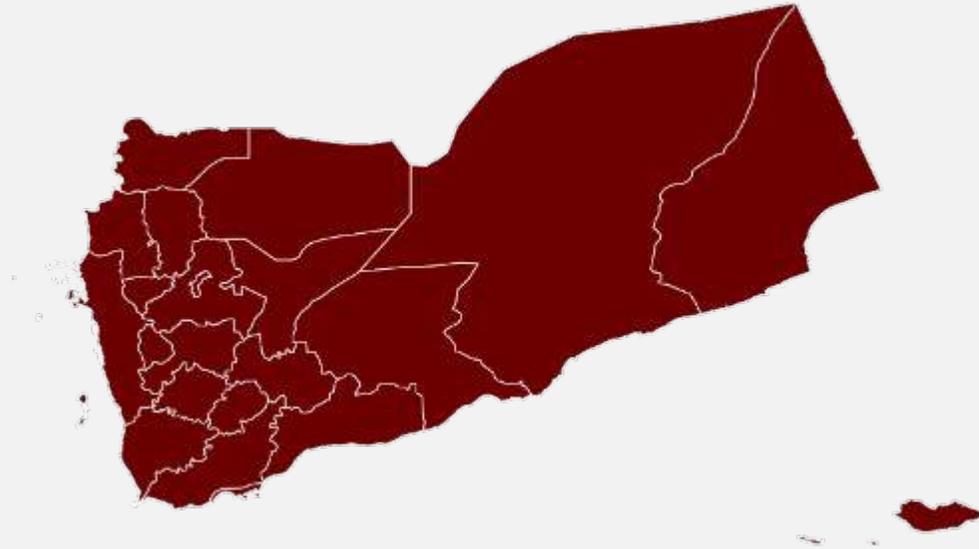


# CURRENT SITUATION OF YEMEN'S HERITAGE

## EFFORTS TO PREVENT LOSS AMID DEVASTATION



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23ème Rencontres Sabéennes „Out of Arabia: South Arabian long-distance trade in antiquity“

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Vienna, Austria

## Abstract:

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This paper presents the current situation of the Yemeni cultural heritage in the shadow of the destruction it is being subjected to by the human dangers (wars - armed conflicts) that have obliterated its features and threatened its survival as a human cultural heritage. Although preserving important natural, cultural and historic sites in wartime seems challenging, there are many things that concerned bodies and competent organizations can do to help. This paper highlights the exerted efforts and the provided grants for documenting and restoring many of the destroyed and damaged museums to prevent, mitigate and recover the loss of the Yemeni cultural heritage, which since March 2015 has been living an extremely dangerous situation.



# Introduction :

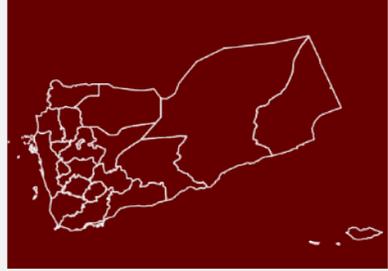
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The cultural heritage, on diversity of its kinds and forms, is a source of pride and glory of peoples with the values and meanings it conveys that reflect the deep-rootedness and authenticity; it is the expression of national identity as being a link between the past and present of the peoples. It is also seen as an essential pillar in the economy of many countries. It is one of the important resources of the tourism industry and the most important resources for the development of society, of which cultural heritage represents an integral part and has become a key driver of the national economy.

Archaeological evidences, rock paintings, architectural buildings and inscriptions are a living witness dating the greatness, splendor and antiquity of these successive civilizations, which in turn left a historical legacy that is today considered a part of the world heritage.

