Chapter 16
The Threat to Cultural Heritage in Times of Conflict and Its Dynamic Relationship with Gulf Society

Amr Al-Azm

Abstract Cultural heritage, both material and immaterial, is an important representation of a nation's diverse cultures and vital to national identity. Yet this heritage is increasingly coming under threat from ongoing regional conflicts resulting in an unprecedented surge in looting and trafficking in cultural heritage materials throughout the region. Furthermore, social media has led to the exponential growth of this illicit trade of antiquities where an international network of traffickers, traders and terrorists utilize online platforms for the auctioning and sale of cultural goods. This paper seeks to address a number of questions pertaining to the evolving relationship of Gulf states and societies to cultural heritage (museums, private collections, etc.) and the international laws and conventions protecting them. The extent of trafficking that occurs in the region and changing attitudes to it.

The Arab uprisings of 2010–2011 also known as the Arab Spring broke out all over the Middle East region with citizens demanding democratic rights in response to enduring authoritarianism, and social and economic justice in the face deep held grievances. Most have since receded to simmering embers of resentment with recurrent flareups as seen in the recent protests in Sudan, Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon. The uprisings, however, also spawned hybrid wars with state and non-state actors fighting in Libya, Yemen and Syria. These hybrid wars involving domestic, regional and international actors have been very destructive to the countries they are being waged in with significant blowback into neighbouring states and destabilizing the region as a whole.

The political, economic and humanitarian dimensions of such armed conflicts are usually the primary focus of the international community, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGO's). In 2015, the UN secretary General Ban Ki-Moon described the ongoing war in Syria as a "shameful symbol" and "the world's

A. Al-Azm (✉)

Gulf Studies Program, Qatar University, Doha, Qatar

e-mail: aalazm@qu.edu.qa

largest humanitarian crisis", (United Nations, 2015) followed more recently by a similar description of the ongoing Yemen conflict (United Nations, 2019). It is not surprising therefore that cultural heritage an important casualty of these conflicts is often ignored or forgotten. Until recently that is, when the media started paying more attention to attacks against cultural heritage sites and monuments by radical Islamist groups. These include the Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 (Centlivres, 2012) and later more famously the attacks by ISIS in Mosul and Palmyra (Lister et al., 2016).

The threat to cultural heritage during such conflicts is both directly through military action and deliberate destruction as well as looting and trafficking of archaeological materials. Looting and trafficking of antiquities, in particular, has been well documented in recent years with objects from conflict zones being sold openly on the international markets. These include Khmer art from Cambodia following the collapse of the Khmer rouge in 1979, Iraqi antiquities in the wake of the US invasion of Iraq and the looting of the Baghdad museum in 2003 (Losson, 2017). More recently, the extensive looting and sale of antiquities from Libya, Syria and Yemen have showed up being openly sold as well (Athar Project, 2019). Often, the sale and trafficking of such looted antiquities becomes a profitable source of income for the individuals or warring factions involved and may even fuel the conflict thus extending its life in some cases (Fearon, 2004).

This is exacerbated by the existence of a robust, and largely unregulated, international market for art and antiquities dominated by Western nations providing ample opportunities to launder movable cultural artefacts into the global marketplace— opportunities that are not always available when trafficking in narcotics, oil, weapons or other traditional sources of illicit/terrorist financing. Traffickers will often employ same pre-existing smuggling routes and connections used for traditional exports (Al-Azm & Paul, 2018). In Afghanistan under the Taliban, the volume of looting reached epidemic proportions almost rivalling profits from the opium trade (Nemeth, 2015).

