

Culture Heritage and the Idea of Jordan Museums

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Abstract

The idea of collecting valued objects dates back to the period prior to the arrival of Islam, Arabs having traditionally placed precious things inside the Kaaba in Mecca for religious purposes. The idea of establishing museums in Jordan and the region started after Europeans began to turn their attention to the antiquities and traditional objects of the Arab world, whether as Christian missionaries, colonists or private individuals. In Jordan, the Department of Antiquities was established and participated in protecting the movable and immovable cultural heritage, which led to the establishment of museums. The DOA created museums throughout the country to spread the awareness of archaeology and heritage and to house archaeological objects. However, Jordanian museums developed slowly, as a result of a lack of interest and awareness, unqualified staff with inadequate power structures, political instability, poor economic conditions, the fact that publicly-run bodies do not benefit from their own income, and the absence of official associations or museum councils.

Keywords: Jordan, museum, departments of antiquities, cultural heritage

1. Introduction

The growth of interest in museums is indicative of the fact that the museum is focus around which many of our global and local preoccupations can coalesce. Alongside the expansion and diversification of the museums in Jordan, particularly since 1990's, has raise the awareness of Jordanian local community about museums and the subject of museology in general, which lead the government in one hand to pay more attention to the current situation of the existing museums, and on the other hand to reconsider establishing new specialized ones. This was the result of the massive increase in the amount of critical commentary upon museums.

Throughout human history, Jordan has witnessed successive ancient states (for a convenient site-oriented overview see Kennedy and Bewley 2004) and has undergone significant developments, thus the country has played an important role in hosting ancient civilizations through the ages. Although the significance of Jordan's role has varied from time to time, the many underground antiquities, remains and monuments found indicate permanent importance (Scheltema 2008). By the turn of the past century, increasing interest in archaeology had resulted in more excavations and explorations of archaeological sites. Nowadays approximately 70 missions are annually held, most of them by merely foreign missions (Alkhraysheh 2007). At the same time we see an increase in the quantity of monuments and objects discovered. In response to this increase, it became necessary and urgent to establish museums to aesthetically display such remains and protect them at the same time. Notwithstanding the advancement of museology, Jordanian museums are still lacking a well-developed infrastructure. At the same time, the museums lack most of the requirements to be able to address, criticize and analyze such necessities. Therefore, it seems important to conduct an inclusive study to cater for the needs of Jordanian museums and have them improved and developed, in order to portray the best possible image of Jordan and its history. In spite of the great development Jordan is undergoing, the subject of museology remains fairly unknown, thus it was important to conduct this study in order to increase the public and governmental awareness about museums in Jordan.

2. Cultural Heritage and the Department of Antiquities

The idea of collecting valued objects dates back to the period prior to the arrival of Islam, Arabs having traditionally placed precious things inside the Kaaba in Mecca for religious purposes (Hitti, 1974: 93). Islam encouraged people to preserve property through the creation of *al-waqf*, which means preserving material goods

for the benefit of society and to please God. The motive for al-waqf can be religious, such as the establishment of mosques; social, such as constructing hospitals or homes for poor people or for students; military, such as supporting armies; or cultural, such as creating schools and universities. Movable objects, such as books, illustrative materials, carpets, pots and religious manuscripts or the Holy Quran itself can also be donated to schools, mosques and homes (Abazah, 1981: 17).

Al-waqf began during the time of Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon Him) and has continued through all Islamic regimes from the Umayyad period until the present day. Currently, all Arab and Muslim countries have ministries of Al-Awqaf (plural of waqf), which are responsible for Islamic/Arab cultural property, whether ancient or new, such as Islamic affairs, mosques, Islamic museums and monuments.

From the sixteenth until the beginning of the twentieth century, Jordan and all Arab countries were under the control of the Ottoman Empire (Hitti, 1974: 718). During that period, there were no institutions or departments to protect the cultural property of the Arabs, except for what was preserved and kept through various collectors, churches and religious purposes, and al-waqf. Usually, any precious thing found during the Ottoman period was taken to Istanbul (Al-Ush, 1969: 4). In the nineteenth century, with the establishment of museums in the Arab world, most al-waqf collections and treasures were transferred to these new museums. For instance, extraordinary Islamic manuscripts, textiles, weapons and glass were transferred to the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (Mustafa, 1978: 9) and the Islamic Museum in Jerusalem from al-waqf in Cairo and Jerusalem (Salamah, 1980: 8).