# Introduction :



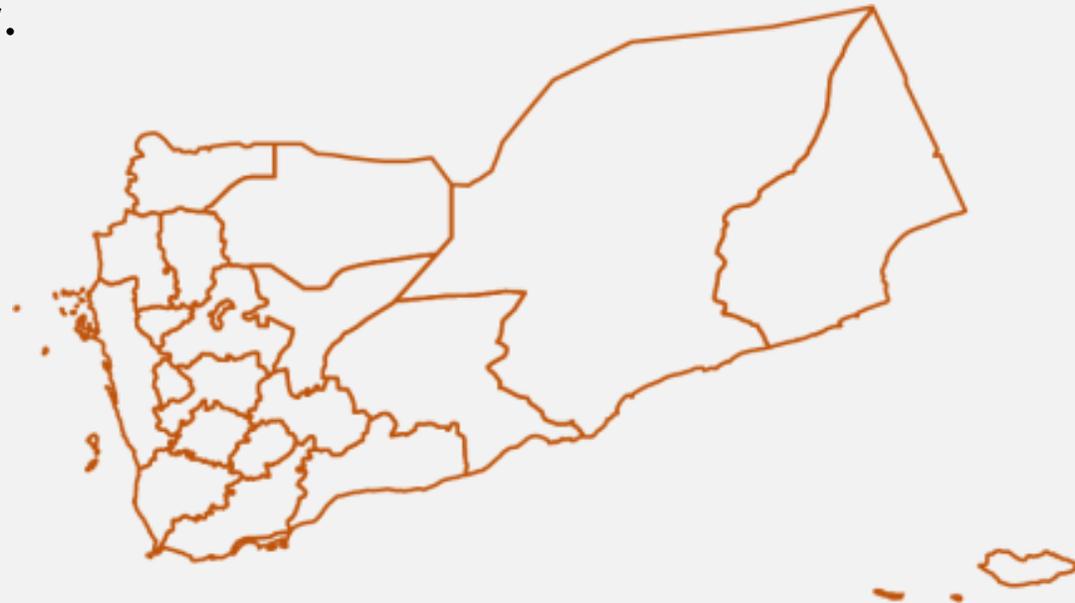
Yemen has four sites on UNESCO World Heritage List (Old City of Sana'a - Historic Town of Zabid - Old Walled City of Shibam - Socotra Archipelago), and ten other sites on the UNESCO Tentative List. The geographical and natural diversity of Yemen in the context of a colossal richness and remarkable diversity of heritage is considered the most prominent in the region, making it the focus of attention of researchers, historians and tourists.



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While the scent of the history and deep-rooted civilizations pervades the region, it has been suffering the scourge of wars that are very seriously threatening Yemen's cultural heritage.

The war on Yemen has, since four years, left its marks on all aspects of political, economic and cultural life. Where the historical standing of the archaeological evidences in a country that is the cradle of civilizations has not interceded to spare them the consequences of the war. The current situation of Yemeni heritage is almost the worst in history.



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During the war more than 101 archaeological sites and historical monuments were destroyed, according to preliminary statistics carried out by the General Organization of Antiquities and Museums (due to inability to make a final inventory as seriousness of access to some sites)



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66 museums, sites and monuments have been partly or totally destroyed by direct and indirect targeting of coalition air strikes.



# The Regional Museum of Dhamar

Air Strikes

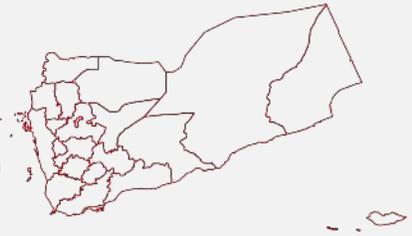


completely destroyed



# Old City of Saada

Air Strikes



listed on UNESCO World Heritage tentative List, includes hundreds of historic houses, monuments and archaeological sites