In Southeast Asia, the antiquities trade continues to flourish alongside the narcotics one (Nemeth, 2015). While in Syria and Iraq, the foreign fighters who joined ISIS went on to occupy some of the most powerful roles within the terror network. In May 2015, US Special Forces raided the headquarters of a senior ISIS official, a Tunisian named Fathi Ben Awn Ben Jildi Murad al-Tunisi—or more commonly Abu Sayyaf. During the raid, US Special Forces found a hoard of information about ISIS' inner workings. Among, their findings were evidence of a highly organized antiquities trafficking scheme. Abu Sayyaf's compound not only yielded looted antiquities, but a trove of documents (Chulov, 2014) permits, receipts and computer files revealing how ISIS had made antiquities trafficking part of their institutional infrastructure (Al-Azm & Paul, 2017).

In fact, since the rise of ISIS and the establishment of the Caliphate in 2014, the looting and trafficking of antiquities in the Middle East and North Africa has reached unprecedented levels (Engel, 2016). In a region with tens of thousands of archaeological sites, antiquities are as easily accessible as oil for terrorist groups controlling such archaeologically rich territory. ISIS militants loot and sell movable artefacts within their reach. Antiquities have been found in ISIS strongholds in Syria,

Iraq and even Libya. However, this is not the only way cultural heritage is exploited to further the group's efforts—what cannot be moved is often destroyed as seen in Nineveh (Iraq) and Palmyra (Syria) (Al-Azm, 2015a, 2015b).

Looting, however, should not be seen as activity exclusive to war zones per se. There are many other reasons why looting occurs in times of peace as well, whether it is by organized criminal elements within society or due to poverty as with subsistence looting and these have been well documented elsewhere (Emberling & Hanson, 2008). Nor is looting and destruction of cultural heritage a recent phenomenon. For as long as, humans have been burying their dead with valuables, waging wars, sacking cities and carrying off the plundered wealth of conquered nations, cultural property has been the principal victim. The looting and destruction would then be celebrated by the victors with monuments and symbols of their own commemorating their victories. The sack of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD was depicted on the Arch of Titus (Cartwright, 2013) while the pillage of Dacia is graphically depicted on Trajan's column (Trajan's Column in Rome) to name but a couple of notable examples. Iconoclasm would soon become a phenomenon of wars and conquest with religious and cultural symbols being systematically destroyed. Government led iconoclasm begun by the Byzantine empire in the eighteenth century AD, would become widespread during the Protestant Reformation wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Eire, 1989). Large scale removal of cultural property and art during conquest and war are also well documented. During the sack of Constantinople by the 4th Crusade in 1204, shiploads of gold, silver, jewels, artwork, and sacred relics left the city that year for the ports and cities of Western Europe (Cartwright, 1204: The Sack of Constantinople, 2018).

During the Napoleonic wars, many of Europe's treasures and finest works of art were carted back to Paris and displayed, however the greatest orgy of looting and destruction of art and cultural property in the modern era would be perpetrated by the Nazis in World War II (Wills, 2015). They not only looted the museums and private collections from the conquered but also indulged in orgies of destruction of what they deemed to be "degenerate art" that did not conform to Nazi Aryan ideology (Holocaust Encyclopedia, 2020).

While there have been efforts throughout history to attempt to protect cultural property from theft or destruction. These ranged from placing spells in the royal tombs of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia that cursed any who would attempt to rob them to international treaties, national laws and agreements aimed at preventing the looting and destruction cultural heritage. It was in the aftermath of the World War II that the international community moves to establish the first international convention to address the issue of protecting cultural property during conflict (1954 Hague Convention). This is then followed by the 1970 UNESCO Convention in response to international trafficking in antiquities. The 1970 Convention prohibits the sale, export and import of illicitly acquired cultural property (UNESCO, 1970).

16.1   The Case of the Gulf States

The majority of Gulf, states and their societies adopt a seemingly paradoxical relationship with cultural heritage. In countries, where local tangible cultural heritage has only recently been taken into consideration from the 2000 onwards, with the exception of Oman whose earliest entry into the World Heritage Site list was the Bahla fort inscribed in 1987 (UNESCO), there has been a significant effort to engage in public international acknowledgement of historical sites in the region. There has also been increasing interest in highlighting private collections, as well as collecting in general among the general public for arts and antiquities. This is also evidenced by shifts, at least nominally, in the enactment of laws relating to cultural heritage trafficking and ratification of relevant UNESCO Conventions on the topic in some cases much earlier than their eventual signing and acceptance/ratification dates.

