

**MUSEUMS IN QATAR: CREATING NARRATIVES OF
HISTORY, ECONOMICS AND CULTURAL CO-OPERATION**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the history of museums in Qatar to investigate a significant period of transformation - politically, economically and socially - and their role in the reordering of 'things'. I compare the way in which Qatari museums have been used during two different eras, from the 1970s to 1995 and from 1995 to the current day, to demonstrate how museums in Qatar have been politically driven and where they have been used to strengthen a national profile, locally, regionally and globally. A specific study of Qatar National Museum allows for an exploration of how Sheikh Khalifa's aims for the museums in the country changed the community's understanding of their everyday objects, when they were shown in a museum context as a part of a specific narrative of history and change.

The economic, social and political paradigm shifts that Qatar is witnessing currently have brought about recognition of the need for a wider and more important role for museums and their acquisitions. Alongside moves to modernise the country, there has begun to be an emphasis on the need to preserve Qatar's traditions and heritage and the desire to rebuild some sites and cities from Qatar's history. Throughout these projects, Qatari and Islamic heritage have been utilised in the politicians' vision and plans for globalisation and modernisation. The new museum culture in Qatar acts as a very powerful tool to generate narratives about the country as a nation; however, the opening of these new museums invites debate about why certain objects have been brought together and why specific narratives have been constructed around them.

I have completed this research as both a curator employed by the Museums Authority in Qatar since 1998, and as a doctoral student at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. This has created an interesting tension in my work. As an insider, I have had to engage with

the cultural basis of understanding demanded of a curator working in Qatar. However, as a research student, I have been required to question, analyse and critique Qatari museum practice. This is the first thesis to explore the history of museums in Qatar conducted by a Qatari employed by the Museums Authority and I have addressed the challenges of this position in my research.

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CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

On 22 November 2008, Qatar's Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) was opened with great ceremony. Prior to this event, Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) had drawn the public's attention to the museum by publicising the inauguration from October to November around the country, creating an atmosphere of a national event [Fig. 1].



Fig. 1. The Museum of Islamic Art's poster accompanied by the national flag emphasises the importance of the occasion.

The presence of the royal family, the Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa, his wife Sheikha Mozah, their children, heads of state, celebrities and the press emphasised the national importance of the event [Figs 2-3]. Sheikha Al-Mayassa, Chair of The Board of Trustees of Qatar Museums Authority, welcomed the country's formal guests with this statement: 'Welcome to Doha, the capital of a country that wishes to emphasise its position as an effective centre of cultural advancement'.¹ The richness of

¹ Ashraf Mumtaz, 'The Islamic Museum as a Platform for Dialogue Between Civilisations', *Al-Raya newspaper*, appendix of the Opening Event of the Museum of Islamic Art, Sunday, 23 November 2008, pp.1-8 (p. 5).

this statement acts as an effective introduction to my thesis, which considers the role of the museum as an agent of social change and development in Qatar.



Fig. 2. The Qatari Emir with invited heads of state, representatives of heads of state and members of the board of Qatar Museums Authority.



Fig. 3. Sheikha Mozah with the wives of some of the invited heads of state.

This publicity aimed to whet the public's appetite for the new Museum of Islamic Art.² The Museums Authority, however, announced that the first eight days of the opening would be restricted to the country's private

² 'Museum of Islamic Art's Inauguration', Qatar TV, 22 November 2008. CD

guests. The general public was admitted in December 2008.³ At this point, Qatar Museums Authority announced:

The largest dedicated Islamic art museum in the world resounded with the footsteps of fifteen hundred visitors on its 1 December opening day. Visitors of all ages enjoyed the museum's permanent collection featuring more than eight hundred pieces of priceless Islamic art and the first temporary exhibition, *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures* – completely free of charge. On Friday 12 December alone the museum received over 6,500 visitors in just six hours.⁴

The opening was deemed 'a huge success' by Abdulla Al-Najjar, the Chief Executive Officer of Qatar Museums Authority.⁵ He added further:

Naturally we are delighted with such a large attendance. We are certain the high attendance for the Museum of Islamic Art bodes well for the success of Qatar's cultural future, and that it is well on the way to becoming the most popular art museum in the region.⁶

Fifteen days after the official opening on 15 December 2008, my own ticket showed that I was visitor number 30969. This represents a record number of visitors in the history of museums in Qatar [Figs 4-5].



Fig. 4. The general public visiting the Museum of Islamic Art on 2 December 2008.

³ 'Museum of Islamic Art', *Al-Raya newspaper*, 23 November 2008.

⁴ 'News and Events', *Electronic Archive of Qatar Museums Authority* <http://www.qma.com.qa/eng/index.php/qma/news_item/63> [accessed 6 March 2009].

⁵ 'News and Events', *Electronic Archive of Qatar Museums Authority*.

⁶ 'News and Events', *Electronic Archive of Qatar Museums Authority*.



Fig. 5. A group of invited visitors accompanied by a cultural guide at the Museum of Islamic Art in August 2008.

The development of the MIA is just one part of an on-going museum strategy in Qatar. The next museum to be opened will be the Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art (AMOMA) and Qatar National Museum (QNM). The QNM intends to adopt the same standards and policies as the MIA, which became an icon for modern Doha very soon after its inauguration. In her speech, Sheikha Al-Mayassa emphasised that Qatar would continue its strategy of building, establishing and renovating various cultural organisations, and that the MIA was only the beginning of a major phase of museum building that would be realised in the future under the auspices of Qatar Museums Authority. With the launch of the MIA, and plans for the launch of future museums, Qatar is poised to compete with the other Gulf countries currently engaged in building a cultural strategy.

The start of the museum boom in Qatar reflects Michel Foucault's concept of the 'fundamental codes of a culture'.⁷ Foucault proposes that these codes, which control and dictate the language, values, beliefs, concepts, traditions and customs of a nation from the first day of its

⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 20.

establishment, can be reordered via their interpretation in the museum. These philosophical interpretations use narratives to explain why these orders in the museum exist and are established, what role they play, what principle and contextual organisations account for them and what they are meant to deliver.⁸ It is within such narratives that the codes of a national culture can be manipulated to suggest a new order. Institutionalising this culture, therefore, requires a separation from the original cultural codes.⁹ However, such reordering carries the inherent risk that the new cultural codes are perhaps neither the only nor the best possible interpretation. Regarding the ordering and reordering of things, Michel Foucault states:

Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as the inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there waiting in silence for the moment of its expression.¹⁰

Reordering cultural codes in the museum risks their being superimposed upon other kinds of concepts, values and grids that could potentially neutralise them. Therefore, this superimposition could mean that these codes are both revealed and excluded.¹¹ Despite such risk, the new museum boom in Qatar aims to reorder codes of belief, perception, heritage, tradition and practice. As such, it is pertinent at this point in time to explore and reveal the impact of such a significant programme of national cultural change. This thesis is the first study to trace the history of museums in Qatar and investigate their changing political, economic and social codes and their role in the reordering of 'things'.

It is essential to ask why Qatar is putting the wealth generated in the last forty years from its oil and natural gas reserves into the creation of a museum culture that aims to reorder its cultural codes. Therefore, I am

⁸ Foucault, pp. 20-24.

⁹ Foucault, pp. 20-24.

¹⁰ Foucault, p. 20.

¹¹ Foucault, p. 20.

suggesting within my investigation the need to consider what lies between the use of the ordering codes and the order itself. I will attempt to show why and in what ways the Qatari government has manifested the existence of an 'order', how far that order has the ability to impose changes on society, and how the order has been applied to link space and time and represent values that create a certain knowledge, philosophy and narrative. Such an analysis aims to discover on what basis and within what limits the construction of knowledge, narrative and theory through the construction of a heritage became possible. I highlight which and whose history has been envisaged and which experiences have been reflected, which ideas have been used, and which rational values have been referred to in order to create a new heritage model. This reveals that Qatari museum culture is paradoxical in its claim to preserve culture and heritage. Rather than preserving and presenting, it is offering an opportunity for the development and rise of diverse forms of a new heritage and culture. It is when we recognise that these spaces are created for new forms of culture and heritage that the extent of the risk is revealed.

The new museum culture in Qatar acts as a very powerful tool to generate narratives about the country as a nation; however, the opening of these new museums invites debate about why certain objects have been together and specific narratives constructed around them. Without doubt, the language imposed upon the objects in the museums can be manipulated to reorder the objects' meaning. Through my experience studying at the University of Leeds, I began to question this new system and recognise that my country has become complicated in its aim to be modern and globally open. Consequently, life has become much more complicated for all Qataris, including myself, and, as such, many no longer feel that their familiar local culture will be protected. As a Qatari, I believe that what the government is doing is brave, as it is constructing a new interpretation of heritage that might instigate direct criticism of the government. As a key part of this thesis, I will trace instabilities in the

hereditary monarchy during my study period in order to demonstrate why redefining heritage and culture in Qatar could carry potential risk. It should be noted that questioning political decisions has no precedent in Qatar, which is a country ruled by an absolute monarchy.

At the heart of this study is the paradox of my own position as both an insider, as a curator employed by the Museums Authority in Qatar since 1998, and an outsider, as a research student at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. This has created tension in my study journey, placing me between subjectivity and objectivity. As an insider, I have had to engage with the cultural basis of understanding demanded of a curator working in Qatar and its curatorial narrative. However, as a research student, I have been required to question, analyse and critique these paradoxes, how these narratives are made and how they are meant to function. It became clear to me, therefore, that to recognise my own personal narrative within the wider narrative of museums in Qatar, I had to ask a range of questions. What has been the story of collecting in Qatar since the 1970s? How have these narratives been imagined and envisaged as functioning ideologically and historically? How have people aimed to use objects within these narratives to tell stories? And why do people want to create such a narrative?

My ambition throughout this study has been to explore the narratives of collecting in Qatar since the 1970s and to understand how these are driving and changing the narratives of new museums in the country since the 1970s, when the British protectorate ended. Interestingly, the first official museum in Qatar was instigated by an Emiri decree to create a state collection. The Qatari ruler at that time, Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad Al-Thani, commissioned a committee of men of Qatari nationality to search for objects that represented *their* heritage. This was a deliberate construction of Qatari history, culture and heritage through collecting that aimed to construct and document a Qatari historical archive. However, this involved the political use of the country's history and heritage to

promote a certain narrative of nationhood. This is why in Chapter Two I examine the fetishistic qualities of this initial collection. I use the term 'fetishised' to propose that the Qatari committee, during their research journey, deliberately chose objects that fitted a pre-determined narrative. Thus, their search was for objects that were representative of their perception of the power of Qatari history and culture. This ideological dimension demonstrated clearly that the committee's choice of objects was by no means random. Such a process demanded that the collectors subverted previous historical interpretations in order to develop a new ideological narrative.¹² This was important for a ruler such as Sheikh Khalifa at a time of significant self-reflection about the identity of the Qatari people. On this basis I will explore what the country hoped to achieve through this 'new' mood of nostalgia. Why would the country spend millions of pounds buying collections and creating all these museum spaces? What were the government's aims?

Literature Review and Methodology

This study is unique in several ways. Firstly, no one has written critically and analytically about the history of museums in Qatar, the political philosophy of Qatar National Museum, or the recent museum developments in the country. Previous published studies include; *Qatar National Museum in Brief* by Darwish Al-Far, *The Treasures of Qatar National Museum* by Najla Al-Ezi, and *Archaeological Sites-Architectural Heritage-Museums in Qatar* by Mohammed Jassim Al-Khulaifi. However, these texts focus mainly on a description of the museum's collections and presentation, omitting any analysis that uses museological philosophy. For example, Darwish Al-Far, who was a museum professional in Egypt before becoming director of Qatar National Museum in 1976, describes the museum's departments and their collections, yet he does not analyse what these objects, as cultural artefacts, mean for Qatar's different communities and their cultural

¹² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 118-133.

histories.¹³ Likewise Najla Al-Ezi wrote about the collection in a way that describes the given names of the objects and their use in the past but she does not analyse the collection critically.¹⁴ The Qatari archaeologist Mohammed Jassim Al-Khulaifi listed the museums in Qatar by name, content, location and site,¹⁵ and as an architectural expert, also published books about the Old Emiri Palace, the original site for Qatar National Museum. However, he only examined the aesthetics of the palace and its previous function, plus the materials used in its restoration work. He did not mention the political value and meaning of the palace nor explain why it was chosen as the site for the first (and only) national museum in Qatar. In contrast, my study, critically considers the reasons why the site of the Old Emiri Palace was politically and culturally significant (see Chapter Two). As part of this research, I interviewed several members of the Museum's original collection committee who were involved in establishing the QNM. Unfortunately, the history of this committee is not yet documented and is known only through oral reminiscence. This thesis provides me with the opportunity to document some of this rare information for the first time.

To answer the questions I posed above, studies by Mieke Bal, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have been very important for my work.¹⁶ It is the combination of these theoretical studies at the University of Leeds with my own experience as a member of Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) and the opportunity to create a new archive of unpublished primary material that distinguishes this study. I

¹³ Darwish Mustafa Al-Far, *Qatar National Museum in Brief* (Doha: Science Institution, 1979).

¹⁴ Najla Al-Ezi, *The Treasures of Qatar National Museum: Qatar National Museum*, 1 (Doha: Ministry of Information, 1979).

¹⁵ Mohammad Jassim Al-Khulaifi, *Architecture of The Old Palace: Qatar National Museum* (Doha: The National Council for Culture, Art and Heritage, 2003).

¹⁶ Mieke Bal, 'Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting', in *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*, ed. by Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago (King's Lynn: Biddles Ltd, 2003), pp. 84-102; Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981); Foucault (1994); Spivak (1988); and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *History and Theory*, 24:3 (October 1985), 247-272.

am both analysing and am part of the culture that I am analysing. I was made a chief curator of Qatar National Museum in 1999 and have been involved in both developing and interpreting the displays within the museum. As the museum was closed for redevelopment, I was offered a sabbatical to study abroad. Despite the tension created by my position as both insider and outsider, this interplay has benefited me as, through my connections and networks in Qatar, it has given me privileged access to members of the original National Collection Committee, such as Yousef Jassim Darwish and Jassim Zani. In addition, I have documented for the first time the comments of important figures in Qatari museum history and culture who have had key roles in its interpretation policy, such as Dr. Darwish Al-Far, Khalid Al-Jaber, Mohammed Jassim Al-Khulaifi, Abdullah Al-Najjar, and Yousef Ahmed who was a pivotal figure in the development of the private museums of Sheikh Hassan Bin Mohammed Al-Thani. These men were a very important resource for my study as they offered valuable material about the early museum history but also the current museum culture. However, because most of them still have roles within that culture, one needs to be aware of their subjectivity and limits on the amount of information they were willing or able to give me. This created a number of obstacles for me. Furthermore, the nature of my interviewees, who brought their own experiences and readings of the situations, demanded that my interview technique be fluid and responsive. I also need to acknowledge the influence of my own interpretation of what they said to me, which I translated both literally and through my own experiences as a member of curatorial staff.

While many Western authors have written extensively and influentially about collecting and interpreting as a political and social act,¹⁷ my research is original because it has been conducted by a Qatari about Qatar. As such, this study has demanded that I combine my understanding

¹⁷ *Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World*, ed. by Sonja Mejcher-Atassi and John Pedro Schwartz (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012); *Reimagining Museums: Practice in the Arabian Peninsula*, ed. by Pamela Erskine-Loftus (Massachusetts: MuseumsEtc, 2012).

of the museological analysis of the narrative of collecting with my knowledge of the Qatar museum system. What has been happening within museum culture in Qatar since the 1970s can be read as the construction of a narrative; that is precisely why Mieke Bal's study of the 'narrative perspective on collecting' has been very useful and influential on my study.¹⁸ Bal argues that collecting is a narrative in itself. Defining collecting as a narrative allows her to demonstrate how objects carry multiple meanings and multiple interpretations. Thus, collectors can manipulate the meaning and narrative around objects to construct a certain story and/or philosophy. Through her study, Bal demonstrates how narrative functions ideologically, socially and politically and how this can match the target and purposes of the collectors. Therefore, objects are fetishised according to the possible meanings they can provide for narrators/collectors. Bal argues that the relationship between the collector and his/her narrative can be called 'focalisation' and, by recognising the existence of a 'focalisor' we can identify the subjective presence in narratives.¹⁹ This focalisor recognises the capacity of objects to carry many possible readings and interpretations. Thus, the readings and interpretations proposed by the narrators/collectors can generate tension, as the example of Qatar demonstrates.

Such an analysis reveals that there are a number of problems with what is happening between Qatar and its 'heritage'. Firstly, there was an undocumented and unarchived cultural history that needed to be recovered and the Qatari collectors literally had to go back and try to find it, be that orally or physically. Secondly, this was predicated on a specific moment in time when Qatar entered a point of reassessment about its position nationally and globally. Recovering Qatari history, interpreting it and studying it, helped the emergence of a new form of heritage in which the museum was intended to play a vital role, but it was not recognised at the time that there was a danger of damaging and distorting the very

¹⁸ Bal, pp. 84-102.

¹⁹ Bal, p. 98.

culture that the collectors were trying to preserve, especially when one considers the impact of the rhetoric of globalisation and modernity within the reconstruction of that heritage.

What we have in Qatar now is recreation, hybridity, imagination, contradiction and tension. Thus, when I refer to history, culture and heritage in Qatar, I do not mean that there is one, specific, intact history or heritage. Rather, nostalgia and interpretation has resulted in multiple histories and heritages that continue to develop and change the nation. For instance, the 'heritage' and 'culture' introduced through the reordering and reinterpretation of museum objects and collections (the subject of Chapters Two and Five), the creation and recreation of architecture (Chapter Four) have all involved narratives and simulacra that introduce new thinking and ideas. This is why Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, Spivak's *In Other Worlds* and Foucault's *The Order of Things* have helped me highlight the paradoxes of the heritage narrative.

It is useful to explore how the Qatari culture narrative in the 1970s differs from the culture narrative in the 1990s. One of my wider goals has been to put the notion of 'Qatari culture' into a wider context. However, this has allowed me to recognise the existence of certain concepts that have no origin in heritage. In Qatar today, there is a notion that what we are looking at and experiencing is genuine 'Qatari heritage', but what we are actually experiencing is a simulacrum, an interpretation and/or a reordering of Islamic history and culture. It is important to explore how and why these simulacra of Qatari and Islamic heritage were constructed. One needs to be very careful in thinking and rethinking our heritage, culture and history and one needs to be aware of ourselves within that rethinking.

To construct my own narrative, I have had to be very aware of the hybridity and tension derived from my role as both curator/research student when I came to analyse cultural heritage in Qatar. I constructed

my narrative by positioning myself within that narrative as a focalisor. As a focalisor, I became interested in reading between the lines; therefore, I had to navigate my own subjectivities in order to develop my analytical voice. While constructing my and my country's narrative, I wanted to know exactly who controlled this narrative and what made the Qatari narrative of heritage so important for its creators and so specific as a case study. These questions became important for me as a focalisor to understand the use of various terminologies in Qatar today, such as globalisation, modernisation, and democracy.

I began to wonder how far a Qatari understanding of these terminologies stretched beyond their stereotypes. It was necessary to understand how terms such as 'globalisation' and 'modernisation', which are capable of carrying negative narratives, have been utilised for positive effect in Qatar. It is evident that globalisation has often been viewed as involving domination, a controlling and enforcing power upon weaker countries.²⁰ Thus, globalisation is mostly associated with terminologies such as 'Westernisation' and 'colonisation', a point that I will discuss further in Chapter Three. However, globalisation within the Qatari narrative has been extended to mean being a universally recognised, well known and effective participant in the world's events in a positive way. Likewise, within the Qatari narrative, modernisation means developing various aspects of the country by adopting new creations, ideas and technologies. Although globalisation and modernisation do not necessarily go together, in Qatar they go hand in hand.

In addition to its unique interpretation of globalisation, democracy in Qatar comes with its own definition and narrative; it does not mean democracy as it is understood in Western culture. I will explore Qatari democracy with its unique narrative and paradoxes further in Chapter Three. Investigating what these terminologies mean within the Qatari

²⁰ E. Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University, 1991), pp. 118-133.

narrative has allowed me to uncover various paradoxes. For example, in 2005 the establishment of Qatar Museums Authority was described as an independent authority whereas, in fact, this organisation was put under layers of powerful control, including the patronage of the Emir himself and his daughter becoming the head of the QMA. The result was, and is, a highly controlled and structured narrative of Qatari cultural heritage as the royal family, which is very powerful, dictates what and which narratives should be told, presented and interpreted. Looking at these specific terminologies within the Qatari narrative, as a focaliser, I became very aware of how they have played strong and effective roles in shaping Qatari heritage. Therefore, in order to make sense of the collecting attitude and the construction and reconstruction of Qatari heritage, I used the notion of narrative. Like Bal, I found the notion very helpful in discovering a logic and reason for collecting in Qatar. Applying a traditional structure to the narrative of my case study as Bal does – that is, a ‘beginning’, a ‘middle’, and an ‘end’ – allowed me to illuminate the reasons for, process of and approach to collecting in Qatar. Accordingly, I found that the integration of globalisation, modernisation and democracy into the Qatari narrative made the motivations behind collecting and reconstructing our heritage a changeable one. For example, collecting a narrative and creating ‘heritage’ in the 1970s differed at the beginning, middle and end from those of the 1990s. These differences made me aware that, even if a collecting narrative is completed, its perfection is impossible.²¹ Instead it opens a path for the beginning of a new collecting narrative with its own specific hopes, ideology, aims, order and targets. Thus, the end of one collecting narrative is in reality the beginning of another. As Bal suggests, a concentration on subjectively utilising and investing endless meanings in a range of objects could be the result of an absence of a desired past or history. For me, this fact raised an essential question: How far could we then consider the ordering of the objects and reconstruction of heritage in Qatar as representative of historical facts?

²¹ Bal, pp. 84-102.

This reminded me of the statement by E.H. Carr: 'In the first place, the facts of history never come to us 'pure', since they do not and cannot exist in a pure form: they are always reflected through the mind of the recorder'.²²

Obviously, interpretations of heritage and objects involve the personal and collective point of view of politicians and curators, which may influence the readings of these objects. Carr compares the influence of the author, in our case the curators, on the reader to fishing, where the author picks up the information he wants to present from various resources he might come across. As such, he states that 'no document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought about what he thought had happened'.²³ The question of historical facts may create a tension relationship between what the curators present, me as a focalisor, and the audiences as subjective readers. This is especially so if we analyse why objects that were collected and ordered in the 1970s are now being reordered and more objects collected, as this highlights that there is a renewed desire for the same objects to be presented as part of a different narrative.

This desire to reorder and enhance the collections likewise contributed to the shaping of the Qatari collecting narrative of the 1990s.²⁴ Therefore, to complete the structure of my own narrative, I define those politicians and curators who had strongly influenced Qatari heritage during the 1970s and 1990s as 'narrators'. I call them narrators and my work a narrative because, like Bal, I am trying to find a definition that opens up multiple understandings of Qatari heritage. What is happening in Qatar today is not just the construction of a museum culture or a heritage; multiple ideas, objects, powers and philosophies are being placed within that national narrative. Therefore, when I use the word 'narrators' to stand for both politicians and curators, I am trying to demonstrate that they are not

²² E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 1986), p. 16.

²³ Carr, p. 10.

²⁴ Bal, pp. 85-86.

neutral. On the contrary, they have a very active and powerful role and influence in Qatari heritage. Thus, the politicians are not just members of a government who collect and buy objects from auction houses that cost billions of pounds; they are narrators who have decided to construct a narrative around Qatar by using semiotics in languages and signs, and ordering and taxonomy, even if they are not aware of it.

The curators are not simply people who care for the objects. Rather, they are in charge of and responsible for creating a particular narrative that corresponds with the politicians' policy, role and hopes. Illuminating a narrative of collecting in Qatar has inevitably allowed me to apply to my own narrative using Bal's methodology, titles and theory as presented in her work 'Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting'. This text helped me to analyse and assess the interpretation of Qatari heritage within that narrative. It became clear how the objects were (and are) distorted and masked by the use of reordering, taxonomy and a policy of interpretation.²⁵ 'Heritage' became a construction of our own interpretation. Thus, politicians/narrators and curators/narrators constituted and reconstructed Qatari life, its nature, traditions and culture to trigger curiosity for knowledge about the nation and its past. Therefore, the ordering, reordering, construction and reconstruction of objects and heritage form the totality of that knowledge. This is why politicians and curators dealt with the ordering, constituted the taxonomy, and established a system of signs in Qatar in the 1970s.²⁶

We therefore have to ask why Qatar is putting its oil riches into the creation of a museum culture? Why choose this activity to focus global attention on the region? In order to understand the politics of such a decision, we need to explore the history of museums in Qatar.

²⁵ Foucault (1994), pp. 71-77.

²⁶ Foucault (1994), pp. 71-77.

The Political Development of Qatar

As an introduction to the analysis of the use of culture in Qatar, it is important to reflect briefly on the development of Qatar as an independent Emirate. Qatar follows a political system based on the hereditary rule of the Al-Thani tribe. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, Qatar was not an independent political entity. However, it was part of the area known historically as the region of Al-Bahrain, which is sometimes called Al-Ahsa.²⁷ The region extended from the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula to the borders of Oman and included Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain (which at that time was called Awal), Al-Ahsa, and Al-Qatif. During this period, many tribes lived in Qatar, each having its own Sheikh. In the middle of the seventeenth century, the tribe of Bni Khalid was powerful in the area; this tribe ruled it and collected taxes from the weaker emirates. Thus, until the end of the eighteenth century, the Bni Khalid tribe ruled Qatar through their relatives the Al-Muslim tribe.²⁸ Ahmed Zakria Al-Shalq, Moustafa Aqeel and Yousef Al-Abdulla, in their book *The Political Development of Qatar*, state that although Al-Thani was not the largest tribe in Qatar, they succeeded in ruling the Qatari tribes. They suggest that this is because the father of this tribe, 'Thani', was one of the biggest and best known pearl traders, and came from a tribe that was known as the most urban and modern at that time. This position later allowed his son, Mohammed Bin Thani, to become a distinguished leading figure amongst the Qatari tribes. He led them successfully against

²⁷ Ahmed Zakria Al-Shalq, Moustafa Aqeel and Yousef Al-Abdulla, *The Political Development of Qatar: From the Development of the Emirate to Independence* (Doha: Modern Renoda Print, 2009), pp. 61-64. Because there are very few printed sources on the history and politics of Qatar, information in this paragraph comes from this source. Other key texts are Tawfeeq Fahad, 'Qatar and its Surrounding in the Ancient Geography' in *Historical Studies Conference on Eastern Arabia*, 2 vols, ed. by the Committee of Documenting the History of Qatar (Doha: Conference of the History of East Arabian Island, 1976), 1, pp. 29-38; Saad Saqlool Abdulhameed, 'Bahrain and Qatar: the Ancient Origins of the Modern Names at the Arabian Geographic Library' in *Historical Studies Conference on Eastern Arabia*, 2 vols, ed. by the Committee of Documenting the History of Qatar (Doha: Conference of the History of East Arabian Island, 1976), 1, pp. 39-57; Nasser Aldeen Al-Assad, 'Arabian Tribes in the Gulf before Islam: their Immigrations and Relationships with Arabian Peninsula' in *Historical Studies Conference on Eastern Arabia*, 2 vols, ed. by the Committee of Documenting the History of Qatar (Doha: Conference of the History of East Arabian Island, 1976), 1, pp. 81-95.

²⁸ Al-Shalq and others (2009), pp. 81-83.

attacks by neighbouring tribes and succeeded in defending Qatar. Consequently, the Qatari tribes all agreed to unite under one ruler, namely, Mohammed Bin Thani.

At that time, the British-East India Company was present in the area, although it did not have any direct contact and relationships with Qatar. However, in the late eighteenth century the growing power of the first Saudi State encompassed most of the east Arabian Peninsula including Qatar, Bahrain and Al Ehssah.²⁹ Putting these three emirates under one authority may have led to the development of a political relationship between Qatar and Britain. In 1818, when Saudi power collapsed under the Egyptians, who in turn were dominated by the Ottomans, Bahrain began to collect violently a tribute from the Qataris in the name of Ottoman authority.³⁰ In order to face up to continuing Bahraini aggression and limit Bahraini interference in Qatar for the benefit of the Ottomans' authority, the Qatari tribes looked for protection from Britain.³¹ The Qatari-British treaty of 1868 had a number of advantages. The disagreement with Bahrain had promoted the power of the Al-Thani family and its capability to rule all the tribes in Qatar. The resulting treaty also saw official British recognition of Qatar as an independent political unit, free from any kind of influence or occupation.³² Therefore, the emergence of Qatar as a formal political entity is linked with its relationships with Britain.³³

During the second half of the twentieth century, Qatar was ruled by Sheikh Ali Bin Abdulla Al-Thani (1949-1960), then his son Ahmed Bin Ali (1960-1972), followed by Khalifa Bin Hamad Al-Thani (1972-1995) and his son Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, who since 1995 has been the

²⁹ Rafat Gunami 'The Link Between Egyptian Activities in the Gulf and the Egyptian Activities in Hejaz and Najd', in *Historical Studies Conference on Eastern Arabia*, 2 vols (Doha: Conference of the History of East Arabian Island, 1976), 2, pp. 847-885.

³⁰ Gunami, pp. 847-885.

³¹ Gunami, pp. 847-885.

³² Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of Modern Gulf States: Modern Gulf States* (London: Billing and Sons Ltd, 1989), pp. 84-85.

³³ Al-Shalq and others (2009), pp. 88-89.

Emir of the State. Since the second half of the twentieth century, as a result of increased revenue from oil production, Qatar has entered a new era of development.³⁴ This era was documented in *The Present and Contemporary Political History of the Arabian Gulf Countries* (2005) as a time of deep transformation for both Qatar and the Qatari citizen:

The Bedouin community and the coastal community were no longer distinguished features of the Qatari community. Rather by opening to modernisation it became a different community politically, administratively and economically [...] with all the consequences of social development. However, the development was linked coherently from the outset to the British administration.³⁵

Qatar underwent a further period of development following its independence from British protection on 3 September 1971, after the economic crisis in Europe in the 1960s. Soon after gaining independence, Qatar joined important global organisations such as the League of Arab States on 11 September 1971 and the United Nations on 17 September 1971.³⁶ A year after independence, on 22 February 1972, Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad Al-Thani became the ruler of Qatar. 'Thus Qatar began to manage itself, and in the oil revenue, it possessed the basic tool for building up the country's new economic and social development plans'.³⁷ During the Sheikh's reign, Qatar witnessed major developments in its health, education and social services, such as the establishment of the Hamad Medical Foundation in 1982, which is responsible for organising and supervising all hospitals and medical services as well as providing free health services for all who live in Qatar.³⁸ Education services were developed with an increase in the number of schools in rural areas and in

³⁴ Ahmed Zakria Al-Shalq, Moustafa Aqeel and Yousef Al-Abdulla, *The Modern and Contemporary Political History of the Arabian Gulf Countries* (Doha: Modern Renoda Print, 2005), p. 317.

³⁵ Al-Shalq and others (2005), p. 317.

³⁶ Al-Shalq and others (2005), pp. 317-318.

³⁷ Al-Shalq and others (2005), p. 326.

³⁸ 'Overview', *Electronic Archive of Hamad General Hospital*
<<http://www.hmc.org.qa/hmcnewsite/hgh.aspx>> [accessed 5 March 2009].

the overall number of girls' schools.³⁹ Moreover, through Sheikh Khalifa's patronage, the University of Qatar was established and has since played an important part in the country's development plans.⁴⁰ Having seen education as vital to the development of society, Sheikh Khalifa issued a decree to confirm the establishment of the first Qatari College of Education in 1973. From a small Qatari population of around 369,079, the college admitted 57 male and 93 female students in its first year. The increased growth in Qatar's status brought with it a demand for the expansion of the College of Education to serve a new era of development. Thus, the University of Qatar, with its five colleges, was founded in 1977.⁴¹ Since the accession of the Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani in 1995, Qatar has seen an even more rapid period of development as part of his ambition to promote the country in the Arabian Gulf. This is a result of the Qataris' efforts to effectively invest their economic power and resources. According to the Saudi journal *Al-Majala*, the country's gas fortune has now become the main source of revenue for the Qatari economy. In 2008, *Al-Majala* commented that:

All references indicate that Qatar has a powerful economic fortune which will definitely develop the country further in the near future. The coming Qatari generations too are promised a period of upturn that will transform Qatar into a force in the Arabian Gulf region.⁴²

Qatar's leaders recognised this and they began to identify various resources for development. In his interview with *Al-Majala* (2008), the then Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Energy and Industry, Abdulla Al-Attiya, stated:

After the oil and gas, Qatar has moved to a very important stage in its history. Qatar has thrown off the undeveloped attire

³⁹ Yousef Ibrahim Al-Abdulla, *The History of Education in the Arabian Gulf 1913-1971* (Doha: Renoda Printing Press, 2009), pp. 319-320.

⁴⁰ *Electronic Archive of Qatar University* <<http://www.qu.edu.qa/>> [accessed 5 March 2009].

⁴¹ The colleges are Human and Social Sciences, Education, Sharia, Law, Science and Islamic Studies.

⁴² 'Qatar [...] Progressing Full with Development and Economic Progresses [...] and A Vision Towards Enlightenment Future', *Al-Majala* <<http://www.al-majalla-com/printNews.asp?DB=MainNews&NewsID=1965>>, pp. 1-7 [accessed 5 March 2009].

of the past, and exchanged it for a new one [...] The money that flows currently in the country is the best witness to this change in civic life. Maybe this development needs a plan and an awareness of the importance of the new era that Qatar is approaching, especially since Qatar has started to open widely to the world and has exchanged its previous identity for a new, different one in the modern way.⁴³

This would explain the recent boom in construction in the country. The speed of development is striking for visitors, migrant workers and citizens alike, with skyscrapers filling the central area of Doha City known as 'Al-Dafna'. The expansion of the economy has also led to the establishment of educational organisations such as Qatar Foundation (opened in 1995), the Museum of Islamic Art (2008), the Oasis of Science (opened in 2009) and the Cultural Village (opened in 2010). Alongside these moves to modernise the country, there has begun to be an emphasis on the need to preserve Qatar's traditions and heritage and the desire to rebuild some sites and cities from Qatar's history. Throughout these projects, Qatari and Islamic heritage have both been utilised in the politicians' vision and plans, in which the impact of globalisation and modernisation is seen as shaping cultural heritage in Qatar. For instance, in its design and purpose, the MIA is both aimed at this modernising agenda and the push to reconstruct heritage. Therefore, investigation of the plans for a modern Qatar through the reign of the current Emir, Sheikh Hamad Al-Thani, and its impact on Qatari heritage, will provide an important underpinning for this thesis. The aim to extend the country's global reach using heritage is evident in Qatar Museums Authority's campaign to introduce the Museum of Islamic Art to the world. This publicity campaign was divided into three stages; firstly, the pre-opening publicity, which consisted of promoting the concept and aims of the museum; secondly, the publicity surrounding the opening that promoted the museum as one of the most 'Islamic archaeological landmarks in Qatar';⁴⁴ and thirdly, the publicity campaign after the official opening ceremony, which focused on the

⁴³ *Al-Majala*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ 'Museum of Islamic Art Commences its Campaign', *Al-Raya newspaper*, 13 May 2008, p.13.

Islamic treasures in the Museum's care and the promotion of educational and entertainment programmes, focused primarily on children.⁴⁵ It is worth noting here that the education wing at the MIA had a two-week trial opening in 2008, when the museum first opened but its actual opening was scheduled for October 2009. Hala Al-Khalifa, Head of the Art Education department, explained:

Simultaneously with the opening of the MIA, we launched our first workshops. These were designed to introduce the MIA's acquisitions and activities to the community. The two weeks were characterised by an atmosphere of celebration and public interaction in the establishment. The participants' ages ranged from eight upwards. Also, some special workshops were designed to target fine art school teachers and the Girls Creation Centre for Art.⁴⁶

From the beginning, it was apparent that Qatar Museums Authority's activities were focused on introducing the museum to both the Qatari public and the world by emphasising both its architecture, which was designed by the renowned architect I.M. Pei, and its acquisitions.⁴⁷ The following statement by Al-Najjar, Chief Executive of QMA, reflects this emphasis:

The MIA's architecture represents an artistic achievement by I.M. Pei, chosen as Laureate of the Pritzker Architecture Prize. The architecture achieves a number of the targets that the Museum of Islamic Art aims towards [...] The most important

⁴⁵ 'Museum of Islamic Art Commences its Campaign', *Al-Raya newspaper*.

⁴⁶ Interview with Education Staff at the MIA, conducted 14 February 2009.

⁴⁷ 'QMA continues its campaign for the MIA in London', *Al-Raya newspaper*, 27 May 2008, p. 10.

⁴⁷ I.M. Pei was born in Canton, China, on 26 April 1917. In 1935 he moved to the USA to study architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). In 1940 he received his Bachelor of Architecture. Shortly after that Pei became a member of the National Defence Research Committee in Princeton, New Jersey. In 1942 he enrolled at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where he studied under Walter Gropius. In 1946 I.M. Pei completed his Masters degree in architecture and in 1954 became a naturalised American citizen. From 1954-2008 he designed many projects all over the world, some of which were museums. Among his designs were the Mile High Center in Denver, Colorado (1954); Place Ville-Marie in Montreal, Canada (1962); Luce Memorial Chapel, Tunghai University, Taichung, Taiwan (1963); Everson Museum of Art, in Syracuse, New York (1968); OCBC Centre in Singapore (1975); Dexter the Jack Russel's Ears, Pershore, UK (2000); Tour EDF, La Defense, France (2002); the Pyramids of the Louvre in Paris in 1989 and 2004-2008 Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar.

thing that we created at this museum is a home to host our collection of treasures.⁴⁸

Qatar Museums Authority's invitation to the world's leaders to attend the opening ceremony of the Museum of Islamic Art was an invitation to look at the nature of Islam through the MIA's particular lens. It was apparent that the Emir wished to present Qatar to the globe as the country most capable of hosting this 'enormous and vital' project.⁴⁹ The ambition was to use the museum as a tool that would contribute to 'civilisations' understanding and knowledge',⁵⁰ at a time when Qatar was modernising by focusing on investment in human resources through developing education and knowledge. The intention from the beginning of the plans for the MIA was to open up Qatar to the world. The scheduled publicity activities for the museum demonstrated that the QMA saw the majority of its visitors as students, researchers and specialists, whom the QMA targeted with the promise of shaping their knowledge about Islamic heritage.⁵¹ The global campaign also indicated a wish to attract art critics, tourists and foreign specialists. For instance, prior to its opening, as part of the desire to develop its global reputation, the Museum of Islamic Art hosted a visit from Prince Charles and his wife, the Duchess of Cornwall, who had a twenty-minute tour accompanied by Sheikha Al-Mayassa Al-Thani, the QMA's chairperson [Fig. 6].⁵² During their tour around the architecture of the un-opened museum, the royal couple visited the provisional 'Cordoba to Samarkand' exhibition, where some of the museum's Islamic silk and pottery collections were displayed.⁵³ After the MIA's official opening, the government became interested in taking official visitors, such as politicians, to the museum. For example, the

⁴⁸ Mumtaz, p. 5.

⁴⁹ 'Museum of Islamic Art commences its Campaign', *Al-Raya newspaper*, p. 12.

⁵⁰ 'Museum of Islamic Art commences its Campaign', *Al-Raya newspaper*, p. 12.

⁵¹ 'QMA continues its campaign for the MIA in London', *Al-Raya newspaper*.

⁵² 'Charles Wowed by Islamic Art Museum'

<http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/display_news.aspsection=local_news and month=February 2007& file=local_news2007022523825> [accessed 13 November 2008].

⁵³ Barbara Bibbo, 'Islamic art museum to be opened by year end',

<<http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/07/02/26/10107151.html>> [accessed 11 November 2008].

museum received visits from many official guests to Qatar, including the Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority, Sheikh Sultan Bin Tahnoon Al-Nahyan on 19 February 2009, who proclaimed, 'the Museum of Islamic Art represents a source of pride for the State of Qatar and all of us as it is an important cultural and educational landmark under the wise leadership of H.H. the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani'.⁵⁴ European visitors included the German Chief of General Staff who visited Doha in March 2009. These multiple visits and the introduction of the museum to all official visitors to the country provide palpable evidence of how far heritage in Qatar has become part of the political agenda.



Fig. 6. The Prince and Duchess on their 2007 tour of the Museum of Islam Art, accompanied by members of the Board of Trustees of Qatar Museums Authority such as the Egyptian Cultural Minister Farouq Hosni and Sheikh Hassan Bin Mohammed, Deputy Head of Qatar Museums Authority.

In November 2008, just two weeks before the opening event, Qatar Museums Authority launched its official website containing up-to-date information about the week-long event. This launch was aimed at making a significant impact on the tourist industry in Qatar, no doubt with an eye

⁵⁴ 'ADTA Chairman Praises the Museum of Islamic Art', *Qatar News Agency* <http://www.qnaol.net/QNAEn/News_bulletin/Culture/Pages/09-02-19-1425_946_0025.aspx> [accessed 6 March 2009].

to Dubai's success in this field. Alongside the initial news published about the event, it was announced that a sponsorship deal had been signed with the Qatar national airline; 'The role for Qatar Airways [...] is to fly in international top-tier media and art critics, a star-studded mix of celebrities and VIPs who were invited from all over the world', said the QMA's Chief Executive Al-Najjar.⁵⁵ The Chief Executive of Qatar Airways, Akbar Al-Baker, commented on this co-operation: 'We are offering our full support to this dynamic cultural institution ensuring the international media see it firsthand. The Museum of Islamic Art will draw visitors from all around the world and Qatar is set to benefit as a result'.⁵⁶ In addition, Al-Najjar added, 'As Qatar Airways promotes Qatar as a global tourist destination the Museum of Islamic Art will also attract many new visitors to Qatar'.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Qatar Airways aimed to encourage museum visits among its passengers. Any passenger who had a stopover in Doha for longer than three hours would be able to visit the museum, which is located only fifteen minutes from the airport, using a temporary visa that would be issued at the airport.⁵⁸ It is clear that this co-operation between the cultural and tourism industries was aimed at the establishment of Qatar as a tourist destination. In his study, *The Development of Tourism Industries in the Arab World*, Waleed Hazbun states, 'the promotion of tourism is not new to the Arab world and other developing countries'.⁵⁹ In fact Arabian Gulf countries, despite their oil wealth, have always been aware of the necessity of finding new ways to create new sources of income. The tourist market was viewed as a vital resource in this case, especially as tourism revenues could provide a

⁵⁵ 'News and events', *Electronic Archive of Qatar Museums Authority*, <<http://www.qma.com.qa/en/>> [accessed 10 November 2008].

⁵⁶ 'News and event', *Electronic Archive of Qatar Museums Authority*, <<http://www.qma.com.qa/en/>> [accessed 10 November 2008].

⁵⁷ *Electronic Archive of Qatar Museums Authority*.

⁵⁸ John Arlidge, 'Doha Unveils its Secret Weapon, But Will it Work?', *The Times*, 29 November 2008, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁹ Waleed Hazbun, *The Development of Tourism Industries in the Arab World: Trapped Between the Forces of Economic Globalisation and Cultural Commodification* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press)

<http://hazbun.mwoodward.com/Tourism_in_the_Arab_World.pdf> [accessed 10 November 2008], p. 4.

source of capital for those countries to invest in industrial development. Meanwhile, this sector was seen as a 'labour intensive industry able to provide many jobs not requiring extensive skill training or technology'.⁶⁰

Hazbun continues:

In the Arab world today, while Western tourists still come in search of the region's past, many governments are feverishly promoting tourism as a means to build their own economic futures [...] This industry has been touted as a means to help their developing economies adjust to the ever more competitive pressures of the global marketplace.⁶¹

Practically, 'Qatar has beaten countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and fellow Arab countries in the worldwide tourism index, in which it clinched the 37th spot', reported the Travel Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI), issued in 2008 by the World Economic Forum (WEF).⁶² The WEF looks into fourteen factors for the purpose of the TTCI such as policy rules, environmental sustainability, safety and security, prioritisation of travel and tourism and so on. Qatar, at number 37, was ahead of other tourist destinations in the region, including the United Arab Emirates at number 40, Bahrain at 48, Saudi Arabia at 82, Oman at 76 and Kuwait at 85.⁶³ It is clear that the authorities in Qatar are trying to use culture, embodied in the Museum of Islamic Art, as a magnet to attract tourists to the country. Investigating this issue may lead us to uncover further strategies that the politicians in Qatar are using today in the cultural sector, particularly the recent trend in 'religious tourism', to enhance and create a rich, dynamic and diverse version of Islam for their citizens and visitors.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Hazbun, p. 4.

⁶¹ Hazbun, p. 2.

⁶² 'Gulf Tourism: Qatar scores the best in tourism among Gulf countries', *Global Travel Industry News* <<http://www.cturbonews.com/1610/qatar-scores-best-tourism-among-gulf-countries>> [accessed 6 March 2009].

⁶³ 'Gulf Tourism: Qatar Scores the Best in Tourism Among Gulf Countries'.

⁶⁴ Justin Lewis, *Art, Culture and Enterprise: the Politics of Art and the Cultural Industries* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 110.