# Mosque of Al-Imam Al-Hadi in the Old City of Saada

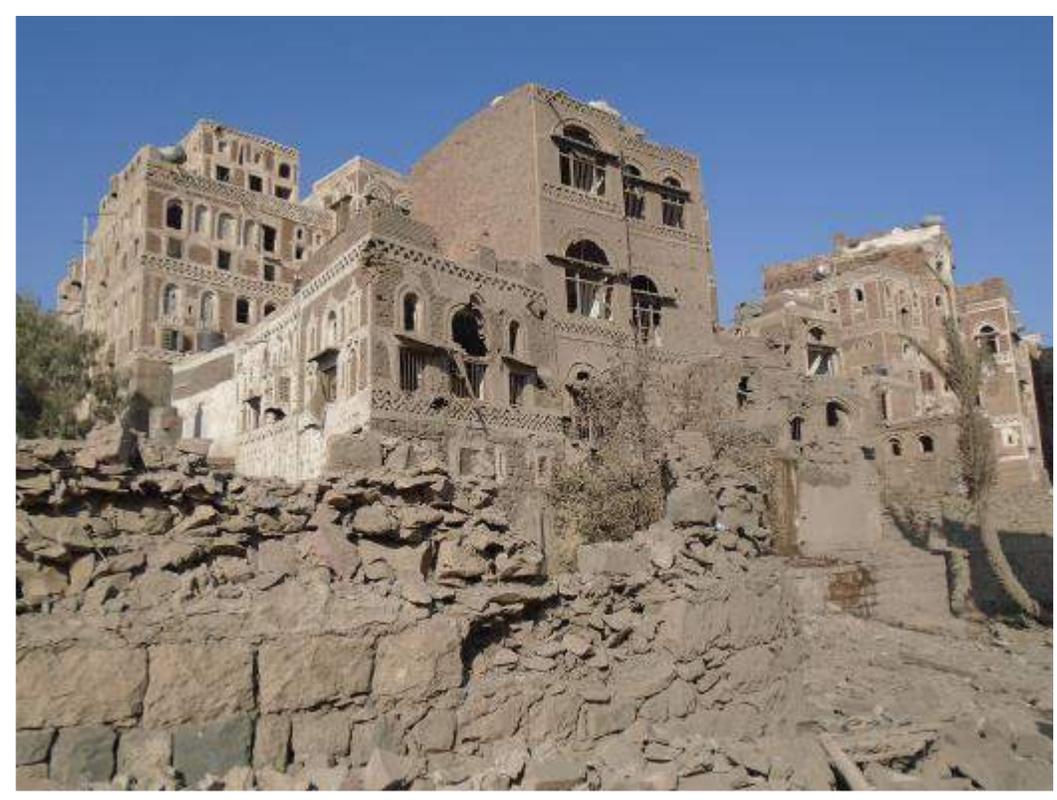
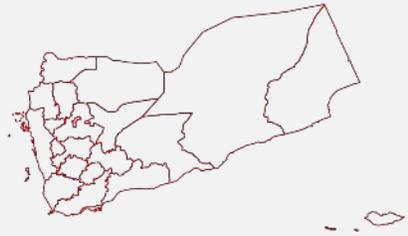
Air Strikes



raids were very near to mosque resulted in massive damage to the mosque building and as well to a lot of traditional houses

# Al-Fulhihi neighborhood in the Old City of Sana'a

Air Strikes



listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site

# Al-Qassimi neighborhood in the Old City of Sana'a

Air Strikes



listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site

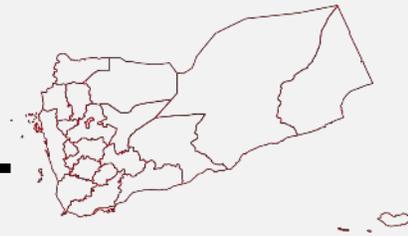
# Baraqish City

Air Strikes



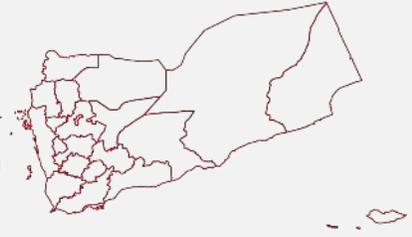
# Al-Shareef Citadel in Bajel – Hodeidah

Air Strikes



# The Ancient Great Dam of Marib

Air Strikes



(one of the greatest engineering buildings of the ancient world )