Beginning with the 1970 UN Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, Table 16.1 shows the current status of GCC countries.

As can be seen from the table above, with the exception of the UAE and Bahrain who ratified the treaty in 2014 and 2018, respectively, all the other GCC countries ratified or accepted soon after independence, within the first decade. A key question that emerges from this is where the theory of wanting to protect cultural heritage as indicated by the early ratification dates by most GCC states and the actual practice of doing so through the enactment of patrimony laws intersect. To further understand this matter as well as the status of antiquities trafficking in the region, we need to examine laws and case studies that emerge directly from the region including prevailing attitudes to private collections and their legal status within individual states as well as the region as a whole.

Table 16.1 Country wise Acceptance/Ratification Data of GCC states with regard to the 1970 UN Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (UNESCO World Heritage Convention)

Country	Action	Date of Notification	Date of Effect
Bahrain	Ratification	N/A	07/03/2014
Kuwait	Acceptance	22/06/1972	22/09/1972
Oman	Acceptance	02/06/1978	02/09/1978
Qatar	Acceptance	20/04/1977	20/07/1977
Saudi Arabia	Acceptance	08/09/1976	08/12/1976
UAE	Ratification	09/10/2017	09/01/2018

16.2   Laws in the Gulf Pertaining to Trafficking of Antiquities

In examining the laws regarding the protection of cultural heritage and antiquities, and in particular those pertaining to looting and trafficking that have been passed/amended in each country, it is interesting to note how recently many of them have come into effect. Especially, when compared to the dates when that the UNESCO, 1970 Convention on the means of prohibiting the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property was ratified by those states. Listed below are the key laws found in each country concerning this issue and the dates that they were enacted.

Bahrain: (Woskinski & Renold, 2017)

–   1995: Decree Law No. 11 of 25 June 1995 Concerning the Protection of Antiquities. This replaced an older Bahrain Antiquities Law of 1970, which was amended by Decree Law No. 17 of 1985.
–   1989: Decree by the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities (BACA) on the listing of monuments (although many of the monuments no longer exist due to development and urban expansion).

Kuwait: (UNESCO, nd1)

–   1960: Law of Antiquities and amendments thereto.
–   1960: Princely Decree on the Antiquities Law No 11, 1960.
–   1994: Antiquities Law No. 9, 1994.
–   1994: Decree No 52 on National Library, 1994.
–   1999: Law on Intellectual (and artistic) Property No 64, 1999.

Oman: (UNESCO, nd2)

–   1976: Royal Decree No 14 of 1976—changing the name of the Ministry of Omani Heritage to the Ministry of National Heritage. (Oman) (Royal Decree No. 14 of 1976 Changing the Title of the "Ministry of Omani Heritage", 1976) (e.Oman).
–   1977: Decree of the Sultan N, 20/77 on the functions of the Ministry of National Heritage.
–   1977: Law on the censorship of works of artistic composition.
–   1977: Law on the protection of Manuscripts.
–   1980: Law on the protection of national cultural heritage (UNESCO).
–   1997: Decree of the Sultan n.65/1997 on the adoption of a law to control Art Traffic.
–   2005: Decree of the Sultan n.24/2005 on the functions and structure of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture.
–   2005: Decree of the Sultan on the adoption of the UNESCO Convention of Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage.
–   2005: Law on the control of Art Circulation.
–   2007: Decree of the Sultan n.37/2007 on the adoption of international conventions related to the protection of intellectual property.

– 2007: Decree on the adoption of the Cultural Diversity Convention.
– 2008: Decree of the Sultan modifying intellectual copyright.
– 2010: Ministerial Decision regarding the list of Museums and Heritage Institutions.
– 2010: Ministerial Decision regarding the organizational list of religious recital groups.