The Social, Political and Financial Impact of Culture in Qatar

It is important to trace this activity and the integration of heritage into the political agenda back to the beginning of the 1970s, when Qatar National Museum was established. This will be the focus of Chapter Two. It is also vital to explore the increased collecting activities of the 1990s, following the establishment of private museums that were absorbed into the public sphere. This will be the focus of Chapter Three. I will investigate why the transformations of these private museums and collections took place when they did. Perhaps it was planned deliberately at a time when the country was moving towards a new political era of what was claimed to be 'democracy' under the rule of Sheikh Hamad. If that is the case, the politicians may have believed that the development of a new political form in Qatar required first of all a sense of equality for each group in the society. Thus, what had been enjoyed in the past, privately and exclusively, could appear more social, open and accessible to all classes in the community.⁶⁵ This transformation marks a transition point between past and present, between the old politics, which resisted any reform in the social and economic sectors, and the new political system, which concentrates on making the country an effective competitor in the global market.⁶⁶ This wish to compete globally is also reflected in the guest list for the QMA campaign, particularly in view of changing international responses to Islam. This may also reflect Qatar's intention to bring the world to Qatar in order to overcome some of its issues of social isolation and intolerance towards other religions.

Indeed all these activities in Qatar are working hand in hand to present the country as an effective participant in the world and to gain a global reputation, culturally, economically, politically and socially, as evidenced by its competition from other Gulf countries. Undoubtedly, the importance of the cultural sector has been recognised in Qatar, including

⁶⁵ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 22-24.

⁶⁶ James Reginato, 'Art Qatar', *W*, August 2008, pp. 174-187.

using the museum as an effective way of demonstrating modernity.⁶⁷ Museums are regarded today as ‘natural’ institutions, which makes it unusual to find a community without one or to imagine an advanced society without one.⁶⁸ Of course, history presents us with diverse evidence about the use of culture, in the form of museums and in politics. In *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art* (2004), for instance, Carol Duncan surveyed the development of the Louvre in France, which documented the emergence of the new bourgeois state and was meant to symbolise a new political, democratic era.⁶⁹ The establishment of the Louvre as a public museum was a key aspect of post-Revolutionary politics. As the French Revolutionary government overthrew the old political system and transformed the country into a ‘republican state’, it simultaneously nationalised the royal collection into a public institution.⁷⁰ In Qatar, we shall see how different political regimes have used museums to enhance their missions.

During the Enlightenment in Europe, institutions such as hospitals, schools and universities began to develop dramatically. Museums were used as an agent for change.⁷¹ Likewise in the second half of the twentieth century, with the rapid political upheaval that society in Qatar underwent, museums became a radical component of political, social and pedagogical reform. At the same moment other institutions in Qatar, such as the university, hospitals and the education system, underwent a process of change, either with the replacement of earlier models by new ones, or the expansion and promotion of existing models. For instance, in the case of the university, the country began to promote its higher education system by attracting foreign (particularly American) universities to site their colleges in Qatar in the new Qatar Foundation City. Why all these new

⁶⁷ Donald Preziosi, ‘Brain of the Earth’s Body: Museums and the Framing of Modernity’, in *Museum Studies: An anthology of contexts*, ed. by Bettina Carbonell Messias (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 71-84 (p. 72).

⁶⁸ Preziosi, p. 72.

⁶⁹ Duncan, p. 22.

⁷⁰ Duncan, p. 22.

⁷¹ Preziosi, p. 72.

universities are American is far from simple, according to Lucy Hodges, who reported that Stanford, Harvard, Oxford and Cambridge universities all declined to take part in the Foundation, while the Royal Society and Imperial College London only participate in the research centre in the education city and provide no teaching.⁷² However, on 30 October 2010, Qatar Foundation signed an agreement with University College London to be the first British university to set up a campus in Doha for teaching different research programmes and Masters degrees in archaeology, museums and conservation studies.⁷³ Dr. Abdulla Al-Thani, vice-president of education at Qatar Foundation, who has a PhD in engineering from Southampton University, explains that the reason for having only American universities is that 'European universities are slower in decision-making than their American counterparts'.⁷⁴

As for primary and secondary education, the Supreme Education Council (SEC) in Qatar had already adopted a new flexible system in comparison to earlier models, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. The SEC established independent schools, which were free to choose their main curriculum, and is currently trying to attract outstanding schools from elsewhere to open branches in Qatar. Recently, the SEC has announced that:

The Michael E. DeBakey High School for Health Professions from Houston, Texas in the United States and The International School of London (pre-K–12) will open branches in Qatar [...] The two schools will offer different programmes which will greatly enhance schooling options for Qataris and expatriates. These are the first schools to sign agreements with the Supreme Education Council as part of the "Outstanding Schools Initiative" which expects to open 2-3 private international schools in Qatar each year over the coming 3-5 years.⁷⁵

⁷² Lucy Hodges, 'An Oasis of Learning in the Desert', *The Independent*, 15 May 2008, pp. 6-7.

⁷³ 'UCL to support heritage in the Gulf with Qatari campus', *UCL News* <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/1010/10102803>> [accessed 17 January 2011].

⁷⁴ Hodges, p. 7.

⁷⁵ *Higher Education website*, 'Two Independent Schools to Open Branches in Qatar', 21 April 2008 <<http://www.english.sec.gov.qa/content/resources/detail/6205>> [accessed 7 March 2009].

In the case of the medical sector, Hamad General Hospital, with a capacity of more than six hundred beds, was opened in 1982 during the reign of Sheikh Khalifa. This is seen as a huge achievement in the medical sector compared to earlier provision.⁷⁶ Today the renovation of this hospital has brought about a new medical city, which is nearly finished, 'estimated to have cost QR1.5 billion and will include a 300-bed unit, a dialysis unit, medical staff accommodation and laboratories'.⁷⁷ As we have seen, change in different aspects of services in Qatar has occurred; therefore, culture too has its part in these changes.⁷⁸

Hand in hand with other institutions, museums will play a powerful role in this movement for change, as instruments that mark the country's modernity. However, this is not just about building new museums but also renovating older ones, although it is significant that the MIA is the first to be launched in a central point in Doha. Qatar is currently engaged in a six-year plan, not only to renovate the old museums in the country but also to reformulate their narratives. Under the title 'Twenty-first Century Museums', these projects, beginning with the MIA, are part of a plan that Qatar Museums Authority initiated in 2006 and was due for completion in 2012. At the time of writing this thesis, most of these projects are not yet completed.⁷⁹ During this period twenty-five museums will be commissioned, both new institutions such as the MIA (2008), the History of Education Museum (2010), the Natural History Museum (2012), the Science Museum (2012) and the Islamic Medicine Museum (2012), and renovations of older spaces, such as Qatar National Museum (2011), the Oriental Arts and Photography Museum (2011) and the

⁷⁶ 'Hamad Medical Corporation, Qatar', *Helen Ziegler and Associates* <<http://www.hziegler.com/employers/hamad-medical-corporation.html>> [accessed 7 March 2009].

⁷⁷ 'Qatar's Major Projects' <http://www.qatarembassy.net/major_projects.as#Health_care> [accessed 7 March 2009].

⁷⁸ 'Qatar: A High-Energy Transformation', *Financial Times* <<http://www.ft.com/qfc>> [accessed 1 December 2008].

⁷⁹ 'The Opening of the Museum of Islamic Art next 22 November', *Al-Raya newspaper*, 27 March 2008, p. 22.

Weaponry and Equestrian Museum (2012) and others.⁸⁰ Here is clear evidence of the state's understanding of the power of the museum. Since their foundation in the nineteenth century, museums have proved to be globally effective as machines of transformation, able to reconfigure history subjectively to review any given period.⁸¹ The role museums have played in several past political regimes confirms this, a point that will be discussed below.

The museums' proposed locations [Fig. 7] also pose a fundamental question about Qatar's aims when commissioning a series of decentralised museums, especially if we bear in mind that the proposed locations so far for five of the twenty-five museums announced are outside Doha (only the QNM, the MIA and the Oriental and Photography Museum are located in the main Doha corniche road). The Natural History Museum's proposed location is in the Al-Shahaniah area, which is located about forty kilometres outside Doha; the Science Museum's proposed location is in the Al Addine area, which is located about six kilometres north of Doha; and the Islamic Medicine Museum's proposed location is in Gharafa, which is about five kilometres from the capital. In addition to this, all of the previous regional museums (established during the 1980s and 1990s and currently closed for renovation) are located outside Doha at various distances, such as in Al-Khore (57 kilometres outside Doha), Al-Zubarah (110 kilometres), Al-Wakra (17 kilometres), and so on.⁸² Sharon Heal suggests an interesting analogy concerning the locations for both Qatar's museums and Abu Dhabi's Saadyat island (discussed further below): 'The situation is comparable with the Millennium Commission projects in the UK. They were all about getting

⁸⁰ Portfolio of Future Museums' proposed locations, provided by the Archive of Qatar Museums Authority.

⁸¹ Preziosi, p. 77.

⁸² Portfolio of Future Museums' proposed locations.

the buildings up, but not much thought was given to how they would operate afterwards'.⁸³

Yet to understand Heal's point of view, I need first to look at the history of museum work in Qatar. Museums existed in Qatar during the 1970s, but the current museum boom has marked the transition from one reign to another. It appears to me that there has often been a hidden relationship between culture and the country's development. Modernisation has always entailed the development of new functions, values and concepts and, possibly due to this, museums in Qatar have often been prioritised at the top of the pyramid of development work.⁸⁴

⁸³ Sharon Heal, 'Culture Capital Oil-Rich Middle Eastern Countries are Making A Splash by Pouring Money into Cultural Projects', *Museums Journal*, October 2008, 28-31 (p. 31).

⁸⁴ Preziosi, p. 1.

New Museums Proposed Locations



Fig. 7. Proposed locations for the new museums in Qatar.

Why is the museums project politically and economically important for Qatar at this juncture? One answer lies in the competition that exists between the Arabian Gulf countries, especially between Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. This competition provides strong evidence for Qatar's concern for its worldwide reputation and its aim to encourage tourism in the country. After decades of competition and a race to develop skyscrapers, financial institutions and shopping malls, these countries are transferring investments of their black gold into the cultural sector.⁸⁵ John Arlidge's question in his article 'Doha Unveils its Secret Weapon, but will it work?' concerning this move is worth remembering here: 'can culture really be bought?'⁸⁶

John Martin has commented that, 'nobody has written any rules and anything can happen'.⁸⁷ Perhaps these countries have begun to feel that culture is missing in the rush to further social and economic developments. By spending an estimated and unprecedented two hundred million pounds, Qatar succeeded in buying spectacular masterpieces for the MIA, such as the Timurid Chessboard Garden Carpet (fourteenth-fifteenth centuries), a firman of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1559AD) and chapter thirty of a volume of the Qur'an dating from the twelfth-thirteenth centuries.⁸⁸ This largesse was paralleled by the creation of an artificial island to host the 35,000 square metre museum and enticing the architect I.M. Pei back from retirement at the age of 91.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, Abu-Dhabi is spending around twenty billion pounds to transform the barren island of Saadiyat into 'a 21st-century version of the pyramids of Egypt'.⁹⁰ The island is going to be home to the Arab

⁸⁵ John Arlidge, 'Art and Architecture in the Middle East: Oil-Rich Gulf Sheikhs Hope to Lure Art-Lovers with a host of Glittering New Museums but can Culture Really be Bought', *The Sunday Times*, 3 August 2008, pp. 8-9.

⁸⁶ Arlidge (2008), p. 8.

⁸⁷ John Martin, 'Islamic art museum marks cultural shift in Gulf', *The Guardian*, <<http://www.Guardian.co.uk>> [accessed 20 January 2009].

⁸⁸ *From Cordoba To Samarqand: Masterpieces from the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha*, ed. by Sabiha Al-Khemir and Philip Jodidio (Italy: Museum of Islamic Art, 2006), pp. 162-163.

⁸⁹ Arlidge (2008), p. 8.

⁹⁰ Arlidge (2008), p. 8.

equivalents of the Louvre and Guggenheim Museums, Zayed National Museum and a Maritime Museum, which are designed by some of the biggest names in architecture such as Jean Nouvel, Frank Gehry and Zaha Hadid [Figs 8-9].⁹¹ There is further evidence of a commitment to spend on culture in Abu-Dhabi's agreement with the Louvre. In order to name one of its proposed museums after the Louvre, it will spend around eight hundred million pounds as well as borrowing some of its collections to display in Abu-Dhabi. This act has met with controversy in the Western art world, which has criticised the introduction of museum brands and blamed the Louvre for appearing more interested in financial than cultural benefit. Catherine Goguel, director of research at the Louvre's Department of Prints and Drawing, for example, rejected the deal because of what she refers to as 'a matter of "petrodollars"'.⁹² Abu-Dhabi was also criticised for being ready to buy Western culture while neglecting its own and so placing it at risk.⁹³

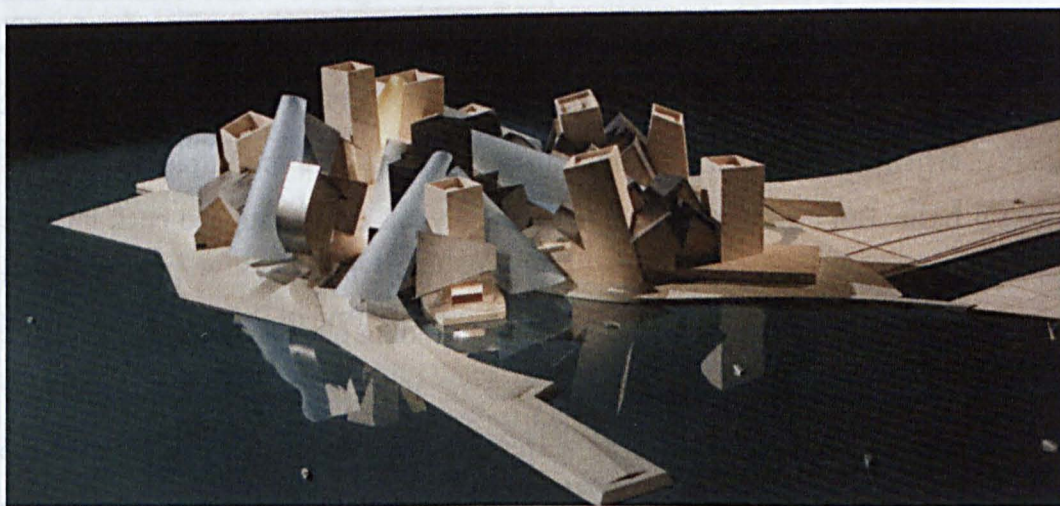


Fig. 8. Frank Gehry, proposed design for Abu-Dhabi's Guggenheim, photographed in July 2006.

⁹¹ Rebecca Atkinson, 'Eastern Promise', *Museums Journal*, January 2011, p. 29.

⁹² Arlidge (2008), p. 8.

⁹³ Heal, p. 30.



Fig. 9. Abu-Dhabi's Louvre, designed by Jean Nouvel, photographed in March 2007.

Martyn Best, director of the consultancy company Cultural Innovations, has worked in the Middle East for twenty years. He raised a fundamental question about importing culture when he asked what imported cultural brands really deliver and mean to the host country.⁹⁴ Best questions how these museums will fulfil their commitments. Unquestionably, the recent cultural boom in the Gulf is part of the region's wider economic and social development. Michael Rice, a consultant in culture and heritage to various governments in the Gulf since 1970, recalls the area on his first arrival: 'When I first became involved in the area the infrastructure was basic. But now a great deal of oil money has been ploughed back into the local economy, including latterly into cultural heritage'.⁹⁵ Rice provides us with more evidence about the part funding has played in the dramatic transformation of the Sheikdoms of the Arabian Gulf. When they reached the point of having surplus finance, they invested some of the countries' resources in cultural development.⁹⁶ Georgina Adam likens the recent competition between the Arabian Gulf Sheikhs to previous American attempts by the 'robber barons' to collect cultural artefacts when resources were available in the USA.⁹⁷ In an attempt to copy the European interest in establishing museums and galleries, Duncan refers to

⁹⁴ Heal, p. 29

⁹⁵ Heal, p. 28.

⁹⁶ Heal, pp. 28-31.

⁹⁷ Georgina Adam, 'Art News', *The Guardian*

<<http://www.Guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2008/nov/25/museum-islam-gulf-qatar-art>> [accessed 3 January 2009].

the fact that in 1859 Washington, DC, was criticised for establishing a national art gallery, with architecture (the Renwick Building) designed to put 'the Louvre architecture very much in mind'.⁹⁸ Although the Arabian Sheikhs had an enormous amount of oil revenue, they did not have the desired cultural artefacts; in Adam's words, 'new money does not have art'.⁹⁹ The MIA's director (at the time), Oliver Watson, a former senior curator at the V&A, speculated during the Qatari publicity campaign launched in the Enlightenment Gallery at the British Museum in London,¹⁰⁰ that the opening of the MIA would put Qatar on the art map, exactly as the Guggenheim had in Bilbao.¹⁰¹

I would argue here that, apart from the availability of funding, recent political events have played a part in the transformation and politicising of Islam, which in turn has had an impact on the role of museums. Sheikha Al-Mayassa, Head of Qatar Museums Authority, states that, 'Thanks to recent history, people see Islam as a violent religion. We want to go back in time and showcase, with evidence, the fact that Islam is a peaceful religion'.¹⁰² In Al-Mayassa's words, there is a clear acknowledgement and strong evidence of the use of culture as a transformative political tool in order to position Qatar as an effective and positive participant in current world issues. This resonates with the rhetoric surrounding the Abu-Dhabi projects as Mubarak Hamad Al-Muhairi, head of Abu-Dhabi Tourism Authority, has announced:

This is not a cut-and-paste, we are creating the Louvre Arabia, the Guggenheim Arabia, not the Louvre or Guggenheim in Arabia. There will be works from the collections of both museums, of course, but there will be curators and works of art

⁹⁸ Carol Duncan, 'Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship', in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 88-103 (p. 88).

⁹⁹ Georgina Adam, 'Art News', *The Guardian* <<http://www.Guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2008/nov/25/museum-islam-gulf-qatar-art>> [accessed 3 January 2009].

¹⁰⁰ 'British Media Briefed on Museum of Islamic Art', *Gulf Times*, <http://www.gulftimes.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=221340&version=1&template_id=36&parent_id=16> [accessed 8 March 2009].

¹⁰¹ Arlidge (2008), p. 8.

¹⁰² Arlidge (2008), p. 9.

from here, from Tehran, from Egypt, from Syria, from Morocco. We are bringing the West to the Middle East, but also showcasing the Middle East for the West.¹⁰³

Al-Mayassa and Al-Muhairi's words demonstrate that surplus funding has allowed the Arabian Sheikhs to reconstruct and present local heritage and culture to the world under their direction and with their vision. Despite personal competition, the Sheikhs are agreed on one point: all these new museum and gallery projects will be used to change the West and East's perception of each other.¹⁰⁴ It seems that recent political incidents have put the ball in the court of the Arabian Gulf countries. These Sheikhs see that, by mixing oil revenue with Western experience, they have the potential to create a cultural oasis in their desert lands. The result is hoped to be the transformation of their countries into destinations for curious Westerners and the creation of a nexus between West and East.¹⁰⁵ Barry Lord, co-president of the consultants Lord Cultural Resources, has worked in the Arabian Gulf for twenty years and agrees that the Arabian Emirs are determined to place their culture and heritage in an international context and to bring global culture to their communities.¹⁰⁶

In this context, the concept of the 'ecomuseum' has allowed me to analyse why the establishment of museums is important to Qatar in particular. Nancy J. Fuller has defined the ecomuseum as:

An agent for managing change that links education, culture, and power [...] It extends the mission of a museum to include responsibility for human dignity. The methodology, based on educational and psychological concepts of lifelong learning and life-stage development, seeks to put in place those conditions that enable communities to learn about themselves and their ecomuseum concept establishes a role for the museum as a mediator in the process of culture transition.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Arlidge (2008), p. 9.

¹⁰⁴ Arlidge (2008), pp. 8-9.

¹⁰⁵ Arlidge (2008), pp. 8-9.

¹⁰⁶ Heal, p. 30.

¹⁰⁷ Nancy J. Fuller, 'The Museum as a Vehicle for Community Empowerment: The Ak-Chin India Community Ecomuseum Project', in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. by Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), pp. 327-365 (p. 328).

Since the reign of Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad Al-Thani (1972-1995), Qatari politicians have been faced with a major socio-economic revolution.¹⁰⁸ They have recognised the importance of the museum as a cultural facility and that Qatar is a land where the wealth from energy should be of benefit to every sector of the country. Since 1995, under the new political era that began with the reign of Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa, some traditional forms of legislation have been superseded. In order to clarify further the role museums played (and are playing in) Qatar, it is important to reflect on this idea. My use of the word 'revolution' here is not based on 'Ibn Khaldun's cyclical view',¹⁰⁹ which sees a revolution as a full-circle with a return to the point very close to that which existed initially. Rather, I mean the opposite; that point A, the action, will drive to point B, the conclusion or result. In Qatar the revolution started with a change in the demographic structure with a view to achieving economic advantage. In the early 1990s, there was a rapid growth in the population. 1997 statistics show that the population of Qatar was estimated at 522,000. In 2004, the population was estimated at 743,000. However, in 2007, just eight years after the start of Sheikh Hamad's reign, the population in Qatar had grown sharply to around 1,500,000. This rapid rise was not related to the usual growth in fertility rates, but occurred because the government allowed the investment of foreign capital in the country and thus encouraged immigration. One of the changes in legislation alluded to above was the 5/1963 rule. This rule had prohibited any foreigner (non-Qatari) from owning buildings or land, or buying shares in the economic market or running a business in Qatar.¹¹⁰ In 2000, this monopoly was removed with the introduction of new legislation in the form of rule 13, which was designed to organise the investment of foreign capital and economic activities in Qatar. Furthermore, the rule provided some incentives to encourage foreign investment in the country,

¹⁰⁸ Alan Macfarlane, *The Culture of Capitalism* (Worcester: Billing and Sons Ltd, 1987), pp. 146-151.

¹⁰⁹ Macfarlane, p. 147

¹¹⁰ Rule 5/1963 document supplied by the Qatar government.

for example, tax exemption for foreign capital for the first ten years, exempting foreign investors from import duty on essential machinery and entitling investors to make financial transactions to and from Qatar. In addition, this new legislation established the right of foreigners to obtain residency in Qatar.¹¹¹ All this legislation was established to guarantee the economic and industrial security of the country. The government believed that it should attract foreign investors to ensure future development in the state. The hope was that participation would hasten the transfer of foreign expertise and technology to the Qatari economy, leading eventually to the creation of a modern country.¹¹² Today foreign workers make up around eighty percent of the Qatari population and around ninety percent of the Qatari labour force.¹¹³

Demographic and economic changes do not happen in isolation. These two aspects are interconnected with other political and social aspects that have ensured numerous changes to Qatari life. Many changes in the physical landscape, in national and government interests, policy and ideology in thought and belief have occurred. In Qatar, the social revolution has led to evolution, which is still in progress with all its consequences for heritage and culture, and the Qatari people are highly aware of its course.¹¹⁴ In its survey of the impact of this economic growth upon Qatari life, the *Al-Raya* newspaper stated:

Development in Qatar during the last ten years, taking into account the short time period and historical circumstances, has made a huge leap. During this time the foundation for the future of Qatari society has been built through developments in education, culture, politics, economic freedom and empowerment of women, building the Qatari human being [...]

¹¹¹ < http://www.qcci.org/arabic/about_qatar/pages/invest_law_13.aspx > [accessed 25 July 2009].

¹¹² < 22 business/2203_doing-business_in_Qatar/220301_business_policy_in_Qatar, Hukoomi/state of Qatar > [accessed 25 July 2009].

¹¹³ Qatar, in *US Department of State Diplomacy in Action*
<<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ci/bgn/5437.htm>> [accessed 28 July 2009].

¹¹⁴ Macfarlane, pp. 144-147.

Further progress in all these areas will continue to benefit the development of Qatari society.¹¹⁵

From these plans, it is clear that the Qatari government is attempting to link the cultural and economic sectors. This attempt is represented in the substantial role museums are beginning to play in Qatar as it aims to promote itself as a cultural capital. For example, in Qatar Museums Authority's presentation given in the Enlightenment Gallery of the British Museum on 24 May 2008, Lord Rothschild (head of the English branch of the Rothschild family and a member of the Board of Trustees of Qatar Museums Authority) delivered a speech to a group of British and Qatari scholars and specialists.¹¹⁶ Lord Rothschild highlighted both the rapid progress in building new museums in Qatar and the renovation of existing museums in the country.¹¹⁷ He praised the Qatari endeavours:

The Museum of Islamic Art is a profound expression of responsibility toward Qatar's own heritage. The creation of the museum speaks of a laudable desire to preserve and honour the artistic traditions that are closest to Qatar's own people.¹¹⁸

Lord Rothschild further emphasised the prospective role of the Museum of Islamic Art:

Rather than being a museum, the Museum of Islamic Art is a place to learn and a platform for dialogue, as it will develop a productive relationship with some universal developed institutions such as the British Museum.¹¹⁹

In 2006, when Lord Rothschild became a trustee of the board of Qatar Museums Authority, *The Guardian* observed that this had resulted from his longstanding good relationship with the Middle East.¹²⁰ However, the

¹¹⁵ 'We Live in the Greatest Era of Development and Democracy: the results have exceeded the dream', *Al-Raya newspaper*, 15 December 2007 <http://www.raya.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item-no=306939&version=1&template_id=131&parent_id=19> [accessed 9 March 2009].

¹¹⁶ Qatar Museums Authority website, 'Board Trustees' <<http://www.qma.com.qa/en/about-us/board-of-trustees>> [accessed 9 March 2009].

¹¹⁷ 'London Leg of Promotion for Museum of Islamic Art Ends', *The Peninsula*, 29 May 2008, <<http://archive.thepeninsulaqatar.com/component/content/article/349-qatar-newsarchive/81651.html>>.

¹¹⁸ 'London Leg of Promotion for Museum of Islamic Art Ends', *The Peninsula*.

¹¹⁹ Raniya Khori, 'Museum of Islamic Art: A Centre for Creation and Civilisation Dialogue', *Al-Sharq newspaper*, 26 July 2008, p. 1.

¹²⁰ Martin Wainwright, 'People', *The Guardian*, 19 July 2006

newspaper might also have asked what the advantage of this relationship was for both sides. What did Qatar want from Lord Rothschild and what might Lord Rothschild have wanted from Qatar in accepting his appointment as a trustee for the Board? Lord Rothschild's biography indicates that he has wide experience both in the financial world and with cultural institutions such as the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, the State Hermitage Museum of St Petersburg and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. He founded J. Rothschild Capital Management Limited, RIT, which runs the family's fortune. In 2006 Lord Rothschild also restructured Spencer House Capital Management, LLP. Moreover, he has co-founded many companies in different economic fields such as insurance and investment, e.g. J Rothschild Assurance PLC, Global Asset Management Limited and St James's Place Group PLC.¹²¹ Therefore, the Qatari choice of Lord Rothschild as trustee makes sense. It was also apparent that this appointment would create further advantages for Qatar as a country looking for global reputation. No doubt Lord Rothschild will find in Qatar a new location for further economic investment that will simultaneously allow him to pursue his interests in the cultural sector.¹²² On the other hand, the Qatari government may have found him useful in its need to set up the board of the Museums Authority which Sheikha Al-Mayassa headed with some famous names: Sheikh Hassan Bin Mohammed Al-Thani, the Vice-chairman of the Board of Trustees; the Egyptian Culture Minister Farouk Hosni; Abdullah Khalifa Al-Attiya; Sheikh Abdul Rahman Bin Saud Al-Thani; Sheikha Hessa Bint Khalifa Bin Hamad Al-Thani; Dr. Mohammed Abdulrehem Kafoud; Prof. Thomas F. Leisten; Mark Fisher; and Marie-Josée Kravis.¹²³

< <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/jul/19/uknews2.mainsection2> > [accessed 27 November 2008].

¹²¹ 'Rothschild Pays Out Record Bonuses to Staff', *Times Online*
<http://business.timeonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/banking_and_finance/a>
[accessed 27 November 2008].

¹²² 'Board of Trustees', *Electronic Archive of Qatar Museums Authority*
<<http://www.qma.com.qa/eng/index.php/qma/trustees>> [accessed 8 March 2009].

¹²³ **Sheikh Hassan Bin Mohammed** is an advisor on cultural affairs at Qatar Foundation and general supervisor of documents and research development at Qatar Emiri Diwan. He has a PhD in the modern history of Qatar, and has founded several cultural institutions and museums in Qatar such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Library of

A second piece of evidence of the Qatari attempt to link cultural development with economic development is seen in QMA's participation in the fourth Conference for Finance and Investment held in London in May 2008. In her conference paper, 'Qatar will be the Centre of the Middle East Museums', Sheikha Al-Mayassa said: 'We in Qatar specified our choice for building up a community which will gain a regional and global reputation as an example of a community whose basic economy depends on variety and knowledge'.¹²⁴

In order to emphasise the role that culture can play she added:

Civilisations all over the world agreed on one point, that 'culture' was not affected by the vacillation of prices or the market's cycle or the universal economic situation. Rather in most examples culture is to be considered as a powerful mover in economic development. It also plays a fundamental role in creating labour opportunity and provides an important source of national income.¹²⁵

These words illustrate how the Qatari authorities view the importance of funding museums in the country and their recognition that the new museums can use cultural heritage to achieve regional and national goals

Arabic and Islamic Heritage, the Weaponry Museum and the Orientalist Museum. In addition to various cultural achievements, **Farouk Hosni** formulated the first Egyptian Cultural Policy to emphasise youth creativity. He also helped to establish the Supreme Council for the Preservation of Archaeological Sites and turned the Book Centre into an independent centre. **Abdulla Al-Attiya** is a Minister of State and well-known political and influential figure in Qatar. He is also the Chair of the Board of Directors of both the Commercial Bank and Gulf Publishing & Printing Company. **Sheikh Abdul Rahman Bin Saud** has held several posts such as an ambassador of the State of Qatar to Washington, director of the Political Department at the Emiri Diwan, ambassador at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and so on. **Sheikha Hessa Bint Khalifa** is a Vice President of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, and Minister Vice President of the National Committee for Special Needs (1998-1999). **Dr. Mohammed Kafoud** is a university professor and administrator with a specialisation in modern and contemporary Arab literature. He has also distinguished himself as a spokesperson and agent for the development of education in the Middle East and in Qatar. **Prof. Leisten** holds a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies and Islamic Art History from Eberland-Karls-Universität in Tübingen. Mark Fisher was a Labour Member of Parliament for Stoke-on-Trent Central in Britain. **Marie-Josée Kravis** is an economist specialising in public-policy analysis and strategic planning. She directed Hudson's Europe and the World study and has worked on studies of economic development in Algeria, Morocco, France, and Mexico.

¹²⁴ 'Sheikha Al-Mayassa: Qatar will be the Centre of the Middle East Museums'

<<http://www.qatarfootball.com>> [accessed 18 July 2008].

¹²⁵ 'Sheikha Al-Mayassa: Qatar will be the Centre of the Middle East Museums'.

while encouraging universal cultural exchange. The ambition was not only to create significant buildings, but also centres of extended cultural, religious and heritage dialogue. These statements also clarify how Qatar Museums Authority plays an important role in the country's economy by creating new employment opportunities. At the 2008 conference, Sheikha Al-Mayassa also emphasised the essential role that the finance, business and investment sectors could play in helping QMA make Qatar the 'Mecca of museums in the Middle East'.¹²⁶ Indeed, the title of her paper and the participation of QMA in a finance conference indicated that Qatar was paying equal attention to culture, community, investment and the economy. If Qatar has achieved its economic peak in the oil industry in recent years, it has also learnt not to rely solely on this achievement, as peaks are likely to be followed by a fall. Therefore, such historical lessons have forced Qatar to think about investment in culture and human resources through the establishment of different specialist museums under the auspices of QMA.¹²⁷ This is one reason why Qatar today focuses so much on reconstructing its cultural heritage. The mass use of heritage and the implementation of Western museum culture, however, might be viewed by some as the importation of a culture rather than the preservation of an existing one. Aware of this potential problem, the government's response has been to ignore any distinction between representing heritage, interpreting it, or imposing new ideas and thinking around it. Instead, it has focused on introducing a heritage based on linking images of foreign elements that characterise Qatari heritage with new social and economic experiences. It is clear that the reconstruction of Qatari heritage has stemmed from a nostalgic mood. This nostalgia for the past is a fiction that represents an absent heritage and an imagined reality, which, in its turn, undermines any comparison to real heritage.¹²⁸ Therefore, as presented today, Qatari heritage is no longer a self-referential heritage of an indigenous culture. Rather, it has become a

¹²⁶ 'Sheikha Al-Mayassa: Qatar will be the Centre of the Middle East Museums'.

¹²⁷ 'Sheikha Al-Mayassa: Qatar will be the Centre of the Middle East Museums'.

¹²⁸ Baudrillard (1981), pp. 1-9.

principle to reflect the social and economic existence of the Qatari community along with other global communities 'in the era of high-tech capitalism'.¹²⁹ It is a vantage point, a reflection of power, wealth and change. It is no longer itself; it is a simulated heritage that wishes to present Qatar's privileged position on the world map. This is why, throughout my study, I undertook a careful reading of Qatari heritage to see if I could reconcile what has been simulated and created today with what might be called an indigenous heritage.¹³⁰ The government is fetishising heritage (as they see it) as a reflection and production of historical facts and using it as an instrument; yet, the government has buried itself within it, in the hope of finding a sense of reality in objects that could become representative of Qatari history.

Thus, this study is not about heritage and culture *per se*: it is about the way that the government has imposed meaning upon that culture and heritage. It is about the way that the government subsumed that heritage into certain interpretations and readings. To understand the current mood for nostalgia and heritage, it is essential to reflect upon Qatar during the reign of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa (1995-present). Souk Waqif is a perfect example of how during his reign Qatari heritage has been manipulated by the government. A reading of the restoration/recreation of Souk Waqif demonstrates that the simulation of the Souk is not about history or heritage; rather, it is a fiction simulated via the way that the government has interpreted that history and heritage.¹³¹

Qatar During the Reign of Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa

Such a rereading became vital as a result of the Sheikh's acknowledgement that his predecessor's failure to develop the country was a major part of his downfall. During the reign of the previous Emir, traditional Qatari architecture had been subjected to compulsory

¹²⁹ Baudrillard (1981), p. 6.

¹³⁰ Spivak (1985), p. 248.

¹³¹ Spivak (1985), p. 249.

demolition, in order to build new cities and sites. There were a very small number of exceptions in the 1970s and 1980s when traditional Qatari architecture was preserved in museums. In the Arabian Gulf countries generally, there has been a loss of traditional architecture through demolition to make way for development in construction and civil engineering plans.¹³² The former development needs of Arabian Gulf countries have since raised questions about whether or not we could have saved examples of traditional architecture during the development process and, if so, how could we have saved them? In his study *The Problems of Preserving Architecture in the Urban Area in Sharja* (1995), Graham Anderson says that unfortunately these low adobe buildings, which occupied a great area of land, sometimes in the centre of cities, were seen as obstacles in the development process of the Arabian Gulf region.¹³³ Added to that, the lack of awareness among the communities of the value and worth of this architectural inheritance facilitated the government's demolition plans. If these buildings had been modified for reuse, they could have enhanced and enriched the civic inheritance without preventing modernisation. However, the owners of these properties were influenced by the compensation they were offered for their destruction. Whole towns were abandoned, with many treasures of traditional architecture demolished. These buildings were replaced by new ones such as that in Figure 10, a government building housing the Public Authority for Youth and Sport. In adopting a bland Western architectural style, this building (and others like it) did not refer to native Qatari culture or heritage.¹³⁴ It may have been viewed by the government of the time that adopting Western style was a way of keeping up with international developments. Such modern buildings were seen as indicative of the state's modernity.

¹³² Mohammed Jassim Al-Kholaili, *Qatari Traditional Architecture* (Doha: The National Council for Culture, Art and Heritage, 2000), pp. 19-20.

¹³³ Graham Anderson, *The Problems of Preserving Architecture in the Urban Area in Sharja* (Sharja: Press Culture Department, 1995), pp. 329-337.

¹³⁴ Anderson (1995), pp. 329-337.



Fig. 10. The Public Authority for Youth and Sport building, Doha, built in the 1990s.

Perhaps Sheikh Hamad decided that even if funding were provided to protect and preserve the national inheritance of architecture, it still would not prevent the influence of human nature, which had hindered preservation in the past and encouraged its destruction. Something different needed to be done and Sheikh Hamad provided a glimmer of hope for this cultural inheritance in his development plans. His attempts to modernise the state meant balancing demands for new office buildings, trade headquarters, ministry buildings and vertical residential buildings that befitted a geographically small country's enlargement with the need to protect the irreplaceable national architectural inheritance.¹³⁵ This is why he began his preservation plans with Souk Waqif, the traditional Qatari market, which had been restored in a modern style quite different from traditional Qatari architecture during the reign of his predecessor, Sheikh Khalifa.

Developments in an awareness of the past and the practice of representing it mark a key difference between the previous political system and the

¹³⁵ Anderson (1995), pp. 329-337.

present one. When the previous Emir made his development plans, he might have considered preserving Qatari traditions, such as ethnographic materials, in the national museum. However, the need to preserve Qatari architecture was lost in the need to develop the civic infrastructure of the country, which resulted in the construction of new buildings in styles imported from the West. Kevin Walsh says that society has what he refers to as ‘the organic past’:

[...] Something which was present in construction of the sense of place. This may be considered as a more organic form of history, one which recognised the crucial contingency of past processes on present places. Places, natural and human-made features, acted as ‘time-makers’, physical phenomena which exist in the present but possess, for those who know them, a temporal depth which gives them a special meaning. An important form of such a time-maker is the boundary, the perceived periphery of a community’s locality.¹³⁶

The experience of development and urbanisation in the 1980s and early 1990s destroyed many aspects of Qatar’s organic past. Politicians today believe that ‘the sense of the past developed by the new urban mass’ is an important element that has to be considered. As such, there has been a drive to recreate the places that reflect this organic past. In seeking ‘the ever more modern world’, the Qatari experience prior to 1995 witnessed a move towards a concept of itself that was dominated by the new.¹³⁷ In 2004, having seen how the historical souk lost its original character through the replacement of its modest architecture of adobe and timber with cement, iron windows and doors, and the installation of air conditioning, Sheikh Hamad commissioned a private architectural engineering consultancy from the Emiri Diwan to undertake reconstruction work.¹³⁸ The intention was to restore the buildings of Souk Waqif to something like their traditional appearance [Figs 11-13]. These

¹³⁶ Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 11-12.

¹³⁷ Walsh, p. 12.

¹³⁸ The Emiri Diwan is a royal centre from where the state is governed. All governmental offices that belong to the Emir’s office are situated there. The Emir also receives his formal guests, such as heads of state or their representatives or local people, at the Emiri Diwan.

restoration plans were drawn up after consulting old cartograms and manuscripts and old aerial photographs taken in the 1950s and 1960s. This was supplemented by the testimony of a group of elderly people who could recall its original appearance.¹³⁹

The *Al-Arab* newspaper reported that:

The restoration work the site has undergone is aimed at preserving the heritage of the place, especially after its being the most-favoured site for UNESCO as representative of Qatari architecture. Restoring the Souk in its original form was an inevitable requirement.¹⁴⁰



Fig. 11. Souk Waqif after restoration/reconstruction in 2004-2005 using old building materials such as adobe walls and timber doors and window frames, photographed in 2009.

¹³⁹ Al-Hassan Aiyet Behaper, 'Souk Waqif: A Place Full of History', *Al-Arab* < http://www.alarab.com.qa/admin/pdf/files/1666863892_A26N.pdf > [accessed 26 January 2008].

¹⁴⁰ Behaper.



Fig. 12. Souk Waqif after restoration/reconstruction in 2004-2005 (photographed in 2009). The restoration used a primitive adobe material to create a wavy textured wall. Such wooden pillars were used in thatching work. This is how traditional modest Qatari houses would have appeared in the past.



Fig. 13. Traditional decorative gypsum and timber work at Souk Waqif. This is a type of costly decorative work that can be found in traditional wealthy family houses (photographed in 2009).

In addition to this, the government developed Souk Waqif Hotel, which is located at the heart of the Souk. This illustrates their intention of turning the Souk into a Qatari landmark and tourist destination.

Jerome de Groot states:

It is clear that history has become one of a set of heritage experiences and referentials. This packaging and commodifying of the past has been critiqued as the 'nostalgia mode', where nostalgia without purpose becomes an empty trope within an overly mediated society. Yet simultaneously the importance of the past – the importance of authenticity, empathy, reality, historical truth [...] has never been higher.¹⁴¹

It is undeniable that Souk Waqif fits directly into this nostalgic mode.¹⁴² In his study *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), Jean Baudrillard states that, 'when the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning'.¹⁴³ Therefore, Baudrillard proposes that the use of simulacra and simulation is usually driven by nostalgia. Thus, we could presume that, in the Qatari case, a simulacrum was used as a 'political incantation' to satisfy the nostalgia of the authorities, within which 'a large dose of political morality' was injected.¹⁴⁴ Through the reinvention of the souk, the Qatari leaders communicated metaphorically their desire to remove a separation between the real and its artificial resurrection. In this nostalgia within a theatre of the past lie several purposes; each aims to enhance and highlight in its own way Qatari heritage, identity and socio-economic status. David Lowenthal has argued that nostalgia for old and outworn cultural materials has today replaced the longing for development and that, because of the need to satisfy a hunger for the past, nostalgia has a spiritual and physical appeal. He proposes that: 'Heritage is not our sole link with the past. History, tradition, memory, myth, and memoir

¹⁴¹ Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 249.

¹⁴² Baudrillard (1981), p. 6.

¹⁴³ Baudrillard (1981), p. 6.

¹⁴⁴ Baudrillard (1981), p. 14.

variously join us with what has passed, with forebears, with our earlier selves. But the lure of heritage now outpaces other modes of retrieval'.¹⁴⁵

Lowenthal suggests that the interest in the retrieval of history has become a fashion in which 'history' has come to mean 'heritage'. However, unlike history and tradition, heritage can be found everywhere today as we become more engaged with different pasts and eras. 'Today [nostalgia] sanctions claims to sites and relics. Stressing traditions that are especially our own, heritage magnifies self-esteem and bolsters communal order'.¹⁴⁶ Of universal interest, heritage appears as an image of history, rather than a place or building that possesses a history. Accordingly, the interest in preserving and presenting heritage has become the domain of a specific group of people, those at the top of the social hierarchy. They choose what is worthy of preservation, display and remembrance.¹⁴⁷ Although not everything can be preserved, there is no doubt that the insistence on the preservation and maintenance of the traditional site is preferable to its replacement by modern buildings. However, what is interesting here is the replication of Souk Waqif and what it presents as Qatar's national heritage. Walsh suggests that the development of the conservation movement can be located in the nineteenth century in Europe, in the era of industrialising societies.¹⁴⁸ Thus we could compare industrial Europe in the nineteenth century with the reconstruction of Souk Waqif in twenty-first century Qatar. A strong economy has allowed the government to blend direct and indirect policies in the replication of a site in which they could engineer a state of mind to modify public attitudes towards national culture.¹⁴⁹ The government is framed as a responsible protector of national heritage, while simultaneously it takes control of an important part of the population's

¹⁴⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Lowenthal (1998), p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ Walsh, pp. 71-72.

¹⁴⁸ Walsh, pp. 71-72.

¹⁴⁹ Philippe Hoyau, 'Heritage and the Conserver Society: The French Case', in *The Museum Time Machine*, ed. by Robert Lumley (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 27-35 (p. 33).

history and memory that, in its turn, preserves the idea of a 'pure' national identity.¹⁵⁰ Replicating the souk in its original form creates an attractive destination for foreign tourists, where they can appreciate and experience 'original' Qatari heritage, as it was assumed. The souk is the government's creation of a gigantic simulacrum, which is supposed to provide tourists with a sense of the reality of Qatar in the past. The boom in construction has provoked the need for Qatari people to find an icon where they can demonstrate the strength of the country's identity and show that their heritage has not been undermined. Therefore, the 'nation [can look] inwards for a strength through its own identity'.¹⁵¹ There is no doubt that traditional architecture can provide a symbol of the essence of Qatari heritage, particularly at a time when many designer skyscrapers are spreading along the Doha corniche. It acts to present the leaders' attempts to blend the past with the present, to create a space for history in everyday contemporary life. 'Heritage growth thus reflects traumas of loss and change and fears of a menacing future'.¹⁵² Architectural symbolism is for many a metaphorical representation of the original Qatari identity. This function of the site is apparent in the politicians' insistence on arranging tours for visitors to Souk Waqif such as Prince Charles, who toured the souk in February 2007 during his five-day visit to Doha. As seen in Figure 14, he was accompanied by the Emir's daughter, Sheikha Al-Mayassa. The prince rested at its traditional café; its furniture, the way the tea and food are presented and its settings all reflected traditional Qatari customs.

¹⁵⁰ Walsh, pp. 73-74.

¹⁵¹ Walsh, p. 73.

¹⁵² Lowenthal (1998), p. 11.



Fig. 14. Prince Charles in conversation with Sheikha Al-Mayassa Bin Hamad Al-Thani, the daughter of Qatar's Emir and Chair of Qatar Museums Authority, at a traditional café in Souk Waqif on Friday, 23 February 2007.

The images of this visit in the press demonstrate the ambition to restore the majority of the souk's buildings as traditional Qatari cafés (where men used to gather to enjoy their afternoon leisure time), the traditional Qatari grocery, and shops selling Qatari women's products. Even the Iranian Carriers (the old porters in the souk, a job done by the first immigrants to Qatar) and policemen in traditional uniforms are present.