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth the Ottoman Empire became quite weak and its control over the Arab countries purely nominal, especially in North Africa. In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt (Hitti, 1974: 721). A Commission on Science and Arts was attached to the expedition to survey the area and to document the ancient monuments. The Commission's work attracted the attention not only of Europeans, but also of the local people (Thompson, 1972: 9). This led in 1835 to the establishment of the Archaeological Museum of Cairo, which is considered the earliest museum in the Arab world (Muhammad, 2002: 38-41). The remainder of North Africa—Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Libya—was occupied by different European countries in the nineteenth century (Hitti, 1974: 717f). Museums then appeared in these countries as a direct result of colonialism (Abazah, 1981: 24-26).

3. The Recognition of Cultural Heritage and the Formation of the Department of Antiquities

Because of the status of the Holy Land, Palestine and various parts of Jordan received special attention from Christian missionary orders and individuals who wished to study places that were mentioned in the Old and New Testaments. They played a vital role in protecting the Holy Land's cultural heritage by conducting excavations and surveys, by preserving old churches, buildings and movable objects and by documenting many archaeological and heritage sites in the area. They saved and protected objects that formed the collections of the current museums in Palestine and Jordan. Examples of these missions are the Franciscans, who came to Palestine in 1333, the White Fathers, who arrived in Jerusalem in 1878, the Betharamite Fathers, who came to Bethlehem in 1879, and the Dominican Fathers, who established the École Biblique d'Archéologie in 1891 (Abazah, 1981: 29). Several expeditions also arrived from Germany in the 18th and 19th centuries (Sadek, 1994).

Regarding individuals, Ulrich Jasper Sitzen of Germany and Johann Ludwig Burckhardt of Switzerland carried out surveys from 1805 to 1807 and 1810 to 1812 respectively in Greater Syria, including Palestine and Jordan. Captain C.R. Condor also conducted surveys on the West and East Banks of the Jordan River in 1881 (Ibrahim, 1973: 3). In 1868, Dr. F. Klein, a Prussian missionary, saved the Mesha Stele, which was found in Dhiban in southern Jordan. He recognized the value of the stele and purchased it from the Bedouins. Later, the stele was displayed in the Louvre and is still there (Abazah, 1981: 30). In 1865, "The Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) was founded by a group of distinguished academics and clergymen, most notably the Dean of Westminster Abbey, Arthur P. Stanley and Sir George Grove. The purpose of the PEF was (and is) to promote research into the archaeology and history, manners and customs and culture, topography, geology and natural sciences of biblical Palestine and the Levant" (Anon, ND3). The American Palestine Exploration Society (APES) was founded in 1870 for the same purposes (Ibrahim, 1973: 3).

A Department of Antiquities was established in Palestine in 1920 under the British Mandate (Ibrahim, 1973: 4). In 1927, a museum was established in Jerusalem to house thousands of archaeological objects that were discovered in 19th and 20th century surveys and excavations. Initially, the museum was located in an Arab-style building; later, John D. Rockefeller Jr. granted two million dollars for constructing a new building and for operating expenses (Sadek, 1994). The Palestinian Archaeological Museum, as it was known, was opened to the public in 1938 (Malt, 2005: xvi). It was one of the largest and richest in the Middle East, representing the history

of Palestine from prehistoric times to the late Islamic period. From 1951-1967 the museum was operated by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities.

In 1921, with the establishment of the Transjordan Emirate, the government discussed the matter of how to protect thousands of archaeological sites that were scattered throughout the country. For this reason, in June of the same year, the Minister of Finance sent a memorandum to the prime minister asking him to establish a department of antiquities, like the one in Palestine. According to the memorandum, this department would play an important role in protecting the archaeological sites from illegal excavation, illicit sales and export. It would also house movable antiquities and collections by establishing museums for this purpose (Abazah, 1981: 31). Consequently, the Department of Antiquities was founded on 27 June 1923 and is considered the earliest cultural organization in Jordan (Mousa, 1985: 109). It aimed to prevent damage to ancient cities in the country and to carry out such work of conservation and excavation (Harding, 1967: 24). According to article 3: A of the Law of Antiquities, the Department will carry out the following (Anon, 2004: 6f):

- 1) The execution of archaeological policy of the state.
- 2) The appraisal of the archaeology of objects and antique sites and evaluation of the importance of every piece of antiquity.
- 3) The administration of antiquities, antique sites and antique protectorates in the Kingdom, their protection, maintenance, repair and preservation, beautification of their surroundings and display of their features.
- 4) The spread of archaeological culture and establishment of archaeological and heritage institutes and museums.
- 5) Searching for antiquities in the Kingdom.
- 6) Rendering assistance in organising museums pertaining to Government activities in the Kingdom including historic, technical [artistic] and popular museums.
- 7) Co-operation with local, Arab and foreign archaeological groups who serve the national heritage and spread archaeological awareness in accordance with the laws and regulations in force.
- 8) The control of possession and disposal of antiquities pursuant to this law and the regulations, decisions and instructions issued hereunder.