Qatar: (UNESCO, nd3)

– 1980: Law N. 2 Antiquities Law (Meezan).
– 2002: Law N. 7 on the protection of copyrights.
– 2010: Law N. 23 of 2010 Amending Certain Provisions of Law No. 2 of 1980 on Antiquities (al Meezan).

Saudi Arabia: (UNESCO, nd4)

– 1972: Antiquities Law No M 26 on 23/6/1392.
– 1972: Criteria on cooperation between Ministry of Culture, Archaeological Research Centers, Scientific Department of Antiquities and Museums regarding Legislation on Antiquities.
– 1972: Regulations concerning the export of antiquities.
– 1998: Law on the protection of sites and the protection of archaeological and cultural objects/artefacts.
– 2000: Statues of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities.
– 2014: Antiquities, Museums and Architectural Heritage Law.

United Arab Emirates: (UNESCO, nd5)

– 1970: Law N.8 on antiquities and excavations (Abu Dhabi).
– 1992: Antiquities Law (Sharjah).
– 2017: Federal Law No. 11 of 2017 On Antiquities (Government of UAE, 2017).

The majority of laws that were issued in the 1960s and 1970s followed along the UNESCO Conventions of 1954 and 1970. These conventions were the impetus to begin establishing cultural heritage preservation institutions in the region, particularly post-independence. This was a time when newly independent countries in a region with shared cultures and traditions were being founded, thereby necessitating the development of state-building tools. Additionally, with the majority of the GCC countries providing early acceptance of cultural heritage conventions (1954 and 1970), it provides an opportunity for these young nations to present themselves and issues of importance to them on an international stage. Particularly, as widely demonstrated in the region, in the case of intangible, and more recently tangible cultural heritage. Even with states like Bahrain and the UAE who are late ratifiers to the 1970 convention, it is clear that they had enacted patrimony laws for the protection of their cultural heritage quite early on as well.

Oman, followed by Saudi Arabia, present the greatest legal investment in ensuring that laws concerning the identification, listing, sale, acquisition and transport of cultural heritage are enacted. However, it is interesting to note that the prohibition of

sales of cultural heritage in these two states in addition to Bahrain is only restricted to local finds. This raises the question of what oversight mechanisms are in place to determine the origins and provenance of objects found on the market, as well as in private and public collections. What trafficking networks have been identified, and whether there are official registries of collectors and sellers which brings us to the issue of private collections in the Gulf states.

16.3   In the Gulf too, Private collections have become a Trend

The question of private collections of antiquities is one that has not been well documented in the Gulf states. Legally, as demonstrated from the laws below, private collections are permitted with the exception typically of local artefacts, being purchased/sold as part of private collections. Acquiring such private personal collections has become a prestigious pastime for those with the ability to do so in recent years too.

In countries such as Qatar, such private collections are highlighted on national television, *AlRayyan TV*, on a programme called *Muqtanayat* (Al Rayyan Satellite Channel) where in each episode a collector and their private collection of art, artefacts, archaeological specimens and objects of curiosity are presented to the public and celebrated. Some of these do relate to Qatar and its regional history (such as Mr. Alfardan's famed pearl collection), but they are also often associated with other areas of interest ranging from scientific instruments to palaeontology. There are also with only occasional instances of high-profile private collections of art and artefacts being donated to the state as with the collection of Sh. Hassan bin Mohammed bin Ali Al-Thani and his donation to the *Mathaf Museum* collection, jointly owned by Qatar Museums and Qatar Foundation. Whereas in Oman, there is more emphasis on the celebration of collections and collecting of items of national cultural importance and concern in heritage preservation. Earlier this year, a national newspaper highlighted the personal efforts a collector in the region of Al Buraimi (A 'Treasure Trove' of Antique Collections in Al Buraimi, 2021). As well as, several locals who preserve their cultural heritage in small exhibits in their private homes (YouTube, 2021). Inherited cultural artefacts are not usually acquired by the Omani state, again as with Qatar, only occasional instances of high-profile private collections of art and artefacts being donated to the state. While in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), we see the active encouragement of participation in not only the viewing, but also the acquisition of tangible and intangible cultural heritage as a commodity that would draw a connection to a glorified past (Alhamawi, 2021).

