



حماية - *Himaya*¹

A practical project suggested by library professionals to support the efforts to counter the trafficking and illegal circulation of the documentary heritage² in the Middle East and North Africa³ region and neighboring countries⁴

Period: The first phase of the project will commence 2020 – 2022

Coordination: Qatar National Library (QNL) which is the IFLA PAC (Preservation and Conservation Center) for Arab Countries and the Middle East

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CONTEXT

For centuries, the Arab and Middle East region has been a melting pot of civilizations, which have produced many tangible artifacts with historical, spiritual and aesthetic values, not to mention the pride and respect of their owners and custodians.

For several years, the trafficking and smuggling of heritage items from libraries and archives has been rising. In the MENA and West and Central Africa region⁵, this phenomenon is greater due to the number suffering of conflict and insecurity (Chad, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Niger, Syria, Sudan and Yemen⁶). Moreover, trafficking may be linked to the criminal and terrorist groups, who use it as a means to increase their income and launder money.

The various international organizations in charge of countering the trafficking of artifacts have, *de facto*, strongly focused on the illegal circulation of archaeological and artistic items. Little has been done until now with respect to documentary heritage, which is even more at risk because it is less protected by national legislation and is easier to move illegally.

Moreover, there are specificities in the *modi operandi* for archives, books and manuscripts when compared with other types of cultural objects. These specificities should be addressed separately. In this context, Stephane Ipert, the Director of Qatar National Library's IFLA PAC Center for Arab

¹ In Arabic this means "protection", care», «safekeeping," "guardianship," or "defense."

² In his case it is mostly archival documents, books and manuscripts

³ Commonly called MENA region

⁴ Mostly the region WCA (West and Central Africa), but not only.

⁵ West and Central Africa are strongly concerned by the traffic of Islamic manuscripts and books as there are a lot of such collections in these regions.

⁶ Chad, Mali and Niger are not MENA countries but they should be involved in the project as they have large collections of Islamic manuscripts and they are in close relation with Maghreb countries

Countries and the Middle East presented these specific issues and challenges in February 2020 during the annual World Customs Organization (WCO) Enforcement Committee meeting.⁷

After this meeting and looking at the success of the conference organized in Doha in December 2019⁸, it has been decided, together with IFLA, to focus the activities of the QNL IFLA PAC center on the protection of the documentary heritage in regard to this specific challenge.

GOALS

Qatar National Library and the IFLA Preservation and Conservation (PAC) Center for Arab Countries and the Middle East will cooperate and partner with various organizations to counter the trafficking of manuscripts, books and archives in the MENA region.

An important goal of the project will also be to create strong engagement to protect the documentary heritage with broader international agencies and regional organizations to counter trafficking of items.

The method adopted is first to list all activities in which professionals of the libraries and archives could be involved (see below), to share it with all potential partners and then to decide on the detailed action plan for 2020-2022.⁹

The priority will be given to co-funded actions, considering all the expertise, work and technical assistance provided by any organization being part of the co-financing.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS to be contacted (this list is not exhaustive)

Partners already involved (participation foreseen in one or various actions; to be confirmed in the coming months)

- IFLA¹⁰
- World Customs Organization (WCO)¹¹
- INTERPOL,
- UNIDROIT,
- French Embassy in Qatar (acting as representative of various French organizations)

⁷ WCO Committee meeting that take stock of the variety of Customs enforcement matters, including that of illicit trafficking of cultural objects.

⁸ Conference on “Safeguarding the documentary heritage in Arab region and Middle East”; was organized by QNL and UNESCO in QNL’s premises in the framework of a project funded by QNL.

⁹ A steering committee including representative of the main partners will be established to manage the project and help its strategic orientation

¹⁰ International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. Several IFLA section must be involved: rare books, parliaments libraries (for their lobbying capacity), group of the national libraries, Preservation and Conservation section ...

¹¹ The event and course for customs officers from Arabic countries, which was planned in Qatar in April 2020, has been postponed due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Intergovernmental organizations

- UNESCO¹²; GCC¹³, ALECSO, ISESCO, ICCROM, Arab League, etc.

National active organizations

- National police departments in charge of countering the traffic of cultural items
- National customs departments

Ministries

- Ministries of culture
- Ministries of Justice
- Laws makers and laws enforcement services

Professional organizations and NGOs

- ICA¹⁴-(EGATTT), TIMA¹⁵, ILAB¹⁶, ICOM...

Librarians, archivists...

Auction houses, free ports, antique bookdealers

Various others expert

- lawyers experienced in this field, consultants, academics whose research covers this area etc.