However, beside these direct and indirect policies, Souk Waqif represents an implicit fear of permanent loss. As Walsh states, 'The consumption of certain heritage or museum products serves to enhance the identity and culture capital of individuals and groups'.¹⁵³ Souk Waqif's recreation serves to replenish the exhausted national symbols of architecture and heritage. Despite the fact that Souk Waqif's shops were full of traditional local goods before it was destroyed and replicated, the meaning of that heritage was not clear because the traditional objects were accommodated within a modern architecture. During Sheikh Hamad's reign, there has

¹⁵³ Walsh, p. 127.

been an expansion in the consumption of heritage. The great number of immigrants in Qatar in relation to the population of indigenous people has without doubt increased the tendency for nostalgia.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the development of heritage as a cultural service did not tend to highlight society's differences. On the contrary it is aimed at presenting a history for Qatar as it continues to operate, despite demographic differences, by promoting the hegemony of identity.¹⁵⁵ 'The more people are on the move, the more [leaders] will grasp at a tangible memorial of their collective past'.¹⁵⁶ We are dealing here with a relationship between heritage and identity, a strategy that the political leaders use to provide a sense of meaning when accommodating Qatari heritage within the market context in Souk Waqif.¹⁵⁷ In contrast, Western designer goods are sold in modern shopping malls.

Today Souk Waqif is located very close to Doha's corniche and its architecture is visible to anyone walking or driving along this popular route. It is a major Qatari tourist destination and an attraction for locals. 'It is considered the most worthy remaining treasure in Doha city', commented *Al-Arab* newspaper.¹⁵⁸ *Al-Arab* further suggests that it is a particular attraction because 'both the local and tourist can travel hypothetically to the essence of Qatari heritage and the past via this site'.¹⁵⁹

The successful experience of the Souk Waqif project encouraged the Emir to commission another scheme to restore a part of the old coastal city Al-Wakra, where restoration work is ongoing and will eventually provide another traditional tourist site for Qatar. In Figure 15, we can see a development of another simulacrum, in this case a reconstruction of an imagined old city, Al-Wakra. For local inhabitants, in particular, the

¹⁵⁴ Lowenthal (1998), pp. 1-11.

¹⁵⁵ Lowenthal (1998), pp. 3-13.

¹⁵⁶ Lowenthal (1998), p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ Walsh, pp. 127-130.

¹⁵⁸ Behaper.

¹⁵⁹ Behaper.

development of the old city proves that the government has not forgotten or neglected its historical and cultural importance.



Fig. 15. The reconstruction of the old city of Al-Wakra.

The Emir's interest in reconstructing and protecting Qatari architecture has had an impact upon some investors, who have employed Qatari or Islamic characteristics in the design of their skyscrapers to create a post-modern architectural style that says something about Qatar. What is interesting is that the investors' attitudes reflect how they have been influenced by the government's globalisation and modernisation policies, as they are taking the names of historically recognised heritage sites and applying them to new buildings. For example, Barzan Tower [Fig. 16] is a design inspired by the historic Qatari castle of Barzan [Fig. 17] located to the north east of the city of Umm Sulal Mohammed, twenty kilometres from Doha. Barzan Castle was built in 1910. Its Arabic name means 'the prominent place'. It is no wonder then that the new skyscraper was named after the original tower.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Mohammad Jassim Al-Kulaifi, *Archaeological Sites – Architectural Heritage – Museums in Qatar* (Doha: National Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage, 2003), pp. 100-102.



Fig. 16. Barzan Tower, which is located among other skyscrapers on Doha's corniche.

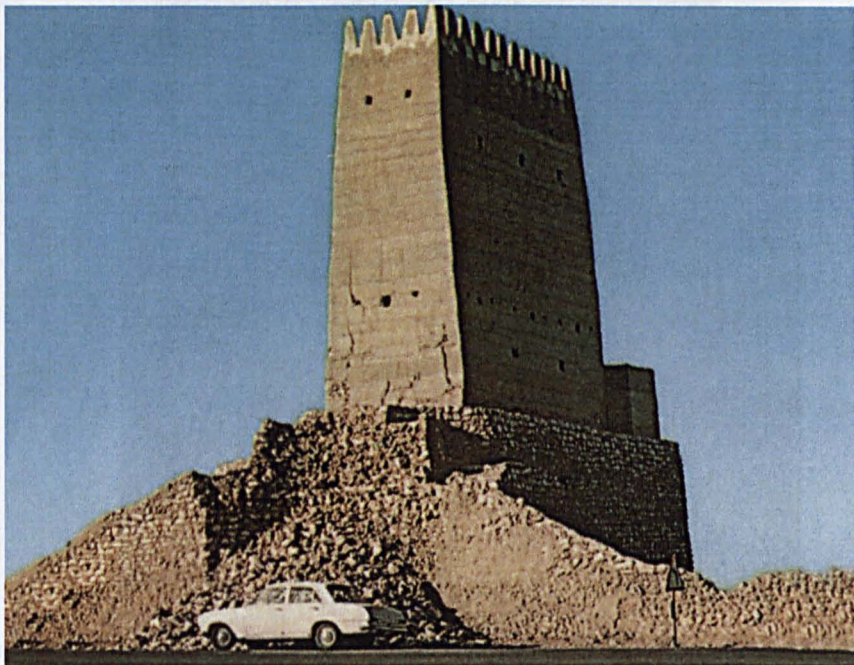


Fig. 17. The historic Barzan Castle at Umm Sulal Mohammed in 1968, before restoration.

The echo of the form of Barzan Tower has had positive consequences as further skyscrapers have been built using Qatari architectural inspiration, for example, the new Ministry of Education building [Fig. 18]; Freej Sharq hotel [Fig. 19]; the new skyscraper that was inspired by the national animal, the Oryx [Fig. 20]; and the Fanar Centre that was inspired by the Al-Malwiya minaret of the great Mosque Samara in Iraq 848/49 AD [Fig. 21]. The latter is inspired by an Islamic element rather than anything specifically Qatari and thus demonstrates the mix of architectural inspiration that we will see in Pei's designs for the Museum of Islamic Art.



Fig. 18. The new building for the Ministry of Education. Islamic inspiration is evident in the dome and the shape of the middle windows.

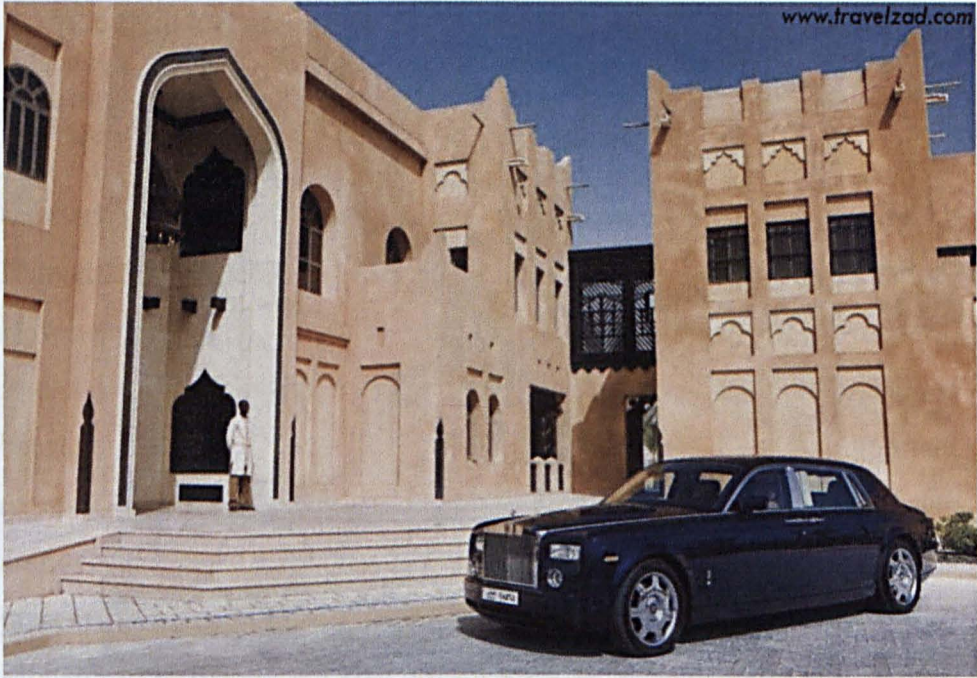


Fig. 19. Freej Sharq Hotel, inspired by and named after the traditional word for the suburb in the Qatari language, 'Freej'.

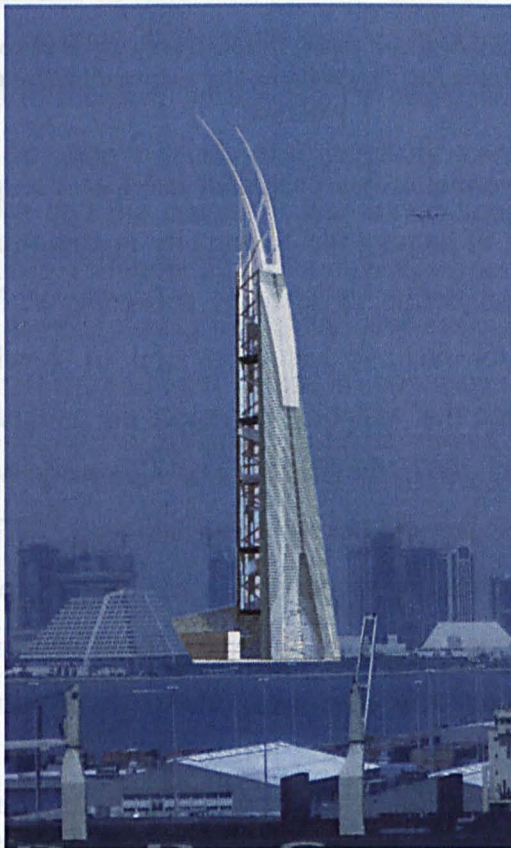


Fig. 20. A new skyscraper with architecture inspired by the oryx. This post-modern building employs high-tech materials and its façade is used to project pictures after sunset.

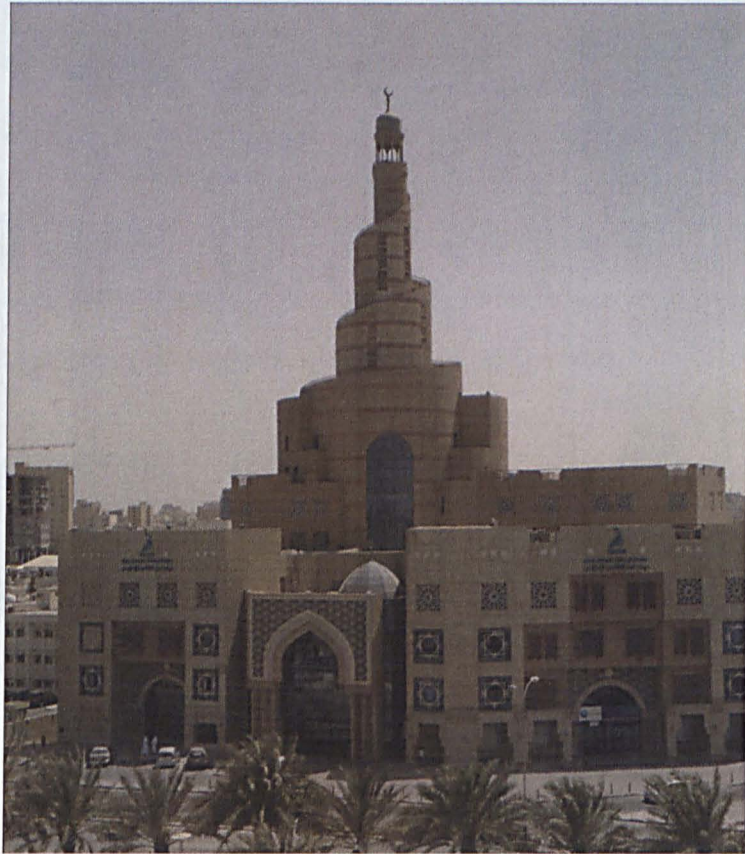


Fig. 21. The Fanar Centre, which is clearly visible from both the restored Souk Waqif and the Museum of Islamic Art. This building also uses spotlights at night to create a panorama.

Since 1995, the government has presented itself as a responsible actor, facing the challenge of helping the community to determine its place on the world's map and define its identity, enhancing self-respect while respecting others. As such, it has been vital to develop a specific department to manage this ambition to protect the national architectural inheritance. In April 2007, the Doha Land Company was established under the logo 'rediscover the beauty of our heritage'.¹⁶¹ This department monitors Qatari architecture while demonstrating its capacity to adopt new architectural styles and techniques. In *Traditional Architecture in Saudi Arabia: The Central Region States* (1990) Marco Albini suggests:

Formal characterization and correspondence to the specific living habits of a country are important factors of the traditional continuity and search for the expression of ethnic

¹⁶¹ 'Overview', *Doha Land Company* <<http://www.dohaland.com/company/overview>> [accessed 4 February 2011].

identity. On the other hand, stylistic elements and schemes need evolving consistently with our age: while respecting and interpreting tradition, the work should be attuned to today's living standards.¹⁶²

Similarly, in contrast to the previous reign, Qatari architecture in Sheikh Hamad's reign occupies a central role in the country's regeneration. However, the choice of style, be that traditional, modern or post-modern, is dictated by a consideration of the country's economic status. This is because the Emir realised that architecture is a very important representation of culture, providing a coherent interaction between architectural design and the surrounding environment.¹⁶³ But, is what is presented in Qatar an articulation or a simulacrum and simulation? Mohammed Al-Khulaifi suggests in his study *Traditional Qatari Architecture* (2000) that architecture is an ideal artwork that refers to and represents the social, psychological and economic status of and to the community.¹⁶⁴ He further suggests in *Archaeological Sites, Architecture and Museums in Qatar* (2003), that Qatari architecture is distinguished by having been influenced in its designs by original Islamic architecture, which relies on simple forms that carefully consider the country's climate, the sun and the desert.¹⁶⁵ The architecture of Sheraton Hotel Doha, for instance, in Figure 22 was a pioneering architectural symbol in Qatar when it opened during the 1980s. However, it does not represent Islamic or Qatari architectural forms; it was something new that soon became a (hybrid) pyramidal landmark on the shores of Doha Bay.

¹⁶² Marco Albini, *Traditional Architecture in Saudi Arabia: The Central Region States* (Riyadh: Department of Antiquities and Museums, Ministry of Education, 1990), p. 7.

¹⁶³ Albini, pp. 11-17.

¹⁶⁴ Mohammad Jassim Al-Khulaifi, *Traditional Qatari Architecture* (Doha: National Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage, 2000), p. 25.

¹⁶⁵ Al-Khulaifi (2003), pp. 77-78.



Fig. 22. Sheraton Hotel Doha.

Architecture has started to flex its muscles in Qatar, where there is a drive to create an architectural language for the country. There is a dilemma of choice. From the mid 1990s onward the adoption of ‘synthetic’ architecture that blends traditional with contemporary styles to create something new.¹⁶⁶ Perhaps the Emir believes that ‘the style of architecture is a way of building codified by time’.¹⁶⁷ Museums, in particular, are viewed as arenas for the powerful display of culture. They do not aim to exclude any evidence of the influence of contemporary life; rather they reflect the changing society in the country by accepting the new.¹⁶⁸ Doha Land Company was launched prior to the announcement of the Emir’s 2030 national vision. Through this launch, the Emir (with the Qatar Foundation) consolidated his efforts to protect national architecture with the aim of developing new architectural concepts in building new modern cities. Doha Land Company mainly found inspiration for design from

¹⁶⁶ Joseph Mordaunt Crook, *The Dilemma of Style* (London: The British Museum, 1987), p. 100.

¹⁶⁷ Crook, p. 13.

¹⁶⁸ Moira G. Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 35-49.

traditional Islamic architecture. The company has four conceptual pillars to support its projects. These are culture, continuance, creativity and enrichment of the environment. Doha Land Company's mission is as follows:

[...] to enhance the social dynamic, the inheritance of heritage and culture and the standard and quality of the daily life, by developing creative projects that offer a contemporary and vibrant life style that harmonizes with its surrounding and allows the individual and the community to improve and flourish.¹⁶⁹

The establishment of this company raises questions as to whether we are witnessing the creation of a Neo-Qatari architectural style in a manner similar to Neo-Oriental, Neo-Egyptian or Neo-Greek, 'styles equally remote in time and place, but not yet equally assimilated or understood'.¹⁷⁰ This could be possible when we consider that the launch of the company took place at a time when the authorities observed a chronological gap in the development of Qatari architecture. They decided that this gap would prevent Qatari architecture from achieving international distinction. The ambition was therefore to create 'a new species of architecture more applicable to [the] country'.¹⁷¹ Thus Doha Land Company began its work with pre-determined plans that had been created by the government and were based on researching absent elements and employing them creatively in the new architectural development of Qatar. By developing collaborative projects between foreign and Qatari architects, it is hoped that a good balance can be sustained between native culture and other styles. This action is reminiscent of Lord Lindsay who in 1847 in his *History of Christian Art* called for a new distinguished architectural style for Great Britain, one that would express the human progress of the epoch. Lindsay stated:

¹⁶⁹ 'The Launching of Doha Land Company for Building Development in New Architecture Concept', *Al-Arab*, Wednesday, 4 March 2009, <<http://www.alarab.com.qa/main.php?issueNo=436&secId=17&subsec=47>> [accessed 4 March 2009].

¹⁷⁰ Crook p. 35.

¹⁷¹ Crook, p. 26.

This is the problem – England wants a new Architecture, expressive of the epoch, of her Anglican faith and of the human mind as balanced in her development, as heir of the past and trustee for the future [...] We have a right to expect this from the importance of the epoch.¹⁷²

Logically then, the Museum of Islamic Art's architecture does not appear as an incongruous form of architecture in Qatar, but as a work of simulacra. Post modernism offers the chance to involve both the past and the present, a key theme of Robert Venturi's definition of the style.¹⁷³ During Sheikh Hamad's reign, post-modern architectural style has replaced the modernism of the previous regime. This modernism in its turn had replaced the traditional style of Qatari architecture that followed the country's improvement plans between the mid-1970s and the beginning of the 1990s. Sheikh Hamad's reign is witnessing a shift towards new aesthetic values. The business of evaluating and understanding different architecture styles has begun. Thus different schools of architecture have been combined to create distinct designs, determined by their own goals and circumstances.¹⁷⁴ The story of post-modern architecture in Qatar began with a synthesis of ideas: constructive unity, expressive ornament, vernacular art and didactic art. Perhaps, it is the Emir's intention and belief that by this method he is balancing Qatari heritage with the most modern creative techniques. In contrast, in Frank Gehry's design of the Abu-Dhabi Guggenheim we see a building that is representative of Gehry's typology [Fig. 8]. I will discuss this further in Chapter Four. When one looks towards the building, one can identify the architect rather than the location. A visitor to Al-Saydaat island, the site of Abu-Dhabi Guggenheim Museum, would probably not be able to recognise the cultural setting of the museum. In contrast, the MIA's site indicates its own architectural language, which narrates metaphorically for Qatar's visitors the story of Qatar's economic and social development. Both politicians and curators believe that this architecture distinguishes

¹⁷² Crook, p. 100.

¹⁷³ Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (London: The Architecture Press, 1977), pp. 16-20.

¹⁷⁴ Crook, pp. 38-41.

the museum from other museums in the region. It is as if the leaders are sending a message to the public saying, 'we have made great social progress in Qatar'. The photographer of Figure 23 has enhanced the presentation of the architecture where, after sunset, spotlights crown the cubic forms, focusing illumination on different parts of the building and creating a subtle overall picture that is in line with the curatorial narrative. Using the language of Charles Jencks, when writing about the post-modern movement in architecture, the viewer's eye shifts towards the site of the MIA and one inevitably feels the presence of the Qatari fingerprint and character of this unique creation.¹⁷⁵



Fig. 23. Lighting the Museum of Islamic Art after sunset enhances the impact of the architectural narrative.

My thesis critically traces the narrative of museums in Qatar that has brought us to this point. As such, in the next chapter, I will investigate the development of Qatar National Museum in the 1970s within the context of the development of the first collecting narrative for the country. Throughout this investigation, it has become more and more evident that the development of museums in Qatar was an integral component in the

¹⁷⁵ Charles Jencks, *The Modern Movement in Architecture* (London: Clays Ltd, 1985), pp. 97-107.

agenda of the Qatari politicians/narrators. They have had, and continue to exert, an overt influence on the narratives of national heritage. We will start our study by exploring how twentieth-century rulers, such as Sheikh Khalifa, succeeded in constructing a national heritage in order to construct an historical archive for the country.

In this light, Chapters Four and Five will analyse the newly opened Museum of Islamic Art and investigate its mission, history and future plans. It soon became apparent during this investigation that literature on the MIA in any language was very limited, therefore, I have used the MIA's catalogues as well as articles written by foreign journalists in an attempt to bring together this important information for the first time.

Chapter Six will be devoted to a study of the future of museum projects and cultural activities in Qatar in order to understand the role that culture plays in development processes in the country.

In order to complete this thesis on the narrative of museums in Qatar, I am aware that my own narrative within Qatar Museums Authority has enabled me to conduct much primary research and compensate for the fact that so little has been written on museums in Qatar. The secondary texts that do exist do not explore the cultural, political or economic significance. As part of this study, I have been able to gather together for the first time a range of oral histories and document this important data for future scholars working on museums in the Middle East. As such, it is hoped that this thesis will open up a new and fascinating research field.

CHAPTER TWO. THE NARRATIVE OF MUSEUMS IN QATAR

First phases

This chapter investigates a narrative of collecting and the construction of cultural heritage in Qatar since the 1970s, during the reign of Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad Al-Thani, using the establishment of Qatar National Museum as a case study. On 23 June 1975, this became the first official museum inaugurated in Qatar. The location chosen by the Emir, Sheikh Khalifa, was the Old Emiri Palace, which had been the residence and central government building of the previous Qatari ruler, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Jassim.¹⁷⁶ The museum was developed to interpret Qatar's history through objects and archaeology using four key elements: the Old Emiri Palace, a new building called the Museum of State (constructed during the restoration of the Old Emiri Palace to house exhibitions, a library and administration offices), the Marine Section (added in 1977 to exhibit materials associated with the natural history of Qatar such as an aquarium, displays of natural and artificial pearls, fossil invertebrates and fish, plus examples of medieval Arab navigation), and the Lagoon (a natural extension of the sea, which was used to exhibit different types of historic dhows and boats).

It is important to explore why the creation of a national museum was so vital for the Qatari government at this point in the history of the country. It has already been established that it was driven by British-Qatari cultural co-operation from 1973 onwards, but it is useful in this chapter to use Bal's concept of a 'narrative of collecting' to explore how heritage was used as a key driver for the political ambitions of the government.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Yousef Jassim Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

¹⁷⁷ Bal, pp. 84-102.

‘Beginnings’

The history of the development of museums in Qatar is associated with the reign of Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad, who became ruler on 22 February 1972. The circumstances that led to his ascendancy may explain the motivation to establish a national museum for the country.¹⁷⁸ Before Sheikh Khalifa’s reign, Sheikh Ahmed Bin Ali had ruled Qatar from 1961-1972. Sheikh Ahmed’s rule was criticised as failing to lay the foundations for a modern state, despite the discovery of oil.¹⁷⁹ For instance, Figure 24 shows how undeveloped the capital city of Doha was during his reign.



Fig. 24. An aerial view of the site of Old Emiri Palace in the centre of Doha in the 1970s.

This image illustrates how neglected Doha was at this time, with only basic facilities and public amenities. Doha looked like the fishing village it had always been and did not reflect the country’s economic development at this time.¹⁸⁰ More critically, Figures 25-27 show how the

¹⁷⁸ Zahlan, pp. 84-89.

¹⁷⁹ Zahlan, p. 88.

¹⁸⁰ In her study *Economic and Social Development in Qatar between 1930-1973*, Mozah Al-Jaber describes how members of the royal family utilised Sheikh Ahmed’s support to rapidly increase their personal wealth between the 1950s and 1973. This wealth was derived from landownership, oil revenues and trade monopoly. Additionally, acquaintances of the royal family shared in these nefarious activities, which served their own interests instead of public interest. Researchers have called this era ‘the control of the bourgeoisie’. Mozah Al-Jaber, *Economic and Social Development in Qatar: 1930-1973* (Doha: University of Qatar Research and Humanities Centre, 2002).

Old Emiri Palace positioned in the heart of Doha city, appears forgotten and neglected, in spite of its importance in Qatar's history.



Fig. 25. The Old Emiri Palace during the reign of Sheikh Ahmed Bin Ali.



Fig. 26. Another view of the Old Emiri Palace during the reign of Sheikh Ahmed Bin Ali.

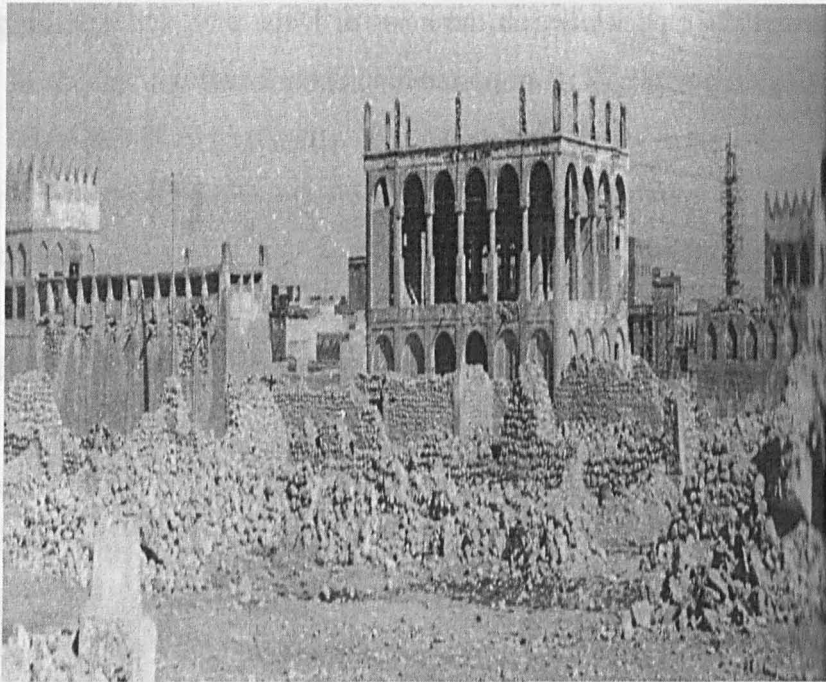


Fig. 27. The core of the Old Emiri Palace during the reign of Sheikh Ahmed Bin Ali.

Everything about the Palace's situation, from the undeveloped landscape to the ruined buildings, suggests that it had all but disappeared from Qatari consciousness. These photographs also reflect a lack of awareness on the part of the government at this time of the importance of documenting the social, economic and political history of Qatar through heritage, restoration and in particular the preservation of the Old Emiri Palace. It was not yet recognised that the Palace had the potential to tell a number of stories; an economic story that could be told through a comparison between the palace's modest buildings and more recent architectural developments and a political story told through the strategic location of the palace. Sheikh Ahmed had the tools, power and, most crucially, profits from the burgeoning oil industry to transform and develop the country. In her study *The Making of the Modern Gulf States* (1989), Rosemarie Said Zahlan describes Sheikh Ahmed as a ruler who 'proved to be incapable of steering Qatar through this period (1961-72)'.¹⁸¹ Zahlan goes further and describes the misuse of oil revenue as 'he

¹⁸¹ Zahlan, p. 88.

was allocated one-quarter of Qatar's oil revenues for his personal use [which] encouraged the extravagance of his life-style'.¹⁸²

Qatar underwent a further period of development following its independence from British protection on 3 September 1971.¹⁸³ Zahlan describes the oil fortune at that time as 'fabulous' in comparison with the tiny Qatari population of only thirty thousand people.¹⁸⁴ She further comments that:

The abrupt transition from poverty to extreme wealth took the Qataris by surprise. Unaccustomed to urban ways – Doha, after all, was little more than a fishing village – they were not well equipped to deal with their new found wealth. This was the era when gold-plated cars were sold to them by unscrupulous dealers who had suddenly descended on Qatar, motivated by the desire to become rich as quickly as possible.¹⁸⁵

Soon after gaining independence, and joining important global organisations such as the League of Arab States (1971) and the United Nations (September 1971), it became clear to some that Sheikh Ahmed Bin Ali was not equipped for the rigours of rule.¹⁸⁶ Exploiting his absence abroad, the Al-Thani family agreed unanimously to replace him with his cousin Sheikh Khalifa.¹⁸⁷ 'Thus Qatar began to manage itself and, in the oil revenue, it possessed the basic tool for building the country's new economic and social development plans'.¹⁸⁸ At his accession, Sheikh Khalifa was described as a 'nationalistic', 'wise' and 'dedicated' ruler who was deeply involved in developing the country socially, economically and politically.¹⁸⁹ Although we must recognise the inherent polemic in such media comments, he immediately began his reign with the radical project to physically change the country (as described in

¹⁸² Zahlan, p. 88.

¹⁸³ Zahlan, pp. 84-89.

¹⁸⁴ Zahlan, pp. 84-89.

¹⁸⁵ Zahlan, p. 86.

¹⁸⁶ Zahlan, pp. 87-89.

¹⁸⁷ Zahlan, pp. 87-89.

¹⁸⁸ Al-Shalq and others (2005), pp. 328-329.

¹⁸⁹ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

Chapter One).¹⁹⁰ Examples of this change can be seen in Figures 28 and 29, which demonstrate how wide ranging development and planning in the country was during the early years of his reign. Shortly after his accession, Doha was subject to significant architectural change.



Fig. 28. Restoration work on the Old Emiri Palace and the development of the surrounding area.



Fig. 29. Development of the city in 1975, during the reign of Sheikh Khalifa.

¹⁹⁰ Al-Far (1979), p. 1.

The radical reshaping and rebuilding seen in these photographs was an important component of the narrative of progress that the new government wished to create. The Old Emiri Palace was exploited as a major component in this development and came to play a key part in demonstrating the new ruler's commitment to local heritage, tradition and history. Thus, one can see how the government of Sheikh Khalifa was encouraged and equipped to engage the 'full range of players necessary to ensure' the success of its intended narrative.¹⁹¹ Given that the Old Emiri Palace, with its traditional architecture, was surrounded by new development in architecture and city planning, this suggests that the government believed such radical and rapid change had to have popular support, requiring the comfort of tradition to alleviate the fear of the 'new'.¹⁹² The need to restore and to some extent recreate this space demonstrates Sheikh Khalifa's recognition that there might be public consternation at the projects he was determined to initiate. He anticipated that the traditional Qatari community, significantly isolated from external influence, would inevitably be fearful of rapid change and want Qatar to preserve its values and traditions.¹⁹³ Perhaps it was this apprehension of the outside world that led the politicians to the idea of a heritage site and the development of national historical collections. It was proclaimed that:

Since the beginning of his rule Sheikh Khalifa recognised that although development is necessary sometimes the cost was at the expense of the country's tradition and heritage. However, he did not intend to destroy that heritage, on the contrary, the Sheikh insisted on attempting to preserve his country's cultural heritage, tradition and values, while the country moved forward. Thus, creating a link between the new generation and their history.¹⁹⁴

This was particularly important for the new generation of Qatari people, whose only contact with their history, culture and heritage was via family

¹⁹¹ Lee H. Skolnick, 'Towards a New Museum Architecture: Narrative and Representation', in *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design and Exhibitions*, ed. by Suzanne MacLeod (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 118-130 (p. 125).

¹⁹² Darwish Al-Far, interviewed on 26 March 2008.

¹⁹³ Al-Far, interviewed on 26 March 2008.

¹⁹⁴ *The Qatar National Museum: Its Origins, Concepts and Planning* (Doha: The Ministry of Information, 1975), p. 3.

oral traditions, that is the narration of Qatari history as told by older members of the family to the younger generations. There was no official historical archive for the country and very few documents had survived.¹⁹⁵ This is especially true for the period under discussion. Most historical information about important events was transmitted orally.¹⁹⁶ As such, there was a gap in popular knowledge of what was meant by Qatari cultural history. The potential existed for the politicians and their curators, tasked with the job of narrating Qatari histories through developing a museum collection, to manage the stories to be told in the new national museum.

Telling Stories

National museums and their collections have traditionally been viewed as places where tourists and visitors to a country can marvel at the past and enjoy observing a different culture. They are also seen as places that can document, exhibit and preserve local cultures. This dual purpose has seen national museums become core spaces for defining national identities.¹⁹⁷ For the Qatari government in the 1970s, a national museum was intended to serve the nation's need for a specific narrative of its history and heritage, in such a way that it reflected or enhanced the status of the new oil-rich nation state.¹⁹⁸ Erwin H. Barbour explains that it is important for people to have museums because they are storehouses for art, materials, history and nature. He further suggests that museums are not luxuries and leisure places for a few people, 'but are necessities

¹⁹⁵ Al-Far, interviewed on 26 March 2008.

¹⁹⁶ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

¹⁹⁷ See for example 'Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship' by Carol Duncan and 'Art Museums, National Identity, and the Status of Minority Cultures: The Case of Hispanic Art in the United State', by Steven D. Lavine, both in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and politics of Museum Display*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution, 1991).

¹⁹⁸ Douglas Newton, 'Old Wine in New Bottles, and the Reverse', in *Museums and the Making of Ourselves: The Role of Objects in National Identity*, ed. by Flora E.S. Kaplan (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1996), pp. 269-290 (p. 273).

demanding by all, and are thoroughly practical in their aims and ends'.¹⁹⁹ Establishing Qatar National Museum in 1973 may also have had symbolic significance as an act of revolution against previous political conditions. It redefined and restructured the social history of the country and laid the foundations for a modern Qatar. This process of building a heritage for Qatar was seen as the next step in the development of modernity alongside an infrastructure created through new permanent jobs, organised education and hospitals.²⁰⁰ The timing of the establishment of the National Museum, just a year after independence, was not a coincidence. It was proclaimed that Sheikh Khalifa wanted to 'make [...] a place where evidence of Qatar's ancient history is preserved to narrate a history of Qatari life, tradition and heritage before these narratives disappeared from people's memories'.²⁰¹

This would also explain the on-going excavation activities during the reign of Sheikh Khalifa, and it is possible he believed that, like other cultures, Qataris should also have a site that could publicly narrate and represent the historical order of their country from its distant past to its present. What opened Sheikh Khalifa's eyes to the vital role that a national museum could have in society? This is an important question to investigate, especially if one considers that a museum culture was not popular in the Arabian Gulf region at this time.²⁰²

Sheikh Khalifa's attention was first drawn to the population's need for their heritage to be constructed, documented, recorded and preserved in a national museum by an early attempt at developing an exhibitionary

¹⁹⁹ Erwin H. Barbour, 'Museums and the People', in *Museum Origins: Readings in Early Museum History and Philosophy*, ed. by Hugh H. Genoways and Mary Anne Anderi (California: Left Coast Press, 2008), pp. 69-71 (p. 69).

²⁰⁰ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 89-90. On p. 90, Bennett argues that 'the museum [...] has been constantly subject to demands for reform. Moreover, although its specific inflections have varied with time and place as have the specific political constituencies which have been caught up in its advocacy, the discourse of reform which motivated these demands has remained identifiably the same over the last century'.

²⁰¹ *The Qatar National Museum: Its Origins, Concepts and Planning*, p. 3.

²⁰² Mohammed Jassim Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.

culture in the country. In 1972 two Qatari artists, Jassim Zani and Yousef Ahmed, organised a small museum (no more than 4x4 square metres) in association with an art exhibition, where they displayed ethnographical artefacts such as specimens of gypsum,²⁰³ costume, fishing and diving equipment and artefacts related to the rituals of married life. The artists were members of the Al-Jassra Club, a cultural and social organisation of Qatari artists and intellectuals that still meet today to discuss different cultural, artistic and contemporary issues and organise social and cultural events and exhibitions locally and overseas.²⁰⁴ At the 1972 exhibition, two statues made of clay by the artist Jassim Zani aimed to demonstrate aspects of Bedouin life.²⁰⁵ One depicted a Bedouin woman shaking milk to produce butter and the other was a Bedouin man roasting coffee.²⁰⁶ The exhibition and museum were reviewed in local and regional newspapers, including the journals *Al-Orobaa* and *Sadda Al-Essboaa* and the *Al-Arab* newspaper.²⁰⁷ The Bahraini journal, *Sadda Al-Esboaa*, for example, reported that ‘the endeavours that were spent in organising the exhibition and museum reveal the beginnings of a responsible and large artistic movement in the country’.²⁰⁸ The artist Yousef Ahmed has described this early experience of exhibitions in Qatar:

The idea of organising that small museum was significant and pioneering at that time. When we opened the exhibition, astonishingly we received daily a good number of enthusiastic audiences from different levels within the community, such as ministers, official visitors from the government, school teachers and students. In respect to the Qatari traditional lifestyle at that time, the audiences were exclusively men. Particularly at that time women were not considered as

²⁰³ Gypsum Plaster or Juss is a local raw material (hydrated calcium sulphate). It was calcined, pulverised, sieved and sometimes mixed with lime, to yield a very quick setting plaster for plastering and ornament. The display of this material highlighted the trade of the northern fishing town of Al-Khour.

²⁰⁴ Yousef Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2009.

²⁰⁵ Qatari demography at that time was not yet overtaken by the number of immigrants. It was simply divided into two main societies, Urban and Bedouin. The urban society inhabited the coastal towns, whereas the Bedouin inhabited the desert. Each group has its own costumes, culture and tradition.

²⁰⁶ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2009.

²⁰⁷ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2009.

²⁰⁸ ‘Pausing with the Qatari Art Exhibition’, *Sadda Al-Esboaa*, 182 (10 June 1973), pp. 4-6 (p. 4).

participants or audiences to art or museum exhibitions.²⁰⁹

This early museum demonstrated that there was a desire to experience the heritage of Qatar, despite the social exclusion of women, for whom galleries and museums were thought to have little appeal.²¹⁰ Crucially, this experiment engaged the government and the 'Ministry of Information and Culture insisted on taking its official guests on a tour of the museum'.²¹¹ The large numbers of official and unofficial visitors to the museum provided concrete evidence for Sheikh Khalifa that the community was ready and eager for such an institution. Alongside paintings and photographs, both artists took a risk when they broke away from their usual art practices to develop three-dimensional tableaux that illustrated Qatari class structure and identity. Ahmed has said that 'Displaying statues at that time in the museum meant that we dissolved the conservative barrier that the community insisted on. We created from these statues a meaningful demonstration of Bedouin life'.²¹²

Sheikh Khalifa recognised that these two artists, using simple objects such as fishing and diving equipment, together with their clay statues of Bedouin people, had brought history alive by placing them in an exhibitionary context. Their modest project proved how effective such a narrative technique could be in helping to preserve and celebrate the culture of his country. As most of the people of Qatar are related to the great nomadic tribes of ancient Arabia, their story could be secured for future generations by chronicling Bedouin life and demonstrating their costumes, customs, social activities, and achievements. The artists attempted to depict the nobility of Badu life and the courage and adaptability that was demanded to live in such a tough environment. The Sheikh also hoped that this narrative of his people would recognise the fact that there were two distinct societies within the small population of

²⁰⁹ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2009.

²¹⁰ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2009.

²¹¹ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2009.

²¹² Ahmed, interviewed on March 2009.

Qatar that shared the same ethnicity: a more urban society of fishing villages and the more traditional nomadic Bedouin culture.²¹³ The curators/artists became the ‘meaning-producing agency’ as they manipulated the objects in their narrative to suit their ambitions to tell a story of Qatari life.²¹⁴ This modest experience perhaps opened the eyes of the government to the potential of a semiotic system that spoke to the community. Through this semiotic system, the objects remained physically unchanged but, as signs, they became entirely different once they had been integrated into the new narrative created by the exhibition as a whole. As he had been prime minister before becoming ruler, Sheikh Khalifa had had the opportunity to visit Europe and, more specifically, Britain regularly during the 1960s for both business and pleasure.²¹⁵ This allowed him to experience first hand the long history of public museums in a country where, since the nineteenth century, ‘most local museums [had been] established in order to further society’s knowledge’.²¹⁶ Al-Khulaifi states that ‘it is certain that [Sheikh Khalifa] had visited British museums before as he was aware of Britain’s long history in the museum field. He also visited other museums in France, Egypt, Syria and so on’.²¹⁷ Within the displays in these great public museums, he would have observed systems of taxonomy and the way that knowledge can be structured through the presentation of different subjects such as biology, archaeology, history and geology.²¹⁸ As such, he may have been introduced to the possibility of making a narrative of Qatar visible, understandable and tangible through the museum. The European museums he saw may also have informed his desire to provide his community with an institution that could be considered as much an open university as a place of leisure.²¹⁹ The moment that the decision was taken

²¹³ *The Qatar National Museum: Its Origins, Concepts and Planning*, pp. 7-8.

²¹⁴ Bal, p. 98.

²¹⁵ Al-Far, interviewed on 26 March 2009.

²¹⁶ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museum and Gallery Education* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1991), p. 114.

²¹⁷ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 May 2008.

²¹⁸ *Museum Studies: an anthology of contexts*, ed. by Bettina Carbonell Messias (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 18.

²¹⁹ *The Qatar National Museum: Its Origins, Concepts and Planning*, pp. 3-8.

to develop a national museum was also the moment when it was recognised that this type of institution offered the possibility of reordering objects, via specific taxonomies, to create particular systems of knowledge.²²⁰ This semiological system would thereafter become even more coherent and strongly nominalist, instead of sceptical.²²¹ Such sign systems could strengthen the logic of the new narrative. The ideas that drove this museological move in Qatar were themselves part of a wider, complex desire to provide a simple analytical narrative that offered proof of the country's heritage. There is definitely a connection between the theory of reordering and taxonomy and the theory of language imposed upon the objects.²²² Sheikh Khalifa did not simply aim to create a narrative that was both imaginative and coherent; he also aimed to create a complete reconstruction and reorganisation of what was known of the nation's identity through its culture, heritage, tradition and history. This was apparent in the philosophical goals he set when Qatar National Museum was established in 1973, which had the stated aim of educating Qatari people about themselves, and tourists about the Qatari.²²³ The proclamation of his intention was stated briefly but clearly in QNM's first introduction pamphlet:

First and foremost, its purpose is to inform. This responsibility is perhaps the most important in a country whose people have not had the casual access to museums of those who have grown up with them [...] To inform successfully, the co-operation of the person being informed should, ideally, be engaged [...] The museum, therefore, makes extensive use of modern communication techniques in presenting the complex, often highly technical, information which it contains. Museums may entertain as well as inform.²²⁴

These words emphasise that the principle behind the QNM was that all people would be able to utilise the museum space as part of a self-guided educational programme. However, this kind of knowledge

²²⁰ Foucault (1994), pp. 3-8.

²²¹ Foucault (1994), p. 3.

²²² Foucault (1994), pp. 3-8.

²²³ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 May 2008.

²²⁴ *The Qatar National Museum: Its Origins, Concepts and Planning*, p. 7.

generation 'involves the allotting of a sign'.²²⁵ Within this representation, the curators/narrators tried to include perception, desire and thought.²²⁶ As such, the Emir could separate himself from the historical stereotypical image of Qatari politicians, as those who only desire increased wealth, total control and the retention of absolute monarchical power over the nation. Instead, his authority would be justified and enhanced through the museum.

Given national levels of literacy and education in Qatar at that time, the museum relied heavily on an interpretive strategy founded on photographs and film in the original. This was justified because 'the majority of [visitors] were old and middle aged and with a modest educational level'.²²⁷ In Figures 30 and 31 for example, different measuring devices and scales, diving equipment and pearl trading tools are displayed alongside photographs that demonstrate how these objects were used. By juxtaposing objects and photographs, as seen in Figure 30, for example, a specific period of pearl diving is recreated. In the background photographs, divers appear naked and without professional diving equipment and, in order to enhance this narrative of traditional techniques, primitive tools were included in the display, such as the 'al kher' or large stone that would be attached to the diver's leg to pull him deeper, the 'al deycen' or net basket that hung around the diver's neck in order to collect oysters, 'al fetam' or small nose clips made of tortoise shell, 'al khabt' or pieces of leather used to protect divers' hands, and a simple knife or 'al maflag' used to open the oysters. This display aimed to invoke memories of rituals of the four-month-long diving season such as farewells to families, rituals of welcome, rituals of singing specific lyrics and memories of struggle, death and the fight against nature that were such a significant part of the traditional pearl fishing experience. To some extent, within this semiotic system, the whole history of pearl fishing is

²²⁵ Foucault (1994), p. 6.

²²⁶ Foucault (1994), p. 6.

²²⁷ *The Qatar National Museum: Its Origins, Concepts and Planning*, pp. 1-7.

preserved. As seen in Figure 31, each piece of pearl (measured and sized in one of the scales) and each manuscript (documenting trade deals, divers' income and loans) represented both individual and collective memories of this significant aspect of Qatari history. The trade monopoly that controlled pearl prices, the homesickness and danger suffered by the divers, and the importance of the harvest for the financial well-being of their families underlie the curatorial desire to recreate the hardships of former Qatari life and contrast them with the more comfortable lifestyles of today.



Fig. 30. A display at Qatar National Museum in 1999 featuring diving equipment and a photograph of pearl divers illustrates how divers relied on basic tools in such a dangerous job.



Fig. 31. A display of the different scales and measuring tools used to grade pearls, manuscripts used to document pearl trading deals, and a photograph illustrating pearl trading (photograph taken in 1999).

As there was no national collection, when Sheikh Khalifa decided to establish the museum in 1973, he decided to appoint a committee that included Jassim Zani to collect the ethnographical materials that dominate displays such as those described above.²²⁸ The initial curatorial aims of the museum were that the collections and displays would not simply be about presentation but rather would focus on the relevance these objects could hold in a narrative about Qatar's history and progress. Upon opening the museum in 1975, the curators introduced the function of the museum's collection as follows:

The museum's objects include ethnological, archaeological, ecological and historical pieces that demonstrate the physical nature of the peninsula of Qatar from the first appearance of mankind on Qatari land and all the physical changes that Qatar witnessed during different eras. These changes, in turn, explain the different periods that the Qatari witnesses during his lifecycle, as well as how he has been influenced by his surroundings [...], how he has, to some extent, won the battle over nature [...]. The museum also highlights, either by objects, illustrations or films Qatar's activities and experiences in both desert and sea environments.²²⁹

²²⁸ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2009.