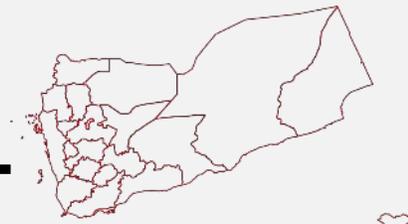
# Al-Qahera Castle - Taiz city

Air Strikes



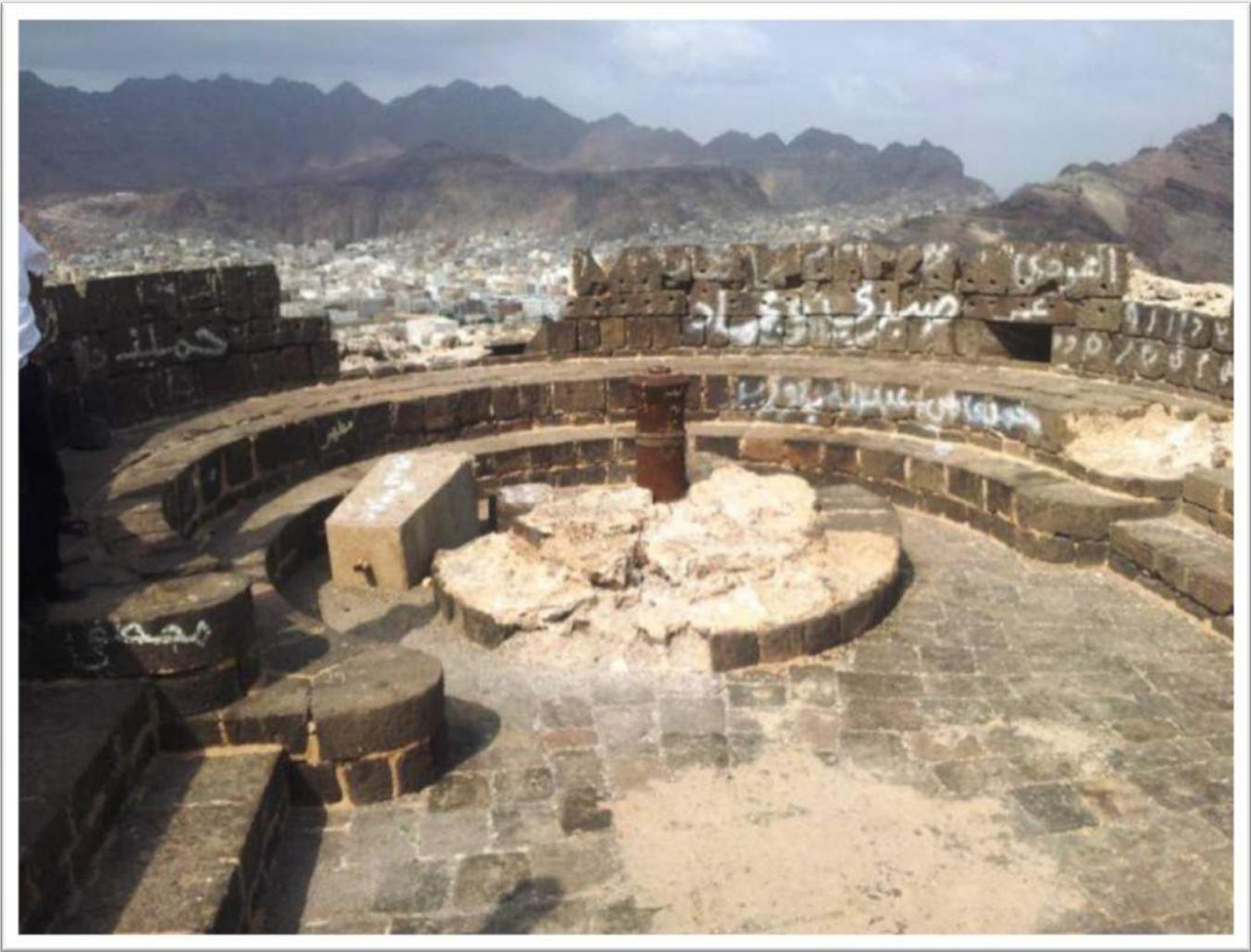
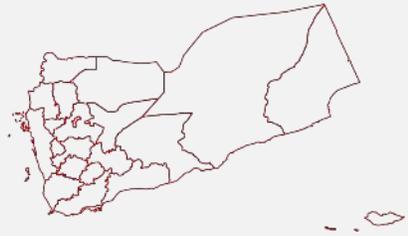
# Republican Palace in Sana'a

Air Strikes



# Sira Fortress - Aden

Air Strikes



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In addition, 35 religious monuments (shrine-dome-mausoleum) and museums that have been blown up by extremist terrorist groups (the so-called Ansar al-Sharia and al-Qaeda):