The data concerning how and where these private collections are acquired, expanded, and are maintained is sparse. This is particularly so in the case of information available on the collections of private citizens who often are not public figures, and government tracking of these collections is practically non-existent. The majority

of the laws and decrees do not discuss or seem to apply to private collections beyond the need of defining what is and is not legal to acquire, typically correlating to international law/UN conventions, as well as tangible national cultural heritage. This reveals a potentially fruitful avenue for future inquiry which opens up questions regarding what purchasing choices are made by regional private collectors (is it what is available on the market, does it relate to the acquisition of cultural capital, and do private collections have thematic or period interests that overlap, and do these collections—whether consciously or unconsciously—contain trafficked artefacts and artworks?). Addressing these questions through further investigation would reveal important information regarding attitudes towards trafficked artefacts, as well as the mechanisms, networks and routes that are adopted to engage in these activities, as well as what the reaction would be should an artefact be discovered (after acquisition) to be a trafficked object with all possible implications surrounding its purchase.

16.4   Trafficking of Cultural Material in the Gulf

While publicly available media concerning the trafficking of goods through the Gulf region is not widely reported, a few incidences that have been identified and highlighted are listed below:

- One hundred and ninety fake Iraqi antiquities illegally trafficked to the UK via Bahrain. They were stopped and seized by UK Border police force at Heathrow airport after they were detected there on the 1 July 2019. The shipment was destined for a single buyer/collector. This demonstrates a route through Gulf airports to Europe (Bailey, 2020).
- Buyers from the Gulf region have been noted to travel to Turkey with the specific intent of purchasing looted antiquities mainly from Syria and Iraq directly from traffickers who have smuggled these goods into the country (Howard et al., 2016).
- Yemeni looted artefacts sold at auction in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and then smuggled to the US. This illicit trafficking in looted Yemeni cultural materials has increased significantly since 2015 and is thought to be worth millions of US dollars (Jarus, 2019). Yemeni artefacts have also been smuggled into European markets through Saudi Arabia. Later, these items began resurfacing in private collections in Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE as well having been purchased from European dealers and auction houses (IADAA Newsletter August 2021, 2021).
- Looted Palmyrene statues were shipped to Switzerland from Qatar and UAE in 2010 and then discovered in Geneva in 2016 (McGivern, 2016).
- A Syrian looted mosaic that was discovered and confiscated in California (the US). It had been purchased from a well know Syrian artist based in KSA but frequently travelled to Turkey which is where the mosaic was acquired from (Felch, 2018).
- Hobby Lobby purchased and smuggled ancient Iraqi artefacts which were viewed for purchase in the UAE with vendors from the UAE and Israel (Newton, 2017).

- There is a high demand for Islamic art in the GCC states with Egypt as a major supplier (Wilson Center, 2016).
- Dubai has become a major hub for trafficking looted Libyan (and Yemeni) artefacts. Typically, the trafficked items are smuggled to Europe and US (The State of Illicit Trade and Looting of Libyan Antiquities 2011–2020, 2020). One example is a Libyan statue from Cyrene trafficked via a Dubai based art dealer, with forged documents. The statue was later recovered in the United Kingdom (Brodie, 2017; District Judge, 2015; Lee, 2015; Netcher, 2020).
- There is additional data to support the notion that Dubai has become a hub for the illegal trade in antiquities as shown in the 2020 RAND report: Trafficking and Disrupting the Illicit Antiquities Trade (Sargent et al., 2020).