²²⁹ *The Qatar National Museum: Its Origins, Concepts and Planning*, p. 9.

Yousef Darwish, an acquaintance of Sheikh Khalifa and the head of the collecting committee, has said that Sheikh Khalifa found evidence in a newspaper article of the public desire to have a museum in the country.

Darwish recalls that:

I remember one day that Sheikh Khalifa met me and was very pleased about the article that had been written by the Qatari journalist Nasir Al-Ottoman. In his article Al-Ottoman praised Sheikh Khalifa's intention of establishing a national museum in the country, and discussed what this kind of institution would mean to both the country and the community. Al-Ottoman praised also the idea of preserving the Old Emiri Palace in the form of a museum. After this article Sheikh Khalifa's enthusiasm was strengthened and his idea of establishing a museum was set.²³⁰

In the 1970s, as to some extent today, the Qatari press was the mouthpiece of the ruling family and therefore can be read as representing their aims and ambitions. This article was published at a time when the intention to establish the QNM had already been announced and it was part of the curators/narrators plan to emphasise its importance for the nation. The article demonstrated to the Sheikh that, having experienced the small museum, the Qataris were eager to have a larger museum to reflect and preserve their heritage, history, identity and culture. The government's motivation for establishing the National Museum was political, to make up for the absence of a national heritage, the absence of a national archive and the absence of a recognition of past experience. The process of filling in these gaps would hopefully produce a coherent narrative for the nation and truly reflect its identity.

To make this narrative effective and persuasive, however, the country needed first to establish new ethnographical and archaeological collections. Consequently, in the early 1970s, Sheikh Khalifa approached Britain to ask for its help in organising a nationwide archaeological expedition in order to amass a substantial collection for the projected new

²³⁰ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

museum. A small-scale attempt had been made some time earlier by a Danish excavation team, but this had been discontinued and any artefacts discovered had been sent to Denmark.²³¹ Thus, despite the cessation of the protection agreement in 1971, 1973 saw the beginning of the second wave of British-Qatari cultural co-operation.²³² The 1970s therefore witnessed the first serious attempt to collect the specimens needed to present Qatar's history in a new narrative style in a national museum.

Creating a Collection in the 1970s: Middle

The 'beginning' of the narrative of collecting came at a time when Qatar had only just gained its independence from the British protectorate and therefore the establishment of a national museum at the Old Emiri Palace had a particular political significance. Sheikh Khalifa focussed on culture, recognising that it should be 'foundational to development and an essential point of reference by which all other factors are measured'.²³³

Discussing this comment, Yousef Darwish stated:

[Sheikh Khalifa] believed that a country, before getting involved in any development programme, should first of all have a museum which presents and preserves its history, traditions and heritage. The lack of a museum in the country would have meant it missing an essential element.²³⁴

By asking for British involvement in the first national museum in Qatar and later in some of the regional museums, Sheikh Khalifa sought to utilise previous British-Qatari political and economic relationships to establish a new period of cultural co-operation that would help fulfil his vision for the country.

²³¹ Al-Far, interviewed on 26 March 2008.

²³² The Danish group came in 1956, during the reign of Sheikh Ali Bin Abd Allah. These excavations uncovered valuable evidence proving that there had been communication between Qatar and famous civilisations such as Babylon, Nile, Persia and India. Al-Kulaifi (2003), pp. 36-38.

²³³ Christina F. Kreps, *Liberating culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Heritage Preservation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 116.

²³⁴ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

This approach can also be regarded as a clear acknowledgement of the potential advantages of a cultural exchange between both countries. The British archaeological expedition of 1973 achieved two significant results. Firstly, their report extended the knowledge of the Stone Age in Qatar and identified new types of artefact, such as small stone specimens and yellow and orange potteries, evidencing the presence of an immigrant group in Qatar during the earlier Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods.²³⁵ Secondly, they identified sites in Qatar that they believed dated back to Neolithic times.²³⁶ The discovery of Ubaid pottery at Al-Da'asa offered evidence that this site was the most southeasterly habitation in the Arabian Gulf. The Ubaid pottery revealed one of the earliest civilisations of the Near East, dating from 7-6 millennia BC.²³⁷ Darwish Al-Far, who was the first director of Qatar National Museum and a participant in the archaeological work, stated that these pre-historic artefacts were extremely important for a ruler such as Sheikh Khalifa, as they represented his commitment to enhancing the knowledge of Qatari history and identity at a time of great social change.²³⁸ This was apparent in the Sheikh's decree that created the national committee, the request for a British archaeological expedition so soon after his succession, as well as the decision to employ the British curatorial consultant Michael Rice to help develop the first national museum. The curators/narrators acknowledged that they recognised that 'museums' and 'communities' were closely related to each other in Qatar.²³⁹ This practice fits with Carol Duncan's statement that museums 'reinforce the community's collective knowledge about itself and its place in the world, and preserve the memory of its most important and generally accepted values and beliefs'.²⁴⁰ Michael Rice, who worked at Qatar National Museum between 1972 and 1974, describes the initial concept of the museum in Qatar with regard particularly to children:

²³⁵ Al-Khulaifi (2003), pp. 15-16.

²³⁶ Al-Khulaifi (2003), pp. 33-34.

²³⁷ *The Qatar National Museum: Its Origins, Concepts and Planning*, pp. 1-9.

²³⁸ Al-Far, interviewed on 26 March 2008.

²³⁹ Fuller, p. 328.

²⁴⁰ Duncan, p. 103.

We noticed that the local kids were coming in to the newly built museum building in the evenings and copying down the extensive texts there. We found out that they had been told by their teachers, who weren't local, that they had no history – but because of the museum they realised that they did have a history and they responded. When the museum opened, they brought their parents and grandparents.²⁴¹

The reaction of the children towards what they saw suggests that the educational aspect of the museum was paramount. For these children and their families, the national museum functioned to help define their history and heritage in a way that their schools were not supporting.²⁴² As such, the objects in the QNM became fetishised by audiences and the curators. This attitude underlines the audiences' desire to have objects or artefacts displayed in such a way that would allow them to locate and understand Qatar's history in a more formal manner. Fetishism for the curators/narrators meant that the objects could be totems of the political and social desires that they represented rather than simply their inherited meanings and functions.²⁴³ Within the context of a narrative of collecting, these totemic objects allowed the curators/narrators to explore previously hidden narratives in order to form a Qatari narrative. Often there is a collection that needs to be displayed in a suitable space. However, it was the other way round in the case of QNM, as in this instance, there was an empty building that had been selected to be the home of a collection that did not as yet exist. Interestingly, in the light of this desire to create a national narrative Sheikh Khalifa insisted that all of the national committee should be Qatari. Yousef Darwish remembers that:

When the time for finishing the reconstruction work was near, an essential question was raised for Sheikh Khalifa by Mahmood Al-Shareef, a chairman in the Ministry of Media. What collection was going to be displayed in the museum? At this time he decided to appoint a committee of men of Qatari nationality only, to collect the objects, because

²⁴¹ Heal, p. 30.

²⁴² Fuller, p. 328.

²⁴³ Bal, pp. 87-88.

the Sheikh believed they were most suitable to identify the pieces which were derived from Qatari ethnography [...] The acquisition would be made either by donation or purchase.²⁴⁴

The very careful choice of committee members suggested that their task came with a huge responsibility. The government did not approach known collectors or auction houses to acquire objects or whole collections to construct their narrative. Instead they chose to rely on purchased objects and those donated during the collection process. As well as instigating a British archaeological expedition, the committee acquired more ethnographic objects by travelling around the country and, at times, literally knocking on strangers' doors. In some cases, they were involved in negotiations to purchase items from Qatar's richest families.²⁴⁵ The research and negotiations were not conducted randomly as the committee in some cases utilised personal relationships with the royal family and individuals from a wealthy background. Darwish provides an example of how the committee used personal relationships when they sought potentially significant objects:

I remember that I went to Sheikha Mariam Al-Atiya, the wife of Sheikh Ali Al-Thani, because I know her very well and our families have had a long relationship. I knew that she had very valuable pieces that would enrich the museum's collection. I explained to her what the committee was doing and that she could participate with us in this national duty, and contribute towards preserving Qatari history and heritage. These objects would be preserved for her descendants forever, who would be proud of having their family's objects in the museum's display.²⁴⁶

Once objects had been located, the committee's role was to identify what Bal refers to as 'objects of representation'.²⁴⁷ In approaching people such as Mariam Al-Atiya, Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammed and other families with important collections, the committee considered such aspects as consistency (how an object represented an historical idea), chronology (how an object represented an historical period) and coherence (how a

²⁴⁴ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁴⁵ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁴⁶ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁴⁷ Bal, pp. 96-99.

collection fits with the construction of a wider narrative). In this context, objects such as the tent, old vessels and valuable jewellery donated by Sheikha Mariam [Fig. 32] were fetishised within a specifically Qatari narrative.²⁴⁸ They created an impression that historical events could be experienced through a physical encounter with authentic relics. The presentation of the rare tent, for example, illustrated the royal family's historical living condition when, like other members of their tribe, they camped in the harsh conditions of the desert with very basic necessities. Camels were their most valuable asset as they were vital for milk to drink, urine to clean their hair, dung to light the fire in the tent and wool to build their houses.²⁴⁹ In the summer men usually left the desert for the sea, where they spent months pearl fishing. Unlike European society and Qatar today, at this time there was no social class structure and people used to live, travel, work and socialise together under the same circumstances and conditions.²⁵⁰ In his journey of discovery through the Arabian Gulf (1857-1909), Hermann Burchardt recorded that he could not meet Sheikh Jassim, leader of the Qatari tribes, because he lived five hours outside Doha in the west Qatari desert and travel was difficult because of poor pathways and sand storms.²⁵¹ Thus, the rare tent that Sheikha Mariam donated was used to represent a very important moment in the history of Qatar's royal family, when nomadic life was abandoned. The jewellery, vessels and gold-plated furniture that the Sheikha also donated were used to demonstrate the beginnings of the royal family's accumulation of wealth once the leader of the tribes became a formal ruler of the state. This change in status was both derived from and allowed them to benefit from their pearl trading activities in a more global market and the British discovery of oil at the end of 1930s. The amassing of significant and valuable jewellery, in particular, also demonstrates the beginning of the development of different social classes within Qatar.

²⁴⁸ Darwish, interviewed on 24 May 2008.

²⁴⁹ Hermann Burchardt, *Along the Gulf: From Basra to Muscat 1857-1909* (Abu Dhabi: National Library Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2009), pp. 135-137.

²⁵⁰ Burchardt, pp. 135-137.

²⁵¹ Burchardt, p. 139.

Traditionally women possessed large-sized jewellery, not only for its beauty, but to demonstrate their husband's status. Heavy necklaces (sometimes extending to a woman's thighs), head jewellery, large inlaid bracelets, inlaid straps, long earrings and large rings were worn in female-only ceremonies, such as weddings. On arrival, each woman would take off her cloak to reveal her jewellery.

These important types of objects, inherited from previous Qatari rulers and found in Sheikha Mariam's home became integral to the curators' interpretation of an historic Qatari narrative [Figs 33-34]. Gold plated chairs and large wooden inlaid chests (imported from India and Turkey) reflected the kinds of materials that the ruler had possessed when they moved from a nomadic life style to a more urban life. Special furniture was imported from outside Qatar specifically for the Sheikh's 'palace'. This furniture adorned those formal spaces where he received his relatives and wealthy friends, whereas the room of government – the majlis – where he received his Qatari subjects was decorated using traditional Qatari furniture [Fig. 40]. This collection illustrated a history of changing lifestyles, status, global trade relationships and differences in class and wealth, in contrast to the more primitive artefacts that had already been collected to demonstrate an ordinary lifestyle and lower economic status. Sheikha Mariam's decision to donate her valuable belongings to the national museum perhaps reflected her changing attitude towards such possessions. Having been made aware of the committee's role in amassing a national collection, she realised that these objects were of much greater importance and value for her nation, as part of the new national museum, than they were in storage. In this new narrative, such objects became far more significant. If their value could be articulated and constructed collectively, they could deliver a powerful statement to the Qatari people. The curators/narrators proclaimed that the display of these objects helped audiences to understand the movement and

development of Qatari society and the consequences of this for their cultural heritage.²⁵²



Fig. 32. In this photograph from 1999, traditional Qatari necklaces are displayed at Qatar National Museum.



Fig. 33. Furniture from former Qatari rule as displayed at Qatar National Museum in 1999.

²⁵² 'Inside Qatar National Museum', *Al Ummah*, (1980), p. 5.



Fig. 34. Different types of chests dating from previous Qatari reigns as displayed at Qatar National Museum in 1999.

Such objects helped to recreate a particular political period in Qatar's history. In creating a narrative for these objects in the national museum, the curators/narrators created a space that represented a richer, more diverse past. Integrating different objects such as jewellery, furniture, chests, daggers, censers, home made perfume bottles and kitchen tools from different parts of the community – the royal family, wealthy families, and ordinary families – articulated a particular hierarchy [Figs 33-37]. For example, the organisation of the daggers in the display shown in Figure 35 was meant to tell a meaningful story of Arabic pride and bravery at the time when nomads lived in the wild desert and carried such objects for ceremonial (rather than functional) purposes. Likewise, the presentation of imported perfume bottles as seen in Figure 36 demonstrated the adoption of a new life style by those women who could afford such luxury goods.²⁵³

²⁵³ 'Inside Qatar National Museum', pp. 1-4.



Fig. 35. A display of traditional male accessories at Qatar National Museum in 1999.



Fig. 36. Imported phials and censers for homemade perfumes, as displayed at Qatar National Museum in 1999.



Fig. 37. Kitchen tools displayed at Qatar National Museum in 1999.

Once these objects became part of a museum collection, the research on them and their resulting interpretations, imbued them with a greater importance than simple market or monetary value.²⁵⁴ They became objects within a very specific narrative. As such, the curators/narrators aimed to reveal a form of reality that presented these objects as representative of facts, history, culture, identity and heritage, which thus made their narrative a substitute for a lost past.²⁵⁵ In the new space of the national museum, the objects' relevance was enhanced and meaning was created.

It is important to note that none of the collecting committee members had any previous experience of this kind of work, apart from Jassim Zani who had a little experience with the Al-Jassra Club's museum. They had not even visited museums in Europe or Arabic countries. The only motivation for their activities was the Emir's desire to have a national museum in the country, and his directive that they should concentrate their acquisitions on creating a 'Qatari collection'.²⁵⁶ 'Therefore, we did not need to know what we should obtain', concluded Yousef Darwish.²⁵⁷ This suggests that the committee were, at that time, only concerned with collecting objects that were 'ancient'. Their age and not their condition was crucial to the collectors. It made no difference to them what condition they were in, or how bad they looked, as long as the objects were old and Qatari, they were going into the national museum. The committee was ordered to look for objects that could be placed in a museum context, where, with their new meanings and multiple readings, something entirely different could potentially be created.²⁵⁸ They would become representative objects, demonstrating Qatari identity, heritage, culture and history. The curators/narrators had to decide how they could make an object symbolise

²⁵⁴ Bal, pp. 96-99.

²⁵⁵ Bal, pp. 96-99.

²⁵⁶ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁵⁷ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁵⁸ Bal, pp. 87-88.

something more than simply itself.²⁵⁹ The intention to display the past through these objects created a number of challenges. At this time in the 1970s, the concept of a cultural history was virtually unknown to the Qatari people.²⁶⁰ Darwish explained to me how he and his colleague Jassim Zani had to clarify what the establishment of a museum would mean for Qatari cultural history:

It was not easy to persuade the Qataris to let the old family belongings go. Therefore we began to explain to them that what we were doing was serving the country and saving its history and heritage before it disappeared. We persuaded them that putting these objects in an official museum would preserve them forever, for both themselves and future generations.²⁶¹

The following case study illustrates how they proceeded. Darwish and Zani told me the story of a Shiite family of two sisters and a brother who owned important ethnographic materials belonging to different Qatari families.²⁶² As this family was wealthy, they acted as pawnbrokers for the community in difficult economic times. People would borrow money and, in return, leave valuables as pledges.²⁶³ Those who could not repay their debt lost their belongings, which then passed into the ownership of the family. As they were Shiite, they believed that any materials that had been acquired by the debt could not be sold or given as a gift to anybody.²⁶⁴ This made it harder for the committee to persuade the family to sell these items to the government. During their visit, Darwish and Zani gradually began to demonstrate how these items, worthless to the family, could be worthy and valuable for the nation:

On one visit, while we were approaching outside the house, we found some traditional Qatari thermoses that had been thrown in the backyard. We asked them if we could buy these thermoses. They were surprised and laughed at our request. To them these items were rubbish but for us they were antiques, valuable, and worthy to be owned. They were surprised by the

²⁵⁹ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁶⁰ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁶¹ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁶² Shia is a second largest doctrine in the Muslim religion. It was created by followers of the fourth Muslim ruler, Ali Bin Abitaleb, after his death.

²⁶³ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁶⁴ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

price that we paid for these thermoses.²⁶⁵

A generous offer was made because the curators knew that they were not collecting ordinary buckets, thermoses, carpets or cloaks. Rather, they were contributing to an ethnographical collection that could ideologically narrate the history and heritage of Qatar. However, this was a fictional construction that aimed to produce the 'effect of [the] real', through a whole collection.²⁶⁶ This aim motivated the committee to make a generous offer to the family, and a further offer to fund medical treatment in Iran for one of the sisters. These offers made what was unacceptable for the family into something acceptable.²⁶⁷ It allowed otherwise broken, meaningless objects to be interpreted as important objects in a national narrative. That success motivated the committee to become involved in further negotiations with the family and they succeeded in persuading them to sell to the government more cultural materials that were hidden away in three old boxes. As Darwish recalls:

After a long negotiation, one of the sisters opened the boxes. What we found was like a dream, textiles, cloaks, jewellery, carpets, clothes, all very old indeed. Some of which could be estimated to go back more than 80-90 years [...]. These collections especially enriched the jewellery section in QNM.²⁶⁸

The choice to include these objects in a national collection, was based on the aim of promoting an idea that Qatari heritage was complete, solid and beyond question.²⁶⁹ The inclusion of such objects gave them a new cognitive value and importance.²⁷⁰ In addition to the historical value of the items collected, other aspects were also considered by the committee. As Darwish recalls, 'we agreed we should consider the age of the piece

²⁶⁵ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁶⁶ Spivak (1985), p. 249.

²⁶⁷ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁶⁸ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁶⁹ Caroline Wilks and Catherine Kelly, 'Fact, Fiction and Nostalgia: An Assessment of Heritage Interpretation at Living Museums', *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 3 (2008), 128-140 (p. 131).

²⁷⁰ Duncan, p. 25.

and its sentimental value to the owner.²⁷¹ The lack of public knowledge of the value of cultural materials and their historical meaning led the government to hold sentimental value in high esteem. It often seemed that it was the main reason for people to keep and preserve these objects. My interview with Darwish also made clear that the financial value of such objects was an unknown, 'We agreed that whenever we received any piece that seemed valuable, we should take it first to the experts to be valued, and then we could increase three to four fold the expert price'.²⁷² As such, the committee was seeking other ways of determining value. An example of this is the case of Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammed's stamp, a stamp used to seal official documents. Yousef Darwish remembers that:

We heard that Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammed, who has the same name as the founder of Qatar, Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammed the great grandfather of Sheikh Khalifa, had the stamp of Sheikh Jassim the founder. We negotiated with Sheikh Jassim for acquisition of the stamp and he agreed to give us the stamp but only if we promised him that we would preserve it forever.²⁷³

The absence of an archive in Qatar at this time made it difficult for many, such as Sheikh Jassim, to understand the cultural and historical importance of these objects. Instead, such was the sentimental value of the stamp to Sheikh Jassim that he kept watch over it for over six years.

Darwish continues:

After six years of the museum being opened, Sheikh Jassim called for me. When I saw him he was so upset and he accused me of not being able to keep my promise. Since he had given the stamp to the museum he sent a person regularly to check it, and after a month the stamp had vanished [...]. Later I found that they had taken it off display as they were arranging a new display for the stamp.²⁷⁴

Presumably Sheikh Jassim's sentimental obsession with the stamp prevented him from recognising the object's value in a museum context

²⁷¹ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁷² Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁷³ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

²⁷⁴ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

even though this small object could help broaden people's knowledge about their political past.

Objects of Representation

The curators/narrators constructed and translated the nation's history and heritage into a museum display through which Qatari artefacts could be codified culturally by their similarities and differences to narrate the story of the nation.²⁷⁵ As such, Qatar's cultural experience was built on integrating two elements, the physical display of the artefacts and their relevance to the curators'/narrators' interpretation. This must lead us to question the accuracy of the curators'/narrator's version of Qatar's heritage.²⁷⁶ I would argue that the Qatari narrative was actually a radical version of the curators'/narrators' desire for power and has led me to question the grandiose notion of establishing a national museum barely a year after Qatar's independence. It suggests that, in their wish to maintain their power and influence over the nation, the government was using the museum for hegemonic purposes. Moreover, history itself was subject to revisionist interpretation and manipulated in such a way as to distort the audiences' response to the objects. Therefore, we need to be very careful in our reading of the narrative of Qatar. We should remember that the interpretation of history sometimes aims at representing an ideal past. That aim, in its turn, often leads to a selective account of the past, which has more to do with fiction than reality.²⁷⁷ For example, Figure 38 illustrates a selective view of the past as a group of musical instruments has been displayed without any reference to their turbulent and troubling narrative. The curators/narrators displayed different types of drums, mother of pearl tambourines, flutes and an anthropomorphic harp in a way that celebrated the aesthetic qualities of these objects. The musical instruments were used to perform a specific ritual during pearl diving season known as 'sea art'. Each boat had its own choir and a main singer,

²⁷⁵ Bennett, p. 77.

²⁷⁶ Wilks and Kelly, p. 131.

²⁷⁷ Wilks and Kelly, p. 131.

‘the nahham’, who entertained the divers during their rest time.²⁷⁸ The museum’s presentation of these objects omitted to highlight how these African instruments came to Qatar in the first place: as a result of an increase in the slave trade, with all its inhuman consequences, throughout the Arabian Gulf coast. The objects here are tangible evidence of the existence of the slave trade in the Persian Gulf until 1930s.²⁷⁹ Many thousands of enslaved African youths from places such as Ethiopia, Zanzibar and Somalia were kidnapped from their hometowns by slave traders and imported to the Gulf, where they were sold to pearl and date merchants in ports such as Qatar, Oman and Jeddah. The slaves were forced to work as divers (‘ghasahs’), assisting the divers by pulling them up to the deck (‘siyub’), working as servants, or by playing percussion instruments.²⁸⁰ These musical instruments of African origin, therefore, could be used to tell the real story of aggression, humiliation, abuse and cruelty. The objects could reflect a black history in the region during the nineteenth century, when the Gulf pearl banks and economy expanded in the global market at the expense of these African slaves. The only reference to the instrument’s origins can be found in the painting in the background, where a man of African origin can be seen playing the drum.

²⁷⁸ ‘Sea Culture’, *Qatar Tourism Authority*
<<http://www.qatartourism.gov.qa/pillars/index/1/culture/357>> [accessed 20 September 2012].

²⁷⁹ Matthew S. Hopper, ‘Imperialism and the Dilemma of Slavery in Eastern Arabia and the Gulf, 1873-1939’ in *Itinerario*, 3 (2006), 76-94 (p. 76).

²⁸⁰ Matthew S. Hopper, ‘Slavery and the Slave Trades in the Indian Ocean and Arab World: Global Connections and Disconnections’, *Proceeding of the 10th Annual Gilder Lehrman Centre International Conference at Yale University*
<<http://www.yale.edu/glc/indian-ocean/hooper.pdf>>, pp. 8-10 [accessed 20 September 2012]. Enslaved women worked as housemaids.

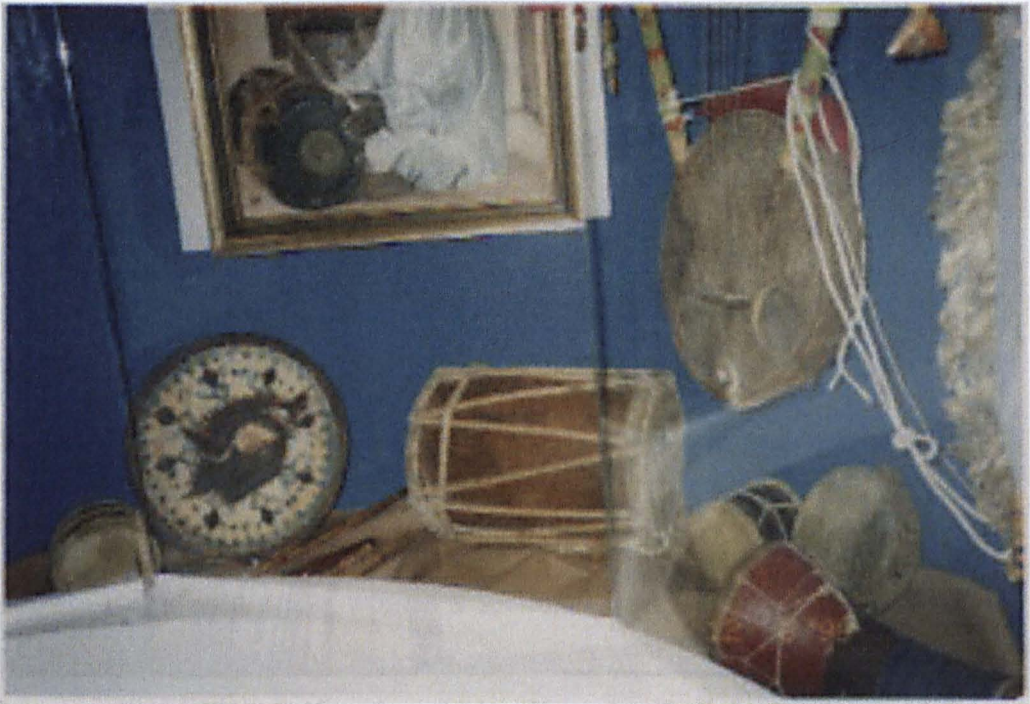


Fig. 38. Musical instruments, mostly African, displayed at Qatar National Museum in 1999.

In their study 'Fact, Fiction and Nostalgia: An Assessment of Heritage Interpretation at Living Museums', Caroline Wilks and Catherine Kelly, discuss how heritage has often been elaborated:

The rejection of certain aspects of a previously living culture, and the reliance on memory as suggested by Thomson (1963) to build an accurate appraisal of the past is fraught with ambiguity, particularly within a heritage context. One might argue, however, that this is precisely what heritage, and its custodians, wish to facilitate – an environment where a series of myths can be perpetrated to induce the idea of a cultural tradition and a nostalgia for a 'golden age', thus retaining hegemonic equilibrium.²⁸¹

The move from 'object' to 'subject' was the curators'/narrators' attempt to place themselves at the heart of that history. Everyday objects have been constructed via a system of rhetoric. In Figure 39, for example, everyday objects such as thermoses, palm frond baskets and woven textiles were transformed from 'absence' to 'presence', from objects to subjects.

²⁸¹ Wilks and Kelly, p. 129.



Fig. 39. A display of everyday objects at Qatar National Museum.

These ordinary thermoses, textiles, palm frond baskets and wooden place settings are still in daily use today in ordinary households and at the same time they are being sold in the old Souk as souvenirs for tourists. In the museum context, however, the objects have been interpreted through the lens of Qatari heritage. Through this symbolic presentation, alongside films made in collaboration with the newly established Qatar Television especially for the museum, audiences were given an insight into Qatar's heritage. This display represents a particular ritual in Qatar, used to welcome guests into the home (house or tent) through the presentation of coffee, which is called in Arabic 'qahua'. Usually when guests arrive, they are offered 'qahua' that is sometimes roasted and ground in their presence. Different thermoses called 'dallah' made of copper with a long spout are traditionally used to serve the 'qahua'. The 'qahua' is first boiled in a 'dallah' (called a 'louqma') and then is poured into a more decorative and graceful 'dallah' (a 'mazel') to be served to the guest in a small cup with no handles (the 'finjan'). As a sign of Arabic generosity and hospitality, the cup should not be filled to the brim, but it can be refilled as many times as required by the guest. To indicate he/she has had enough coffee, and in respect for the host, the guest has to follow a

specific ritual by wiggling his cup from side to side.²⁸² In the Museum the displays of different sized, named and decorated thermoses, became symbolic of both the history of Qatar and the everyday life of the Qatari. Likewise, different patterns in woven textiles, or 'al sadu', seen in the illustration represent another aspect of Qatari history and heritage. 'Al sadu', in particular, became a powerful signifier and symbol of Bedouin culture. The sophisticated patterns and colours are symbolic references to different tribal groups in Qatari society. Likewise, different woven parts of the tent represent different social functions. For instance, the part of the tent called the 'qati', which is recognised by its decoration and size, separated the men's and women's sections. Every single textile in the home was woven by the Bedouin women, who supplied their nomadic households with every necessity from covers, to rugs, to tents, to textiles for the horses and camels. Significantly, when these objects were displayed in the museum, they powerfully represented the Bedouin women, who were seen as important, sophisticated and productive. Such women successfully challenged the harsh desert environment and employed very primitive and basic tools, such as wood and wool to create objects that, skilfully and artistically, fulfilled the family's needs.²⁸³

The presentation of these everyday objects in the national museum formed part of the preparation for opening the country to the globe. Al-Far describes Sheikh Khalifa's aim in establishing a museum as follows, 'He had social and political aims; he aimed to preserve some of old modest objects from Qatari life before the oil invasion'.²⁸⁴ As Qatar was becoming more outwardly focused, it became more aware of itself within that context. Therefore, the tent and the display of woven textiles and palm baskets as seen in Figure 39 became talismans, signifying what had

²⁸² Alison Wellner, 'Traditional Arabic Coffee Ritual in an Omani Bedouin Tent' <<http://culinarytravel.about.com/od/internationaltravel/ss/Traditional-Arabic-Coffee-Ritual-In-An-Omani-Bedouin-Tent.htm>> [accessed 15 June 2012]

²⁸³ Susannah Tarbush, 'Weaving the Story of Bedouin Textiles' <<http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2010062175892>> [accessed 15 June 2012]

²⁸⁴ Al-Far, interviewed on 26 March 2008.

been in the past and what, potentially, could be in the future.²⁸⁵ They were perhaps the most potent objects for the continuity of Qatari heritage as it moved towards a new, global agenda. Such ethnographical collections became very powerful when they were brought into the museum. The utopian space of the museum allowed the construction of a heterotopic understanding of the past, present and future of the country.²⁸⁶

This narrative of collecting and the narrators' interpretations of the collections prompt an important question for my thesis. Did the narrators recognise a contradiction stood between the objects and their subjective agency? The moment that these objects became subjectivised in an exhibition context, they developed a new visual relationship with the audiences. Here a tension was created between the readings that the narrators imposed, and an audience who might impose multiple readings.²⁸⁷ Therefore, the narrators' assumption that their narrative could produce only one reading and one interpretation was naive. 'Vision is by no means more reliable, or literal, than perception through the other senses; on the contrary, it is a semiotic activity of an inherently rhetorical kind'.²⁸⁸ When the visitors looked at the objects, their interpretation was based not only on the curatorial vision but also on their own understanding drawn from their own experiences. Therefore, for my purposes, in thinking about museum culture in Qatar, there is an obvious tension between this idea of a new sign system and the audiences' readings. As the narrators created a new system of knowledge, they risked breaking up all the familiar orders, systems and thoughts of the nation. It was an open invitation for debate as visitors might start to question their system of heritage and its interpretation, government, and identity. If this happened, they could become aware of how the Qatari system was created. Consequently, the narrators themselves could risk direct criticism

²⁸⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 40-41.

²⁸⁶ Foucault (1994), pp. 17-18.

²⁸⁷ *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 101-120 (p. 101).

²⁸⁸ Bal, p. 108.

as it became apparent that fantasy, subjectivity, taxonomy and structure all contributed to their Qatari narrative. Crucially, to help navigate the audiences' attention away from this potential issue, the choice of the museum's location on the site of the Old Emiri Palace was vital.

The Choice of the Old Emiri Palace

Why did Sheikh Khalifa choose the Old Emiri Palace over other locations? In the same way that we have seen the fetishisation of the collections, the historic architecture of the palace was fetishised as well. It appears that personal nostalgia was the strongest motivation for the Sheikh's choice because, at this time, most of the buildings in Doha were being demolished in order to build a new city and services. Amongst this destruction, one monument was dearest to Sheikh Khalifa's heart, the palace where he was born and brought up. It was still in existence, overlooking the main coastline of Doha. The palace had been occupied by a previous ruler, Sheikh Abd Allah, Sheikh Khalifa's grandfather. It was built in 1901 and occupied by Sheikh Abd Allah and his sons until 1933.²⁸⁹ The building of the palace was politically important for security reasons at the end of the nineteenth century, as the dominant Ottoman authority occupied the higher land in Doha and simultaneously asked the Sheikhs of Al-Thani to move to an area on the eastern outskirts of the capital.²⁹⁰ From here Sheikh Abd Allah governed Doha, supervised maritime life and liaised with the Ottomans. Thus Sheikh Abd Allah built the palace to manage the day-to-day affairs of Doha as well as using it as a family residence.²⁹¹ Al-Far provides us with evidence of the Sheikh's political purposes behind choosing the Old Emiri Palace:

His political aim was to prove to people, especially foreigners [the Ottoman and English], that we had always been there and did not exist to the world through them. We were and still are a

²⁸⁹ Al-Far (1979), pp. 1-3.

²⁹⁰ Al-Far (1979), pp. 4-6.

²⁹¹ Al-Far (1979), pp. 4-10.

community that has its own traditions, heritage and ancient history.²⁹²

Therefore, in Sheikh Khalifa's opinion, when looking for a site to embody the country's history, there was no other building in Qatar as suitable as the Old Emiri Palace, a building that could also dispel the myth of the power and influence of the Ottomans and the British.²⁹³ The usefulness of the site with its political history was that it stood for both an earlier culture and Al-Thani authority. After an initial inspection in 1972, it became clear that the buildings and decorative elements of the palace could be restored to their former condition. In order to do this and to preserve as much as possible, the Old Emiri Palace was made part of a national restoration programme.²⁹⁴ The government requested help from older members of the Al-Thani family, and some of their retainers, who remembered the old building. In addition, old photographs were collected from a variety of sources to confirm their descriptions.²⁹⁵ The second stage involved a team of specialists, coordinators and designers who were assembled to develop and implement the final decisions on the museum's design and its contents.²⁹⁶ During this process Sheikh Khalifa himself supervised the development of the restoration work, which in itself raises a significant question; what ideological usefulness would the Old Emiri Palace offer to the state as it was modernised?²⁹⁷

The circumstances behind the building of the palace might suggest the existence of an undeclared political intention in Sheikh Khalifa's choice to restore the palace. It allowed him to link his political life with that of his ancestors, to give his rule length and continuity. Therefore, rather than appreciating the past for its own sake, it was valued for what it

²⁹² Al-Far, interviewed on 26 March 2008.

²⁹³ *The Qatar National Museum: Its Origins, Concepts and Planning*, pp. 1-5.

²⁹⁴ *The Qatar National Museum: Its Origins, Concepts and Planning*, pp. 1-5.

²⁹⁵ *The Qatar National Museum: Its Origins, Concepts and Planning*, pp. 1-5.

²⁹⁶ *The Qatar National Museum: Its Origins, Concepts and Planning*, pp. 1-5.

²⁹⁷ Ibrahim Al-Jaber, interviewed on 21 March 2008.

could say about the current leader and his political power.²⁹⁸ This is evident in the presentation of the reception room, which was known in Qatari culture as the ‘majlis’, where Sheikh Abd Allah used to receive the public during the Ottoman epoch [Fig. 40].²⁹⁹ As well as having the common cultural furnishing of a majlis, this room was distinguished by its special decoration and as a consequence constantly received public attention.³⁰⁰



Fig. 40. The restored ‘majlis’ at the Old Emiri Palace.

²⁹⁸ Lowenthal (1985), p. 61.

²⁹⁹ Khalid Al-Jaber, interviewed on 25 March 2008.

³⁰⁰ The Majlis takes rectangular shape and is usually separated from the rest of the rooms in the house, where it is located next to the entrance. Its interior is similar to the rest of the rooms, however, it is bigger and with more windows that allow more air and light. The walls in the Majlis would be decorated with gypsum reliefs and ornaments, and sometimes the ceiling would be decorated with colourful motifs, depending on the status of the owner.

Furthermore, in most of the histories of the Old Emiri Palace, the room has been identified with politics, emphasising it as the place from where the ruler governed the country and practiced his political rights. When asked about the formal description of this room, Khalid Al-Jaber who worked as a curator in QNM and hosted many foreign political visitors, said:

In most of these official visits I began my tour from the 'majlis' and explained to the visitors the significance of the Old Emiri Palace [...] The ruler used to sit and in front of him would be a box and to his right and left there would be two scribes to write the public's complaints. The ruler used to rule Qatar from this small 'Majlis' and that is not strange in our Islamic culture as the Prophet Mohammed ruled his community from his small mosque.³⁰¹

For what purpose did the curators/narrators want this political past emphasised? Al-Jaber's description of the majlis's history helps support the creation of a mythical political history. It is worth clarifying here, that to use the word myth is to highlight the creation of a montage from history.³⁰² As such, the Sheikh's government was represented as benevolent and the Sheikh was portrayed as a great and noble ruler who dedicated himself to listening to his people. It is possible that he did listen to his people as he specified special times to receive his subjects and promised to look into their complaints. However, as he was a ruler with little real authority, given the presence of the Ottomans and the English, this needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. The Qatari political history of that period suggests that the encouragement of this benevolent myth was a major reason for the presentation of the majlis in the museum.³⁰³ This presented a somewhat romanticised view of the political class, which can be seen to include more myth than veracity.³⁰⁴ A redundant building was used to create a Qatari heritage site and a montage of its history. Perhaps the curators/narrators wanted to produce a

³⁰¹ I. Al-Jaber, interviewed on 25 March 2008.

³⁰² Wilks and Kelly, p. 129.

³⁰³ Al-Far, interviewed on 26 March 2008.

³⁰⁴ Wilks and Kelly, p. 129.

functionalist view of the site related to the myth of the existence and the continuing hegemonic power of the royal family during different historical periods.³⁰⁵ This is possible, especially if we consider the demographic structure of Qatari society during its pre-state era. Like some of its neighbours in the Arabian Gulf region, Qatar was not an independent political entity, but part of the whole political entity of the Arabian Gulf. At that time different tribes occupied Qatari lands, each with its own individual leader. However, the continuing conflicts between the Qatari tribes, led successfully by Jassim Bin Mohammed Al-Thani, and the tribes that occupied nearby lands such as Bahrain, eventually saw him become leader of all the Qatari tribes.³⁰⁶ The choice of the Old Emiri Palace, was not about the history of a single ruler alone. Instead it emphasised and highlighted the right and quality of the Al-Thani as the only rulers for Qatar. The space allotted to the majlis in the museum created a political setting for the idea of the ruler as a powerful man, a hero, who ruled his people wisely and powerfully in the face of external forces, whether he had or had not such authority. To think simply of this history in the past tense was, and is, anathema. David Lowenthal, for example, explains that 'the hopes and fears that the past arouses are heightened by the conflict between our knowledge that its return is impossible and our desire, perhaps our instinct, that it must and can be reached'.³⁰⁷

It became a form of nostalgia, a way to enable the audience to know and 'feel' the past.³⁰⁸ The site was chosen to create a past that never was. Thus, through this site, the curators/narrators were yearning for both yesterday and tomorrow. The dream of reviving the past within the Old Emiri Palace had the virtue of bringing the royal family's 'history and memory vividly' to national consciousness.³⁰⁹ For the curators/narrators,

³⁰⁵ Wilks and Kelly, pp. 129-130.

³⁰⁶ Al-Shalq and others (2009), pp. 82-84.

³⁰⁷ Lowenthal (1985), p. 33.

³⁰⁸ Lowenthal (1985), p. 3.

³⁰⁹ Lowenthal (1985), p. 33.

reviving that past was vital in order to set in 'sharp relief both the deficiencies and the virtues of the present; intense awareness of the past lends the present fullness and duration as well'.³¹⁰ It is telling that tours of the museum began in the majlis. The site in general and the majlis in particular were integral to the curatorial narrative, that sureness of what we 'were' became a vital component of the sureness of what we 'are'.³¹¹ It was the site's ability to recall an historical existence that gave value, legitimacy, meaning and purpose. The Palace had been reconstructed strategically to eschew the loss of the only evidence of the existence of Al-Thani political power during the protection period. What we have in that palace and specifically in the majlis is a political, symbolic and semiotic presentation, saying much about the status of the monarch. Thus this heritage site was essential to a continuation of the monarchy, who knew that if their present rule was backed up by their past, it would be far deeper and more valuable.³¹²

Socio-Economic Motives

Alongside the political reasons for choosing the site, the decision to house the museum in the Palace also had much to do with the aesthetics of the architecture of the building. When most of the old architecture in Qatar was being demolished, Sheikh Khalifa insisted on preserving this monument as representative of historic Qatari architecture. As Yousef Darwish told me:

When he [Sheikh Khalifa] became the country's ruler, he had a great desire to transfer the Old Emiri Palace into a museum partly to preserve Qatari history. He had the desire to protect the palace from being lost forever. At that time especially, the capital Doha was undergoing construction work and development plans [...] The development work in the country spurred him into preserving this monument, which had a particular value to him, by transforming it into a museum. He

³¹⁰ Lowenthal (1985), p. 33.

³¹¹ Lowenthal (1985), p. 41.

³¹² Lowenthal (1985), pp. 41-42.

believed that this monument represented the history of the royal family.³¹³

Figure 41 shows how the restored site, situated right in the heart of Doha city, produces a particular reference point and a source of inspiration for many architectural companies and researchers in Qatar. Aesthetic values of the past such as the distribution of the wooden shuttered windows, wooden spouts, arches, the alcoves in the walls, the balconies and gypsum decoration as seen in Figures 42 and 43 offered architects tasked with creating a new Qatari architecture with a distinct connection to the past. For example, Figures 44 and 45 demonstrate that the restored Souk Waqif used the designs of the Old Emiri Palace as an historical reference point.³¹⁴ These photographs demonstrate that the nostalgic impulse of the 1970s' curators/narrators was matched in the 1990s, when a replica of the Souk was built.³¹⁵

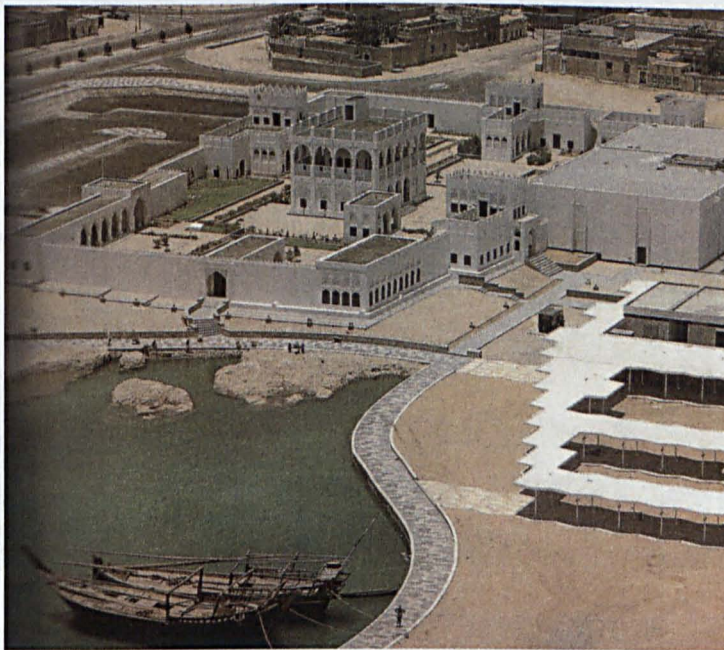


Fig. 41. The Old Emir Palace after restoration and conversion into Qatar National Museum.

³¹³ Darwish, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

³¹⁴ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.

³¹⁵ Lowenthal (1985), pp. 59-62.



Fig. 42. The majlis at the Old Emiri Palace, Doha, in 1976.



Fig. 43. Different buildings in the Old Emiri Palace in 1976.



Fig. 44. Souk Waqif after restoration in the 1990s.



Fig. 45. Souk Waqif.

When interviewed, the Qatari archaeologist Mohammad Jassim Al-Khulaifi informed me that:

[The Old Emiri Palace] represents the previous economic situation for Qatar, before the oil boom. Furthermore the state museum represents the ancient history of Qatar which

continues, chronologically, until the visitor reaches the oil section, in which can be seen the beginning of modern Qatar. Furthermore, the Emir, Sheikh Khalifa did not omit presenting the maritime life of Qatar and the important part that the sea played in Qatari economic life, through the boats that were displayed in the lagoon.³¹⁶

This is particularly true when one considers that the palace was restored to represent the formerly modest economic status of the Qatari community.³¹⁷ Qataris today are surprised at the diminutive size and appearance of the palace and by the fact that their forefathers even considered the building to be a palace. Since the growth of the oil industry and its concomitant wealth, the very concept of a palace has changed completely, especially since many Qatari today live in houses that compete with and often overwhelm the Old Emiri Palace in size, facilities and design. As visitors entered the QNM and looked at the building, defined as a palace, they compared it to the modern houses and skyscrapers surrounding it and asked what kind of life this community had experienced and how far the country's progress could be seen as a reflection of the successful investment of the oil fortune. By restoring the Old Emiri Palace, the curators/narrators used its buildings to represent and symbolise something no longer there and simultaneously underline the new economic status of the country. The palace became representative of both old wealth and a new economic and social reality. Thus, it would help to articulate the new Qatari narrative and make it more convincing. They hoped that this material reality would express the national narrative, not only through its exhibits, but by the splendour of its brick, wood and gypsum decoration.³¹⁸ Al-Khulaifi believes that this site demonstrated to visitors the development in Qatar, as he commented:

We can say that the visitors gained several things from their visits; knowledge of the history of Qatar during different periods; knowledge of the economic history of Qatar; seeing and understanding the changes that Qatar witnessed after the

³¹⁶ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.