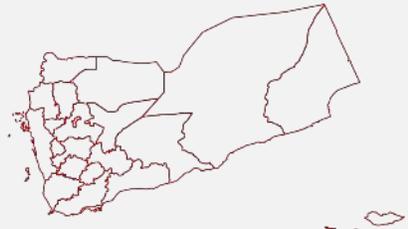
# Shrine of Al-Sayed Hassan - Dhale'

terrorist groups



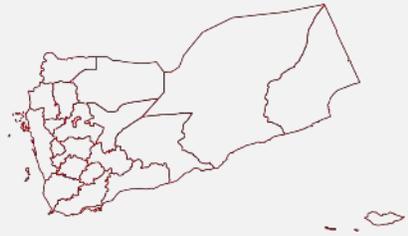
# Mosque of Al-Hussein - Aden

terrorist groups



## Zinjibar Museum - Abyan

terrorist groups



also, its entire contents had been pillaged

# Shrine of Al-Imam Al-Barasani - Al-Mukha

terrorist groups



# Shrin and Mosque of al-Imam Ahmed Alfaz in Al-Hudaydah

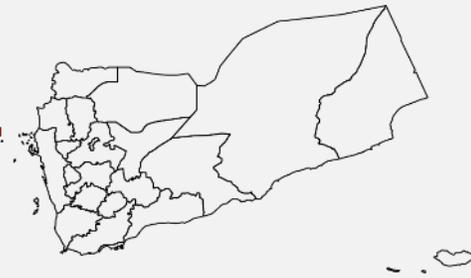
terrorist groups



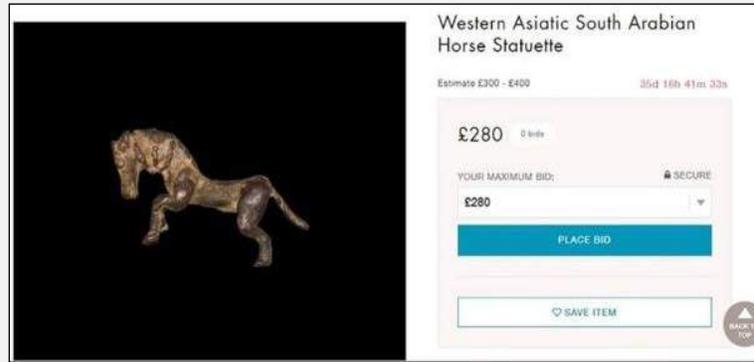
# Ismail Domes - Hadramawt

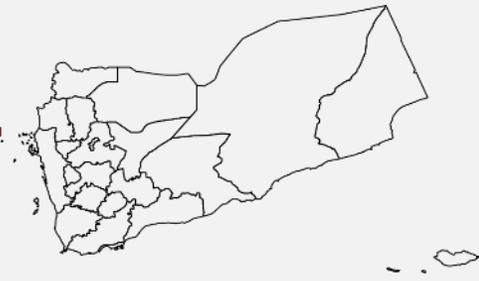
terrorist groups





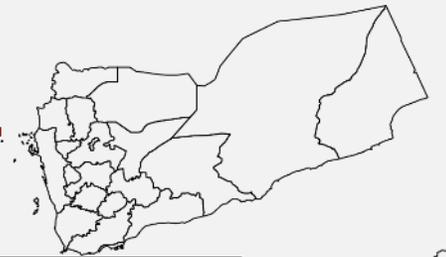
Yemen's cultural heritage has become vulnerable to looting, which has become more severe during the current war, where the illegal digging and vandalism have increased. The looting, theft, smuggling and illicit trafficking of cultural property has become a common practice that has firstly targeted the archaeological sites, resulted in displaying many of Yemeni artifacts in the international auctions.



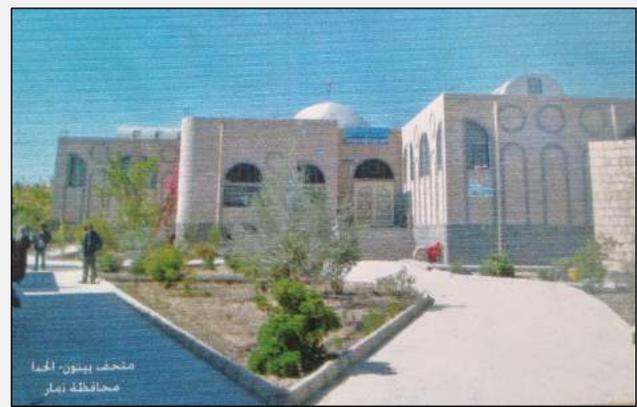


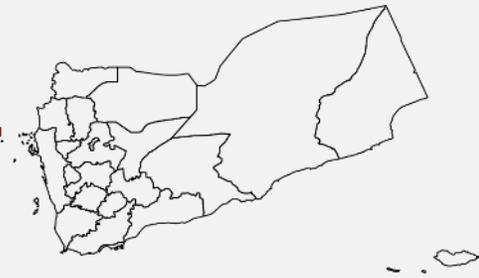
An attack on the cultural property of any people constitutes an attack on the heritage of all mankind. As stated in Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of 1954