16.5 The Rising Threat of Social Media in Looting and Trafficking in Stolen Antiquities

Since the Arab uprisings a new and more sinister threat to the looting and trafficking of antiquities comes from social media platforms. Social media has changed the way in which people interact with each other providing a means for the global dissemination of ideas and information. In the process, however, it has unwittingly expanded the communication abilities of transnational criminal networks the world over. The same features that allow us to share photos and videos about ourselves and communicate with others are also the ideal toolkit for traffickers to buy and sell illicit antiquities from some of the world's most conflict-ridden nations (Al-Azm & Paul, 2019).

Facebook is the most high-profile of the social media platforms that have been used as vehicles for the sale of illicit artefacts; others include WhatsApp, Telegram and Viber. Antiquities traffickers use these platforms to evade the authorities and circumvent regulations imposed by online auction and e-commerce sites like eBay, LiveAuctioneers and Etsy (Al-Azm & Paul, 2018).

Today, Facebook offers a veritable digital toolbox for traffickers to utilize including photo and video uploads, live streaming, disappearing "Stories", payment mechanisms and encrypted messaging. Facebook is the perfect platform for a one-stop-shop black market. This, in turn, has made Facebook the wild west of social media, providing opportunities for violent extremist organizations and criminal groups to operate in plain sight with little recourse. Facebook and other technology companies receive broad immunity from responsibility for any content posted to their platforms by third parties under the 1996 Communications Decency Act Section 230. Aside from the law, Facebook does have its own internal policies laid out in the company's Community Standards that prohibit the sale of black-market items like drugs and wildlife. Illicit cultural property is not listed in the banned trades under Facebook's Community Standards. As a result, today we can find detailed information about the antiquities trafficking that has remained active on the platform for years. This data provides a rare look at the inside of the trade (Al-Azm & Paul, 2018). It is worth noting that unlike other black-market trades, there are few statistics on the

trade in illicit antiquities. Likewise, little data is available for the legal global trade in antiquities. Art market industry reports typically loop datasets for antiquities sales in with broader art market data (TEFAF, 2020). For a trade that can straddle the legal and illegal realm, it is difficult to get a handle on the amount of cultural property that is currently leaving Middle East and North African (MENA) countries in high volumes.

The 2011 Arab Spring served as a catalyst for Facebook's growth across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The platform's role in turning local protests into a viral global phenomenon generated widespread popularity across the region for Facebook (INESC-ID). In the years since, terrorists and transnational criminals have capitalized on the reach of social media platforms like Facebook and the gaps in online security and content moderation. The result has led to sprawling digital black markets on Facebook trading everything from drugs and human remains to wildlife and antiquities (Alliance to Counter Crime Online (ACCO).

One may wonder, how prevalent are these buyers on Facebook groups and other social media platforms. How often are they from or based in the region? More importantly, why turn to these methods of collecting objects?

Facebook is currently the most widely used social media platform in the world. The company boasted 2.32 billion monthly active users at the end of 2018, more than one-third of the world's population (Facebook). From 2011 to 2017, its user base increased by over 1,200% in countries facing conflict like Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen.

The massive footprint and meteoric rise of the world's most popular social media outlet paired with an overall lack of content moderation have brought about new questions regarding Facebook's ability or willingness to police its platform (Al-Azm & Paul, 2018). Facebook's Community Standards were updated in April 2018 to develop a more refined set of guidelines. The update was timed with the appearance of the company's CEO Mark Zuckerberg before Congress as law makers addressed the litany of issues on the platform. The change included the addition of animals and wildlife to the "prohibited content" list in Facebook's Commerce Policies (Facebook). Illicit cultural property, however, did not make the prohibited content list this time (Facebook). The company's content moderation policies focus on activities and items that are forbidden by their Community Standards (Word Press). Without an explicit ban, Facebook isn't looking for the crime (Al-Azm & Paul, 2018).

The types of cultural property illegally traded on Facebook include looted artefacts from conflict zones, religious relics, historic pieces, and even artefacts in situ. Users in conflict zones like Yemen have even posted artefacts resting on their weapons in photos. As recently as March 2019, users in war torn Libya were posting images of a stolen church bell from Zintan. In Tunisia, even large artefacts like tombstones are posted while still in situ.