³¹⁷ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.

³¹⁸ Newton, p. 273.

discovery of oil. The importance of these visits can be seen in that Sheikh Khalifa sometimes joined his guests in [their visit to the museum].³¹⁹

In realising the need to convince his community of the fundamental value of preserving and presenting their everyday life in the museum, Sheikh Khalifa succeeded in strengthening his position as ruler. By choosing this site, he aimed to link visually the economic, social and political history of Qatar as a protectorate with his new, independent Qatar.³²⁰ This helped the community to define the achievement of their ruler, especially in comparison with his corrupt predecessor Sheikh Ahmed Bin Ali. Such a comparison was intended to deepen an appreciation and evaluation of Qatari lives and encourage the community to work harder in order to support the rapid development of their country. Evidently, in creating a cultural record for Qatar, Sheikh Khalifa recognised that cultural factors were crucial in any assessment of his political rule. This encouraged him to resurrect the country's heritage and use it to emphasise his responsibility as a cultural guardian. During his reign, culture and history were manipulated to become symbols of the social and political development of the country. They also successfully symbolised a political organisation. When Sheikh Khalifa used the Old Emiri Palace as a museum, he overcame the convention that saw tradition as an obstacle to development. Instead, he used a cultural resource, the museum, as a vehicle to promote the process of modernisation.³²¹ By establishing the national museum, it became clear how Sheikh Khalifa brought culture 'within the province of government'.³²² In his study *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), Tony Bennett states:

The relations between culture and government come to be thought of and organized in a distinctively modern way via the conception that the works, forms and institutions of high

³¹⁹ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.

³²⁰ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.

³²¹ Kreps, p. 114.

³²² Bennett, p. 18.

culture might be enlisted for this governmental task in being assigned the purpose of civilizing the population as a whole.³²³

Furthermore, Douglas Newton argues that the establishment of national museums became a dilemma for those countries that had achieved independence after being colonised or under the protection of other countries.³²⁴ Such attempts were driven by the desire to create something that could make a modernised country distinctive and give it meaning both internally and externally. The tension between being a former British protectorate and adopting a British model of preserving heritage within the museum is striking. Paradoxically, the traditional museum became, in the Qatari case, a way to preserve indigenous culture and to inspire the community as a whole to rescue this culture.³²⁵ Newton suggests that the main function of the national museum is to define national identity. He goes further to describe national museums as:

A child of this century, but not a single child: it is a twin. On the one hand, it is not intended as an exposition of the works of other cultures as a testimony to national power's ability to take them over; on the other hand it demonstrates a nation's power to be itself. It is a statement about the nation itself and its heritage. The potential of the national museum to provide a focus for its nation's culture may well be its clear character. This agenda suggests three things: that there is such a thing as culture, that it needs help in maintaining itself, and that museums can provide that help.³²⁶

This leads us to question the direction in which Qatar National Museum moved in order to define and preserve the country's cultural heritage. Perhaps the ambition was to improve the community's cultural and moral well-being. Erwin Barbour argues that 'the moral effect of museums on the community is invariably wholesome and good, and tends to high citizenship'.³²⁷ These virtues were seen as essential by the government in preparing their society for a higher quality of living. Instead of merely being concerned with basic needs, the government aimed to surround its

³²³ Bennett, p. 19.

³²⁴ Newton, p. 272.

³²⁵ Newton, pp. 272-273.

³²⁶ Newton, p. 273.

³²⁷ Barbour, p. 71.

people with the best incentives and examples.³²⁸ A national museum could be used as a vital part in the state's developmental process, where the museum functions as 'a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power'.³²⁹ As Bennett suggests, 'Culture in so far as it referred to the habits, morals, manners and beliefs of the subordinate classes was targeted as an object of government'.³³⁰ When viewed in this way, the Qatari government's establishment of the museum can be seen as a resource that could be used to regulate the community's behaviour by endowing it with the capacity to recognise its own national identity. The emphasis on national identity can be seen explicitly in the Sheikh's insistence in having only Qataris as museum committee members. He expected that these people would be able to judge the origin, value, function and meaning of the collections, as 'the museum was meant to reflect Qatari society; nothing foreign should be displayed in it'.³³¹ The emphasis on Qatar itself suggests that, after the protectorate came to an end, consideration was given to preserving as much of Qatar's culture as possible. Archaeological and ethnographical materials were viewed as providing that help, and as evidence of how a nation acted, thought, built and lived.³³² Within this concept of nationhood, the government implied a distinction between Qatar now and the Qatar of the past. Therefore, via the national museum, 'Qatar-past' emerged as a reference point in the construction of a new national identity. Emphasis on national identity may also have signified a liberalisation of the Qatari spirit and freedom from any foreign sovereignty. The status of the inherited materials moved systematically from that of neglected objects owned by members of the public into to a new relevance as a collection, conserved as a rich cultural resource, with a new purpose, a new narrative and new readings.³³³ When the objects were classified by period and region, they created the 'impression of a historically authentic milieu' for the

³²⁸ Bennett, p. 17.

³²⁹ Bennett, p. 19.

³³⁰ Bennett, p. 19.

³³¹ Darwish, interviewed on 26 March 2008.

³³² Newton, p. 273.

³³³ Bennett, p. 19.

public.³³⁴ Bennett argues that the significance of building up an historical museum presentation is:

[To manifest] the relations between two new historical times – national and universal – which resulted from an increase in the vertical depth of historical time as it [is] both pushed further and further back into the past and brought increasingly up to date.³³⁵

Thus, the development of the Old Emiri Palace into a museum became a clear and vibrant symbol of the rise of a new, modern Qatar in the 1970s.

Specialist and Regional Museums

The 1980s saw a new wave of museums being established both in and outside the capital of Doha. The creation of these museums demonstrates and confirms that the narrators/curators were now extending their new museum culture and narrative throughout Qatar. Figure 46 shows the location of these museums.

³³⁴ Bennett, p. 76.

³³⁵ Bennett, p. 76.



Fig. 46. Map of Qatar.

An awareness of the importance of social history encouraged the curators/narrators to establish specialist and regional museums, in spite of very limited support from the government.³³⁶ Perhaps this new emphasis was an attempt to reassure the regions that they too were worthy of participating in the national movement to preserve Qatari heritage. These museums aimed to define the regional past and serve as local markers of value. Thus, regional communities would not be deprived of the opportunity to participate in the national narrative that had the potential to enrich their environment and life.³³⁷ For example, work began on the first specialist museum, later named the Ethnographical Museum, in 1983. The Department of Antiquities and Museums and the Ministry of Public Works carried out restoration and maintenance on Barahat Al-Jaffairy, an area of traditional architecture located in an old part of a market area on the outskirts of Doha.³³⁸ The building, which contains thirteen rooms and is distinguished by its Badjir (wind-tower), was inaugurated on 22

³³⁶ Jassim Zani, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

³³⁷ Lowenthal (1985), pp. 59-62.

³³⁸ Al-Khulaifi, pp. 122-123.

February 1985 as a museum of folk traditions that focused on Qatari life.³³⁹ It was named the Ethnographical Museum to demonstrate what life was like in Qatari households before the discovery of oil. Ethnographical museums, in particular, stress the 'complexity and sophistication of traditional ways of life',³⁴⁰ therefore, each room in the museum exhibited one aspect of a family's daily life in the past, such as children's games, the marriage ceremony, the preparation of food, receiving guests (both men and women), bringing up children, family life in winter and summer, etc. The museum demonstrated that, apart from the majlis and kitchen, rooms in Qatari houses were multi functional places; they were used for gathering, eating, praying, working, studying and sleeping. In summer time, for example, men used to use the upper part of the house, whereas women used the 'Badjir', a special room for receiving their visitors and sleeping in cooler conditions. A three-dimensional display in Figure 47 shows a kitchen, where the woman's main cooking hob was no more than pieces of rock to hold saucepans and wood for the fire. The kitchen is shown as a place that combined food preparation and storage with a cowshed.

³³⁹ Al-Khulaiḫī, pp. 122-123.

³⁴⁰ Brian Durrans, 'The Future of the Other: Changing Cultures on Display in Ethnographic Museums', in *The Museum Time Machine*, ed. by Robert Lumley (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 144-169 (p. 145).



Fig. 47. A display showing the traditional kitchen in most Qatari houses before modernisation. The figure of the woman was covered with a black cloak to avoid displaying a figurative model (photograph taken in 1985).

Furthermore, through presenting and interpreting different Qatari cultures, the curators/narrators were trying to show Qatar's different ways of living, working, activities and thinking.³⁴¹ For instance, by using photographs, the museum highlighted for the first time the life of girls as an important component in Qatari society, demonstrating their costumes before and after marriage and illustrating traditional parenting methods.

³⁴¹ Durrans, p. 146.



Fig. 48. Young girls wearing traditional 'bukhniq' playing in the street, Doha (photograph taken in 1985).

Figure 48 shows that, before the age of ten (or on some occasions younger), girls were allowed to play side by side with boys in the street as long as they wore a simple long dress and lightweight black head covering or 'bukhniq', which is heavily embroidered with gold or silver thread around the face and down the center front panel. After the age of ten, when they were deemed to be mature, they would be separated from boys and not allowed to play in the streets. At this stage the girls would be taught how to perform their domestic duties and they would be presented with an insight into the future social roles that would govern

their lives.³⁴² As seen in Figure 49, the museum continued to display girls' lives through the presentation of traditional nuptial costumes for the bride. As shown in the illustration, traditionally families displayed the bridal clothes to friends and relatives before the wedding, in a way that demonstrated the groom's status and wealth.



Fig. 49. Traditional Qatari costumes, Doha (photograph taken in 1985).

A very special moment in the Qatari tradition is represented in Figure 50. This photograph as displayed in the museum shows women gathering at one home in a village a month before Ramadan to prepare essential ingredients for the celebration. They are seen grinding pearl barley grains for making 'harees', which was then and still is considered a main dish in Ramadan. While they worked, women also sang traditional songs that reminded them of their favorite month.³⁴³ The presentation of the ritual of

³⁴² *Doha Ethnographical Museum* (Doha: The Ministry of Information and Culture, 1985), pp. 2-4.

³⁴³ Leaflet of Doha Fort Museum, Ministry of Media Archive (Doha: Antiquities and Museums Department).

Ramadan's food preparation stands for collaboration, intimacy and social values.



Fig. 50. A photograph of Qatari women preparing food for Ramadan, as displayed at the Ethnographical Museum in 1985.

The Ethnographical Museum was not meant simply to differentiate between what is Qatari and what is not, it was also meant to differentiate between what is urban and what is Bedouin, and unite these two societies as one Qatari nation.³⁴⁴ The presentation was strongly influenced by the ideas of what people would like to know about Qatari societies and how their lifestyles differed.³⁴⁵ Throughout these displays, objects and images were brought together to illustrate and share a specific social history with the audience.³⁴⁶ Every object, every setting and every arrangement produced domestic scenes intended to evoke memories. The perceived concepts, understanding and identities of each object and each scene of Qatari social life were not simply to be observed but aimed to involve the Qatari audience.³⁴⁷

When I interviewed Jassim Zani, the former director of the Department of Museums and Antiquities, he explained that the idea to establish regional

³⁴⁴ Zani, interviewed on March 2008.

³⁴⁵ Zani, interviewed on March 2008.

³⁴⁶ Durrans, pp. 146-147.

³⁴⁷ Durrans, pp. 146-147.

museums in Qatar came from an internal, independent decision that the Department took:

From my point of view as an artist I thought it was necessary to have specialist museums in Qatar, particularly, as the QNM had a clear philosophy that concentrated on displaying the political history of the country within its development, whereas the display of the heritage was not the main focus.³⁴⁸

These regional museums were designed to provide a precise continuity of the national narrative. Within these establishments the curators/narrators were building a new myth upon their national myth.³⁴⁹ Zani explained the ideology behind developing these establishments:

I thought we should create specialist museums, which concentrated mainly on showing Qatari crafts and traditions [...] We funded these projects from the annual budget for the whole department, which was limited, but we did manage to establish them with this modest amount.³⁵⁰

The display of indigenous crafts and ethnographic objects was thought so important by the curators/narrators because it created a narrative that documented a social history of the country that aimed to create a direct link to individual visitors. As well as documenting the differences between Bedouin crafts and urban crafts, which actually imposed demands upon each community according to their surrounding environment and needs,³⁵¹ the narrative illustrated how crafts such as cloth-making, ship building, net-making, door-making, gypsum-making and tent-making were linked to people's daily needs. These objects would have meant very little to visitors from outside Qatar as very little had been exported, apart from gypsum crafts. Through these objects, audiences were encouraged to appreciate Qatari society's dedication, struggles, determination and its relationship with its environment.

³⁴⁸ Jassim Zani, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

³⁴⁹ Bal, pp. 84-102.

³⁵⁰ Zani, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

³⁵¹ Zani, interviewed on March 2008.

To showcase this narrative, a second specialist museum was established when the Ministry of Public Works renovated one of the few remaining military forts in Doha in 1978, the Kut Fort, located in the middle of Souk Waqif.³⁵² This fort was built as a prison in 1925 during the reign of Sheikh Abdulla Bin Jassim Al-Thani.³⁵³ In 1985, it was inaugurated as a museum of handicrafts and fine arts and renamed Doha Fort Museum. In addition, the museum included an exhibition of paintings by contemporary Qatari artists that illustrated further aspects of Qatari traditional life. Different materials and crafts were displayed in the museum; for example, in Figure 51 a Bedouin weaving loom was used to tell the story of Bedouin women's dedication and loyalty to their household. Through interpretation, illustrations and the use of a three-dimensional display, the curators/narrators built a narrative of Bedouin weaving from shearing the sheep to cleaning, spinning and dyeing the wool and preparing the loom.

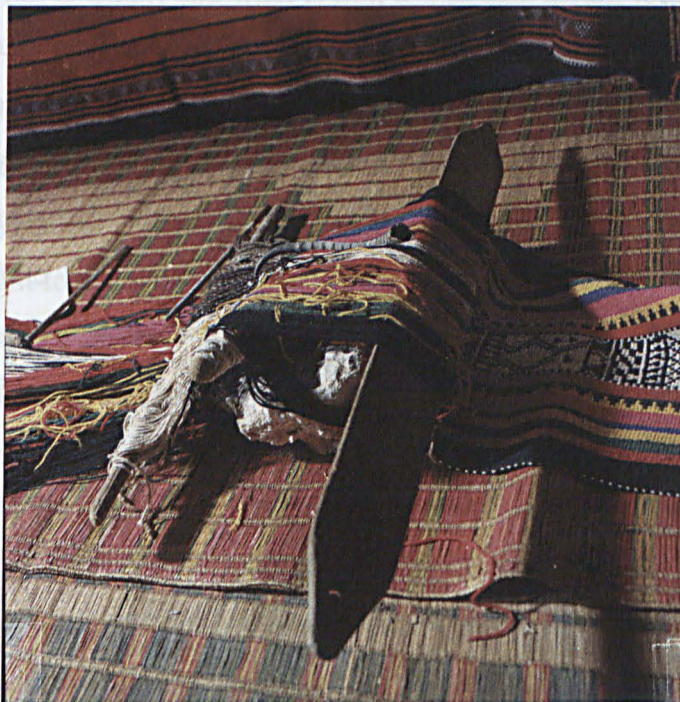


Fig. 51. Weaving a Bedouin woollen tent, as displayed at Doha Fort Museum in 1985.

³⁵² Al-Khulaifi, pp. 93-94.

³⁵³ Al-Khulaifi, pp. 93-94.

Likewise, Figure 52 shows the production of women's clothes. What is interesting about this presentation is the narrative of adoption. Such objects used to be imported from India and Iran, but the Qatari learned the skills and began to produce them themselves and created a native Qatari craft in the process. The curators/narrators thought that the history of importing, adopting the skills and then producing what was once imported, was worthy of presentation alongside objects that Qataris had once exported.



Fig. 52. Traditional cloth making, as displayed at Doha Fort Museum in 1985.

A display of ship and net making brought to life the narrative of the relationship between man and the sea as well as the relationship between craft on the sea and the traditional buildings immediately inshore [Fig. 53]. The relationship between the man and the sea, in particular, was very important to the curators/narrators to complete the story of Qatar. This narrative emphasised through a story of boat-making that concentrated on introducing to the new generation the role that the sea played in their predecessors' lives.³⁵⁴ Although there appeared to be a common type of boat, it was noticeable that there were differences. For example, they

³⁵⁴ Zani, interviewed on March 2008.

displayed the 'baghala', which was once the largest type of boat; the 'boom', which was thought to have replaced the 'baghala'; the 'shuwii' (smaller than the 'baghala' and 'boom'); the 'sambuwiq', which was produced mainly as a pearling craft, although occasionally used for passengers; and the beautiful, long raking prow 'bateel' that was used as a fighting ship.³⁵⁵



Fig. 53. Net making, practiced among the urban community, as displayed at Doha Fort Museum in 1985.

Each craft stood for a specific narrative. For example, weaving represented determination, endurance, and the taming of nature; net and ship making stood for patience, struggle and danger; and clothes making stood for assimilation of foreign skills, ambition and change. To transform these objects, the narrators/curators employed the mechanism of the ethnographical collection as a means of reinforcing, controlling and generating social knowledge.³⁵⁶ Thus, these museums were organised and

³⁵⁵ Zani, interviewed on March 2008.

³⁵⁶ Lowenthal (1985), pp. 47-49.

classified to focus on specific fields or subjects, using the past to enrich the present-day life of the nation.³⁵⁷ Presumably, the curators believed that, without a focused and further demonstration of the narrative of the culture and heritage in these museums, the narrative of the national museum, would be incomplete. They were following an ideology predicated on the belief that objects and narratives that lack configuration and familiarity remain incomprehensible. Without this awareness of their past, Qataris could be viewed as aimless and rootless and their future insignificant.³⁵⁸ Each museum played a principal role in interpreting past ways of life in Qatar. For the curators/narrators, the charm and difference of these museums allowed them to present a more focussed past and use them 'as sociological data banks'.³⁵⁹

In order to cover as much as possible of Qatari cultural heritage in the national narrative, the first regional museum was established in the old town of Al-Wakrah in 1984. The Department of Museums and Antiquities, in co-operation with the Ministry of Public Works, carried out restoration work on a traditional house located in the southern corner of the old town. The house dated to the beginning of the twentieth century but its general form of construction followed the pattern of traditional Arabian houses in the Gulf region.³⁶⁰ Typically these houses consisted of five main rooms including a majlis, an upper room, and a well as a water source for household use. The house in Figure 54 was built from stones and clay and plastered with gypsum, and represents the uniqueness of Qatari traditional architecture which has all but disappeared today. It was characterised by gypsum decoration on walls, niches, cavities and arches. The choice of this location for the museum, in particular, aimed at highlighting Qatari architecture, as well as an architecture prevalent in the region of Al-Wakrah itself.

³⁵⁷ Lowenthal (1985), pp. 47-49.

³⁵⁸ Lowenthal (1985), pp. 47-49.

³⁵⁹ Durrans, p. 147.

³⁶⁰ Al-Khulaifi, p. 121.

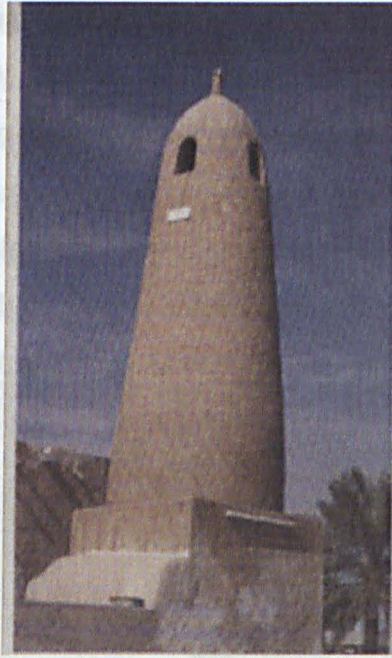


Fig. 54. The traditional architecture of the Al-Wakrah regional Museum (photographed in 1984).

In order to present a complete narrative of Qatari cultural heritage, it was vital that the curators/narrators included this coastal town, especially as it had been the key fishing hub in Qatar. Thus, the marine life of this community was highlighted. In addition, during the eighteenth century this region was considered as the heart of Qatar, thus making it historically significant for the curators/narrators. Therefore, Al-Wakrah's history and heritage stands as a signifier for the history of Qatar. The curators/narrators decided that the economic history of pearl fishing, fishing, wooden craft (especially the production of traditional doors), agricultural equipment and tools such as a plough and the water-wheel, and gypsum decoration, alongside information about the wildlife of the area should be highlighted as a reflection of Al-Wakrah's role in Qatari cultural heritage. On 24 February 1988, the house was opened officially as Al-Wakrah Regional Museum and used to display pearl-diving equipment and other activities not covered by Qatar National Museum.



Fig. 55. Men wearing traditional pearl diving suits and using related equipment as displayed at Al-Wakrah Regional Museum in 1988.

For example, Figure 55 illustrates how diving equipment was used and shows divers and their assistants preparing for the diving session. The display was intended to document the main source of employment for those who lived in the town.³⁶¹ The display of artefacts such as gypsum decorations [Fig. 56] and wooden products from old Al-Wakrah documented other activities that the inhabitants of the fishing town developed and practiced.³⁶² Gypsum decoration was displayed to showcase the influence of Islamic art patterns in traditional design as these patterns were used by the Qatari to decorate their houses.

³⁶¹ Al-Khulaifi, p. 121.

³⁶² Leaflet of Al-Wakrah Museum, Ministry of Media Archive (Doha: Antiquities and Museums Department).

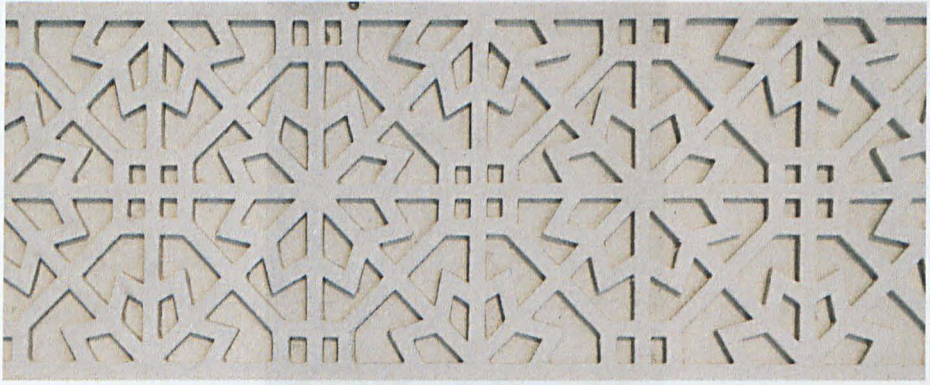


Fig. 56. Gypsum patterns influenced by Islamic art, displayed at Al-Wakrah Regional Museum in 1988.

The fourth museum was established after the Department of Antiquities and Museums restored Al-Zubarah Fort, which is located in northwestern Qatar, roughly 120km north of Doha.³⁶³ It was built in 1938 during the reign of Abdulla Bin Jassim Al-Thani in order to defend the northwestern shores of Qatar. On 22 January 1988, it was inaugurated as Al-Zubarah Regional Museum to display archaeological discoveries.³⁶⁴ Some of the exhibits, such as pottery, ceramics, and coins date back to the seventeenth century and had been discovered at the site of the former town of Zubarah and in the surrounding region.³⁶⁵ Within this museum, the curators/narrators use newly discovered archaeological objects to underline a Qatari narrative that emphasised the intelligence of the ancient people in managing their water supply through well-preserved traditional wells distributed around the historical town and the remarkable capabilities of these ancient people in urban planning. Such archaeological findings, as shown in Figures 57 and 58, also provided the curators/narrators with evidence for their narrative of the early human presence in Qatar that they had started at the QNM.

³⁶³ Al-Khulaifi, pp. 87-88.

³⁶⁴ Al-Khulaifi, pp. 87-88.

³⁶⁵ Al-Khulaifi, p. 120.



Fig. 57. Rare archaeological materials displayed in the yard of Al-Zubarah Museum in 1988.



Fig. 58. Archaeological objects in one of the Al-Zubarah's galleries (photographed in 1988).

In 1987 a police station on two floors, each with one large hall, located in Al-Khor city, around fifty seven kilometres north of Doha, was renovated in order to be transformed into a third regional museum, the Al-Khor Regional Museum. It was opened in 1991.³⁶⁶ The purpose of this museum was to show different aspects of the history of the people of Al-Khor. The museum displayed archaeological discoveries from the Neolithic and Bronze ages that were discovered by a British archaeological team.³⁶⁷ On the lower floor, the museum concentrated on the human environment, anthropology, natural history, the land and sea, traditional costumes,

³⁶⁶ Al-Khulaifi, pp. 115-117.

³⁶⁷ Al-Khulaifi, pp. 115-117.

diving and fishing and shipbuilding, while the upper floor displayed archaeological discoveries, such as coins and pottery. In addition, the museum was dedicated to illustrating the significant Qatari legend of Mayy and Ghilan, which was believed to have originated in Al-Khor.³⁶⁸

In 1994 the government, through the Ministry of Information and Culture, purchased the private museum of arms and weaponry, which was the last of the museums established in this phase, containing around 2315 different pieces from the antique collector Sheikh Hassan Bin Mohammed Al-Thani. The Department of Museums and Antiquities considered this museum to be the nucleus of a cultural establishment for knowledge about arms and weapons throughout the history of mankind.³⁶⁹

David Lowenthal has asserted that 'No statement about the past can be confirmed by examining the supposed facts, because knowing occurs only in the epistemological present'.³⁷⁰ In these new museums, however, the curators/narrators were trying to present cultural materials as evidence of past social life, past history and past circumstances. Therefore, what we had within these museums was not the past as a whole, but the past as residue. The specialist and regional museums were established to ensure that the nation in its entirety had a record of its heritage. In remembering, reading, hearing and confronting objects that could tell stories, the nation lived and experienced its past.³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ The legend narrates a story of historical competition. For decades Ghilan dominated the pearl trade with his navy of fishing boats and pearl divers, in the northern Qatari area Al-Khor. However, a new competitor appeared, Mayy, who with her navy of expert pearl divers could sail further distances and reach the richest pearl fishing areas. Ghilan had to find a way to dominate the pearl trade again, and so created a new sail for his boats, by which he could sail faster and farther. It is believed that the sails used today in the traditional fishing boats in the Arabian Gulf are the one that Ghilan created, therefore, this is a story about the creation of the traditional sail.

³⁶⁹ Leaflet of Doha Weaponry Museum, Ministry of Media Archive (Doha: Antiquities and Museums Department).

³⁷⁰ Lowenthal (1985), p. 187.

³⁷¹ Lowenthal (1985), pp. 191-192.

The Fate of the Specialist and Regional Museums

The government had funded the restoration work for these sites to be transformed into specialist and regional museums via the Ministry of Public Works. Its support did not stretch further than simple restoration work,³⁷² however, and no specific funding had been set aside to help and support the maintenance of these establishments after they had opened. This resulted in the museums being poorly presented and organised.³⁷³ For instance, Figures 57 and 58 show rare archaeological materials displayed in the yard of Al-Zubarah Museum. The specimens were not protected from the heat, sunlight or humidity, and were often poorly presented in inappropriate settings. This presentation shows that the government's passion for these artefacts' had diminished and across these museums signs of neglect became apparent. As these illustrations exemplify, there was little interest paid by the government to these museums in comparison with the significant funding that the national museum received. This low interest suggests that the curators/narrators' objectives and aspirations were more focused on Doha and its global ambitions than in the regions. The curators/narrators nationalised their country's past, called for foreign archaeological expeditions, and outlawed the pillage of any findings.³⁷⁴ Why did the specialist and regional museums receive so much less interest from the government compared to the huge interest in the national museum?

Without doubt, attention was focussed on the political importance of a 'national' museum. Jasim Zani explained the political philosophy behind the focus on the QNM in Doha by using the case study of a mural painting by Barry Evans [Fig. 59] that had been commissioned specifically for the museum:

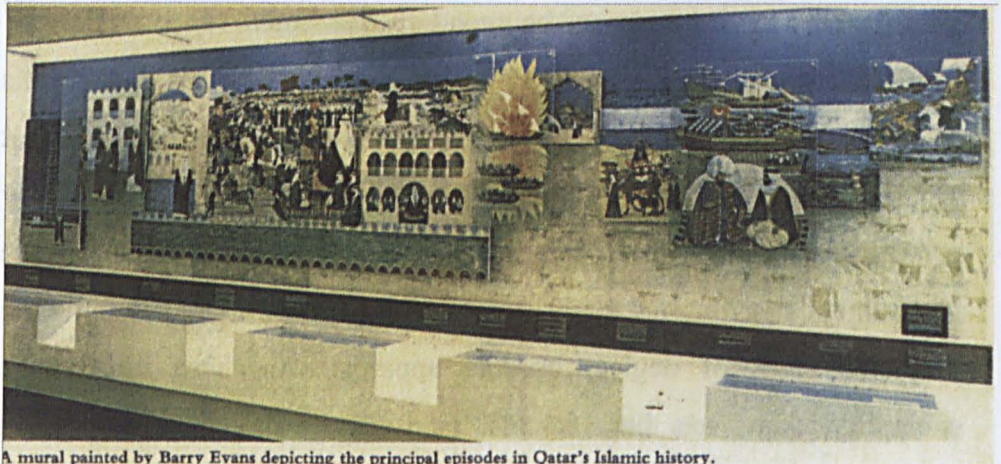
The QNM searched for the political history of Qatar as distinct from the Ottoman presence. The Ottoman's relationship with the Qatari is represented in that museum in the mural painting, which the English organiser [Michael Rice] asked the artist

³⁷² Zani, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

³⁷³ Zani, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

³⁷⁴ Al-Khulaifi, pp. 115-117.

Barry Evans to paint for the museum [...] This painting sparked an argument with the Turkish minister who, on his visit to the museum, rejected its content [...]. The Turkish minister insisted on the removal of the mural from the museum. After this, we studied the painting pretty well and noticed lots of contradictions in it, such as the position of Turkey, which was depicted as dealing arrogantly with the Qatari ruler. Thus we decided to remove this mural.³⁷⁵



A mural painted by Barry Evans depicting the principal episodes in Qatar's Islamic history.

Fig. 59. The mural by Barry Evans that was the subject of an argument with the Turkish minister.

The political debate that the mural provoked with the Turkish minister illustrates the existence of a political philosophy in the national museum. Moreover, the reaction of the Turkish minister meant that, for some, the museum's political message was successful. The Turkish refuted the English depiction of their relationship with Qatar, a depiction that represented them as an occupier rather than affirming the Ottoman proclamation that their appearance in the Arabian peninsula was a means of safeguarding Islam.³⁷⁶

The end of the narrative of cultural heritage from the 1970s to the 1990s created the foundation for the start of a new narrative of cultural heritage in Qatar today. For example, the plan to reconstruct Qatar National Museum will present a new interpretation of Qatari heritage instead of being a representation of that heritage. The architect of the project for the new National Museum of Qatar is the Pritzker Prize-winning designer

³⁷⁵ Zani, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

³⁷⁶ Zani, interviewed on 24 March 2008.

Jean Nouvel, whose design will be built around the Old Emiri Palace.³⁷⁷ The narrators of this new 'memory' of Qatar aim to make a statement about Qatar today and in the future. For instance, a computer-generated aerial view the model of the new QNM [Fig. 60] shows how the Old Emiri Palace will sit in the centre of Nouvel's design. Nouvel is working around the palace, which was reconstructed and re-explored during the 1970s. This narrative and the creation and recreation of museums' sites will be explored further in Chapter Three.

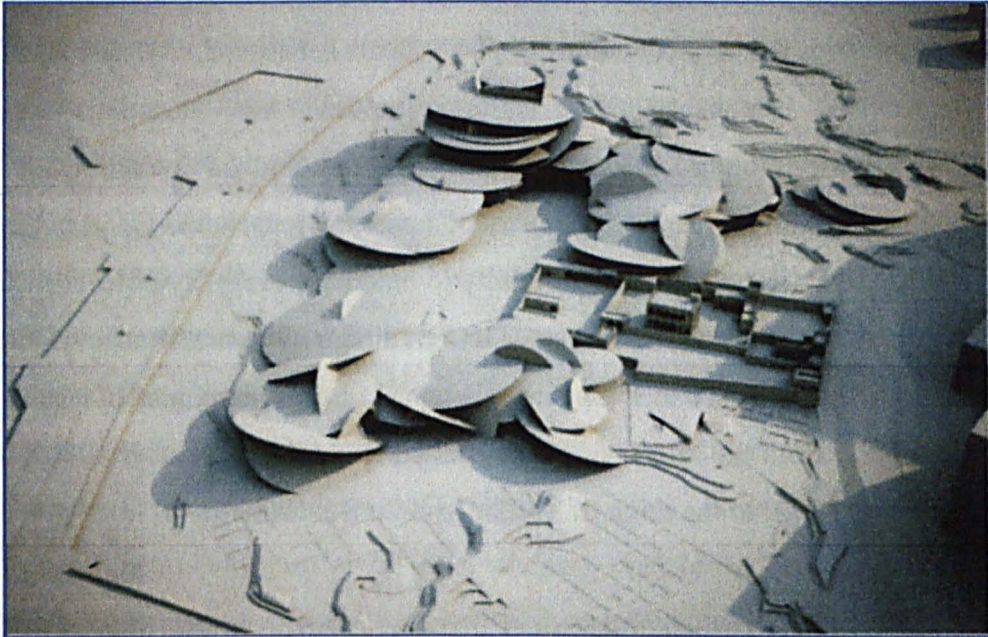


Fig. 60. The new QNM will be built around an historic structure, the Old Emiri Palace, with new exhibitions that will allow better understanding of life in the Arabian Gulf region (computer-generated imagery, 2010).

³⁷⁷ Jean Nouvel was born in 1945 in Fumel, France. In 1966, he came first in the entrance examination for the Ecole National Supérieure des Beaux Arts, from which he received a diploma in 1972. Between 1967 and 1970, he became assistant to Claude Parent and Paul Virilio. In 1981, Nouvel won a competition for the Arab World Institute, one of the 'Great Projects' ordered by the former French president François Mitterrand. In 1984 Nouvel founded Jean Nouvel et Associés (Jean Nouvel, Jean-Marc Bos, Myrto Vitart, Emmanuel Blamont). In 1989-1994, he also founded JNEC (Jean Nouvel et Emmanuel Cattani) and in 1994 established Ateliers Jean Nouvel.

CHAPTER THREE. A NARRATIVE OF COLLECTING IN THE 1990s, GLOBAL AMBITIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF QATAR MUSEUMS AUTHORITY

‘The Middle’

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how museum practice in Qatar began in the 1970s as a consequence of the Emiri decree that commissioned a committee to collect antiquities for Qatar National Museum. In discussing the role of this committee, we have seen how the narrative of collecting and constructing a national history and heritage began. With the construction of a ‘new’ Qatari heritage, a new system of signs was established. This system imposed new meanings and interpretations upon objects in a way that fed into an overall Qatari national narrative. The establishment of a national museum in Qatar in the mid-1970s also helped the community to readdress everyday objects and, by so doing, evaluate their heritage and traditions. The importance of the national narrative at this time was to stress the development of Qatari social life from the reign of Sheikh Ahmed Bin Ali (25 October 1960-21 February 1972) to the reign of Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad.

In this chapter, which focuses on the development of the Museum of Islamic Art, I will discuss the growing importance of Qatari culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century by examining the continuation of a Qatari narrative of heritage and history. This was done in order to further the role that museums could play in the country’s process of national development. We will begin this chapter by investigating the development of a new narrative of collecting for Qatar since the 1990s, which had new aims and a new approach. These new aims led to the establishment of Qatar Museums Authority (QMA), with a new museological philosophy and a new political role. This new philosophy also resulted in the creation of a new architectural language in Qatar, which will also be a focus in this chapter.

A different collecting narrative developed in Qatar during the political reign of Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa, who, on 27 June 1995 became the ruler of Qatar after the so-called 'white revolution' had led to the dethronement of his father Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad Al-Thani.³⁷⁸

There can be no doubt that histories, memories and relics enhance societies' experiences and knowledge.³⁷⁹ More than this, different pasts – ethnic, social, political and national – serve and present different purposes and narratives. Therefore, each search for, and collection of, materials from the past, whether cultural artefacts, manuscripts or archives, has a particular significance. This significance, however, is more visible once such objects are placed in a narrative context.³⁸⁰ For instance, a museum culture that has been established for many years in Western civilisations is often associated with the expansion of countries and is thus established within a colonial context. For certain colonists, collecting became a means of emphasising their domination, identity and rule over these new lands.³⁸¹ On the other hand, in new countries such as Australia and America, the descendants of colonial settlers have searched for geographically relevant prehistoric artefacts in order to compensate for their own relatively recent histories in the region.³⁸² To own and make available ancient artefacts can create a powerful sense of community, identity and hierarchy. In our case, the new government of Sheikh Hamad considered collecting and the creation of a museum culture to be an important component for the country's future. In the same way as his father had done, Sheikh Hamad called for another British archaeological expedition in 2000, in order to find new historical sites.

³⁷⁸ <<http://www.netayman.jeeran.com/netayman61/archive/2009/1/777862.html>> [accessed 26 March 2009].

³⁷⁹ Lowenthal (1985), pp. 15-16.

³⁸⁰ Lowenthal (1985), pp. 49-52.

³⁸¹ Spivak (1985), p. 259.

³⁸² Lowenthal (1985), p. 54.

This initiative was associated with discussions about the establishment of specialist museums in Qatar.³⁸³ Moreover, in October 2008, Qatar became 'the first country in the region to implement the Global Imagery System for archaeological studies as part of research by QMA together with the University of Birmingham'.³⁸⁴ Through this on-going research, Qatar aimed to develop a Qatar National Historic Environment Record of all the archaeological sites in the country. Once the record is completed, it is hoped that a fuller history of the nation will be possible, particularly as a substantial number of new archaeological sites covering the ancient to Islamic periods have been discovered.³⁸⁵ The new government of Sheikh Hamad critically reassessed previous activities and started a new narrative to alter the concept of historical preservation in Qatar.³⁸⁶ This led the politicians/narrators to begin a new discourse on Qatar's heritage and to decide to bring the QMA under the patronage of Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa himself by Decree 26 (2009). The QMA was formed with the overt agenda to coordinate all cultural projects and activities, both local and international.³⁸⁷ Besides its responsibility to establish new galleries and museums, it was also given further responsibilities regarding any legislation relating to historical preservation, acquiring collections and representing the state of Qatar abroad.³⁸⁸ Consequently, the QMA's appointed curators adopted a new ideology, cultural concept and narrative that, in common with the West, allowed people to view their 'traditional cultures in larger contexts'.³⁸⁹ Perhaps this contrast to the West was important for the QMA to reflect the adoption of new ways of thinking of cultural conservation and the protection of heritage.³⁹⁰ It would demonstrate how far their critical rethinking of the country's

³⁸³ Al-Khulaifi (2003), pp. 36-41.

³⁸⁴ Mohit Joshi, 'Latest Archaeological Digs May Revamp Qatar's Entire History', *TopNews.in*, 7 September 2009 <<http://www.topnews.in/latest-archaeological-digs-may-revamp-qatar-s-entire-history-2195625>> [accessed 4 December 2009].

³⁸⁵ Joshi.

³⁸⁶ Kreps, p. 11.

³⁸⁷ 'About us: Mission', *Electronic Archive of Qatar Museums Authority* <<http://www.qma.com.qa/eng/index.php/qma/about>> [accessed 31 May 2009].

³⁸⁸ 'About us: Mission', *Electronic Archive of Qatar Museums Authority*.

³⁸⁹ Kreps, p. 13.

³⁹⁰ Kreps, p. 13.

museological and conservation systems would allow them to create a new paradigm of heritage. This heritage paradigm would give people control over enforcing, constructing and maintaining their identity, heritage and culture. It also provided them with vital elements of their living heritage and culture that would allow a continual development.³⁹¹ This new Qatari museological practice was seen to contrast with previous practice, which had tended to fix heritage and cultural practices in time and space.³⁹² Rather, this new practice does not deny the 'fluid and flexible nature of culture'.³⁹³ Through the arena of museums and heritage, the politicians/narrators are projecting their belief that culture and heritage conservation are very necessary for the survival and continuity of the nation and its history.³⁹⁴ This new ideology and attitude towards history made it vital for the politicians/narrators to promote an individual and private narrative on a larger national scale. The QMA's first major move was to implement plans for twenty-five new or improved museums, which resulted in a museum boom over a very short time. The endless pursuit of artefacts, memorabilia, and the relatively recent, but fast growing interest, in establishing a universal heritage model, was largely because of new and significantly changed goals. Thus, we must identify the narratives of the Qatari government of the 1990s that provided the foundations for a new cultural philosophy and ideology. The Qatari artist Yousef Ahmed believes that the most important stimulus for museum development in Qatar was the oil boom.³⁹⁵ Oil and natural gas were first

³⁹¹ Kreps, p. 13.

³⁹² Kreps, p. 15.

³⁹³ Kreps, p. 11.

³⁹⁴ Kreps, p. 13.

³⁹⁵ Yousef Ahmed was born in Doha in 1955. He has a BA in Arts and Education from Hilwan University-Cairo (1975-1976) and an MFA from Mills College, California (1982). He has been awarded many certificates and has participated in many exhibitions such as: Exhibition at Gulf Hotel 1973, Arab Biennial-Kuwait 1973, First Arab Biennial-Baghdad 1974, the permanent exhibition at Al-Jesrah Cultural and Social Club in 1975, Second Arab Biennial Exhibition-Rabat 1976, and Sculpture World Conference in Washington 1980. Ahmed is an intimate friend of Sheikh Hassan Bin Mohammed. Their relationship goes back to their college days at Qatar University, when Sheikh Hassan was one of the artist's students in 1984. From the early 1990s, the artist has participated in the organisation of several private museums with Sheikh Hassan Bin Mohammed, such as the Weaponry Museum in 1990, the Orientalist Museum in 1992 and the Arab Museum for Modern Art in 1994. He was interviewed on March 2009.

found in the State of Qatar in October 1939 and the first commercial oil was exported in 1949.³⁹⁶ Since then, the production of oil has increased dramatically and brought about deep changes in the country, resulting in its transformation from a tribal administration to a modern government.³⁹⁷ In 1952, after the first oil revenue was received by Sheikh Ali Bin Abdulla (the ruler at that time) he began to develop the first national system of government in the country. At the beginning of the 1960s, the government began to apply new administrative rules and established several departments, such as the Financial and Budget Department, the Petroleum Department and the Department of Law.³⁹⁸ These opened the doors for the development of health, education and social services.³⁹⁹ The Qatari community benefited from this new revenue as well as the Sheikhs. Oil rapidly changed the economic stature of the community and people quickly adapted to a new urban lifestyle and new professions, as the oil industry took precedence as the main economic activity.⁴⁰⁰ Ahmed confirms that:

With the oil boom and the resulting economic fortune for the country, Qatar has had the opportunity to invest this fortune in the culture sector. This fortune allows the government to retrieve for Qatar the Islamic treasures, antiquities and archaeological pieces which belonged to the civilisation and had been taken abroad hundreds of years ago. Even if double their original price was paid, it was of paramount importance that these artefacts were brought back to their original cultural field.⁴⁰¹

This quote exemplifies the relationship between capitalism, authority, and culture. As a result of the flow of oil wealth, cultural institutions were generally considered to be the ideal elements to use to validate prestige, power and a global reputation. However, the word 'retrieve' that Yousef Ahmed used requires us to look into a potential problem that the

³⁹⁶ M. Al-Jaber, pp. 112-113.

³⁹⁷ M. Al-Jaber, p. 241.

³⁹⁸ M. Al-Jaber, pp. 128-129.

³⁹⁹ Saad Al-Humadi, *The Role of Oil in Qatar's International Relationships* (Egypt: The Academic Centre of Strategy Studies, 2001), p. 93.

⁴⁰⁰ M. Al-Jaber, p. 286.

⁴⁰¹ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2008.

politicians/narrators faced. In this context, 'retrieve' means the return of cultural treasures to their original home.⁴⁰² As the government began to collect various Islamic objects to enhance its own collection, such as calligraphies from Central Asia, Turkish manuscripts, jewellery from Islamic India, ivory from Islamic Sicily and Egypt and so forth, it became involved in much legal wrangling. Although these artefacts are Islamic, they do not necessarily represent a unique Qatari culture. They are not of Qatari origin and had never been in Qatar, yet the government deemed its collecting activities to be 'restoration' and 'retrieval'.⁴⁰³ Rather, each of these objects represents the artistic skills, histories and heritage of their respective cultures. Nonetheless, the politicians/narrators concentrated their collecting on Islamic civilisation as a generic entity, regardless of any territorial or cultural differences. I would argue that these artefacts could be universally appreciated and inspirational; however, we cannot presume that each type of object was produced in each country throughout the Islamic world. Consequently, other countries cannot possess them without raising some debate in the same way as, for example, the Elgin Marbles do in the British Museum.⁴⁰⁴ When the narrators/politicians decided to make the possession of Islamic culture theirs alone, they actually placed themselves between two factions: those who support the restitution of artefacts to their original lands and those who support the idea of 'the internationalism of culture'.⁴⁰⁵ Owning the past has become a national duty. 'Retrieving artefacts', as it was called, together with the development of historical archives has become absolutely essential to the formation of Qatari heritage. However, within this, it became inevitable that the private goals of the politicians/narrators were creating a particular national history and heritage. It is vital then to explore why it was so important for the government and Qatari people alike to have these objects in Qatar and make them theirs. The

⁴⁰² Peter Gathercote, 'The Restitution of Heritage', *Anthropology Today*, 6:5 (October 1990), 1-2.