**"the damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind."**



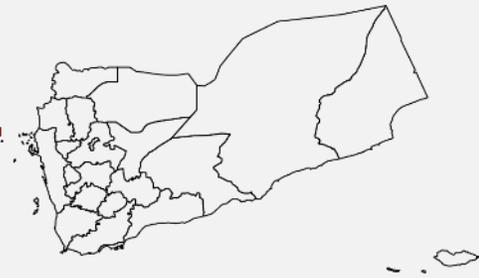
The culture, history, antiquities, traditions and lives of the people remain alive through museums that link the past to the present and which are considered a school for strengthening the identity and disseminating the archaeological and cultural awareness. What the Museums contain is also an important source and reference for many studies and researches.





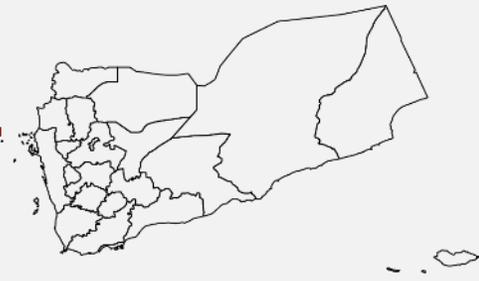
It should be noted that most museums in Yemen lack documentation and some documentation is incomplete, which makes their contents vulnerable to theft and loss. What the museums have been experiencing today from the direct bombing by air raids of coalition jets, resulting in irretrievable loss of over **12500** artifacts of the Yemeni civilization, found during decades of excavations and archaeological discoveries, were housed in **Dhamar Regional Museum**.





Given the circumstances that Yemen has been experiencing and for preserving contents of museums, we have closed them as precautionary measures and transfer their contents to safe stores, believing that the war will not last long, although the archaeological and historical objects are safe from looting, but there are other factors that may cause their damage or loss lie in the poor condition of storage places which make artifacts vulnerable to humidity, accumulation of dust, insects and rodents as well as the lack of conservation materials for some objects.

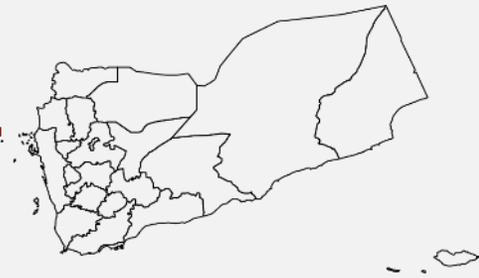




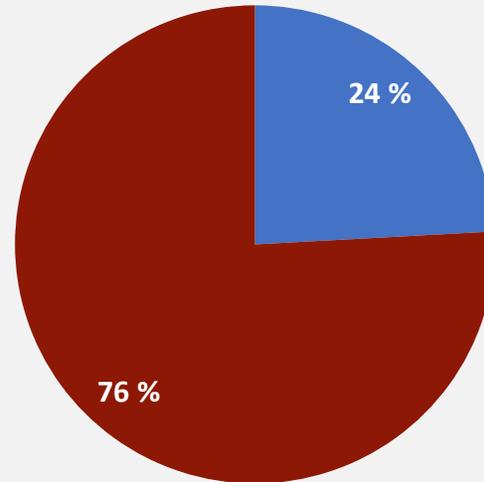
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Therefore, the alarm sounded for an inevitable disaster threatening the stock of human heritage. Hence, we have to focus on the importance of documentation, registration and storage management. In this regard, Dr. Margarete van Ess says, **“If you don't have the documentation about cultural heritage you can offer only memories. Having databases means you have a very strong tool to show what kind of cultural heritage there was.”**

Recognizing the vital role that museums play in documenting and transmitting the history and culture of society as they include the living memory of peoples and the immortal heritage of humanity. It was important to highlight and pay tribute to the exerted efforts and the provided grants for implementing the documentation and restoration works in a number of the destroyed and damaged museums to prevent, mitigate and recover the loss of Yemeni cultural heritage.



