insufficient funding for conservation efforts, clearly shows the critical dependence on international organizations, notably UNESCO, for the protection of Yemen's cultural legacy. It is essential to realize that Yemen's heritage is not solely a national concern but a global treasure belonging to all humanity.

While international heritage organizations, particularly UNESCO, have played significant roles, there remains a pressing need for expanded efforts, particularly in the restoration of war-damaged sites. These sites have borne the brunt of conflict-related destruction, including looting, theft, and terrorist attacks.

Therefore, there is a collective call for international organizations, the global community, and diplomatic bodies to collaborate in ending the war in Yemen and resolving underlying conflicts. These dedicated efforts would facilitate Yemen's recovery, allowing it to reclaim its role in promoting international peace and restoring its looted and damaged antiquities. It is essential for all conflicting parties within Yemen to prioritize dialogue and reconciliation, setting aside arms to facilitate the healing of divisions and the protection of Yemen's invaluable monuments and historical sites. Through collective action and shared responsibility, Yemen's rich cultural heritage can be preserved for future generations, serving as a beacon of resilience and hope amid adversity.

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# دور المنظمات الدولية في حماية التراث الثقافي اليمني على ضوء المعاهدات والاتفاقيات الدولية

د. عبدالغني الحاوري

ملخص:

يواجه التراث الثقافي اليمني مجموعة من المخاطر نتيجة للنهب والتخريب والتدمير المنتشرة في محافظات اليمن. وفي سياق مماثل، تشير منظمة اليونسكو إلى اكتشاف مقبرة كاملة في محافظة الجوف تحتوي على أكثر من 600 شاهد قبر تم التنقيب عنها وبيعها في الأسواق المحلية والعربية. يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحديد الأضرار والخسائر التي تعرض لها التراث الثقافي اليمني، وتسلط الضوء على أهم الاتفاقيات الدولية المتعلقة بحماية التراث الثقافي، والكشف عن الأدوار التي تلعبها المنظمات الدولية في حماية التراث الثقافي اليمني. ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف، تم استخدام نهج تحليلي وصفي وأداة تحليل المحتوى لفحص الأدبيات والتقارير من المنظمات الدولية والإقليمية المختصة بالتراث الثقافي والمعالم التاريخية.

يكشف البحث عن الأضرار الواسعة التي تعرضت لها الآثار اليمنية نتيجة للنهب والسرقة والتجارة غير المشروعة، والحروب، والهجمات الإرهابية، والكوارث الطبيعية. كما يوضح البحث الاتفاقيات الدولية البارزة المتعلقة بحماية التراث الثقافي.

وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، يكشف البحث عن الأدوار الحيوية التي تلعبها بعض المنظمات الدولية، لاسيما منظمة اليونسكو، في حماية التراث الثقافي اليمني. تقدم هذه المنظمات دعماً مالياً وفنياً حيوياً، وتقوم بأعمال ترميم، وتنظيم ندوات وورش عمل ودورات تدريبية، وإصدار بيانات وإدانات، والتعاون مع الجهات المعنية لفرض حظر على استيراد الآثار اليمنية.

وفي الختام، ليس التراث الثقافي ملكاً للأفراد أو المؤسسات أو الشعوب، بل ينتمي لجميع البشر. وبالتالي، فإن الاهتمام به يمثل تجسيداً للهوية الوطنية، ورمزاً للتواصل، وشاهدًا على الحضارة، مع مراعاة أهميته في الاقتصاد الوطني. ولذا، يجب على الجميع، سواء الأفراد أو المؤسسات أو المنظمات، أن يحافظوا عليه من أعمال النهب والتلاعب والتجارة غير المشروعة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدور، المنظمات الدولية، الحماية، التراث الثقافي، الروابط الدولية