The reason why a criminal trade is able to take place on a public platform without any repercussions is because the law has not caught up with the technology. Facebook enjoys broad immunity under Section 230 of the Communications Decency

Act, which stipulates that technology companies cannot be held responsible for third-party content on their platforms (Cornell Law School). That means that when traffickers and even individuals affiliated with terrorist groups list stolen artefacts for sale on Facebook, there are no legal ramifications to compel Facebook to do anything about it.

Authorities in countries affected by the surge of the illicit Facebook trade in antiquities now have to deal with a black market on a digital platform in addition to on-the-ground smuggling networks. Egypt has led the charge in attempting to combat the illicit trade on Facebook. Since 2018, Egyptian authorities have arrested multiple individuals for selling or buying illicit antiquities on Facebook. In September 2018, Egyptian authorities arrested a man for setting up a Facebook Page to sell illicit Pharaonic artefacts (El-Deeb, 2018). Another case in February 2019 involved an attempt by an Egyptian man to smuggle mummy parts out of the country by concealing them in a set of speakers. The man was smuggling the parts for a buyer based in Belgium and the two had connected for the sale through Facebook (Maged, 2019).

In June 2020, Facebook finally announced a major policy change regarding historical artefacts. Under this new policy, Facebook banned and claimed that it would remove content that attempts to buy, sell, trade, donate, gift and or solicit historical/cultural artefacts. This change in policy represents an important shift in Facebook's position on the trade in cultural heritage and demonstrates that they now recognize that this illegal and harmful activity is being flagrantly conducted on their platform. The real issue, however, is how serious Facebook is in their desire to really stamp out this criminal activity and drive it off their platform. A policy is only as good as its enforcement and thus far there has been little enforcement on the curbing of trafficking and sale of looted antiquities on the platform (Al-Azm & Paul, 2020).

There are several campaigns that local Gulf governments and institutions are involved in to prevent the trafficking of antiquities across the region. One of the most prominent recent efforts was conducted by BACA (Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities) who have held a virtual forum in conjunction with the US State Department and the US-based organization entitled The Antiquities collection continuing their efforts with a Statement of Cooperation with the US government on this issue released in October 2021 (US Department of State, 2021). The second is the HIMAYA project run by Qatar National Library who also held a webinar in February 2021 as an awareness campaign as part of their efforts to counter illegal trafficking in the MENA region. (Qatar National Library). Kuwait in February 2019 also hosted a workshop on the prevention of illicit traffic king of cultural property in Kuwait (UNDP, 2019).

It is important to study, observe and understand trafficking in cultural heritage in the Gulf states. Here, certain key question that must be answered include: How is cultural heritage viewed in the region? How does the activity in the cultural heritage market play out here? How familiar are local groups with local cultural heritage? How is cultural heritage perceived? Is it in connection to identity, or commodified, etc. Do these perceptions impact behaviour? These questions require to be studied in-depth individually. Each of these questions has the potential to be individual research projects and provide direction for future research in this field.

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Amr Al-Azm was educated in the UK, at University College, London, and graduated with a doctoral degree in 1991. He was the founder and Director of the Scientific and Conservation Laboratories at the General Department of Antiquities and Museums (1999–2004) and taught at the University of Damascus until 2006. Currently, he is Professor of Middle East History and Anthropology at Shawnee State University in Ohio and Program Coordinator at the Gulf Studies Centre at Qatar University, where he teaches research methodology and Women and Gender in the Gulf. Furthermore, he is a keen follower and commentator on current events in Syria and the Middle East in general and has written articles in numerous journals, and major media outlets including guest editorials for the *New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, *Foreign Policy*, and *Foreign Affairs.* He is a founder and board member on The Day After project (TDA) and currently coordinates the Heritage Protection Initiative (TDA-HPI) for cultural heritage protection at the TDA. He is also a co-Director of the Antiquities Trafficking and Heritage Anthropology Research (ATHAR) Project