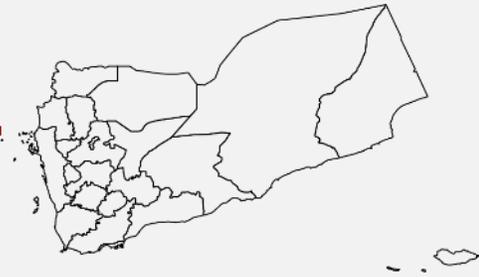
We thank Almighty for finding a quick response, interaction and support for implementing of several projects (refurbishment, restoration, documentation and sift through rubble and salvage what could be found) from associations and organizations ,concerned with protection and preservation of heritage, in seven out of the twenty-nine museums, affiliated to the General Organization of Antiquities and Museums which are as follows:



Percentage of museums in which projects have been implemented from the total number of museums affiliated to GOAM

# National Museum - Sana'a

Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany through the German Archaeological Institute for implementing

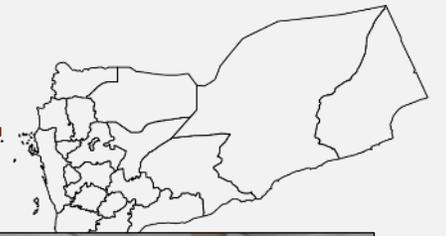


Grant from the **Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany** through the **German Archaeological Institute** for implementing the first phase of refurbishing 11,000 objects out of 140,000 at National Museum in Sana'a.



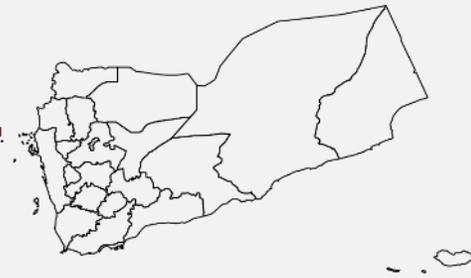
# National Museum - Sana'a

Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany through the German Archaeological Institute for implementing

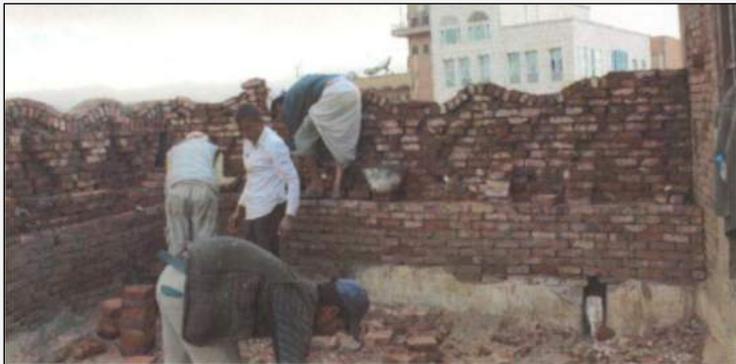


# National Museum - Sana'a

the European Union through the UNESCO GCC and Yemen Office

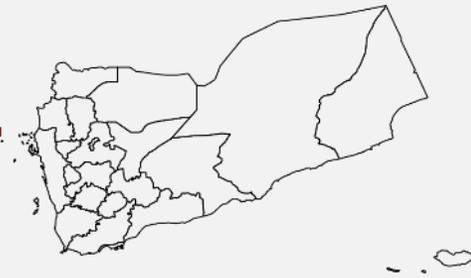


UNESCO GCC and Yemen Office has carried out the restoration works for parts of the roof of the National Museum building in Sana'a in a traditional manner (the same old building materials were used), which were severely damaged and became about to collapse by the air strikes hit the surroundings of the museum building, also implemented the project of inventory and assessment of damage in the historic old cities of Sana'a, Shibam, Zabid and archaeological sites and historic monuments in Aden funded by the European Union.