PROPOSED DELIVERABLES (to be discussed with potential partners)

1. Professional meetings and cross-cooperation exchanges

1.1. Launch meeting for the project *Himayah* in Doha¹⁷

Main potential partners will be invited. The focus will be brainstorm sessions on the project outcomes.

Various meetings and seminars during the implementation of the project, in different places.

1.2. Presentation of the project *Himayah* in various international events:

- o IFLA WLIC conference (Dublin, August 2020)
- o ICA conference (Abu Dhabi, October 2020)
- o ILAB conference (Amsterdam, September 2020)

1.3. International seminar/conference on “artifact circulation and restitution”

This meeting will gather relevant academics, scholars and professionals in the field to debate ideas and practices (to take place in Doha in 2021).

¹² The documentary heritage was covered during the Fourth Session of the Subsidiary Committee of the Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property in 2016)

¹³ Gulf Cooperation Council

¹⁴ Archival items are part of this traffic. ICA is already aware about this problem: EGATTT has been created and ICA was pro-active in UNIDROIT diplomatic conference in 1995

¹⁵ The Islamic Manuscript Association

¹⁶ International League of Antiquarian Booksellers

¹⁷ 2 days. Date to be confirmed after the COVID-19 crisis.

2. Policy developments, capacity building and useful e-tools development

2.1. Study of existing laws and rules in the MENA region

We will conduct a survey of all the existing laws and specific rules in each MENA¹⁸ country in order to identify the weak points regarding the protection of documentary heritage¹⁹. From this survey, we will identify 10 key points to follow regularly and publish the results of the survey in several languages in a summary format. This will go to become a dashboard to better inform librarians worldwide, who need to be aware of these regulations in their acquisition processes.

2.2. Lobby ministries and lawmakers to improve laws and rules regarding documentary heritage protection and circulation

It is a matter of fact that books and manuscripts are less addressed by artifact protection laws (and therefore less protected). Libraries, and especially national libraries, in each country, can be good advocates for strengthening laws in this field. This include encouraging MENA and WCA countries to adhere to UNIDROIT convention 1995.²⁰

2.3. Website with all available tools for librarians

The website can include circulation rules for all countries—including countries outside MENA—for the import of items. This is important as the seizure of artifacts and alerting processes differ in each country, and customs and police have different scopes depending on the country. This website will then be updated regularly, in line with regulatory changes. Due diligence procedures (to be implemented at the time of new acquisitions) will be defined in detail (this could be using E-tools and/or printed guidelines for archivists and librarians).

2.4. Encouraging libraries and archives from the MENA region to update the INTERPOL database of stolen documentary heritage items

Action to push librarians and archivists to report to the police forces the thefts of their own stolen property, considering that the INTERPOL Stolen works of art database is considered by the Monitoring Team of the UNSC as a key tool to fight the illicit traffic of cultural property and that in the resolution 2347/2017 of the UNSC all nations are encouraged to use and contribute the INTERPOL Stolen works of art database with information related to the stolen cultural property²¹.

It will allow to fight the illicit traffic of cultural property and to tackle the funding of the terrorists and of the Organized Crime Groups involved in.

2.5. Support the existing tools (such as Interpol's and other agencies) to better target stolen documentary heritage items

2.6. History of trafficking artifacts cases from antiquity to present day

This will collect and list emblematic cases and provide specific bibliographies resources The goal of this deliverable is also to show how librarians can support other professionals on this matter. This tool can be used by many organizations to remain alert to these instances, as the tool will demonstrate the importance of this phenomenon for centuries.

¹⁸ Could be extended to WCA region

¹⁹ This includes the survey of seizure and the restitution process in each country

²⁰ UNIDROIT Convention, On Stolen Or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (Rome, 24 June 1995)

²¹ By sending this information to INTERPOL, it participates to locate and recover those.

3. Training (in-person and e-learning; English and Arabic), workshops and professional awareness

3.1. Guidelines and e-tools to help customs and police officer to identify manuscripts in Arabic scripts²²

These will provide basic templates and patterns to distinguish different types of manuscripts and books. It will be useful for staff at hot spots as they need simple and rapid tools as decision making aids.

3.2. Helping front-line and law enforcement organizations (such as WCO, INTERPOL, UNIDROIT...) with their online courses, for instance, by providing Arabic translation, and developing specific training packages for documentary heritage

3.3. E-learning and e-tutorial courses for librarians (which can also include training for trainers)

3.4. Presential courses across countries in the MENA region for librarians and archivists

It will be also the opportunity to cross meeting with customs and police teams which must be included in these projects from the beginning. It will help to build regional and local network of cooperation.