⁴⁰³ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2008.

⁴⁰⁴ Gathercote, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁰⁵ Gathercote, p. 1.

government's decision to 'repatriate' these antiquities to Qatar was taken in a mood of nostalgia in order to strengthen and support their new political aims. In fact, antiquity is a complex concept that Lowenthal has suggested revolves around four qualities; 'primordial, precedence, primitive and remoteness'.⁴⁰⁶ The quality of precedence alone could benefit the government of Sheikh Hamad, as this is concerned with demonstrating heritage and lineage. Therefore, with the concept of 'retrieval' and via inscribed cloths, woven textiles, pages from Qur'an manuscripts, epigraphic wares, calligraphies and so on, the government's claim for Qatari ethnicity would be justified. The desire to 'retrieve' supports a wish to safeguard national treasures and thereby to enhance the country's status. There is no doubt that there was a particular narrative underlining Qatari collecting practice in the 1990s, be it political, ideological or around the questions of heritage and identity. Recent museology indicates that 'museums are not neutral'.⁴⁰⁷ Therefore, while they conserve, collect, classify, research, display and educate, they can at the same time create arguments through interpretation.⁴⁰⁸ All these possibilities motivated me to trace what exactly makes the past so beneficial for Qatar. It also encourages me to explore the museums and architecture in Qatar from the 1990s onwards. It is essential then, for my study, to explore what benefits these antiquities and their narratives were thought to bring to Qatar. Even though certain benefits may seem obvious, they do not entirely explain the Qatari narrators' motivation to start a new cultural tradition. The invention of a new cultural narrative and tradition played an essential role in creating a high profile for their goals. They deliberately dismissed the old curatorial practice, which concentrated only on the past, to help define their new approach of a flexible and fluid museological practice. When I asked Yousef Ahmed why the government no longer supported ethnographical collectors such

⁴⁰⁶ Lowenthal (1985), p. 53.

⁴⁰⁷ Randolph Starn, 'A Historian's Brief Guide to New Museum Studies', *American Historical Review*, 110:1 (February 2005), 68-98 (p. 70).

⁴⁰⁸ Starn, p. 71.

as Sheikh Faisal Bin Qassim Al-Thani and Sheikh Hamad Bin Abdullah Bin Jasim Al-Thani, he suggested that:

The country started to think out of the box, as the government became satisfied with the ethnographical materials that were [...] acquired [...] during the preparation for Qatar National Museum, and now it became more important for Qatar to broaden its acquisitions.⁴⁰⁹

Evidence of a hidden narrative in this approach was hinted at by the Head of Qatar Museums Authority, Sheikha Al-Mayassa, daughter of the Qatari Emir. In her speech during the ceremony to inaugurate the Museum of Islamic Art, she stated: 'There will be a complete programme for the development and modernisation of the QNM, which will reflect Qatar's recent position both regionally and globally'.⁴¹⁰ Sheikha Al-Mayassa's words also reveal that the refurbishment of Qatar National Museum would be a reconstruction and a creation of another new narrative of Qatari heritage. This is especially true if we look at the QMA's stated aims: that the new construction would be 'the first monument travellers see from the airport and the striking design of the complex and surrounding landscapes will help prove that Qatar is assuredly, a forward-looking country'.⁴¹¹ Thus, it is a constant layering of myth upon myth that has been employed to construct the notion of Qatar today. What is happening within all these practices – the emphasis on retrieval, the new Western cultural model and the global heritage model – is not specifically about interpretation of Qatari heritage. Rather, it is an interpretation of a new policy, new hegemony and the new Qatar. The narrators/curators are very much aware that by their use of artefacts and heritage, they are actually manipulating interpretation within a specific narrative of collecting.

⁴⁰⁹ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2009.

⁴¹⁰ Mumtaz, p. 5.

⁴¹¹ Bridgette Meinhold, 'Jean Nouvel Unveils Sustainably-Designed National Museum of Qatar', *Inhabitat* <<http://inhabitat.com/2010/03/24/jean-nouvel-unveils-sustainably-designed-national-museum-of-qatar/>> [accessed 6 November 2010].

In promoting an international image, Qatari heritage was meant to serve three major innovations, those of democracy, globalisation, and modernity.⁴¹² Through this invented tradition, the extensive plan for twenty-five new or improved museums, in a broad sense, has become institutionalised. Such institutionalisation also took place in sports, education, science, and child development. By developing the three major narratives of globalisation, democracy and modernity, the politicians/narrators succeeded in creating a specific profile for their government. In his speech at the Sixth Doha Cultural Festival, the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs stated:

The role of citizens in building society appears to be vital. Our topic, hence, is a social subject in the first place. Its scope can accommodate many different views. We are, therefore, required to embrace goodwill and be objective and open-hearted when initiating a dialogue with others [...] Our ultimate objective is to achieve social interest, in other words the people's interest [...] We have also been keen to adhere to gradual and systematic ways in order to achieve what suits our cultural heritage. This will guard us against surprises that may turn the democratic building into a rejected structure. We embrace our efforts to enable citizens to build and develop the country [...] The concepts of good governance have become unequivocally known.⁴¹³

Museums and their architecture have become the most visible form of delivering a comparison between Qatar yesterday and today.⁴¹⁴ The development of this new tradition also suggests an attempt to update and strengthen the nation's bond with the ruler, who wished to promote a new model of Qatar. Therefore, acquiring these official cultural institutions, artefacts, symbols and practices can be regarded as both novel and necessary.

⁴¹² Eric Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Production Traditions in Europe 1870-1914', in *Representing the Nation: A Reader. History, Heritages and Museums*, ed. by David Boswell and Jessica Evans (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 61-86 (p. 65).

⁴¹³ Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al-Thani, 'The Role of the Citizens in Building Society Now and in Future', in The Sixth Doha Cultural Festival, 1 April 2007, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive*
<http://english.mofa.gov.qa/minister.cfm?m_cat=3&id=9> [accessed 7 July 2012].

⁴¹⁴ Hobsbawm, p. 67.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find the new government is enthusiastic about 'going global'. However, it remains to be explored how these antiquities will serve the narrators' stated global aims. What meanings and narratives do these antiquities encompass? For the government, the artistic skills seen in objects such as the 'Franchetti' tapestry from Iran [Fig. 61] could be made to produce a range of historical connotations.



Fig. 61. The 'Franchetti' tapestry, Iran, c.1575, displayed at the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, in 2008.

The tapestry depicts animals and mythical beasts that were thought to have existed in eastern Iran. Some of these animals are exotics derived from China, and others are drawn from ancient Iranian tradition. Therefore, the appearance of indigenous and exotic decorative forms in this tapestry could be manipulated to produce a certain narrative.⁴¹⁵ This translatable trait allowed a national collecting narrative to commence; by transforming a collecting narrative on an individual scale, such as the narrative of the antique collector Sheikh Hassan Bin Mohammed Al-Thani, into a larger scale, it becomes part of the national narrative. Sheikh Hassan is the brother of Sheikh Saud Bin Ali Al-Thani, the former-chairman of Qatar's National Council for Culture, Art and Heritage, and a

⁴¹⁵ Oliver Watson, *Museum of Islamic Art: Doha, Qatar*, Museum Guide (Munich, Berlin, London and New York: Prestel, 2008), p. 72.

cousin of the current Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa. Both brothers are interested in collecting and museum work. Sheikh Hassan currently occupies the position of Vice Chair on the Board of Trustees in Qatar Museums Authority. He was the most significant collector in Qatar in the 1990s and was a regular visitor to museums and auction houses across the world, as well as a reader of museology and history. On his travels in Europe, especially in London, Sheikh Hassan used to buy antique pieces of weaponry, scripts, and rare books that are concerned with the history of the Middle East. The decision to translate his personal collecting narrative onto a national scale was the spark that encouraged him to penetrate further into the antique and auction world. Thus, his collecting activities had a huge influence on the collections of the QMA⁴¹⁶ because it was recognised that narrowing the context of cultural materials had created an elitist protective zone and placed them in an ideology that lacked exploration and subjective relations.⁴¹⁷ There was also the problem of giving the collection a proper functional name. The establishment of the private Weaponry Museum in Qatar under the auspices of Sheikh Hassan is an example of how an individual's narrative was subsumed into a national narrative. As well as his weaponry collection and a collection of traditional male costumes inherited from his grandfathers, Sheikh Hassan began to extend his collection by purchasing more antiques. Yousef Ahmed recalls Sheikh Hassan's weaponry collection growing to the point that it required a larger display space. In the early 1990s, Sheikh Hassan rented a two-storey house in which he asked Yousef Ahmed to draw murals on the walls to augment the displays.⁴¹⁸ Figure 62 illustrates one of the displays in this private museum, where artillery guns were combined with contemporary art to validate the artefacts. The combination of objects and art helped emphasise their advanced technology (for their time), their antiquity and, at the same time, the aim was to produce an experience of past events. Because this particular

⁴¹⁶ Ahmed, interviewed on March 2009.

⁴¹⁷ Lowenthal (1985), pp. 48-49.

⁴¹⁸ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2009.

tableau was positioned near the entrance to the museum, the Sheikh's guests were immediately presented with a living experience of guns, smoke and dim lighting rather than a sterile display.⁴¹⁹



Fig. 62. Artillery guns displayed at Weaponry Museum, Doha, in 1998.

Thus, having displayed the initial collection to his satisfaction, Sheikh Hassan was encouraged to obtain more artefacts including military items such as soldiers' uniforms. Needing more room, he rented two more two-storey houses. However, these were not publically accessible as they were only open to his friends. At this stage, Sheikh Hassan's private museum consisted mainly of objects displayed in cases with labels that only indicated origins and dates. As this example demonstrates, the need to define a narrative within a collection presents problems.⁴²⁰ To define such a collection as a narrative we have to look at its structure. To structure a narrative of collecting, a sense of purpose must first exist. This purpose would then serve to incorporate meanings and goals.⁴²¹ When reviewing the collecting attitudes of Sheikh Hassan, there is an initial absence of a purposeful narrative. In an interview with Qatar Television for the documentary programme *Fadaiyat* (2007), Sheikh Hassan spoke about his initial interest in antiques:

⁴¹⁹ Lowenthal (1985), p. 61.

⁴²⁰ Bal, pp. 86-87.

⁴²¹ Bal, pp. 86-87.

I was brought up in my grandfather's house, the house of the previous Qatari ruler, Sheikh Ali Bin Abdulla, which was itself considered as a library. Before becoming the ruler he was considered a knowledgeable person. He was the owner of a huge library in the house and the founder of the Qatar National Library. Being brought up in that atmosphere my love for books began. Therefore, my interest in history and antiquities developed from my interest in books, culture, civilisation and ecology.⁴²²

If the creation of a collecting narrative is defined as different from merely inheriting objects or buying them, then at best there was only a simplistic narrative created by this initial collection and subsequent additions to it.⁴²³ Even when he bought artefacts to add to his inherited collection, for example matching costumes and accessories, they were not really used to narrate a specific history. His own interest was simply in collecting similar objects for the sake of harmony.⁴²⁴ Yousef Ahmed describes Sheikh Hassan's collecting attitude at this time:

As Sheikh Hassan was very fond of weaponry, he also became fond of paintings that contain weaponry and these were the Orientalist paintings. However, what we mean by Orientalist here is not only the artists but also the travellers, those who visited the area and documented what they had seen in their travel books. Therefore, for Sheikh Hassan, all these things are linked together, the Weaponry Museum, the Library and the Orientalist collection.⁴²⁵

Sheikh Hassan wanted to make his collection more beautiful, more attractive and more valuable to impress his elite visitors and guests. Making access to his private museum exclusive to only his closest friends, however, created a semiotic language that spoke of exclusivity and narrowness. The objects were beautifully displayed in cabinets, as a collection of treasures, but they had no signs, no gestures and no words beyond the simple relationship he created between actual weapons and the representation of similar weapons in Orientalist paintings.

⁴²² Ahmed Al-Dousiri, 'Fadaciat', A Three Part Series Television Interview with Sheikh Hassan Bin Mohammed Al-Thani, 2004, Qatar TV (Doha: 2004), CD 2.

⁴²³ Bal, pp. 86-87.

⁴²⁴ Bal, pp. 86-87.

⁴²⁵ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2009.

However, Sheikh Hassan's collection, which began as a random set of inherited objects, became more significant as it grew and developed as a more logical sequence. He began to collect various objects from different categories, and this new endeavour coincided with the beginning of a wider development of collecting in the 1990s as a result of the new museum plans. Thus, we see that Sheikh Hassan moved from being an inheritor of a collection to a collector himself. When asked about this development, Sheikh Hassan commented:

I deal with these antiquities as vessels, each artefact signifying a vessel of history for me and all these vessels are tools of history. When I see these tools I feel a desire to own them, which might reflect my inner curiosity, which is a love of obtaining a part of history. So when I acquire a piece of manuscript or painting or any historical artefact I feel like I own a part of its history, if I can put it metaphorically.⁴²⁶

His collecting activities at this time were still dominated by his own interests, which we could call a 'collector's mind-set'.⁴²⁷ The benefits of the past here were utilised through the collection for Sheikh Hassan's personal purposes. His collecting narrative seemed to show his own individual taste for antiquity. The age of the objects was motivation enough for Sheikh Hassan's collection,⁴²⁸ as a useful signifier of his knowledge, taste and power, his own 'cultural capital'.⁴²⁹ Hence, the more remote and old an object was, the more attractive his collection might appear.⁴³⁰ Sheikh Hassan's collecting narrative lacked a crucial component, however: the subjective agency of public audiences.⁴³¹ These audiences could form an integral part of the development of his collecting narrative and encourage the Sheikh to utilise these elements of his collection further.⁴³² The next stage in the development of his collecting narrative was spurred by a particular event that marks the 'middle'.⁴³³

⁴²⁶ Al-Dousiri, CD 2.

⁴²⁷ Bal, p. 86.

⁴²⁸ Lowenthal (1985), p. 53.

⁴²⁹ Al-Dousiri, CD 2.

⁴³⁰ Lowenthal (1985), p. 53.

⁴³¹ Bal, p. 87.

⁴³² Bal, p. 87.

⁴³³ Bal, pp. 84-102.

This was the decision to turn his personal collection into a national museum. After visiting Sheikh Hassan's private museum, the Emir began to develop his own interest in antiques and art works.⁴³⁴ He encouraged Sheikh Hassan to continue his activities and collect more artefacts with a budget provided from the Emir's personal account.⁴³⁵ In addition, the Emir suggested that the government buy the whole collection and its buildings in order that it might be opened to the public.⁴³⁶ This decision was a translation of the structure, from an individual collecting narrative with no broad voice into a louder narrative. The government, as narrator, aimed to elevate the private or local scale of Sheikh Hassan's collection onto a national scale that would provide the structure of a collecting narrative with an opportunity to fully utilise all the cultural traits surrounding the objects.⁴³⁷ At a national scale, the objects could be reinterpreted and their significance could be maximised in such a way as to encompass a more heterogeneous array. It was this decision to publicise the Weaponry Museum, and introduce smaller collections from elsewhere, that saw museum collections brought into a wider public context in Qatar. The collecting narrative took on new goals, new meanings, new ideologies and new applications. 'What traits of the past made it beneficial' for the Emir to subsume this individual collection into a national narrative?⁴³⁸

In the 1970s, we have seen that the collecting narrative started with the Emir's decision to construct a national heritage in order to fill in 'the gaps'. The establishment of the national committee helps us to pinpoint the beginning of this collecting narrative in Qatar. However, the narrative of the 1990s did not begin immediately by collecting or buying objects from various sources. Rather, the starting point of the 1990s narrative occurred almost accidentally. Sheikh Hassan's collection began with

⁴³⁴ Al-Dousiri, CDs 1-3.

⁴³⁵ Al-Dousiri, CD 2.

⁴³⁶ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2009.

⁴³⁷ Lowenthal (1985), pp. 52-53.

⁴³⁸ Lowenthal (1985), p. 52.

objects that had been inherited and kept carefully for his self-gratification and aggrandisement. As an inheritance, his collection lacked a specific narrative, a specific structure, a specific ideology or objective. Nevertheless, he began to preserve his grandfathers' belongings as a memorial. The Qatari Emir was then motivated by what he saw in the private museum and he then encouraged Sheikh Hassan's collecting interests. The Emir also started to collect for himself. This arbitrary and accidental sequence of events opened a new chapter in the Qatari narrative of collecting because the two Sheikhs shared a grandfather and thus had a shared interest in this inheritance. The Emir's encouragement led Sheikh Hassan to collect in a more ordered fashion. This in turn led to Qatar becoming the owner of a unique oriental collection in the Middle East region, a collection that started to have a more significant meaning for the Sheikhs. This helped to drive the national narrative to its 'middle stage', the establishment of more museums. As such, collecting became an official practice between 1999 and 2005 through the organisation of Qatar's National Council for Culture, Art and Heritage (NCCA). For almost a decade, this Qatari authority played a vital role in the inflation of prices for artefacts in auction houses around the world.⁴³⁹ It is estimated that Qatar spent approximately £1 billion on art at this time. During this period, the head of NCCA, Sheikh Saud, was commissioned as an official buyer for Qatar. Unfortunately he over-estimated the prices of many objects. For example, on one occasion he paid 113 times the actual estimated value for a much-desired jewel-encrusted jade flask from Mughal India (£901,250). In addition, in 2005 Qatar spent some £15 million on Islamic art in Britain alone. The acquisitions included Turkish Iznik pottery, manuscripts, Mughal jewels, glasswork, metalwork and decorative art.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁹ Georgina Adam, 'Michael Frances Speaks out in the Sheikh Saud Scandal', *Oriental Rugs 2005* <<http://orientalrugblog.blogspot.com/2005/11/rugnotes-michael-frances-speaks-out-in-the-sheikh-saud-scandal>> [accessed 9 November 2008].

⁴⁴⁰ Al Thani, Sa'ud Bin Muhammad Bin Ali (1964-) – Personal History, Influences and Contributions, Biographical Highlights, Personal Chronology: the World's Perspective, Legacy <<http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/articles/pages/5522/Al-Thani-Sa-ud-Bin-Muhammad-Bin-Ali-1964.html>> [accessed 7 July 2012].

In her essay 'A Narrative Perspective on Collecting' (2004), Mieke Bal argues that acquisitions enhance the meaning of a collection only when the objects form a meaningful sequence. The meaning of the collecting narrative has been strengthened and deepened with the emergence of new driving forces: the encouragement of the Emir, the availability of capital and potential museum projects. All the strengths of these collections; the oriental paintings, tapestries, textiles, ceramics, and earthenware etc., were used to highlight ancient and unique skills and lost decorative techniques, creating a rhetoric of beauty and use in the way these collections were brought together. However, these virtues were not the only significant factors behind the narrators' desire to own cultural artefacts. The appetite for possessing cultural material does not suddenly develop in an individual. On the contrary, an awareness of a desire to collect is usually recognised long after its initial development. This is true, especially if we consider the fact that when objects are fetishised through the commodification process when they are no longer produced or possessed simply for utilitarian purposes.⁴⁴¹ The desire to own artefacts is inherently human, relating to a person's relationship with their environment. As such, fetishism is as much about what we cannot see as it relates to what we can see. For the Qatari collectors, this was the main drive to own these objects. It was all about the meanings that could be woven around them. Therefore, the impetus to collect was a mixture of social justification, capitalism and individual desire; it created a relationship between them as narrators and the wider society.⁴⁴² My interview with Yousef Ahmed provided an insight into their motivation:

[The Emir] knew that bringing these rare pieces to Qatar could play a part in building the future image of the country. Say, for example, a rare Orientalist painting or a very valuable piece of weaponry was acquired by Qatar, it would definitely play a big role in the reputation of the country as Qatar owns these rare pieces and they are displayed in Qatari museums.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ Bal, pp. 92-96.

⁴⁴² Bal, pp. 92-96.

⁴⁴³ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2009.

According to Ahmed, when the Emir decided to put these collections into the public domain, and to develop the collections further, his intentions were multiple. He intended to redefine Islam for Western audiences, to raise Qatar's profile in the world, and to return Islamic artefacts to their 'place of origin'.⁴⁴⁴ Therefore, it may be presumed that when the Emir decided to buy the Armouries Museum, he simultaneously decided to reproduce the past and reshape memories, re-fashion relics and rewrite histories.⁴⁴⁵ Consequently, the narrators used a semiotic system of interpretation that communicated and narrated sequences subjectively.⁴⁴⁶ Nevertheless, we have to dig deeper to locate alternative reasons for the Emir's interest, not just in the Museum of Islamic Art, but also in museums as a whole.⁴⁴⁷ In contrast to his father Sheikh Khalifa who, as we saw in Chapter Two, was interested in constructing and documenting Qatari tradition and heritage, Sheikh Hamad's interests reach far beyond national boundaries and history. His cousin Sheikh Hassan's collection might have been the stimulus for the Emir's wish to bring both collections together and move them from the private sphere into the public domain. In contrast to his father, Sheikh Hamad aimed to produce multiple, interconnected narratives of globalisation, identity, modernity, 'democracy' and development for the present day. When the newly combined collection was made publicly accessible, the curators/narrators recognised its potential to help the Qatari develop a sense of identity that could place them firmly as members of a culture that stretched back centuries. They could be proud of their past and look to the future with confidence.⁴⁴⁸ Consequently, these random and sometimes obscure artefacts were shaped by both interpretation and collation to promote specific interests and goals. Every piece was fetishised; every surrounding scrap of history, every encounter or conflict produced, and every circumstance of production was minutely manipulated and utilised to suit the plans of the

⁴⁴⁴ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2009.

⁴⁴⁵ Lowenthal (1985), p. 26.

⁴⁴⁶ Bal, p. 94.

⁴⁴⁷ Ahmed, interviewed on 15 March 2008.

⁴⁴⁸ Bal, pp. 84-102.

curators/narrators.⁴⁴⁹ Hence, the collecting narrative became a narrative in itself that did not relate simply to one person's individual interest. Rather, it became a narrative of appropriation and subordination. The importance of these artefacts lay in their semiological significance once institutionalised and subjectivised within a specific language of signs.⁴⁵⁰

I would argue here that institutionalising the objects creates a problem in itself. Once the objects were institutionalised, a hybrid relationship between object and subject was produced.⁴⁵¹ The narrators could thus control the interpretation of history, 'where vision as both positive knowledge and perverting subjectivity constitutes the core event'.⁴⁵² Obviously, this ideology creates a potential tension through its engagement with audiences who might accept, reject or contest the narrative as it was presented. Furthermore, these narratives of retrieval, authenticity, nostalgia for a 'Golden Age', Qatar's long history and heritage and the presentation of a 'new Qatar' could engender debate, argument and contradiction, particularly from those who might argue that the nation was in danger of losing its indigenous heritage and culture as a result of the rapid development of new narratives and policies. Likewise, the adoption of the new national narratives of heritage, cultural institutions and objects, as well as the newer narratives of 'democracy', globalisation and modernity, could create further tension between a narrative that requires viewers to engage with, but perhaps not question, its authority. For example, the concept of democracy is one that is subject to much debate and contradiction.

Democracy and the Rhetoric of Globalisation and Modernity

The concept of democracy is currently being employed in Qatar as a tool to achieve political goals such as building an image of tolerance and equality within the country, receiving global recognition for the

⁴⁴⁹ Lowenthal (1985), pp. 26-28.

⁴⁵⁰ Bal, pp. 94-96

⁴⁵¹ Bal, pp. 84-102.

⁴⁵² Bal, p. 91.

implementation of this political change and, above all, to help modernise the country. Some years after he assumed power, the Emir was asked by the American TV presenter Tony Franks, 'Do you believe that democracy is an essential ingredient for change?'⁴⁵³ The Emir's answer was:

Any person that wants to develop their country has to practice democracy. That is what I believe, because there is no one who could say that he is the qualified person to lead [...] If I look around the world I can see that the most progressive countries are practicing democracy.⁴⁵⁴

The Sheikh's words reveal that, through the adoption of a 'democratic' system, he aimed to signify the stability and prosperity of his rule. However, it should be remembered that the notion of democracy can be a challenging concept for any emerging government and its citizens.⁴⁵⁵ When Sheikh Hamad implemented a bloodless coup against his father in 1995, his first stated goal was to carry out major reforms for the benefit of the country. Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad had ruled Qatar as an absolute monarch since 1972 and during the two and half decades of his rule, only a few government institutions were able to check his authority.⁴⁵⁶ The problem with the museum's narrative of democracy is that it does not recognise the contradiction between the idea of a 'new' political system and the maintenance of an absolute monarchy in which decisions and practices are still dictated, supervised and controlled by the ruling family themselves. In contrast to the previous monarch, the current political party has expanded, allowing slightly more opportunity for public participation in 'some' issues and some 'areas'. Today's political rhetoric suggests that the public has more freedom of speech, especially when compared to the absolute absence of a public voice under the previous rule. Today's version of 'democracy' in Qatar is actually an amalgamation of the previous and current political regimes, thereby

⁴⁵³ Tony Franks, 'Democracy Qatar Parts 1 and 2', American TV Interviewed the Emir of Qatar and His Wife Sheikha Mozah <<http://www.youtube.com>> [accessed 1 April 2009].

⁴⁵⁴ Franks, part 1.

⁴⁵⁵ 'A Short Definition of Democracy', *Democracy Building* <<http://www.democracy-building.info/definition-democracy.html>> [accessed 1 April 2012].

⁴⁵⁶ 'Freedom in the World 2008 – Qatar, 2 July 2008, *UNHRC Refworld* <<http://www.unhrc.org/Refworld/docid/487ca2402.html>> [accessed 2 April 2009].

making Sheikh Hamad's government appear more inclusive and open. As such, Qatari democracy does not equate with Western definitions of democracy.

In the cultural sector, for instance, Decree 26 (2009) placed the QMA under the direct patronage of Sheikh Hamad. This was neither a random nor a democratic decision as it meant that Qatari cultural practice was entirely supervised and controlled by the government, who can fund, form and control its agenda. Such supervision undoubtedly affects and influences museums in Qatar. The question would seem to be whether or not the narrators/politicians recognise how difficult it would be for them to integrate and control museum policy. Such tight control inevitably produces public debate, as the Emir's subjects begin to question the benefits of generous spending in this sector.

The politicians/narrators began with a narrative of change. They focused initially on the political, economic and educational sectors. This focus, it was claimed, was motivated by the Emir's belief that any nation looking for improvement should first consider fulfilling 'a triangular challenge: "a democracy", with its particular strengths, a system of "comprehensive development" supporting it, and a "free trade" to underpin it'.⁴⁵⁷ Therefore, to achieve this goal, they began with a strong belief in their ability to manipulate the national wealth, resources, environment and heritage for the benefit of society as they saw it.⁴⁵⁸ Their plans were not only targeted towards an improvement in local life, but also aimed to address the country's low international status. Hence, the manipulation of the country's wealth is actually a reflection of the narrators' own power and hegemony. This may be why the narrative of change started with the illusion of the creation of democracy. This governmental attitude can be

⁴⁵⁷ 'The Emir's Statement About the State', *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive* <http://diwan.gov.qa/english/the_amir/the_amir_cv.htm> [accessed 29 Mar 2009].

⁴⁵⁸ Walsh, pp. 7-13.

better understood by briefly examining Sheikh Hamad's background before he became ruler.

Sheikh Hamad, who was born on 1 January 1952, was forty-three years old when he undertook his coup. Before its implementation he had gathered together those members of the Al-Thani royal family who had given their support to his reform plans, thus ensuring that the coup was successful. As a young ruler, the Emir was full of enthusiasm and ambition and was determined to enact reforms that would transform Qatar from 'another insignificant Gulf Sheikdom most of the world had never heard of' into an active participant on the world stage.⁴⁵⁹ The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive provides us with a biography of Sheikh Hamad that demonstrates his interest in improvement plans from the moment that he graduated from the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in July 1971. After graduation, he joined the Qatari Armed Forces as a Lieutenant Colonel, and was then appointed Commander of the first mobile regiment. He was subsequently promoted until eventually he became Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces.⁴⁶⁰ During his military career, Sheikh Hamad's ambition was demonstrated in the major role he played in improving 'the Qatari Armed Forces, modernising existing units, increasing its personnel and equipping it with the most up-to-date weapons'.⁴⁶¹ Sheikh Hamad's opportunities to implement plans for the future of Qatar were broadened when, on 31 May 1977, he was appointed Heir Apparent and Minister of Defence at the same time. The rule of the State is hereditary within the male line of the Al-Thani family. The ruler selects the son that he wants as Heir Apparent and, 'in the case that there is no such son, the prerogatives of rule shall pass to the member of the family named by the Emir as Heir Apparent'.⁴⁶² Sheikh Hamad's interests

⁴⁵⁹ Franks, 'Democracy Qatar Part 1 and 2'.

⁴⁶⁰ 'H.H. The Emir's Biography', *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive* <http://www.diwan.gov.qa/english/the_amir/the_amir_cv.htm> [accessed 28 March 2009].

⁴⁶¹ 'H.H. The Emir's Biography', *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*.

⁴⁶² 'The Constitution', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive* <<http://English.mofa.gov.qa/details.cfm?id=80>> [accessed 24 September 2012].

in welfare, youth and sports were demonstrated clearly through his support of the establishment of various organisations. These included setting up the Higher Council for Youth Welfare in 1979, which he chaired until 1991, and establishing the first Military Sporting Association with an international membership.⁴⁶³ As a result of this ambitious vision, in 1989 Sheikh Hamad ‘was appointed Chairman of the Higher Council for Planning, which [was] considered the corner stone of the building of the modern state’.⁴⁶⁴

As Heir Apparent, Sheikh Hamad recognised that the development plans of his father’s regime did not correspond with the requirements of contemporary life. Rather, had the country continued with this regime, it was more likely to be seen as a backward state. Therefore, he aimed to bring forward major changes to develop Qatar’s status as a modern country.⁴⁶⁵ According to the online *Dictionary of Geography*, ‘modernity’, a word first defined in 1627,

describes the knowledge, power, and social practices which emerged in Europe around that time. Modernity was not associated solely with ‘newness’, but also with beliefs in nationality and ‘progress’ [...] It is associated with urbanisation, as cities provided the facilities for social progress from sewage systems to schools but, additionally, with the atomisation of social life.⁴⁶⁶

In the twenty-first century, the Qatari politicians/narrators adopted the view that ‘an essential proposition of modern thought is an idea of progress’.⁴⁶⁷ When looking back at the 1627 definition of modernity, it becomes obvious that politicians in Qatar are trying to associate newness with development in different sectors, especially in political, social, educational and economic life, at the same time as stressing the necessity to preserve national identity.

⁴⁶³ ‘H.H. The Emir’s Biography’, *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*.

⁴⁶⁴ ‘H.H. The Emir’s Biography’, *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*.

⁴⁶⁵ Abdul Aziz Mohammed Al-Thani, *Qatari External Politics: Between 1995 and 2005* (Qatar: Al-Sharq Press, 2005), pp. 203-206.

⁴⁶⁶ Dictionary of Geography, ‘Modernity’ <<http://www.answers.com/modernity&r=67> [accessed 9 May 2009].

⁴⁶⁷ Walsh, p. 7.

On assuming rule, Sheikh Hamad began his narrative of change by using national revenue systematically to help his society escape 'from the debilitating elements of the past', particularly the historic political regime; however, he believed that the changes should be made incrementally to maintain constant improvement.⁴⁶⁸ Undoubtedly this idea contributed to the foundation of modern Qatar. It has influenced the attitudes of politicians in many sectors, in both local and international politics, in the economy, in education and in the social sectors. However, two things distinguished Sheikh Hamad's reforms from those of his predecessor. Firstly, unlike his predecessor, Sheikh Hamad did not start from scratch; he utilised his predecessor's regime and began where he had left off.

It is necessary to benefit from the experiences of the past and build on its positive results in order to attain a bright future based on a strong foundation [...] We will continue – God Willing – to develop the state's political, economic, administrative and social institutions thus laying down solid foundations for major development in all fields.⁴⁶⁹

Secondly, his reign has been distinguished by the teamwork that exists between himself and the second of his three wives, Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Misned. The official electronic archive of Sheikha Mozah's office briefly summarises her role as:

Her Highness Sheikha Mozah is instrumental in helping to realise this vision through innovative projects that spearhead reform. At the core of this vision is an aspiration for Qatar to realise its full potential in the global market, with a sustainable economy and educated, engaged citizens who have the confidence and skills to be competitive with their peers around the world. Six important themes reflect the vision and work of His Highness the Emir and Her Highness Sheikha Mozah: Islamic faith; partnership; active citizenship; global ethics/human rights; international involvement and care of the environment.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁸ Walsh, p. 7.

⁴⁶⁹ 'The Emir's Statement About the State', *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*.

⁴⁷⁰ 'Her Highness and Her Role', *Sheikha Mozah Official Website*

< <http://www.Mozahbintnasser.qa/output/Page2.asp> > [accessed 4 April 2009].

Through his work with Sheikha Mozah, the Emir has helped to create at least an impression of democracy in Qatar by giving women the chance to be effective participants in this development process. His aim was to apply this vision of change in Qatar, and transform a very conservative and traditional Middle Eastern country into an educated democratic culture⁴⁷¹ as ‘We want our people to have a stake in their country, and we are working to secure leaders for each and every Qatari generation’.⁴⁷² All these government claims of improving the community and preserving its identity must be viewed with a healthy degree of scepticism. History has revealed many previous examples of politicians’ misusing culture and, therefore, one should be very careful when a new narrative of change is introduced. This surely contradicts the narrators’ claim of preserving Qatari values, culture and heritage. The narrators have needed to make the promise of democracy persuasive, thus, they have needed to project an illusion of concrete evidence that encourages people’s trust in such change. As such, they changed the Amended Provisional Constitution that had been in place for over thirty years and yet had not promoted wider political participation.⁴⁷³ The narrative of the promotion of a sense of openness was the first action taken in contrast to the previous regime, as ‘Hamad dissolved the Ministry of Information shortly after taking power, an action designed to demonstrate his commitment to expanding press freedom’.⁴⁷⁴ He announced that ‘Thought and creativity prosper only in an environment that secures freedom of expression and does not restrict thinking’.⁴⁷⁵ This narrative of openness stands between desire and reality and works on two potentially contradictory levels, the national and the global. Both levels occupy fundamental positions in the progressive-regressive policy of the narrators. The wish to ‘go global’ also explains why they established the satellite Arabic news channel Al-Jazeera in

⁴⁷¹ Franks, part 1.

⁴⁷² ‘Her Highness and Her Role’, *Sheikha Mozah Official website*.

⁴⁷³ ‘The Constitution’, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive*.

⁴⁷⁴ ‘Freedom in the World 2008 – Qatar, 2 July 2008, *UNHRC Refworld*.

⁴⁷⁵ ‘The Emir’s Statement About Democracy’, *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*
< http://www.diwan.gov.qa/english/the_amir/the_amir_speeches.htm > [accessed 29 March 2009]

1990. Al-Jazeera soon became very popular in the whole Arab region because it did not focus solely on Qatari political coverage.⁴⁷⁶ It also covered issues in the wider region and the rest of the world by transmitting controversial interviews, debates and talk shows criticising various regimes.⁴⁷⁷ What can be seen through the establishment of Al-Jazeera was an ambition to overcome national boundaries, and an attempt to 'capture and coordinate critical inputs, and to achieve world scale advantages'.⁴⁷⁸ Sheikh Hamad promised to provide liberty and equality for all members of the Qatari community as part of their rights as global citizens. This game of comparison between the old, autocratic regime and the new 'democratic order' was continued in the revival of the election of the Central Municipal Council. The first Municipal Council in Qatar had been formed in the 1950s and reorganised in 1956, while Doha Municipal Council was first commissioned in 1963.⁴⁷⁹ In the latter year, the Emir issued Decree 4 in order to organise elections and appoint municipal members. However, in the same year, Law 11 stipulated 'that the municipal council is formed by decree and appointment of members and is based on the nomination of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture'.⁴⁸⁰ Effectively elections and, therefore, participation in political affairs, were stalled in their embryonic stage and did not see the light in Qatar until 1998, when Decree 12 was enacted to organise the election by law of the Central Municipal Council.⁴⁸¹ Consequently,

⁴⁷⁶ 'Freedom in the World 2008-Qatar, 2 July 2008', *UNHRC Refworld*.

⁴⁷⁷ Franks, part 1.

⁴⁷⁸ Kevin Robins, 'Tradition and Translation: National Culture in its Global Context', in *Presenting the Nation: A Reader. Histories, Heritage and Museums*, ed. by David Boswell and Jessica Evans (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 15-32 (p. 18).

⁴⁷⁹ 'Central Municipal Council', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive* <<http://english.mofa.gov.qa/details.cfm?id=41>> [accessed 30 March 2009].

⁴⁸⁰ 'Central Municipal Council', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive*.

⁴⁸¹ Central Municipal Council: The role of the Council is still one of advising and monitoring. The Council has the right to discuss all matters and problems, and its agenda is not confined to what is raised by the Ministry. The Ministry approves the recommendations of the Council, whose members decide their own work programme and budget without external interference. Both the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture and the Central Municipal Council coordinate their efforts to reach the common goal of serving the country and the citizens. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture explains the different points of view to the Council through a specialised committee. In case a difference in opinion persists, subjects of discord, accompanied by the two different viewpoints, are raised to the Council of Ministers for consideration.

several committees, including committees on security, legal matters, technical matters, supply and information, were formed. They were followed by a preparatory committee under the patronage of Sheikha Mozah. The intention was to run awareness programmes for women and emphasise the importance of their role in elections, as both candidates and voters.⁴⁸² This stressed the importance of women's participation and was another political departure for Qatar, where women's roles had almost always been confined to careers in traditional fields such as medicine, culture and education, but never in politics. As Sheikha Mozah announced, 'We are trying to give women the chance to prove themselves and to be participants in their society and exercise their own choice'.⁴⁸³ Therefore, when the first election in the history of the Municipal Council was held in 1999, it fielded 248 candidates, six of whom were women. During the election, the Qatari government created a new atmosphere of openness throughout the media. They promoted and televised live discussions and debates involving candidates and voters. Meanwhile, thirty-five Arab and foreign parliamentarians were invited to oversee the first elections in the country.⁴⁸⁴ In addition to this, Sheikh Hamad, eager in his belief in wider participation and freedom of expression, announced his intention to replace the Amended Provisional Constitution with the new Permanent Constitution. The *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive* summarises the Emir's targets in replacing the old regime:

On the 13th of July, 1999, Qatar transferred into a new era of its modern history when H.H. the Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani issued Decree 11 in 1999 stipulating the formation of a drafting committee of the permanent constitution in a historic speech he delivered on this occasion. In his speech, H.H. the Emir maintained that the Constitution is the basic document that contains the substantial principles relative to the country's sovereignty in different domains, regulates its authorities and its ruling system and defines public rights and duties. H.H. stressed the importance of expanding the base of communal participation in governance vis-à-vis the election of a parliament. He also defined the basic features of

⁴⁸² 'Central Municipal Council', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive*.

⁴⁸³ Franks, part 2.

⁴⁸⁴ 'Central Municipal Council', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive*.

Qatar's prospective permanent constitution as being based on affiliation to the Gulf region and the Arabic and Islamic worlds and observing the profound Arabic traditions and sublime teachings of Islam.⁴⁸⁵

On 8 June 2004 the constitution was announced, marking a new era for Qatar. It 'upholds personal liberty, [and] safeguards the principle of equal opportunities for all citizens'.⁴⁸⁶ Alongside the municipal election, the new Permanent Constitution confirmed for Qataris the right to participate in the political process via elections for the first time in their history. They gained the right to vote and to choose their candidates in different political organisations. For example, the forty-five members of the Advisory Council, 'Al-Shuraa', includes thirty members 'elected by direct, general secret ballot',⁴⁸⁷ and the Emir shall appoint the remaining fifteen members from amongst the Ministers or any other persons'.⁴⁸⁸ All these announcements and decrees suggested tolerance and open-mindedness. This new form of government portrayed the previous monarchy as an archaic form of government that was closed to global influences. Such a comparison gives the impression that the current government is a true democracy and a 'government of the people by the people and for the people'. In fact, it is a pale imitation of Western democracy. As Sheikh Hamad announced that his 'determination to increase popular participation in decision making and bear its

⁴⁸⁵ 'The Constitution', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive*.

⁴⁸⁶ 'The Constitution', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive*.

⁴⁸⁷ Al-Shuraa, Every member of the Council has the right to propose bills, and every proposal is referred to the relevant committee in the Council for study, recommendation and submission to the Council. If the Council accepts the proposal, the same shall be referred in draft form to the government for study and opinion. Such a draft shall be returned to the Council during the same or the following term of session. Every member of the Advisory Council may address an interpellation to ministers on matters within their jurisdiction. An interpellation may not be made unless it is agreed on by one third of the members of the Council. Such interpellation may not be discussed before a period of at least ten days from the date of submission save in urgent circumstances and provided the minister agrees to reduce such a period. Every minister is responsible before the Advisory Council for the performance of his ministry; and the minister may not be subjected to a vote of confidence save after an interpellation addressed to him. 'Advisory Council', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive*

<<http://english.mofa.gov.qa/details.cfm?id=46>> [accessed 30 March 2009].

⁴⁸⁸ 'The Constitution', Article 77, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive*
<<http://english.mofa.gov.qa/details.cfm?id=41>> [accessed 30 March 2009].

consequences, is firm and irrevocable',⁴⁸⁹ the new political narrative was injected constantly with proclamations, decisions and speeches that underlined a claim to openness and democracy. Rather than illustrate a genuine move towards democracy, however, such rhetoric simply demonstrates that the narrators were manipulating history for their own ends. For instance, in 'Doha's 8th Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade 2008', the Emir emphasised, as usual, the country's need for democracy:

A glance at the outlines of Doha Forum this year shows that the road before us is still long in spite of what we have achieved. It also comes with a visible indication which makes me feel that the rate of moving forward is gaining double strength in all aspects and directions; and that the past seven years since the Forum was established confirm that we are firmly standing in the right position at a time which is challenging us with many of its issues, one of which is Democracy; it is our means to the concept of progress and without it we could not find for ourselves a place in our time.⁴⁹⁰

The continuing trend to introduce a new political system into the country, in the form of what they claimed was a 'democracy', is evidence of the leaders' manipulation of the country's different sectors of society in order to create a more favourable international reputation. Such a profound cultural transformation aimed to address the country's relationship with other cultures and their history. The Qatari government wants to use its power and wealth to attract public opprobrium, not only in Qatar, but also on the world stage. This is the real reason behind Qatar's version of democracy. Such developments are intended to give the impression that there is no hidden agenda to obtain greater power or domination but a different reading, such as the one I am undertaking, explores the alteration and distortion of history for political gain while still acknowledging that the government has achieved enormous improvement.

⁴⁸⁹ 'The Emir's Statement about Democracy', *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*.

⁴⁹⁰ 'The Emir's Speech in the Doha 8th Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade 2008', *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*
<http://www.diwan.gov.qa/english/the_amir/the_amir_speeches.htm> [accessed 29 March 2009]

Article 50 of the Permanent Constitution provides contradictory evidence which reveals the narrators' control and the absence of a public voice. This Article alone produced tensions within the community because it concerns cultural and religious values. Article 50 guarantees non-Qatari people's freedom, specifically in religious practice, by stating that, 'freedom to practice religious rites shall be guaranteed to all persons in accordance with the law and the requirements of the maintenance of public order and morality'.⁴⁹¹ This Article was revolutionary when compared to the previous political regime, which in the 1980s had prevented the maintenance of any religious buildings in Qatar apart from mosques.⁴⁹² Sheikh Hamad's reform plans took into account the country's demographic, as the majority of its population is non-Qatari and follow religions other than Islam. This created tension in 2006 and 2007 because, under the terms of this Article, the government allocated land for the building of Catholic churches. Furthermore, in March 2008 the first Catholic church was opened in Qatar and five more are under construction at present.⁴⁹³ At the time, the BBC Arabic News Channel reported that:

Christmas celebrations this year will be engraved in the Christian population's mind in Qatar, as more than a hundred thousand Christians celebrate Christmas for the first time in St. Mary's Catholic Church in Qatar. This is the first church to be built in Qatar and the biggest in the whole Gulf region, which cost the Qatari government more than \$160 million. It consists of six sections; accommodation for clergy; prayer halls, conference halls and library. However crosses will not appear above the building as there are some still unhappy with this establishment.⁴⁹⁴

The establishment of the church, in itself, represents palpable evidence of the increase in tension between local and global ambitions. The opening

⁴⁹¹ 'The Constitution', Article 50, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive*.

⁴⁹² 'Qatar'

<<http://www.forums.moheet.com/attachement.php?attachmentid=331&stc=1&d=/232182638>>, 17 January 2009 [accessed 26 March 2009].

⁴⁹³ 'Qatar'

<<http://www.forums.moheet.com/attachement.php?attachmentid=331&stc=1&d=/232182638>>.

⁴⁹⁴ 'The Opening of the Catholic Church in Qatar', *BBC Arabic Channel*

<<http://www.bbcarabic.com>> [accessed 2 April 2009].

of the first church in Qatar caused consternation. Some saw it as representative of an unnecessary indulgence, whereas others saw it as an aggressive gesture towards Islam and Qatari tradition. The Islamic cleric Suliman Al-Jubilan commented angrily, 'this indulgence does not mean you should abandon your religion or accept a non-Islamic religion unacceptable in sharia'.⁴⁹⁵ His words represent a community's fear that their cultural and moral values would be affected and influenced by this change. Furthermore, the opening of the church led to debate as a new religious order had been introduced into the nation and could influence the younger generation who might even start questioning their own system of belief.