# Al-Mukalla Museum

UNESCO GCC and Yemen Office

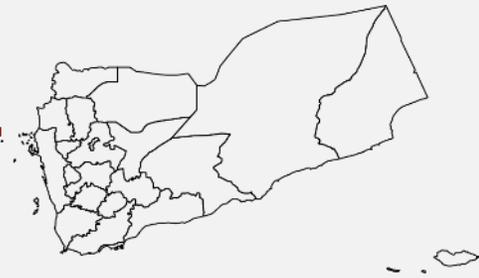


The documentation of the contents of the al-Mukalla Museum has been also completed funded by UNESCO GCC and Yemen Office.



# Dhamar Regional Museum

UNESCO GCC and Yemen Office

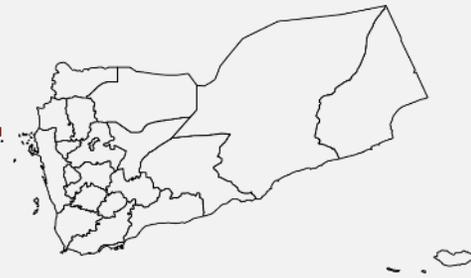


Removing rubbles of Dhamar Regional Museum, which has been directly targeted by the air strikes that led to its total destruction, and the loss of 12,500 artifacts, for salvaging the remains ,funded by the UNESCO GCC and Yemen Office, where found over 7000 artifacts, some of them are in very poor condition, and approximately 1000 out of them have been recorded and documented.



# Dhamar Regional Museum

Council of American Overseas Research Centers through the Kaplan Fund



Small grants from the Council of American Overseas Research Centers through the Kaplan Fund, for retrieving 72 artifacts buried under the ruins of Dhamar Regional Museum



# Dhafar Museum- Yarim

Council of American Overseas Research Centers through the Kaplan Fund

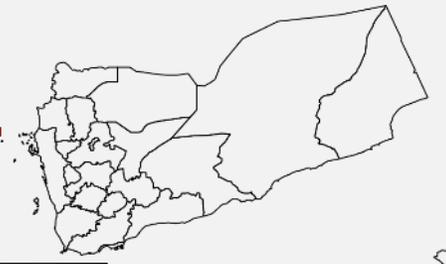


also documenting the museum collections, as first phases, in each of the following museums: Dhafar museum - Yarim



# Seiyun Museum - Hadhramout

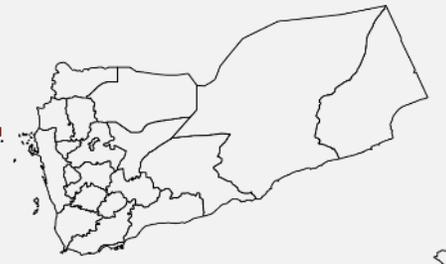
Council of American Overseas Research Centers through the Kaplan Fund



documenting the museum collections, as first phases

# Baynon Museum

Council of American Overseas Research Centers through the Kaplan Fund



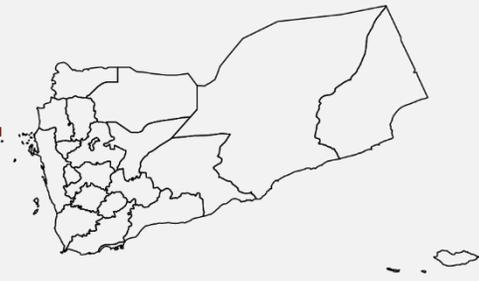
documenting the museum collections, as first phases



As well as support from the **Veneto Institute for Cultural Heritage** for lighting the **Ataq Museum** building (by installing solar panel system)







**However, these and other museums need urgent and ongoing support to ensure proper documentation of thousands of at-risk objects.**

Hoping that friends and lovers of Yemen will interact and encourage for further support for archeological and museum works and start thinking about future plans for inventorying, documenting and assessing the damages in scientific and technical methods. I also hope that dear colleagues who have loved, worked and studied the history of Yemen and its civilization should seek with governments of their countries to help for implementing these actions and work seriously in wider range on what might be done to prevent further destruction.

**Finally,**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Austrian Academy of Sciences for hosting, and organizing this important conference.

I would also like to express my deepest thanks and appreciation to UNESCO for its generous and continuous support, the Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Archaeological Institute in Sanaa, the Council of American Overseas Research Centers and the Veneto institute for Cultural Heritage for their endeavors and supports for the protection and preservation of Yemen's cultural heritage.

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