On 15 September 1925, the legislation for the safeguarding of antiquities was enacted as the first law of Antiquities (Abazah, 1981: 31). This law has been amended many times, most recently in 2004 (Habahbeh, 1997: 7). The Law of Antiquities includes the definitions of antique sites, movable and immovable antiquities, searching for antiquities and protecting them. Several matters concerning the DOA and the antiquities of Jordan are the subject of its articles, such as the DOA's responsibilities, the ownership of immovable antiquities, excavations and surveys, trading of antiquities, transferring antiquities, punishments and fines.

The DOA was originally located in the Roman city of Jerash. In 1928, when Transjordan broke away from the colonial government in Palestine, the Department was transferred from Jerash to Amman and Dr. Rida Tawfiq, the Turkish philosopher, was appointed as its first director (Al-Abedi, 1972: 9). Since Jordan was under the British mandate, a British archaeologist, Gerald Lankester Harding, was appointed in 1936 as Chief Curator of Antiquities, a title subsequently changed to Director General of the Department of Antiquities (Harding, 1967: xi). In 1956, a mission to dismiss all British leaders from the governmental sector was launched in Jordan. King Hussein started with Sir John Bagot Glubb, the British Commander of the Jordanian Army. In the same year, the British director of the DOA, Lankester Harding, was dismissed and replaced by the first Jordanian director, Dr. Abdul Kareem Gharaibeh.

In 1945, Jordan participated effectively in establishing the Arab League Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ALESCO) to protect cultural property in the Arab world. Jordan also participated in ALESCO conferences, from the first one, held in Damascus in 1947. The major topics dealt with during the conference included the law of antiquities in the Arab world, rescuing the endangered archaeological heritage, studying the areas to be destroyed due to the development of cities and towns, establishing museums to house and preserve antiquities, and training personnel in conservation, excavation and museum administration (Abazah, 1981: 77f).

From 1948, excavations were conducted by Jordanians and 1950 saw the first issue of the periodical the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* (ADAJ). This journal contains studies and reports of archaeological excavations and surveys conducted in Jordan by Jordanians or foreigners, as well as other archaeological activities. In 1980, the DOA held the first conference on the history and archaeology of Jordan at Oxford

University in the United Kingdom. Since that date, this conference has been held every three years. The DOA conferences are published in a special journal called *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* (SHAJ) (Mousa, 1985: 110). The DOA has effectively participated in international exhibitions throughout the world by its loans of objects. For example, the exhibition *Jordan: Treasures from an Ancient Land* was shown in various countries including Britain, France, Tokyo, America and Singapore (Biernowski, 1991a: x).

As a result of the 1967 war with Israel, Jordan lost the West Bank, depriving the country of not only of agricultural land and factories, but of religious and tourist sites as well as cultural institutions. Thus, most foreign archaeological and biblical institutions were transferred to or opened new branches in Amman, such as the British Institute of Archaeology, the American Centre of Oriental Research, the German Evangelical Institute for the Study of the Holy Land and the French Institute of Archaeology. These organisations participated widely in developing the archaeological work in Jordan through their excavations and surveys (Hadidi, 1982).

Malt (2005: xviii) mentions that many popular writers have said that Arabs place very little value on presenting their past. She quotes Leon Uris in his book *The Hajj*: “There is a Department of Antiquities in Jordan. The Department exists only to interest foreigners in coming to Jordan to dig. They take almost everything out”. Malt rejects this view, which does not represent official policy, since the government controls the movement of all antiquities. Malt’s interpretation seems to be correct, because even though Jordanians had little interest in preserving their past, the Department of Antiquities was not established to help in transferring cultural property out of the country, a point emphasised by the DOA’s regulations concerning foreign expeditions. These regulations are not new, having been enacted when the DOA was first established. According to articles 16: A, 21: A &B of the Jordanian Law of Antiquities (Anon, 2004: 10f),

4. The Emergence of the Museum in Jordan

The use and meaning of the word *Muthaf* in Arabic is different from that of the word ‘museum’ or its equivalent in the developed countries. Most Arab people consider museums as places to display ancient objects or traditional costumes. Part of the explanation for this may be that museums in Jordan and the Middle East began because of departments of antiquities and have continued to have a direct connection with them (Abazah, 1981: 22). This idea is mentioned by Carol Malt (2005: viii) in her report of a project on museums in Jordan in 1999.