3.5. Preparing type-lists of documentary heritage items which are the more vulnerable for trafficking²³

These lists of vulnerable items will be reviewed in accordance to the audience and after clarifying their goals. The case of documentary heritage is very specific (and has less diversity than art work and archaeology) and the concept of red-lists may have to be adapted. Such work will be best done in cooperation with bookdealer associations and auction houses.

4. Sharing services in MENA region²⁴

4.1. Identification of the laboratories with forensic capacities, enhancing collaboration and access

For example, QNL has a high-level scientific laboratory which can assist customs, police and justice departments for most of their forensic needs (fake identifications, dating and others analysis).

4.2. Identification of the best experts in MENA region available to assist customs, police and justice departments in the task of documentary heritage identification

All these front-line departments fighting against cultural objects trafficking needs lists of experts and their immediate or emergency contact information. This is a prerequisite to help the fight against items in Arabic scripture which could be in, for example, in Arabic, Ottoman and Persian²⁵ (helping to identify originals and fakes, to date and give clues about potential origin...). These expert must not work for the market and a labelling process could even be foreseen.²⁶

²² But not only the items in Arabic script. In the MENA region there are also documents in Hebrew, in Syriac etc.

²³ Based on the example of "red-lists" developed by ICOM

²⁴ Could be also extended to WCA region,

²⁵ But not only the items in Arabic script. In the MENA region there are also documents in Hebrew, in Syriac etc.

²⁶ The authority to validate this label should be carefully chosen and a strict professional process must be applied

5. Targeted steps and actions to increase understanding of trafficking networks and how to deter them

5.1. Improve understanding of trafficking networks

We must learn more about trafficking networks, including “circulation paths,” intermediary storage countries, final destinations, and so on. This is necessary because channels are different in the case of documentary heritage in the MENA and WCA regions. A “white paper” could be produced as delivery.

5.2. Advocate for better cataloguing and description of document heritage

Without good catalogue descriptions, identifying and claiming items is impossible. Librarians and documentary heritage professionals must understand this challenge and the crucial aspect of this in the quest to counter illegal trafficking. The marking of accession numbers and items’ owner is part of this cataloguing process.

5.3. Studies about the thought process behind thefts and trafficking (specifically for books and archives)

These behavioral studies are important to understand better the “enemies”.

6. Intelligence and Strategic Information scanning system

6.1. Monitor sales catalogs, social media and create an alert system

Conduct systematic investigation on social media for sensitive items across relevant sales (booksellers’ catalogues, auction houses, online sales, etc.) and finding appropriate “visible spot actions” such as listing potentially stolen or illicitly exported items²⁷ This will expose the sale of sensitive items and deter the sale of these without proper due diligence.

This could be the opportunity of a highly developed system for social media monitoring to track items, to identify network of trafficking and sales offers, “unclean” sale offers. This is technically possible but it must be done in close cooperation police departments: the alert could be the task of the libraries and archives professionals, but the legal process’ and remedial actions are the task of the police.

6.2. Monitor web and social media about all information regarding illicit trafficking of Islamic manuscripts as well as legal cases and restitutions

All this information should be organized, commented and accessible on social media and on the project website.

7. Cross-cooperation with other organizations

7.1. Cooperation and consistent contact with other professional organizations in heritage fields (arts, archaeology, etc.)

It is necessary to exchange information and compare the networks and circulation channels.

7.2. Work with international law enforcement agencies to show how heritage trafficking is just one element of wider crimes

Using real stories of looted heritage and the crimes which can be related to it – showing that trafficking is a wider problem than one which deals with individual aspects (terrorism, human trafficking, arms, etc.).

²⁷ This could be done on a specific section of the project website (with links to “suspect” items on sale)

8. Outreach and communication campaign²⁸

8.1. Create awareness videos

These videos could be shown on screens in different customs control points, such as airports, train stations and ports.

8.2. Collaborate with partners and like-minded institutions (such as national libraries and museums) to create a global awareness communications campaign. This can include:

- The creation of a global coalition logo
- Collaterals (such as a calendar) illustrated with stolen and recovered documentary heritage items
- Media campaign including TV, radio and newspaper features and interviews describing the importance of the issue

8.3. Cooperate with TV and multimedia production agencies

To encourage them to produce creative content, TV documentary and series about the fight against trafficking of historical items. Usually the large public likes this kind of programs.

9. Contact us

For further information, especially if you are in one of the countries that are covered by our project please contact us:

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²⁸ Close cooperation with Unesco could be helpful because some regional or national Unesco offices have already action plans and projects in this field. It could be in MENA region but also worldwide because the documentary heritage from the MENA region is circulating everywhere there are buyers.