The politicians, however, were aware of the international significance of allowing a Christian church to be built in Doha as it gave the impression of an open and tolerant society. And yet, paradoxically, this seemingly inclusive decision had been forced on the Qatari people and was not democratic. It was apparent to the government that, if people had been consulted, no church would have been built. This problem can be seen when one looks at the church itself [Fig. 63], which clearly demonstrates that there are no Christian markers on the exterior of the building.

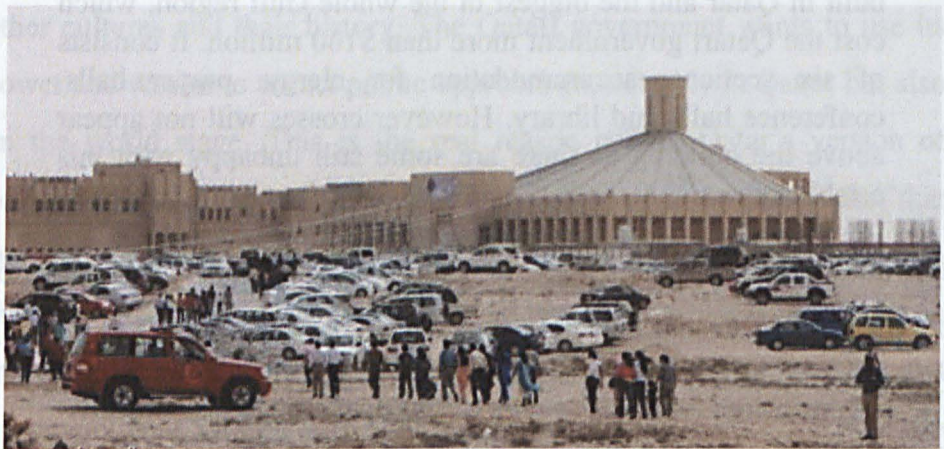


Fig. 63. St. Mary's Church, Doha, on opening day in March 2008.

⁴⁹⁵ 'The Opening of the Catholic Church in Qatar', *BBC Arabic Channel*.

In addition, to further ease potential tension, a representative of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs stated that the church 'would not carry out any missionary activities amongst the Muslim community'.⁴⁹⁶ In an attempt to justify the consecration of this establishment, the former Qatari Energy Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, Abdulla Al-Atiya, stated:

Through this action the state of Qatar sends a message, which is both indulgent and altruistic. We ask the West to permit mosques and Islamic Centres in their countries. Today if you go to Rome you can see a huge Islamic Centre located close to the Vatican. So why should we not have a church in Qatar? There are in the West some dissenting voices seeking to close the mosques, likewise we have here some voices of disagreement asking to close the church. I say these voices should still be silent.⁴⁹⁷

Al-Atiya's comment clearly contradicts the politicians'/narrators' attempts to create a sense of democracy, as there is very little evidence of openness and public participation in his call for dissenting voices to be 'silent'. Instead, the government opted to ignore the fact that Qataris might fear the possible influence of different religious values. All political activity during this time was more concerned with the presentation of a positive global image rather than bringing true democracy to Qatar. In *The Long Revolution* (1961), Raymond Williams suggests that typical social planning adopted by monarchies concentrates on the ruler and his subjects rather than the populace.⁴⁹⁸ Williams further asserts that:

Again and again, in all kinds of study, we see this practical orientation. It is not merely that this is seen as the effective system, but that the maintenance of this system is seen as the dominant social purpose. You start from the king, or from the existing social order, and then everything that happens is related to that.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ 'The Opening of the Catholic Church in Qatar', *BBC Arabic Channel*.

⁴⁹⁷ 'The Opening of the Catholic Church in Qatar', *BBC Arabic Channel*.

⁴⁹⁸ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), pp. 72-122.

⁴⁹⁹ Williams, p. 102.

If we examine the function of different social, economic and political organisations in the country, we are likely to conclude that they aimed to develop a significant image of the function of the single organism, the governing institution.⁵⁰⁰ Indeed, the functional ranges of the state's organisations indicate a political system that is engaging in international relations to create a reputation for the state as an active subject in international actions.⁵⁰¹ James Sewell states:

It is neither possible nor necessary fully to consider why the nation-state has come under question as the sole unit for conceiving our international system. But in passing we can list some of the developments that contribute to wide-spread reassessment.⁵⁰²

The actual targets of the Qatari political system in its local practice and application are not restricted to local boundaries. Kevin Robins suggests that 'the organizing principle behind these complex transformations, [political] economic and cultural [...] the so-called post modernization of geography is about the emergence of a new global-local nexus'.⁵⁰³ These local activities have addressed their aims beyond the Qatari national territory. Such examples of change suggest that the political system in Qatar had begun to think globally while at the same time acting locally, that it intended to bridge the gap between the local sphere and the global sphere by globalising politics, culture, religious belief, the economy, education and social life. However, it seems that by doing this, they failed to recognise that relationships between the Qatari themselves and internationalism would inevitably produce internal tensions. This is a crucial point. As Professor Yaser Suliman, a scholar of Arabic and Middle Eastern studies at Cambridge University, has said, 'globalisation alters the relationship between the local and the global. The global does

⁵⁰⁰ Williams, pp. 101-102.

⁵⁰¹ James P. Sewell, *UNESCO and World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 304-356.

⁵⁰² Sewell, p. 341.

⁵⁰³ Robins, p. 17.

not remain an outsider and the local does not remain local'.⁵⁰⁴ What is happening in Qatar is an operation in tandem. On the one hand, there is a desire for a modern global nation, but on the other hand, the problem is one of presenting this to the Qatari as a means of preserving their heritage and culture. One wonders if they realised the effect that globalisation would have upon the country's social structure? This increased engagement in global ambitions could potentially damage whatever internal political structure comes next. A post-globalisation structure needs to constitute two different interactive worlds: 'a state-centric world', in which its main actors are national, 'and a multi-centric world', whose actors are diverse.⁵⁰⁵ Globalisation creates a new hybrid society and culture, one that is not traditional but is not modern either.⁵⁰⁶ No society stands still and it is inevitable that Qatari identity will become even more complex, as it will be divided between two crucial boundaries, between a need to be loyal to local values, and a need to 'share in global values and lifestyles'.⁵⁰⁷ In this case, therefore, hybridity, which refers to a decline of purity in culture and society as a result of oil wealth could be criticised as bringing about a negative outcome.⁵⁰⁸ Hybridity, however, becomes (in post-modern theory) a keyword in the notion of ethnicity and identity. Accordingly, hybridity is recognised as interculturalism rather than multiculturalism.⁵⁰⁹ This raises a vital question: What are the politicians in Qatar achieving and importing when celebrating hybridity? Any celebration of globalisation and hybridity brings with it difficult relationships that generate various critical forces, such as:

Forces of both fragmentation and unification [...] [engendering] an awareness of political difference as much as an awareness of common identity, enhanced international

⁵⁰⁴ Yaser Suliman, 'Education and Cultural Identity in Globalisation', paper presented at the *Annual Symposium Stresses the Importance on Maintaining Cultural Identity in a Global Era*, organised by Supreme Education Council (Qatar, 2009).

⁵⁰⁵ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, 'Globalisation as Hybridisation', *International Sociology*, 9:2 (1994), 161-184 (p. 166) <<http://iss.sagepub.com/content/9/2/161>> [accessed 19 March 2012].

⁵⁰⁶ Pieterse, pp. 164-165.

⁵⁰⁷ Pieterse, p. 165.

⁵⁰⁸ Pieterse, p. 165.

⁵⁰⁹ Pieterse, pp. 163-165.

communication can highlight conflicts of interest and ideology, and not merely remove obstacles to mutual understanding.⁵¹⁰

Without doubt, a new concept of individuality will come with new thinking, new ambitions and new expectations. Therefore, we need to revisit the question of whether society will accept this political practice as genuine democracy and open government. For this reason, the politicians may have concentrated their efforts on presenting an image of Qatar as a dynamic, modern nation, while at the same time reassuring the populace that their culture is safe. This activity might be defined as 'glocal'. Evidence of such 'glocal' activity includes the establishment of the Al-Jazeera channel, which speaks openly to the world and has recently widened its audience base by establishing an English-speaking channel. There is no doubt that the Permanent Constitution is making an impact on many aspects of Qatari life. Amongst the one hundred and fifty articles of the Permanent Constitution, Article 75 indicates that, 'the Emir can seek public opinion on important issues pertaining to the interests of the state in a referendum'.⁵¹¹ However, since the establishment of this Article, there is no evidence that the Emir has ever sought public opinion on any issues whatsoever. Legislative Article 50 had a bearing upon the opening of the church in that Sheikh Hamad, in his support of liberty, had considered not only the Qatari people but also the immigrants who live in Qatar.⁵¹² The establishment of a Catholic church reflected the leaders' interest in showing the mass media an ideal image of themselves, one that portrays them as tolerant and flexible. The church was used to project a loaded political message from Qatar to the rest of the world.⁵¹³ Acknowledging the church publicly has undoubtedly contributed to Qatar's political system. These governmental activities are aimed at restructuring the narrative of the country as a modern, flexible organism.

⁵¹⁰ Pieterse, pp. 166.

⁵¹¹ 'The Constitution', Article 75, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive*, <<http://english.mofa.gov.qa/details.cfm?id=80>> [accessed 30 March 2009].

⁵¹² *BBC Arabic News Channel* [accessed 2 April 2009].

⁵¹³ Sandra Esslinger, 'Performing Identity: the Musical Framing of Nazi Ideology', in *Grasping the World: the Idea of the Museum*, ed. by Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago (London: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 320-340 (p. 323).

Therefore, these various contradictions are perhaps inevitable and unavoidable. I would argue that the notion of globalisation has multiple meanings that are dependent on the existing environment. Post-colonial theory, for example, argues that the problem with globalisation is that it is a term that has been used to cover up Westernisation or colonisation.⁵¹⁴ The link between both discourses – post-colonisation and globalisation – is complicated. Both globalisation and post-colonialisation appear at the intersection of capitalism, modernity and imperialism.⁵¹⁵ These discourses ‘are concerned with the effects of unequal power relations’ between different geographical locations in the world.⁵¹⁶ Hence, the notion of globalisation is associated with the idea of aggression, domination and the influence of one powerful country over a weaker one. Globalisation and post-colonial theories often concentrate on various forms of social, culture, political and economic issues that are transferred outside the state’s territories and operated outside its original boundaries.⁵¹⁷ Consequently, post-colonial theory concentrates on emphasising and highlighting ‘the cultural contractedness of history’, whereas globalisation theory focuses on the cultural basis of economics, such as ‘the economic value of culture production, as well as the cultural production of economic value’.⁵¹⁸ The programme of globalisation in Qatar is specific to Qatar. Therefore, we need to identify what globalisation means to Qatar, especially in light of the multiple meanings and arguments this concept represents. There is no doubt that the concept of globalisation in the Qatari case does not represent aggression or domination. Rather, it is viewed as positive because in Qatari eyes, to be global is to be good. For the narrators/politicians, to be global is also to be modern. This link is problematic in itself. For instance, there has been a drive to modernise many sectors, such as football by hosting the 2005

⁵¹⁴ Revathi Krishnaswamy, ‘The Criticism of Culture and the Culture of Criticism: at the Intersection of Postcolonialism and Globalisation theory’, *Diacritics*, 32:2 (2002), 106-126 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/156628>> [accessed 19 March 2012].

⁵¹⁵ Krishnaswamy, p. 106.

⁵¹⁶ Krishnaswamy, p. 106

⁵¹⁷ Krishnaswamy, pp. 107-109.

⁵¹⁸ Krishnaswamy, p. 107.

Asian Games Cup and winning the bid to host the World Cup in 2022; to modernise industry; and to modernise urban architecture by using globally renowned names. Such activities have been recognised both locally and worldwide. An example of an international reaction is the celebration of national Independence Day in Qatar, when the Syrian news agency Sana commented:

During the reign of Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa, Qatar witnessed a new era in various aspects of life, under the umbrella of a wise vision. It understood the importance of modernity and the necessity of following the change in the age. Sheikh Hamad contributed to creating a movement for equality in Qatar both inside and outside.⁵¹⁹

However, the pursuit of a global reputation has brought much tension and posed the vital question of whether Qatar can modernise without Westernising its culture. After all, addressing religious, cultural and social taboos may only enhance fear among the general populace. In the same way as Article 50, Article 35 brought fear of the loss of social and cultural values among some conservative families. Article 35 emphasises the political participation and liberation of the community, specifically women, to ensure that, ‘all persons are equal before the law and there shall be no discrimination whatever on grounds of sex, race, language, or religion’.⁵²⁰ It allowed women to participate publicly in political and economic affairs. This breaking of social taboos in the Arabian Gulf region can be evidenced by the first lady, Sheikha Mozah, who appeared in public with the Emir at the opening of Weill Cornell College. When the television cameras were permitted to film her unveiled face, the journalist Tony Franks was inspired to ask the Emir, ‘Your Highness how would you describe yourself, are you a revolutionary or reformer or a pragmatist?’⁵²¹ Sheikh Hamad answered, ‘I consider myself a normal

⁵¹⁹ ‘Qatar’s Celebration on the Occasion of its National Day’, *Sana (The Syrian News Agency)*, 18 December 2008
<<http://www.Sana.sy/print/html?sid=205510&newlang=ara>> [accessed 26 March 2009].

⁵²⁰ ‘The Constitution’, Article 35, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive*
<<http://english.mofa.gov.qa/>> [accessed 29 March 2009].

⁵²¹ Franks, part 1.

person and I'm trying to do my best to help my country'.⁵²² He also declared, 'Our strategy is to let our people accept others and [be] open to others and exchange views with others'.⁵²³ The Sheikh's words are an acknowledgement of a deliberate break with certain cultural values regardless of the public's reaction. The Sheikha's break from a long-held taboo was admired by some young women who consider her a role model. Some of them commented:

Apart from herself, women have no example to look up to as their own model, because in this country you do not see many women on TV who try to help education and improve women's life in general.⁵²⁴

Another university student admitted to Sheikha Mozah's influence and impact in her choice of study:

There is no first lady in the Arabian Gulf countries like her. She encouraged me to study politics and no women studied politics in Qatar before. Until now it was not seen as appropriate but she is encouraging girls to be useful in society.⁵²⁵

This admiration, and the influential modern image presented by the Sheikha, increased the tension and fear among some Qatari families that her attitude would have an impact upon the life of numerous individuals. Such conservative families favour a more traditional life where women are only allowed to do certain jobs, such as teaching or working in a female dominated environment. They feared that women might adopt Western attitudes to their own roles in society. Of course, the politicians are not only people who can influence culture and heritage because they themselves are also subjects in that enterprise.⁵²⁶ Hence the narrators/politicians need to convey to the public that they are sensitive to the fact that Qatari people will continue to develop generation after

⁵²² Franks, part 1.

⁵²³ 'Qatar a Wahabbi Country', American TV interviews the Qatari Emir <www.youtube.com> [accessed 1 April 2009].

⁵²⁴ Franks, part 2.

⁵²⁵ Franks, part 2.

⁵²⁶ Barbara Kirshenblat-Gimblett, 'From Ethnography to Heritage: The Role of the Museum', Conference Proceedings, Marseilles, 2005, pp. 1-8, <<http://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/web/SIEF.pdf>>

generation, and that their culture, values and heritage will persist. Thus, they need to prove to the community that their values and traditions are safe for future generations. Through these practices the narrators/politicians are perhaps trying to prove the idea of the possibility of the co-existence of tradition and modernisation. Therefore, they need to show that cultural change is necessary, but that they may need to adopt a slower pace of change as the new cultural values and governmental interventions may contradict traditional lifestyles. Globalisation, and all its accompanying interventions, has the potential to produce friction and fear through people's relationship with their values.⁵²⁷ Inevitably, the discourses of globalisation and post-modernism will 'change how people understand their culture and themselves'.⁵²⁸ Therefore, when the Sheikha showed herself for the first time on television, she changed the fundamental standard and conditions of Qatari cultural values and traditions. This modern attitude, when combined with Sheikh Hamad's interventions, created a dilemma for the government; they had to prove that their changes were intrinsic to Qatari culture. As they progressed with their plans, it became apparent that the synchronisation of traditional cultural values, heritage, modernity and globalisation produced clear paradoxes that risked placing Qatari culture in jeopardy.⁵²⁹ At this point we need to ask how it was possible to maintain cultural values and reconcile these with new social practices and values. Could Qatar aspire to be a globally recognised country while maintaining its established cultural values? Needless to say, it is not always necessary to use modernisation as a means to gain global reputation. History has given us many successful examples of countries that have achieved global recognition by utilising their heritage. We cannot assume that globalisation and modernity always go hand in hand; however, some theorists argue that globalisation is actually an immediate consequence of modernity. Furthermore, modernity is viewed as providing a structure that

⁵²⁷ Kirshenblat-Gimblett, p. 2.

⁵²⁸ Kirshenblat-Gimblett, p. 2.

⁵²⁹ Kirshenblat-Gimblett, pp. 2-4.

actually speeds up globalisation.⁵³⁰ Yet, by adopting their specific course of action and theory, the politicians/narrators found themselves confronting another contradiction; would celebrating Qatari culture as a means of becoming more recognised globally result in that same culture becoming more standardised and uniform.⁵³¹ Therefore, such hybridity could contradict their claim to preserve culture and heritage. The problem with this interpretation of the notion of globalisation is that it is too narrow and indicates that it really means that globalisation can only emanate from the West. Hence, it can justifiably be accused of being Westernisation under another name. This would multiply the problems and contradictions associated with the narrators'/politicians' narrative of change. How can they protect the Qatari cultural and moral values, when globalisation is viewed as starting 'with the history of the West'?⁵³²

When exploring the narrators' use of globalisation, we could presume that they are using a broad definition of the word as 'a process of hybridisation'.⁵³³ Within this definition, the narrators were involved in international relationships that could link local activities and events to events and activities happening hundreds of miles away and vice versa.⁵³⁴ Hybridisation itself has been defined as 'the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombined with new forms in new practices'.⁵³⁵ Therefore, they allowed Western ideology to infiltrate many aspects of Qatari life as part of their policy of globalisation. This has affected all cross-cultural trade, transnational banks, technological exchange, religious organisations, multinational corporations and international institutions.⁵³⁶ The policy became an open-ended synthesis for the narrators/politicians that was involved in many different

⁵³⁰ Pieterse, p. 161.

⁵³¹ Pieterse, p. 161

⁵³² Pieterse, p. 163.

⁵³³ Pieterse, p. 161.

⁵³⁴ Pieterse, p. 164.

⁵³⁵ Pieterse, p. 165.

⁵³⁶ Pieterse, pp. 161-184.

disciplines.⁵³⁷ Consequently, for the Qatari narrators, globalisation is less likely to be thought of as a ‘one-directional process, either structurally or culturally’, that will standardise the Qatari culture with the rest of the world.⁵³⁸ Rather, these new policies and political declarations are all instruments that have been used to produce tangible evidence of the narrators’ intention to change life in Qatar. For example, Article 75 and various Emiri proclamations have stressed the narrators’/politicians’ claims to transform the country ‘from [a] zone of totalitarian states to the world of democratic countries, and from the cycle of closed countries to the world of liberty and cultural openness to the world’.⁵³⁹ According to the Emir, ‘The fundamental principle of ‘shuraa’⁵⁴⁰ and the people’s exercising of their political rights should enhance their role at international organisations and gatherings’.⁵⁴¹ The Syrian news agency Sana commented on the Emir’s new social and political policies:

He widened community participation in national decision-making through applying a methodology of consultation, liberating public opinion, liberating the press and media and then establishing elections instead of appointments in a number of organisations. Moreover, he contributed to developing Qatar in various sectors, in construction, the economy, in education and in sport. He also established Doha Security Market and widened the national economic investments by utilising the natural mineral wealth of the country, as Qatar owns the biggest gas field in the world and is the third biggest gas producer in the world. Qatar today has the admiration and attention of the world.⁵⁴²

I would argue that this global attention highlights an important fact, the need to emphasise a distinct Qatari, history, tradition and heritage in order to prevent the problem of a loss of national culture. If these aspects were lost, it would be seen as evidence that Qatar had been overtaken by global policies and practices. The need to distinguish Qatari heritage therefore

⁵³⁷ Pieterse, p. 162.

⁵³⁸ Pieterse, p. 162.

⁵³⁹ ‘The Emir’s Statement about Democracy’, *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*.

⁵⁴⁰ A literal translation of ‘shuraa’ from Arabic is ‘consultation and seeking the opinions of others’.

⁵⁴¹ ‘The Emir’s Statement about Democracy’, *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*.

⁵⁴² ‘Qatar’s Celebration on the Occasion of its National Day’, *The Syrian News Agency Sana*.

was paramount in order to affirm the nation, earn respect from its citizens and develop an understanding of its history, culture and tradition. Contrary to the narrators'/politicians' wish, the Qatari people might find their heritage devalued in the process of globalisation. The success and continuity of these efforts may bring a crisis for Qatari relationships with their cultural values and heritage. Needless to say, it could produce a feeling that they have been destroyed as a nation both culturally and demographically. Consequently, Qatari heritage would simply disappear and later generations would be starved of their roots. Present generations would be unfavourably associated with further plans of modernisation at a time when the question of the Qatari image would be further weakened under a new demographic structure. Qatari heritage needed to be inseparable from national developments. An affirmation of such heritage distinguishes Qatar and provides it with status and prestige to enable the country to stand proud among the other cultures that have been opened up to it. Furthermore, if the narrators/politicians were seeking globalisation through modernity, the possession of history and heritage could become a 'mark of modernity'.⁵⁴³ The narrators' use of a global heritage model and a Western museum model has actually become an instrument for safeguarding culture and heritage for the modern state of Qatar. That is why Qatar is now focusing on its new museum culture. The narrators aim to prove to the world that they are not 'below the minimum level of civilisation required for modern life'.⁵⁴⁴ Hence, amongst all these changes, the Qatari narrative became a new cultural structure, part of the plan to define and illustrate the government's responsibility and its ambition to rebuild the national sense of history and pride. Qatar has responded to a policy of 'biculturalism',⁵⁴⁵ by reconstructing those museums built before the current regime through both narrative and architecture. Museum culture and heritage are being reinvented in Qatar, which has naturally produced arguments and opposition from curators

⁵⁴³ Kirshenblat-Gimblett, p. 4.

⁵⁴⁴ Kirshenblat-Gimblett, p. 4.

⁵⁴⁵ Kirshenblat-Gimblett, p. 7.

and other concerned individuals. Furthermore, it opens a door for new policies to contradict earlier narratives of Qatar's heritage and history.⁵⁴⁶

John Beynon and David Dunkerley define globalisation as 'the processes through which sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power orientations, identities and networks'.⁵⁴⁷ Why did the Qatari politicians need to use a 'soft tool' as defined by the Anglo-American historian Walter Lagueur when exploring the use of cultural diplomacy for promoting positive international relations?⁵⁴⁸ Presumably, as a graduate of Sandhurst, the Emir would have had the opportunity to visit many European and American museums and seen the role that these have had in creating and celebrating national and international identities. His stated ambition was to lead the community in crossing boundaries to progress, hence he recognised the importance of creating a receptive and open society in Qatar. Much like the ways in which Western museums have become more democratic and open, politicians in Qatar have come to believe that all Qataris have the right to understand and enjoy art and history. The sense of equality that the museum offers is enshrined in its accessibility for all, even though not all Qataris appreciate it.⁵⁴⁹ The Emir has used cultural diplomacy to promote a positive international image of his country. The British think tank Demos, defines cultural diplomacy as 'a central component of international relations'.⁵⁵⁰ Clara Arokiasamy, founder and director of an international consultancy on organisational development, uses both Lagueur's and Demos's definitions of cultural diplomacy:

As the exchange of cultural offerings, in particular of knowledge and skills relating to the arts, heritage and science,

⁵⁴⁶ Kirshenblat-Gimblett, pp. 1-8.

⁵⁴⁷ *Globalisation: The Reader*, ed. by John Beynon and David Dunkerley (New York: Routledge by arrangement with The Athlone Press, 2000), p. 4.

⁵⁴⁸ Clara Arokiasamy, 'Cultural Diplomacy Needs Equal Partners if it's to Achieve Anything of Real Importance', *Museums Journal*, March 2009, 16.

⁵⁴⁹ Pierre Rebets, *How to visit a museum* (Strasbourg: Council for Cultural Co-operation of the Council of Europe, 1970), p. 13.

⁵⁵⁰ Arokiasamy, p. 16.

between the West and the developing nations, in the promotion of world peace and economic growth.⁵⁵¹

However, Arokiasamy argues that such cultural diplomacy needs first of all to be a demonstration of equitable, respectful, mutual and sustainable exchange if it is to be effective.⁵⁵² This premise has led the Emir to take dramatic action and begin his claim to democratisation from within the cultural sector. He has led the transformation of a restricted and privileged place – the private museum – into an entirely free accessible space for everybody, which provided his community with the opportunity to share in its heritage and the objects that represented it. By following this new political philosophy, the Emir envisaged that art and culture would enrich and improve the quality of national life. Thus the people would have the opportunity to appreciate what had once been a private and exclusive experience. As such, the soft tool of ‘culture diplomacy’ has been used to deliver hidden ambitions.

The Economy and the Rhetoric of Globalisation and Modernity

The fruit of the Emir’s political system and his development plans can be seen in the economic prosperity that Qatar is enjoying at present. Sheikh Hamad believes that economic prosperity is the bone and sinew of any development and modernisation plans, providing the revenue for all the improvements he wishes to make.⁵⁵³ The Emir has stated his belief that ‘laying down a solid basis for a strong national economy will achieve a high standard of living for our people now and in the future’.⁵⁵⁴ He has paid this particular sector a great deal of attention and endeavoured to use the country’s mineral wealth to improve Qatari life. This has been achieved by increasing the production of oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and gas, which are the main economic resources of the country. In addition, new plans aim to develop industrial petroleum and

⁵⁵¹ Arokiasamy, p. 16.

⁵⁵² Arokiasamy, p. 16.

⁵⁵³ ‘The Emir’s Statement about his People’, *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive* <http://www.diwan.gov.qa/english/the_amir/the_amir_speeches.htm> [accessed 29 March 2009]

⁵⁵⁴ ‘The Emir’s Statement about his People’, *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*.

petrochemical production even further. Furthermore, supplementary products such as iron, steel, cement and agricultural products have been developed. The country has also widened its economic base further by opening investment opportunities in Qatar to non-Qatari capital, establishing the Doha Security Market, and the Qatari Businesswomen's Forum.⁵⁵⁵ Sheikha Mozah has commented that 'We are building strong, solid citizens who are informed, engaged and understand how to function in a global economy. This means an even stronger Qatar'.⁵⁵⁶ In a speech at the Opening of the 36th Session of the Advisory Council on 6 November 2007, the Emir commented:

Our options in the economic sphere were limited in the past. They were confined to development of our hydrocarbon industries and to optimal utilisation of our depletable natural resources. Today however, we have several options, and we must choose the best course that suits our new potential and the prospective requirements of our people. We are now in an advanced stage of crystallising a clear-cut vision for what we envisage for Qatar's future. This vision will be the structure and the base for the future strategies we will adopt and we have started working on developing them [...] We will do so by encouraging the industries and services that complement and support our main industries, while concentrating on continuing activation of the private sector in these fields and by encouraging the economic activities that are based on knowledge, along with intensification of efforts to upgrade the standard of education and training and building capacities that we lack in research and development.⁵⁵⁷

The Emir began to realise his economic dream by developing a long-term strategy. As such, several new industrial cities and factories were established in Qatar and others, such as Ras Laffan, Um Saeed and Dukhan, were improved. Ras Laffan, for example, is an industrial city that was inaugurated on 24 February 1997 by the Emir. It is considered to be the 'most modern industrial city in Qatar, and is located 80 kilometres

⁵⁵⁵ Franks, part 2.

⁵⁵⁶ 'Education and Opportunity', *Sheikha Mozah Official Website*

<<http://www.Mozahbintnasser.qa/output/Page2.asp>> [accessed 4 April 2009].

⁵⁵⁷ 'The Opening of the 36th Session of the Advisory Council 6th November 2007', *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*

<http://www.diwan.gov.qa/english/the_amir/the_amir_speeches.htm> [accessed 29 March 2009]

north east of Doha. It covers an area of around 106 kilometres and around 6500 professionals and employees work in it'.⁵⁵⁸ The city also includes the country's biggest industrial trading harbour, which was built to world standards. As a result of the Emir's long-term economic plans, the production of oil and non-oil products sharply increased from 2007 to 2008. Oil production, representing around 55.7% of the total Qatari production, increased by 9.3%, with a value of 129 billion QR,⁵⁵⁹ while non-oil production, representing the remaining 44.3%, increased by 16.8%, with a value of 103 billion QR⁵⁶⁰ in 2007.⁵⁶¹ Therefore, while the world was worrying about the economic crisis, the International Monetary Fund estimated in January 2008 that the Qatari economy would achieve a huge increase of around twenty percent in oil revenue for the year. Moreover, the International Monetary Fund reported recently:

Despite several skyscrapers in Qatar still being under construction and the number of razzle-dazzle hotels increasing in the capital Doha, Qatar is still the calmest location compared with other Arabian Gulf Countries. When countries ponder and guess at the withdrawal or the collapse of their development or even the lack of that development, the Qataris can trust that their economy is enjoying a very pronounced improvement.⁵⁶²

The economic projects tackled by the Qatari Emir led to the establishment of a stable financial footing for the country. Qatar has not been hit as badly by the current economic crisis as some of its neighbours. David Sault, a partner in Clyde & Co based in Doha, said, 'It seems that there is a storm blowing. Yet it is over the head of our neighbours and never came across our home'.⁵⁶³ No wonder Qatar has not felt the effect of the economic crisis, as its overall size and population is small in comparison with the wealth of the hydrocarbon, trade and non-oil products in the

⁵⁵⁸ 'Qatar Celebrates its National Day Amidst Massive Civic Achievements and Improvements', *Al-Riad Newspaper*

<<http://www.ryiadh.com/20081121181article395837.html>> [accessed 30 March 2009].

⁵⁵⁹ Approximately £214,629,712, within the exchange rate of 6 QR to the British pound.

⁵⁶⁰ Approximately £171,456,924, within the exchange rate of 6 QR to the British pound.

⁵⁶¹ 'Qatar Celebrates its National Day Amidst Massive Civic Achievements and Improvements'.

⁵⁶² 'A Mutual Challenge Threw its Umbrella Over Fast Qatari Growth'

<http://www.aleqt.com/2009/03/07/article_2023/3.html> [accessed 26 March 2009].

⁵⁶³ 'A Mutual Challenge Threw its Umbrella Over Fast Qatari Growth'.

Qatari peninsula. The recent implementation of the long-term strategy for LNG export saw an increase from 39.9 million tons to 77.4 million tons in 2010.⁵⁶⁴ The Saudi Arabian newspaper *Al-Riad*, in an article entitled ‘Qatar Today Celebrates its National Day with Massive Civil Improvement and Achievement’, suggested that Qatari success in improving different aspects of the economic sector was the result of the Emir’s ambitious plans. These depend mainly on investment in the country’s industrial capacity and developing Qatari human resources.⁵⁶⁵ Likewise the Yemeni news agency, *Saba Net*, reported recently that Qatar’s powerful economy is a pioneer in the Arabian Gulf. This is as a result of the planned investment of its mineral and non-oil resources. In an era of stalled development projects, Qatar has emerged with some, such as the new airport, still under construction. A new harbour development built to world standards is planned in the next five years.⁵⁶⁶ These economic endeavours prove that Qatar is following an economic logic that is mainly driven by its ambitions to achieve economies of scale and scope at a global level. Kevin Robins comments on this economic achievement: ‘In order to ensure its competitive position [the country] must ensure a global presence: it must be “everywhere at once”. This is bringing about significant changes in corporate strategy’.⁵⁶⁷

The government knows that if the country wants to position itself within a global network, then globalisation requires significant changes in economics. New economic products must have the ability to compete in ways that are quite different from the local market. However, what is being innovated through the globalisation of the Qatari economy is reflected in its culture and is aimed at providing an example of the divergent relationship between the size and the power of the country. As

⁵⁶⁴ ‘A Mutual Challenge Threw its Umbrella Over Fast Qatari Growth’.

⁵⁶⁵ ‘Qatar Celebrates its National Day Amidst Massive Civic Achievements and Improvements’.

⁵⁶⁶ Mohammed Al-Toqec, ‘Qatar Celebrates its National Day Tomorrow’, *Saba*, 17 December 2009 <<http://www.sabanews.net/ar/news/171474.htm>> [accessed 26 March 2010].

⁵⁶⁷ Robins, p. 19.

Robins states, 'The globalisation of economic activity is now associated with a further wave of cultural transformation, with a process of cultural globalisation'.⁵⁶⁸ Indeed, the economic growth that is associated with transformation plans has also had its impact on the country. Some impacts were seen as positive while others were seen as negative. In the current regime, the process of progress has led to the destruction of some aspects of social life that had not altered in the previous Qatari regimes. This was because the way that they were doing it, the elements that they have used, placed their claims of preserving Qatari, Arabic and Islamic identities in question. Preserving and exploring the country's heritage is not just about exploring and conserving its history. It is also about looking forward, it is about the idea of heritage as something that can propel the country forward. By celebrating tradition, identity and heritage, the narrators are also celebrating the differences between one identity and multiple identities. A fundamental tension in the narrators'/politicians' ideology of globalisation is the issue of recognition within Qatar. This tension of recognition is really interesting because it invokes further contradictions in new ideologies and policies. This fundamental tension may explain the acceleration in constructing a new heritage model and museum culture. As I demonstrated in Chapter Two, cultural institutions were asked to tighten their belts in the 1980s during Qatar's economic downturn. Like its peers in the Gulf region, the Qatari government was hit by economic turmoil and had to revise its budgets for cultural spending as well as reducing spending in other sectors.⁵⁶⁹ In contrast, the current economic downturn has had no recessionary impact upon cultural and educational developments or other developing sectors in Qatar. In the face of global economic turmoil, the government has not changed its budgets. Moreover, spending on education and cultural sectors still represents a large percentage of the national budget. It is not surprising, then, to find that the culture sector in general, and museums in particular, at this

⁵⁶⁸ Robins, p. 20.

⁵⁶⁹ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.

juncture are not worried about demonstrating to the government what contribution they can make.⁵⁷⁰

Education and the Rhetoric of Globalisation and Modernity

Ever since development plans were set in place in Qatar in 1996, they have never been withdrawn or postponed. This is because the government itself is aware of the significant impact that these cultural and educational institutions have in the community and globally. It is apparent to the government that these institutions are valuable to society and to the government's social and economic agenda.⁵⁷¹ With change and collapse in the social structures and landscape and the adoption of new lifestyles, it is logical to find Qatar's leaders beginning to place emphasis on the necessity of presenting and preserving the past as well as improving education. It has been claimed that the Emir believes strongly in the importance of building an effective society in a healthy environment, where one can observe and fully utilise knowledge and culture.⁵⁷² On the occasion of the inauguration of the Oasis of Science at Qatar Science and Technology Park (QSTP) on 16 March 2009, Sheikha Mozah commented on the whole educational and cultural establishment in Qatar:

The vision here is really a simple formula to be progressive, dynamic and proactive. Every state, every nation has its unique components and we should build upon these components. We invest the national components that we have, the gas and oil, but we need to create our state by building our human resources. Education is the key for any kind of development so we need always to be very proactive, very creative as catalysts all the time. That is why His Highness believes in education and that is why he dedicated a certain fund to sustain development in education.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷⁰ H.H. Sheikha Mozah Video Speech', *Inauguration Ceremony of the Qatar Science and Technology Park, Electronic Archive of Qatar Foundation*, 16 March 2009 <<http://www.qf.org.qa/output/Page3.asp>> [accessed 18 March 2009].

⁵⁷¹ H.H. Sheikha Mozah Video Speech', *Inauguration Ceremony of the Qatar Science and Technology Park, Electronic Archive of Qatar Foundation*.

⁵⁷² 'H.H. Sheikha Mozah Video Speech', *Inauguration Ceremony of the Qatar Science and Technology Park, Electronic Archive of Qatar Foundation*.

⁵⁷³ Inauguration Ceremony of the Qatar Science and Technology Park. See also 'World Education: A Global Public Media System', *The National Free Press* <<http://www.nationalfreepress.org/A-Sheikha-a-Queen-a-first-lady>> [accessed 3 April 2009].

The acceleration of globalising many sectors in Qatar has extended to education. Needless to say, education is linked directly with other sectors, such as economics, technology, politics and culture. Education has also been debated and included in the rhetoric of modernity and globalisation. Therefore, education in Qatar is used today as a key element that will allow the country to compete in the international market.⁵⁷⁴ This point leads me to conclude that the new educational improvements are actually market-led and will encourage the movement of capital in and out of the country. That is why it has become vital for the narrators to provide sufficient proof of standards and quality in the educational systems. For the narrators/politicians, education has become the third side of the equilateral triangle of improvement plans that they are hoping to implement. Although Sheikha Mozah works alongside the Emir in most of his plans, she has specifically focussed on education. Educational planning is linked directly to cultural-economic improvement, and both are seen as components in the formula for developing the Qatari citizen. Wealth in Qatar is seen as transient, but education is seen as long lasting in its impact. Sheikha Mozah has said, 'We turned our attention to our richest resource, our citizens, and their will to cooperate, and learn in the service of their country and region'.⁵⁷⁵ Both the Emir and Sheikha Mozah believe that education is the key for any improvement and change in their society.⁵⁷⁶ The Emir has communicated his vision for education as follows:

The state of Qatar is determined to develop the educational system and the legislative, executive and judicial authorities, as well as the constitutional system [...] The progress and high ideal we seek for our country depends on our capacity to promote and develop our educational institutions.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁴ Frances Stewart, 'Globalisation and Education', *Educational Development*, 16:4 (1996), 327-333 (p. 333).

⁵⁷⁵ *Sheikha Mozah Official Website* <<http://www.Mozahbintnasser.qa/output/Page2.asp>> [accessed 4 April 2009].

⁵⁷⁶ Franks, part 2.

⁵⁷⁷ 'The Emir's Words on Education', *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive* <http://www.diwan.gov.qa/english/the_amir/the_amir_speeches.htm> [accessed 18 March 2009].

When interviewed by Tony Franks on American television, Sheikha Mozah commented that the Emir's determination is driven by his belief that, 'without education we can't achieve anything. Without citizens who can conduct civilized debate and who can decide for themselves what to choose and whom to choose for political life they won't be able to achieve anything'.⁵⁷⁸ This educational development in Qatar was much greater than that of the previous reign, which had merely increased school numbers and inaugurated new departments in the University of Qatar.⁵⁷⁹ In contrast, Sheikh Hamad's initial achievement was the founding of a non-profit organisation, Qatar Foundation (Education City), which is chaired by Sheikha Mozah. Construction started in 1996, just a year after Sheikh Hamad had become leader. It was built over a 2500-hectare site on the outskirts of Doha. Sheikha Mozah succeeded in her negotiations to attract American universities to the Qatari campuses. These include Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts, Weill Cornell Medical College, Texas A&M University, Carnegie Mellon University, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and Northwestern University.⁵⁸⁰ The state encouraged these universities to come with an offer of free accommodation since the Emir personally funded the entire city in order to attract universities to set up their colleges and offer the same education in Qatar as they offered in America.⁵⁸¹ This generous offer of free accommodation for such 'outreach' universities raises questions about the reality and rhetoric of the narrators'/politicians' practices. Education is being addressed using the same rhetoric of modernity and globalisation. Within this new educational policy, an 'unseen hand of the market' takes responsibility for these new establishments.⁵⁸² The Emir's announcement on the occasion of the

⁵⁷⁸ Franks, part 2.

⁵⁷⁹ Al-Abdulla, pp. 320-321.

⁵⁸⁰ *Qatar Foundation Electronic Archive* <<http://www.qf.org.qa/>> [accessed 25 January 2010].

⁵⁸¹ Franks, part 2.

launch of Education City on 13 October 2003, provides evidence of the existence of this 'unseen hand', as he stated that:

in Qatar, people tend to think that it is related to energy or industry. Today, however, we are celebrating an event that surpasses in its significance any economic or industrial project however large it might be, because it is in fact the foundation and the pillar that will secure the success of any other future project [...] We have to become even more deeply convinced of the necessity of fostering this course so as to become effective partners in what has come to be known as the new world educational system, which requires us not only to address the market demands but also to recognise that education is a universal right [...].⁵⁸³

Education here is intended to correspond primarily with the need for economic growth. Thus, changing education in Qatar is not just an adjustment of the educational structure as it is intended to be part of the whole country's economic development. With all the changes that Qatar is witnessing, the narrators have used education as a collective and cohesive force for the country and international organisations.⁵⁸⁴ What is interesting is that Qatar, with all its economic revenues, is certainly capable of establishing its own universities and educational institutions. However, its policy of hosting foreign institutions indicates that they are developing the educational system as an element in their ambitions for globalisation. The desire is to transform the country's labour force from predominantly unskilled men into highly skilled workers of both sexes. Thus, these plans would be further highlighted internationally, which would make Qatar an attractive destination for international capital and investment. Furthermore, the narrators/politicians could be seen to have an important input, which they are using effectively to improve social and economic life, and consequently their image as reformers would be

⁵⁸² Paul S. Ganderton, 'Concepts of Globalisation and their Impact Upon Curriculum Policy-Making: Rhetoric and Reality – A Study of Australian Reform', *Educational Development*, 16:4 (1996), 393-405 (p. 393).

⁵⁸³ 'H.H. Speech at the Opening of the Qatar Foundation City', *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*

<http://www.diwan.gov.qa/english/the_amir/the_amir_speeches.htm> [accessed 18 March 2009].

⁵⁸⁴ Ganderton, p. 395.

improved both inside and outside Qatar. When commenting on the inauguration of these plans, Sheikha Mozah said 'it is not a changing of culture, it is just an activation of the old culture, of a very positive culture that we used to have'.⁵⁸⁵ She further commented, 'What we are building today is not for our generation, maybe if we are lucky, we will be able to see something of it'.⁵⁸⁶ In her educational activity Sheikha Mozah is fully committed to delivering the Emir's vision.⁵⁸⁷ We have seen in the previous examples how some of the world's press began to view the Qatari experience. These universities, therefore, were not only intended to promote students' educational achievements, but to also allow further planning to meet long term goals. Undoubtedly, besides raising its international image, locally the country will benefit as well, as this activity will promote and upgrade the scientific, medical and research facilities in Qatar. For example, the Weill Cornell Medical College was opened partly to create a collaborative relationship between the college's professors and Hamad General Hospital. This invested Hamad General Hospital, automatically, with the status of a research hospital. Likewise, establishing Texas A&M University in Qatar encouraged collaboration with Qatar Petroleum Company. Significantly, the main language of these institutions is English. This modernised education system will benefit Qatar, both locally and internationally. On a local scale it will create a network of relationships between universities and different industrial and medical organisations and on an international scale it provides prestige.⁵⁸⁸ In an interview, Sheikha Mozah commented on the issue of inviting foreign universities to Qatar:

In order to start change we need good models that can show people that they can achieve something. And through the

⁵⁸⁵ 'Video of the Launch of Qatar Science & Technology Park (QSTP): New Phase in Qatar's R&D Program', *Qatar Foundation Official Electronic Archive*, 16 March 2009. < <http://www.qf.org.qa/output/page823.asp> > [accessed 2 April 2009].

⁵⁸⁶ 'Video of the Launch of Qatar Science & Technology Park (QSTP)'.

⁵⁸⁷ 'Her Highness and Her Role', *Sheikha Mozah Official Archive*.

⁵⁸⁸ Khadija Bin Qanna, 'Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser the First Qatari Lady', interview with Al-Jazeera Arabic News Channel, *Al-Jazeera*, 24 April 2007 (Doha: Al-Jazeera Press, 2007).

project of the education city, we were able to convince and persuade people used to a certain style of education [that] things can happen and be done in a different way.⁵⁸⁹

This new market-led educational system must fit the narrators'/politicians' rhetoric of globalisation. The impact of this rhetoric encouraged the narrators/politicians to continue introducing various educational projects. For instance, within Qatar Foundation, under the commission of the Emir, Sheikha Mozah has worked to improve education and create new opportunities for students. She has developed pioneering educational projects, such as the science schools, the Qatar Academy, the Supreme Council of Education (SCE), Qatar Leadership Academy and the Learning Centre in order to create an outstanding centre for research, higher education and an effective global contributor to knowledge. As a result of her activities in promoting education, Sheikha Mozah was nominated as a special envoy for Basic and Higher Education by UNESCO in 2003.⁵⁹⁰ Moreover, under the patronage of the SCE, schools have discarded previous educational methods and adopted an independent school ethos. Each school is free to develop its own curriculum, following certain criteria dictated by the SCE. This created a spirit of competition between schools, which, it is hoped, will be to the pupils' benefit. However, these independent schools provide testimony of the negative impact of the government's globalisation strategy in education. Since their curricula are not universal throughout the nation there is an instability in education, which has led some to demand the return of the previous national system. The SCE stipulates that the curriculum supports the drive for modernisation and globalisation. For instance, the Brooq Independent Primary Girls School defines its mission as follows:

Our Mission attempts to define a person who is proud of humanity and the Qatari national identity while consistently striving for progress within instructional frameworks [...]

⁵⁸⁹ 'Sheikha Mozah Al-Misned', interview with Sheikha Mozah about Education <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgpcrr6nxk8&feature=related>> [accessed 1 April 2009].

⁵⁹⁰ <http://www.qf-edu.qa/output/page38.asp> [accessed 1 April 2009].