Historically, in 1923, under the British mandate, the first archaeological museum was established in Jerash at the same time as the founding of the Department of Antiquities (Oweis, 1994). The museum was located in one of the vaults of the Temple of Artemis (Malt, 2002: 14). It reflects the beginning of interest in establishing a place to house archaeological objects rather than in establishing a museum to display objects for public or for educational purposes. It was a warehouse rather than a museum (Barghouthi, 2005: interview).

Malt (2005: xxv) discusses the positive side of colonialism in establishing cultural institutions, noting that Jordan benefited from the expertise of foreign experts in the establishment of their museums.

Henrique Abrantes (1984) describes the colonial museum as a warehouse rather than a museum. Objects were displayed in a way that caused them to lose their true spirit and the people who created them were treated as unimportant. Specifically in relation to Arab culture, Abrantes states that “Arabs have been dispossessed of their own artistic creations and their museums do not reflect the greatness of the Arab peoples. The Arab’s cultural identity is smothered when seeking his own essence and originality, and his identification with his past is blurred by colonialism and lingering colonialist attitudes”.

The picture is rather more complex: the exportation of antiquities certainly deprived local populations of them, but it ensured their survival and preserved them for study, which in turn led to recognition and local protection. This contributed to the Arabs themselves recognising and valuing the heritage of their cultures and civilisations, and facilitating in particular the creation of Arab museums and cultural organizations (Thompson, 1972: 9).

However, for three decades from 1923, no new museums were established in Jordan, for various reasons. First, the Emirate was young and the government was concentrating on building the country rather than establishing cultural institutions. Second, there was instability in the political, economic and social situations. Third, there was a shortage of archaeologists and a lack of awareness of the role of museums (Barghouthi, 2005: interview). Finally, foreign archaeologists and their institutions at that time focused their work on Palestine more than Jordan (Khaleel, 2005: interview).

After independence in 1946, the British control over the country did not cease completely, as the DOA remained under the British director, Lankester Harding. In 1949, Harding nominated the British architect Austin Harrison who had designed and built the Palestinian Museum in Jerusalem, to design and build the Jordan Archaeological Museum on the Amman Citadel. The Museum, which was completed and opened to the public in 1951 (Balqar

& Al-Zayyat, 1994), was built to reflect the East Bank's history and cultures and to establish a balance with the West Bank museum in Jerusalem, in order to encourage visits to Amman and to the East Bank (Malt, 2005: 60). The museum was considered the first National Museum of Jordan and has played an important role in establishing and developing all archaeology museums in Jordan by supporting them with archaeological collections. The Jordan Archaeological Museum is one of the few in Jordan that was built to be a museum and whose showcases were made to fit the space. It contains objects from the Palaeolithic age to the Ottoman period which have come from archaeological sites in Jordan—some of them from the West Bank before 1967 (Anon, ND5).

During the rest of the 1950s no new museums were built in Jordan. As a result of the unification of the West and East Banks in 1951, the government concentrated on developing the economic situation, industry, education and infrastructure, rather than establishing museums. Also, since the West Bank is particularly rich in religious places, archaeological sites and museums, the government gave little consideration to establishing new museums in the East Bank. However, in 1954, the DOA was enrolled in the UNESCO list of state parties which ratified the 1954 Hague Protocol and Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (Moftah, 2004).

5. Conclusion

The idea of establishing museums in Jordan and the region started after Europeans began to turn their attention to the antiquities and traditional objects of the Arab world, whether as Christian missionaries, colonists or private individuals. In Jordan, the Department of Antiquities was established and participated in protecting the movable and immovable cultural heritage, which led to the establishment of museums. The DOA created museums throughout the country to spread the awareness of archaeology and heritage and to house archaeological objects. However, Jordanian museums developed slowly, as a result of a lack of interest and awareness, unqualified staff with inadequate power structures, political instability, poor economic conditions, the fact that publicly-run bodies do not benefit from their own income, and the absence of official associations or museum councils.

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