Qatar political leadership provides a springboard for our mission [...] The learner becomes the priority within educational reform, while a movement toward vigilant, intelligent, thoughtful globalisation is taking place.⁵⁹¹

It is clear that the school intends to introduce its students, aged from six to twelve years, to other global influences. Its stated aim is to ensure the cultural and social development of the next generation of women through designed curricula and educational programmes.⁵⁹² Furthermore, since these schools launched their new methodology, which was published with the logo 'Education for a New Era', SCE has hosted an annual symposium that aims to clarify the role of schools in the community. For example, in March 2009, a symposium was held to emphasise the importance of maintaining the strength of national identity while adopting new global ideas. The former Minister of Education, Sheikha Al-Mahmoud, has stated that 'Preserving our cultural identity is not the province of one individual or institution – it is everyone's responsibility'.⁵⁹³ The symposium was dedicated to clarifying the meaning of globalisation and emphasising the necessity to stop resisting it. Speakers stressed society's role in finding effective and convenient ways to make today's globalisation consistent with Qatari values, history and tradition. Yaser Suliman, a key speaker at this symposium, commented, 'we must also ask ourselves how we can incorporate globalisation into our lives in a meaningful and responsible way'.⁵⁹⁴ SCE today emphasises the need for the preservation of old values through the implementation of Qatari history and heritage as a main subject in the curriculum in order to prevent this identity from being undermined.⁵⁹⁵ It

⁵⁹¹ 'Our Mission', *Brooq Girls Independent Primary School* <<http://www.english.education.gov.qa/content/schools/detail/2036>> [accessed 19 May 2009].

⁵⁹² Yaser Suliman, 'Education and Cultural Identity in Globalisation', paper presented at the *Annual Symposium Stresses the Importance of Maintaining Cultural Identity in a Global Era*, organised by Supreme Education Council (Qatar: Supreme Education Council, 2009).

⁵⁹³ Suliman.

⁵⁹⁴ Suliman.

⁵⁹⁵ Suliman.

is interesting to ask what impact this educational reform might have in the long term and what tensions this could bring.

Without doubt, new market-led education strategies have impacted on the Qatari educational system. One impact is the emphasis on the use of English as the main language of instruction in some schools and all the new university branches. Another is the reduced amount of religious studies delivered in schools and the development of co-educational classes in the new universities.⁵⁹⁶ This new fashioning of the old has divided the nation into two camps who debate endlessly the new regulations. Some have rejected the notion of co-education, the reduction in religious studies and the replacement of the mother language of Arabic by English. Others have argued that these changes are necessary for the country's improvement. This debate is evidence of the paradoxes underlining the narrators'/politicians ambitions. The new regulations have brought more fears about the loss of cultural and moral values and language. This in turn has raised vital questions. How can the narrators/politicians protect Qatari identity when they are reducing the content of religious studies and weakening the use of the mother language in both education and business? How can Qatari values be preserved when the narrators/politicians are constantly fashioning new orders?

All these tensions, however, have not stopped the narrators/politicians' efforts to address education and literacy. The Emir has allocated c.2.8% of national income for research, indicating the importance that the government places on it for the future of Qatar.⁵⁹⁷ Many cultural and scientific institutional projects were also planned and others established and linked to education, such as the museum projects, the MIA (which includes an educational wing responsible for raising cultural awareness in the community as well as publishing research), the Cultural Village, the

⁵⁹⁶ Hana Saleh Turk, 'Qatar Participates in Largest National Project to Improve Arabic', *Al-Raya newspaper*

<http://www.raya.com/site/topics/printArticle.asp?cuno=2&item_no631808ofversion=1&template_icl=20&parent_id=19> [accessed 30 May 2012]

⁵⁹⁷ Bin Qanna, 'Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser the First Qatari Lady'.

Rand-Qatar Policy Institute, the Qatar National Research Fund, the Sidra Medical and Research Centre and the 'Oasis of Science' Qatar Science and Technology Park (QSTP). This latest scientific research establishment, the 'Oasis of Science' QSTP is seen as a hub for technological innovation and its opening was attended by international figures from the environment, energy, health, science and ICT. Qatar Foundation, with its corporate partners in QSTP, has invested over \$800 million in this project as evidence of the country's first steps towards a post-carbon economy. Qatar Foundation's electronic archive announced that the opening of the QSTP will mark, 'a new dawn of scientific innovation in the Middle East'.⁵⁹⁸ The educational activities in Qatar have attracted international capital, and have generated interest from some global institutions who wish to participate in its education and development projects. For example, during the recorded message that Sheikha Mozah delivered on the occasion of the establishment of the QSTP, she commented:

Today we see big companies at QSTP come to us asking how they can support, how they can help and I think this is very encouraging. I cannot thank them enough for their contribution [...] I could imagine Qatar here really as a small laboratory for finding solutions for the rest of the world.⁵⁹⁹

The inauguration of the QSTP shortly after the inauguration of the MIA framed the government's vision. After a decade and a half of uninterrupted improvement, the Emir officially made public his intention to achieve his national vision by 2030 when Qatar would be fully and officially transformed into a developed state.⁶⁰⁰ It is no wonder that Sheikh Hamad, at the opening of the QSTP, clearly linked this establishment with the earlier establishment of the Museum of Islamic Art. The Emir acknowledged that these two huge projects, opened within just four months of each other, were to form the basis for the government to build its future vision for the development of Qatar. 'The Museum of

⁵⁹⁸ 'Video of the Launch of Qatar Science & Technology Park (QSTP)'.

⁵⁹⁹ 'Video of the Launch of Qatar Science & Technology Park (QSTP)'.

⁶⁰⁰ 'The Emir: Investment in Qatari Man is Our Deep-Rooted Choice', *Al-Watan newspaper*, 17 March 2009, p. 11.

Islamic Art and the Oasis of Science indicate the main elements of our national vision'.⁶⁰¹ The Emir also added that his constant emphasis and determination to develop the Qatari citizen was driven by his intention to establish a national identity. This combines both the values of the past, when Islamic civilisation was one of the most advanced in the world, and contemporary values in modern Qatar. The first element of this drive is the Museum of Islamic Art and the other proposed museum projects, all aimed at preserving the community's identity as Qatari, Arabic and Muslim. This claim could be debated endlessly by people who do not accept the changes that the rhetoric of modernity and globalisation have brought about. However, these debates have been answered in advance by Sheikha Mozah who commented, 'Our challenge is to promote a meeting – not a melting – of cultures'.⁶⁰² The establishment of the QSTP is considered an integral part of the Emir's national vision for Qatar in 2030. The target is to

transform Qatar into one of the world's most advanced countries within two decades. As a home for technology-based companies from around the world and an incubator of start-up enterprises, QSTP is a major contributor to the development of Qatar's post-carbon economy.⁶⁰³

The government has utilised these elements to help reach its target of improving the country, establishing a national identity and presenting its culture, not only in appearance but also in essence.⁶⁰⁴ However, in spite of establishing the Museum of Islamic Art and the other museum projects currently under construction, the Emir considered that his 2030 national vision would put national culture and heritage at risk, particularly if the preservation plans did not consider all cultural aspects of Qatar. Therefore, we must presume that the narrators/politicians are aware of the tensions and debates surrounding their activities and claims. Martyn

⁶⁰¹ 'The Inauguration of Qatar Science and Technology Park', *Al-Sharq newspaper*, 17 March 2009, p. 22.

⁶⁰² *Sheikha Mozah Official Website*

<<http://www.Mozahbintnasser.qa/HerHighness.html>> [accessed April 2009].

⁶⁰³ 'Launch of Qatar Science & Technology Park: New Phase in Qatar's R&D Program', *Qatar Foundation Official Electronic Archive*.

⁶⁰⁴ 'The Inauguration of Qatar Science and Technology Park'.

Allison, the National Advisor for Culture and Sport at the Improvement and Development Agency (Idea) said, 'Sometimes culture can be lost in the government activities'.⁶⁰⁵ It is likely that the Emir thought it unsatisfactory to have only Islamic and traditional treasures preserved and displayed in museums. Both the Emir's and Sheikha Mozah's high ideals of combining culture alongside the development process indicate that they both believe that protecting national culture will become more difficult in the future and that there is a need for a considered working plan. Thus, it has been claimed that the architecture of the MIA has been designed as an object of representation of Islamic heritage, fulfilling the desire of the politicians/narrators to preserve Qatari Islamic identity and heritage. However, a critical reading of the architecture of the MIA reveals it is actually a fiction. The task of this fiction was to support both the rhetoric of modernity and the rhetoric of globalisation as well as claiming the preservation of identity.

⁶⁰⁵ Julie Nightingale, 'Tough Times: The Economic Crisis has Hit UK Local Authorities Hard and Cultural Services are Starting to Suffer. But It's Not the Only Challenge Council-run Museums are Facing', *Museums Journal*, March 2009, 28-31 (p.31).

CHAPTER FOUR. SIMULACRA AND SIMULATION IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART

Further Development of the Rhetoric of Globalisation and Modernity: the Introduction of a New Style of Museum Architecture

The concepts of globalisation and modernity, as discussed in Chapter Three, specifically motivated the politicians/narrators to look for a brand new architectural style for the Museum of Islamic Art that could address their goals. Hence, the creation of the architecture of the museum can be used to compare the financial and cultural ambitions of previous and present Qatari authorities.⁶⁰⁶ The decision by the politicians/narrators to commission the building instigated a debate about its architectural style. Although they were insisting on preserving and presenting Islamic heritage, they chose a Chinese-American architect, I.M. Pei, to deliver their vision. To globalise the Islamic museum, the architect was asked to design a building that could hold its own against other global museums. This was achieved through a design that embodied a brand new blended style. The MIA's architecture is deliberately pluralist, presenting a new Qatar while producing the illusion that the country is still faithful to a traditional Islamic spirit as evidenced by the narrators' promotion of the finished building as 'an architectural antique'.⁶⁰⁷ Consequently, the introduction of the MIA's architecture as representative of Islamic art involves various contradictions.

Pei's involvement in the Qatari project came following a competition in 1997. The architect Charles Correa had been the first choice, while the Lebanese architect Rames Badran had come second.⁶⁰⁸ The state of Qatar selected the latter to build the museum on Doha's corniche (a coastal walking path), but Badran's project did not go forward.⁶⁰⁹ This led Luis Monreal, a member of the original jury who is currently working as a

⁶⁰⁶ Karsten Schubert, *The Curator's Egg* (London: One-Off Press, 2000), pp. 113-120.

⁶⁰⁷ Mansour Saqer, 'Islamic Art Museum is an Architectural Antique', *Al-Sharq newspaper*, 10 August 2008, p. 20.

⁶⁰⁸ Watson, p. 22.

⁶⁰⁹ Watson, pp. 22-23.

General Manager of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, to persuade the Emir that Pei (who had not participated in the competition) would be a good choice for the project. Although the government has never commented on their decision, perhaps Badran's project was not commissioned because the government decided it needed an iconic architecture designed by a higher profile architect.⁶¹⁰ By contracting Pei, they were deliberately buying a brand that was made possible by the availability of huge sums of money for this flagship project. The 35,000m² Museum of Islamic Art was constructed at a cost of around eight hundred million Qatari rials (£175m).⁶¹¹ The integration of the museum's architecture with the rhetoric of globalisation and modernity is evidenced by the building's location at the south end of Doha's corniche on a landfill island sixty metres from the shore.⁶¹² Figure 64 shows that the corniche is considered as the heart of Doha.



Fig. 64. An aerial view of Doha's corniche.

It is impossible for Doha's visitors to miss it. This area is usually busy with Qatari citizens and immigrant families enjoying exercise, walking or relaxing by the sea after sunset. Essentially, it is the area of the country where Qatar's rise in prosperity can most easily be seen. This

⁶¹⁰ Heal, pp. 28-31.

⁶¹¹ 'QMA continues its campaign for the MIA in London', p. 10.

⁶¹² Saqer, p. 20.

recognisable location was of great significance to Pei when he chose the location of the museum:

I was offered a number of sites along the corniche including the originally planned location, but did not accept these options. There were not yet too many buildings nearby, but I feared that in the future, large structures might rise that would overshadow it. I asked if it might not be possible to create my own site. This was selfish of me of course, but I knew that in Qatar it is not too complicated to create landfill.⁶¹³

The architect's insistence on placing his design on a landfill site may reflect his intention to make a particular statement in the developing state of Qatar. The building was not at risk of being overlooked in the congestion of Doha's corniche, and its architectural symbolism aimed to reflect what was happening culturally, economically and socially in the country.⁶¹⁴ Furthermore, Qatar Museums Authority's publicity campaign attracted the necessary global attention to Qatar, which Margareta Pagano described in *The Independent* as having 'big ambitions, a tiny population, many islands and huge wealth'.⁶¹⁵ On 15 November 2008, one week prior to its official opening, the MIA's opening date had been added to the *Independent*'s travel agenda, with a reminder that 'all eyes will be on Qatar next Saturday when the new I.M. Pei-designed Museum of Islamic Art opens in Doha, housing a treasure trove of work from the Middle East and beyond'.⁶¹⁶ QMA's deliberate emphasis on the description of the Museum building as an 'architectural antique', and Pei's name being repeatedly mentioned in the world's press, was significant. In addition, after the opening of the museum, the MIA's shop began to stock various rapidly produced books and items about the designer and his post-modern architectural creation in Qatar. These included a large book produced to

⁶¹³ Al-Khemir and Jodidio, p. 30.

⁶¹⁴ Philip Jodidio, *Museum of Islamic Art* (Munich, Berlin, London and New York: Prestel, 2008), p. 43.

⁶¹⁵ Margareta Pagano, 'Qatar is the new Venice and London has missed the Boat', 29 June 2008

< <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/comment/margareta-pagano/margareta-pagano-qatar-is-the-new-venice-and-london-has-missed-the-boat-856426.html> > [accessed 29 June 2008].

⁶¹⁶ Travel agenda: 'Free Art at Under Scan, Fontainebleau hotel; Museum of Islamic Art' <<http://www.license.icopyright.net/user/viewfreeuse.act?fuid=M,AZNYZYQNQ%3D%3D>> [accessed 5 March 2008].

very high quality that contains the first sequence of Pei's designs through to his final sketch. The museum guide spotlighted the designer, while his architecture and a book containing an interview with him, discussing his venture into the Islamic field for the first time, was produced for the temporary exhibition before the opening of the museum. A podcast and CD were also developed recording Pei's account of this experience. The language used in the campaign prior to the opening and in all the objects in the museum shop could be described as extensively flattering. It focused mainly on extolling Pei's ability to blend elements of what was claimed to be Qatari heritage with new techniques. The use of such flattering language came close to sacrificing a real understanding of the architecture and the artefacts displayed within it.⁶¹⁷ In addition, amongst the distinguished guests at the MIA's inauguration event was its architect and attention was drawn to the museum's architecture in the introductory speech. In appreciation of Pei's efforts in designing the museum, the Qatari Emir awarded Pei an Order of Merit as well as the new professorship in Islamic Art and Architecture Studies at Oxford University, recently endowed by Qatar Foundation and QMA, and named after Pei himself.⁶¹⁸ Yet all this emphasis on announcing the skills of the architect and awarding him, and the exaggeration in filling the museum's shop with various products that emphasised the glorious architecture, has stimulated me to ask what exactly the architecture of the MIA means and what it has produced for the politicians/narrators. Karsten Schubert proposes:

There are the ideas and wishes of the politicians who control public funding. For them, culture, rather than being 'the icing on the cake', has become an important political tool, too powerful a device for the forging of social cohesion and national identity to be left to its own devices.⁶¹⁹

This emphasis on describing the architecture gave an impression that the politicians/narrators wanted to use the museum as a political tool to

⁶¹⁷ J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Dilemma of Style* (London: The British Museum, 1987), p. 98.

⁶¹⁸ 'Museum of Islamic Art Inauguration', Qatar TV, 22 November 2008, CD.

⁶¹⁹ Schubert, p. 88.

deliver a national narrative in two ways. Firstly, its architectural space was presented as an example of an 'Islamic' architectural creation and philosophy; however, its real (though hidden) purpose was to highlight the narrative of the country's development. Secondly, this would take place through its political role as an *Islamic* museum, presented specifically via the opening of the temporary exhibition. My use of the phrase 'Islamic architecture' is deliberate at this point in order to highlight the politicians'/narrators' claim of their juxtaposition of two fields of art in Islamic culture. However, my objection to this definition is that introducing the MIA's architecture as a new form of Islamic architecture is problematic. One reason that led me to question whether we can really call the MIA's architecture 'Islamic' is the fact that it is representative of hybridity rather than of a certain culture. The use of a new hybrid architectural language reveals that the MIA had become highly politicised and has adopted an important ideological role. This philosophy works with direct reference to fulfilling the agenda of the sponsors, namely, the government, as the main narrator who wished 'to make meaningful connections between [their] cultural and corporate goals'.⁶²⁰ The politicians/narrators were then very happy to leave behind the policies of their predecessors, who had focused on accommodating museums in traditional architecture, preferring instead a glamorous new project in a new architectural style. The meanings and implications of hybridity are diverse and potentially ambiguous; therefore, Pei's architecture has been criticised as being ambiguous as well. Such critiques have seen hybridity as mixing genres, cultures, identities, and nations.⁶²¹ Nonetheless, for the Qatari politicians/narrators, hybridity was viewed as a 'privileged site for conceptualizing global/local articulations'.⁶²² This particular element of hybridity made it a very useful discourse for both the Qatari politicians/narrators and the architect. Hybridity involves contradictions. It could be understood as 'subversive

⁶²⁰ Schubert, p. 88.

⁶²¹ Marwan M. Kraidy, *Hybridity in Cultural Globalisation* (Munich: International Communication Association, 2002), pp. 316-339.

⁶²² Kraidy, p. 321.

and pervasive, exceptional and ordinary, marginal yet mainstream'.⁶²³ At the same time, its extreme openness leaves room for the unpredictable, exclusionary, closed and arbitrary.⁶²⁴ The latter paradox, i.e. the open and elastic nature of hybridity, made it an ideal model for Pei to create and express whatever he wished. For this reason, hybridity became a main feature of his new creation, thus presenting a simulacrum through which Pei intended to impose a particular reading.⁶²⁵ As such, the architecture becomes a text that represents a certain sort of narrative related to the country's socio-political processes and power. Therefore, the MIA's architecture did not simply announce the architect's own statement or signature or his architectural thinking and philosophy. Rather, the role of the architecture came to reflect the voice, philosophy and dream of the Qatari politicians/narrators.⁶²⁶ Within its hybridity, audiences can see a compromise between the narrators and the architect, with both sharing a desire to make a statement through the creation of an architectural design. For the politicians/narrators, post-modern architecture illustrated unequivocal aspirations in the community and the country's economic affluence. The architect, however, was concerned with illustrating his own capability to blend unfamiliar elements and show himself 'at the top of his profession'.⁶²⁷ This became apparent when the narrators introduced the building with the repeated idea that it created a new type of Qatari architectural style.

I.M. Pei and the Claim of Islamic Inspiration

When the politicians/narrators labelled the architecture of the MIA as 'Islamic', they wished to reconstruct a memory of Qatar's religious and national past to make a statement about the state today. The desire to construct this memory encouraged the politicians/narrators to send Pei on a tour to find his inspiration in some of the historical Islamic cities of

⁶²³ Kraidy, p. 321.

⁶²⁴ Kraidy, pp. 321-323.

⁶²⁵ Kraidy, pp. 321-323.

⁶²⁶ Schubert, p. 94.

⁶²⁷ Schubert, p. 95.

Spain, Syria, Egypt and Tunisia.⁶²⁸ Although Pei's knowledge of Islamic architecture was limited, as he himself admitted, he acknowledged that working on the project enabled him to recognise the importance of shade and sunshine as 'the essence of Islamic architecture'.⁶²⁹ Pei has said:

I went to Tunisia and, although my intention had been to examine the mosques, I was taken with another type of architecture in the form of the ribat (fort) at Sousse (821CE). There I felt I was coming closer to the essence of Islamic architecture, where sunlight brings to life powerful volumes and geometry plays a central role.⁶³⁰

It is important to note here that the Islamic faith has shaped and influenced its architecture in both the artistic and technical fields.⁶³¹ Therefore, it is not unusual to find examples where Islamic architectural design relies on conforming to the tradition of excluding figurative patterns and adapting vegetal, calligraphic or geometric figures.⁶³² One of the most famous Islamic architectural structures, which uses a very simple design excluding figurative images and ornaments, is the ancient Al-Ka'aba 'Baitullah' (the house of Allah) in Mecca.⁶³³ The granite exterior of Al-Ka'aba is cuboid, approximately sixty feet long, sixty feet wide and sixty feet high. The interior floor is made of limestone and marble, whereas the interior walls are clad with marble that is inset with Qur'anic inscriptions halfway to the roof. With its single cubic shape and

⁶²⁸ Watson, pp. 25-26.

⁶²⁹ Watson, p. 26.

⁶³⁰ Watson, p. 26.

⁶³¹ 'The Characteristics of Islamic Architecture', *The Islamic Architecture and its Specificities in Teaching Curricula*, ISESCO (2008)

< <http://www.isesco.org.ma/english/publications/Islarch/P2.php> > [accessed 2 November 2008].

⁶³² 'The Characteristics of Islamic Architecture'.

⁶³³ For Muslims Al-Ka'aba has historical significance, as it is stated in the Qur'an that this building was the first house built for humanity to worship Allah. Tradition states that the Ka'aba was ordained by Allah to be built in the shape of the House in Heaven called Baitul Ma'amoor. Allah in his infinite Mercy ordained a similar place on earth and the Prophet Adam was the first to build this place. The Biblical chapter of Genesis describes how God ordained Abraham to erect a shrine when Abraham was ordered to go to the Southern desert with his wife Hagera and infant son Ismael. Thus, all Muslims around the world are supposed to face the Ka'aba during their five daily prayers, no matter where they are. From any given point in the world, the direction facing the Ka'aba is called the Qibla.

its use of solid block granite, Al-Ka'aba presents the ideal example of the simplicity of design in Islamic architecture [Fig. 65].⁶³⁴

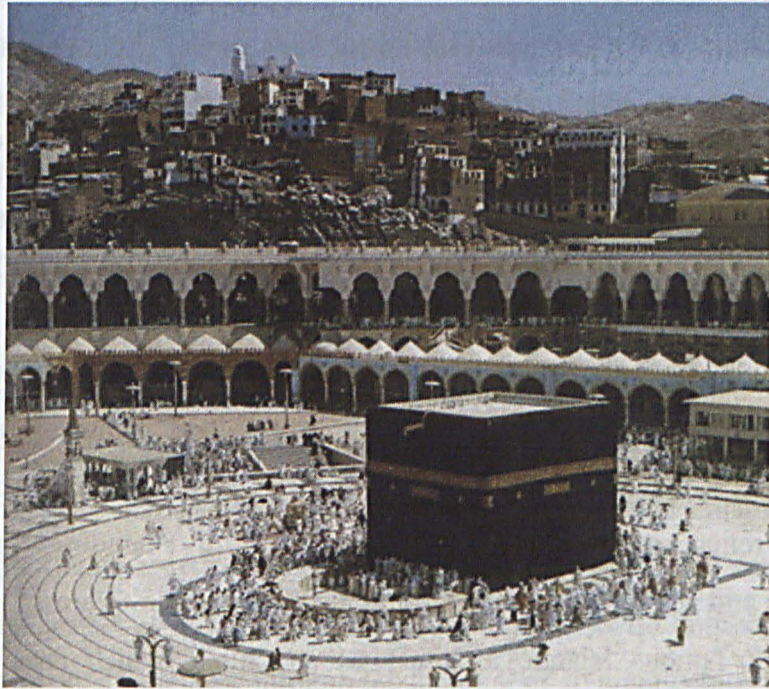


Fig. 65. Al-Ka'aba in the centre of Mecca covered with black and gold embroidered textiles. The simple shape and materials in this design are evident (photographed in 1995).

Perhaps as compensation for the exclusion of figurative sculpture and decoration, Islamic architecture has been characterised by the use of reflective glazes and brilliant materials. Islamic decoration often employs repetition, the manipulation of planes and the constriction of textures to develop a complex decorative design. Reflection, and the interplay of light and shade, is of paramount importance. This tends to generate extra layers of pattern and surface decoration, and transform spaces. The element of light in Islamic art functions decoratively by modifying, enhancing, and originating new patterns.⁶³⁵ The combination of shade and light often adds a dynamic quality and extends the designs and patterns, creating 'strong contrasts of planes and giving texture to sculpted stone,

⁶³⁴ 'Ka'aba The House Of Allah' <<http://www.al-islam.org/kaaba14/1.htm>> [accessed 26 September 2012].

⁶³⁵ Samer Al-Sayik, *Islamic Art: A Reflective Study in Its Philosophy and Aesthetic Principles* (Lebanon: Dar El-Marefah, 1988). pp. 141-147.

as well as stocked or brick surfaces'.⁶³⁶ Thus, in the history of Islamic art, Muslim artists were determined to transform their creations through variations of light. It is for this reason that they covered the interior and sometimes the exterior walls and surfaces of the most famous mosques and palaces with brilliant materials and mosaics.⁶³⁷ The design of the MIA, with its simple cubic façade, reflects this influence in a way that was important to the politicians/narrators in Qatar, who wished to instigate the memory of a common Islamic heritage to create a frame for the collections actively labelled as belonging to that civilisation.

The politicians'/narrators' emphasis on the claim of the continuation of the past in the present served another purpose, as its aim was to instigate 'a living heritage' using 'Islamic' architecture to make a statement about the material and architectural inheritance of Islam.⁶³⁸ Although the politicians/narrators were eager to promote the Islamic elements of the new museum, did the MIA's design encourage a sense of the relationship between the past and present in Islamic architecture? As David Lowenthal commented in another context, 'One way of likening past to present is to play down grand historical events and focus on ongoing usages of everyday life'.⁶³⁹ Samer Al-Sayik has described the relationship between nature and Islamic architecture, suggesting that nature has often assisted and inspired architects to create different forms.⁶⁴⁰

We find that it counts first of all in the appearance of the sun with its light and heat, in the appearance of the wind with its turning, dry and wet, in the appearance of the desert with its extensiveness and mirage, in the appearance of the water, trees, birds, and in the appearance of space, stars and moon, and in the appearance of the directions, the direction of the east, the west, the Qibla and the north.⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁶ 'Architecture', *Islamic Art and Architecture Organisation* <http://www.Salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/march02_index.php?1=5> [accessed 2 November 2008].

⁶³⁷ Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: language and meaning* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976), pp. 76-80.

⁶³⁸ Lowenthal (1998), p. 139.

⁶³⁹ Lowenthal (1998), p. 139.

⁶⁴⁰ Al-Sayik, pp. 193-194.

⁶⁴¹ Al-Sayik, p. 193.

The most common decorative element inspired by nature is the Muqarnas. As seen in Figure 66, the Muqarnas is an ideal example of the interaction, reflection and refraction, between elements of space, light and decoration. This is one of the many Islamic design motifs adopted by Pei at the MIA.

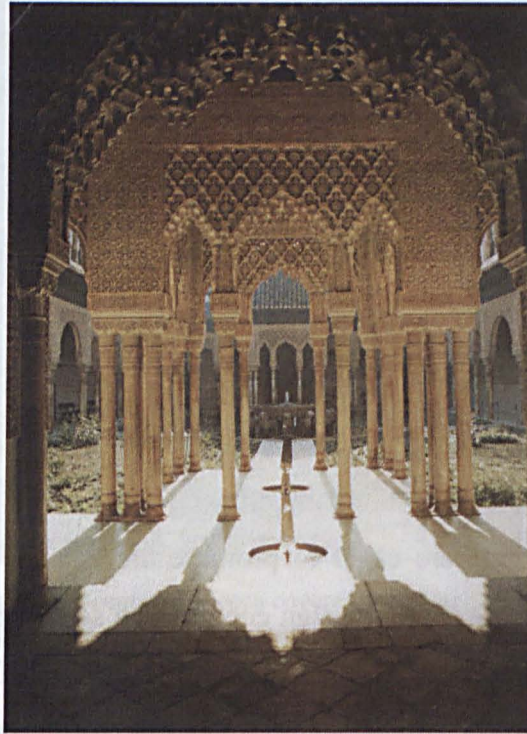


Fig. 66. The Court of Lions in the Alhambra Palace, Granada, Spain. This building is an example of stone transformed into a vibration of light.

Pei was also influenced by the thirteenth century ablution fountain at Ibn-Tulun mosque in Cairo where a simple cubic structure allows the reflection and refraction of light [Fig. 67]. When asked whether his design ‘evokes an abstract vision of the purity of Ibn Tulun’ or whether he had also ‘introduced a number of decorative elements into the design’, Pei answered:

I remained faithful to the inspiration I had found in the Mosque of Ibn-Tulun, derived from its austerity and simplicity. It was this essence that I attempted to bring forth in the desert sun of Doha. It is the light of the desert that transforms the architecture into a play on light and shadow. My design has only one major window – it is forty five meters high and faces the Persian Gulf [...] The central space climaxes in the oculus

of a stainless steel dome that captures patterned light in its multiple facets.⁶⁴²

Nature, and specifically sunshine, was incorporated into the MIA's architecture to create a rapport between the building and nature. Pei's most enduring and inspirational influence, therefore, was the element of light:

If one could find the heart of Islamic architecture, might it not lie in the desert, severe and simple in its design, where sunlight brings forms to life? I was finally coming closer to the truth and I believe I found what I was looking for in the mosque of Ahmed Ibn Tulun in Cairo (876-879) [...] This severe architecture comes to life in the sun, with its shadows and shades of colour. I had at last found what I came to consider to be the very essence of Islamic architecture in the middle of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun.⁶⁴³

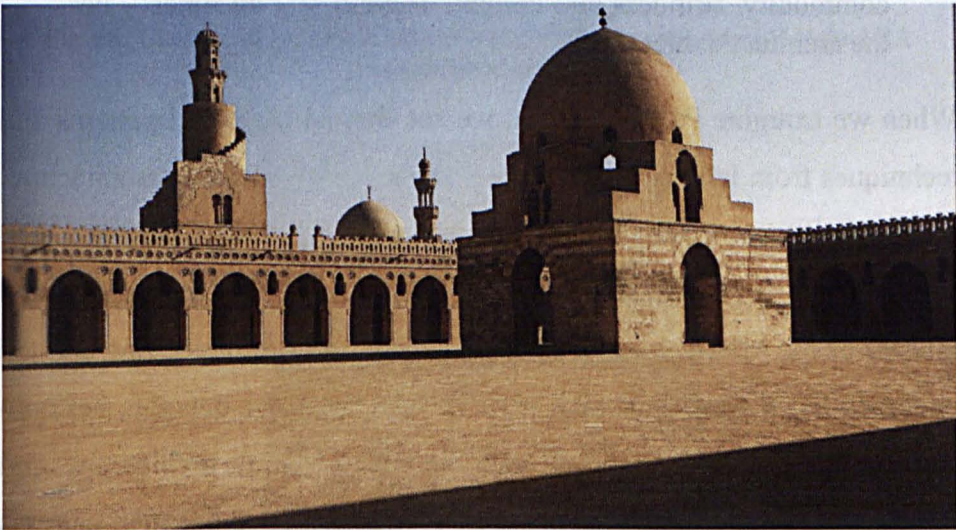


Fig. 67. Ibn Tulun Mosque, 13th century.

Al-Sayik's analysis of the relationship between nature and architecture in Islam might clarify why Pei insisted on having his design built over the water on a landfill site, particularly when we consider Pei's admission about this decision: 'I had never had a chance to build on water before, so I was determined to make the most of it'.⁶⁴⁴ Such a statement reflects the

⁶⁴² Al-Khemir and Jodidio, p. 35.

⁶⁴³ Watson, pp. 26-27.

⁶⁴⁴ John Arlidge, 'Doha Unveils its Secret Weapon But Will It Work?', *The Times*, 29 November 2008, p. 12.

central role nature plays in his architecture, and his determination to impose a certain reading of the building. As an outsider, the architect hoped to give the illusion that he was creating an Islamic building by drawing on many influential themes. Thus Pei was diligent in moving between sources of inspiration and allotting them places in his design.⁶⁴⁵

Pei emphasised his consideration of sunlight, geometric pattern and shade as important elements in Islamic architecture. In addition, he made a direct reference to the ablution fountain at Ibn-Tulun mosque as his main inspirational element. Regarding the dual aspects of architecture, Joseph Mordaunt Crook has said in a different context:

Architecture is two things: it is service and it is art. Hence the tension between structure and appearance, function and form. Hence too the discord built into that eternal triangle: commodity, firmness and delight. Therein – at all times – lies the architect’s dilemma.⁶⁴⁶

When we examine Pei’s dilemma, we see that he borrowed patterns and techniques from Islamic art to make statement about Islamic architecture. This, in turn, was driven by the architect’s responsibility to create a new architectural language using his own techniques.⁶⁴⁷ For example, in the interior of the MIA [Fig. 68], the circle hanging from the ceiling and the patterned black tiled floor both represent the repetitive octagon, hexagon and star patterns that are still used in most Islamic architecture and furniture.⁶⁴⁸ Furthermore, one can see the resemblance between patterns in the entrance hall and the tile patterns in geometric designs at the Alhambra Palace at Granada [Fig. 69].

⁶⁴⁵ Andrew Ballatyne, *Architecture, Landscape and Liberty* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 5-10.

⁶⁴⁶ Crook, p. 98.

⁶⁴⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans by. James Benedict (London and New York: Verso, 2005), pp. 118-119.

⁶⁴⁸ Al-Sayik, p. 104.



Fig. 68. The Islamic geometric pattern is explicit in the entrance hall of the MIA (photographed in 2008).



Fig. 69. An example of Islamic architectural decoration in a single tile in the Alhambra Palace, Granada, Spain.

The design of the entrance hall is tangible evidence of the inspiration that Pei derived from his research journey to the Alhambra. Through the multiple examples of inspiration that Pei introduced in the MIA's architecture, he aimed to provide audiences with a view of 'the continuation of [tradition and heritage within the context of] modernism and its transcendence'.⁶⁴⁹ This can further be seen by the example of the

⁶⁴⁹ Jencks (1989), p. 14.

dome and hanging lamp in the MIA's main hall. In Islamic architecture, particularly in palaces and mosques, domes represent luxury.⁶⁵⁰ They are mostly decorated with Arabic engraving, calligraphy, mosaics, and geometric patterns. The interior of the dome often houses a hanging copper or glazed lamp.⁶⁵¹ At the central point of the MIA, Pei has integrated different Islamic and contemporary architectural components in his decoration of the dome. This consists of the installation of a contemporary stainless steel dome on which decorative patterns have been created from a series of geometric shapes that 'descend from circle to octagon, to square and finally to triangle flaps'.⁶⁵² In addition, Pei used a series of geometric dome matrices that transform light and create a pattern. He concluded this space by hanging a modern Islamic lamp from the central point above the double stairway [Fig. 70].

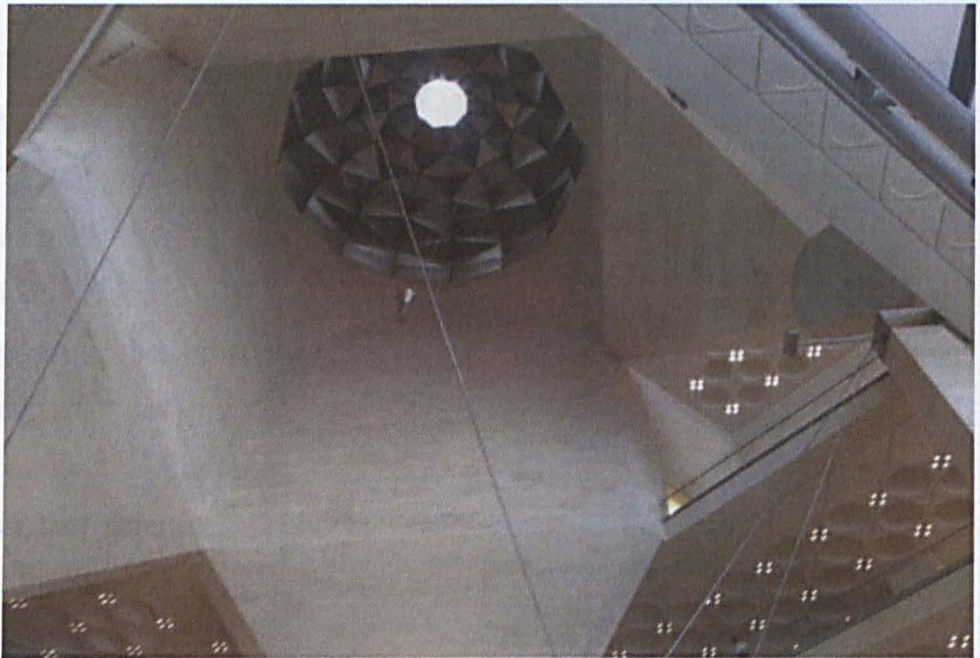


Fig. 70. The stainless steel dome and the steel lantern hanging from it used to be customary in palaces and mosques. The MIA dome's geometric pattern is similar to the honeycomb technique much used in Islamic architecture.

⁶⁵⁰ Al-Sayik, pp. 104-106.

⁶⁵¹ Al-Sayik, pp. 104-106.

⁶⁵² Al-Khemir and Jodidio, p. 35.

In his article 'Doha unveils its secret weapon, but will it work?', John Arlidge commented on Pei's endeavours to incorporate Islamic elements within his architecture:

He certainly has. Pei has blended Western architecture with traditional ideas of Islamic design to create a minimalist icon in the razzle-dazzle Gulf and, perhaps, the best new gallery building in the world. Approached by dhow, the vast tiered limestone cubes loom above the visitor, giving the building colossal impact. But thanks to the detailing, notably the Islamic geometric patterning, the soft grey granite stripes and the traditional Arabic arched windows that catch the changing colours of the sun, the structure is not severe.⁶⁵³

Charles Jencks has argued that architectural development has never stopped at one point; on the contrary, the world of architecture often witnesses revival and change.⁶⁵⁴ Arlidge's article is testament to the impact of the 'Islamic Revival' of Pei's design and his employment of the most developed architectural techniques in the world, such as the materials he used to accommodate traditional Islamic elements into a post-modern building.⁶⁵⁵ What is most noticeable in my quotation from Arlidge's article, however, is his use of the words 'blend' and 'ideas' to describe Pei's architectural method. He does not call the architecture 'Islamic', nor does he specify whether the building represented for him, as a visitor, a Qatari or Islamic heritage. Islamic architecture in its very nature is complex, as it brings together a whole range of sources. In Islamic architecture, for example, despite the common use of certain decorations and media, there are significant differences between buildings created in different eras.⁶⁵⁶ For instance, in the case of mosques, we find that those developed under the Ghurid rule of Sind at Bhadreshuer in South Asia between the ninth and eleventh centuries used the round-arched form, whereas, later on, in the same area the arch became pointed.⁶⁵⁷ Finbarr B. Flood has argued that architecture is non-mimetic,

⁶⁵³ Arlidge (2009), p. 12.

⁶⁵⁴ Jencks (1985), pp. 29-94.

⁶⁵⁵ Arlidge (2009), p. 12.

⁶⁵⁶ Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of translation: Material Culture and Medieval 'Hindu-Muslim' Encounter* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 61.

⁶⁵⁷ Flood, pp. 183-184.

by which he means that it is 'capable of (re)structuring our experience of the world'.⁶⁵⁸ This implies that, although Islamic architecture is characterised by the application of non-figurative ornament, its form often powerfully symbolises culture and politics. In his study, Flood claimed that architecture in Islam has been influenced by the arrival of each new dynasty. In some examples, architecture used hybrid stylistic features, either by recycling architectural materials of a former dynasty or by mixing indigenous styles with those of the conquering armies.⁶⁵⁹ Consequently, style in architecture functions as a powerful symbol of political power and culture.⁶⁶⁰ Furthermore, the preference for recycling architectural materials has often resulted in ambiguity that has helped to smooth the transition from one political culture to another. In his investigation of Indo-Islamic architecture, Flood reveals that the physical alteration to existing structures has helped to create a new architectural form from the past, instead of destroying it.⁶⁶¹ The new form highlights the semiotic qualities of the relationship between the past and present by constructing a memory of history.

In this sense, the appropriations and improvisations intrinsic to bricolage and its ability to generate new meanings from pre-existing materials (and indeed vocabularies) exemplify the unstable and fluid nature of any sign, undermining the notion of a transcendental signified that is intrinsic to mimetic or reproductive models of translation.⁶⁶²

As such, the shift from one political power to another in the Indus Valley, for example, has witnessed an architectural translation marked by either the gain or loss of existing and new terms.⁶⁶³ This has allowed for the creation of either a reconceptualisation or cross-cultural form of visual language that lies within the architectural form. In addition, the appearance and compositional strategies of stylistic details, such as

⁶⁵⁸ Flood, p. 183.

⁶⁵⁹ Flood, p. 183.

⁶⁶⁰ Flood, p. 219.

⁶⁶¹ Flood, pp. 183-184.

⁶⁶² Flood, p. 183.

⁶⁶³ Flood, pp. 137-141.

arches, domes, vegetal ornaments and iconographic decorations, provide evidence of continuity from pre-Ghurid monuments.⁶⁶⁴

In the MIA's architecture, Pei did not recycle architectural elements but rather, he played with many different aspects of Islamic architecture to create a multiple layering of multiple sources. However, the end result is a simulacrum that does not represent any specific Islamic architecture or culture. Contrary to the politicians'/narrators' claim, Pei's creation is essentially a hybrid that he wishes us to view as Islamic architecture presented in a modern way. As discussed on page 215 this is quite problematic for many people in Qatar because the notion of hybridity is derived from the architect's dominant position. His international reputation gave him the freedom to plagiarise aspects of different historical buildings from outside Qatar and create something new rather than rehearse the heritage of what was already there. I would argue that the architect's confidence and dominance allowed him to give Qatar something that is Pei's architecture rather than something that the local community recognises as Islamic architecture. Therefore, the post-modern architecture of the MIA demands a different reading, one that recognises 'the fabrication of representation of historical reality'.⁶⁶⁵ Both Qatari architecture and Islamic architecture were filtered through the wish to globalise and modernise the image of a new Qatar. When reading Pei's architecture, what one notices is that it actually represents the multiple ideas that are current in Qatar's attempt to define Islamic culture as modern, global, culturally relevant, and worthy of preservation. Consequently, it seems Pei was trying to tap into these multiple ideas, and in the process he simultaneously imposed his own, new ideas of architecture. Thus, globalisation, modernisation and even 'glocalisation' are all unquestionably complicit in this simulacrum. These narrative structures lie at the heart of the MIA. However, what is narrated within this site is not traditional Qatari heritage or an Islamic heritage; rather, it

⁶⁶⁴ Flood, pp. 183-184.

⁶⁶⁵ Spivak (1985), p. 271.

is a mark and presentation of the ambitions of Qatar today. The architecture of the MIA does not meet the Qatari people's understanding of Islamic architecture and Qatari heritage in the same way as the restoration of the Old Emiri Palace at the heart of the National Museum and the recreation of Souk Waqif had done, as discussed in chapter two. The simulacrum that Pei presented does not conceal the truth.⁶⁶⁶ Instead, this simulacrum is a truth that conceals the fact that there is no truth. Abstraction in the MIA's architecture is not a reflection or a mirror of any one particular building; the abstraction in the building is a generation of a model without a real origin. Thus, when Pei designed the building, he was trying to send the message that he was creating an Islamic architecture using post-modernist language. However, his building substituted real for non-real, as he was not in reality recovering what once was there, but creating something entirely new.⁶⁶⁷ The simulacrum in the MIA had no referential subject; instead, it became an operational process that does not represent the real.⁶⁶⁸ Imaginary representation in the MIA in reality 'is genetic miniaturization that is the dimension of simulation'.⁶⁶⁹ To claim an Islamic origin for his simulacrum, Pei tried during the building of the museum to make nature 'an integral element rather than an aside, a friend rather than an enemy, a strength rather than a weakness, a revelation and a subject for discussion'.⁶⁷⁰ Yet, the way that Pei constructed the MIA, and the way that he claimed he integrated multiple layering, made the architecture appear foreign to the local community, who might have preferred more traditional, and thus recognisable, motives. Indeed, for much of the population, a copy or clone of one specific monument would appear more 'real' and thus 'Islamic' than the original work of architecture that Pei designed.

⁶⁶⁶ Baudrillard (1981), p. 2.

⁶⁶⁷ Baudrillard (1981), pp. 1-3.

⁶⁶⁸ Baudrillard (1981), pp. 1-3.

⁶⁶⁹ Baudrillard (1981), p. 2.

⁶⁷⁰ Al-Sayik, p. 197.

This simulacrum has further hidden political messages. For instance, when the museum was in the design stage, issues such as Qatar's international relations and economic conditions were considered. In his design, Pei had to view the MIA as a global corporation able to perform as an actor 'in the business of the art',⁶⁷¹ while fully engaging with the issues of local socio-economic growth and expanding global influence in politics. Presumably, this led Pei to avoid cloning a specific Islamic monument, but rather to develop for Qatar a highly individual and inspirational profile that could be seen as a new Qatari brand of architecture.⁶⁷² This brand could have been Western but it is not; it could have been Eastern, but it is not; and it could have been traditionally Islamic, but it is not. With all these elements, Pei was constructing a narrative, yet it was his own narrative instead of a narrative of Islamic architecture as the people of Qatar see it. Thus, the MIA's architecture became Pei's interpretation of an interpretation of a generic Islamic architecture rather than a presentation of Islamic architecture as it has existed in Qatar. Presenting this new hybrid architectural language created a contentious dialogue with visitors.

Architectural Hybridity and the Audience

Tony Bennett, a Professor in social and cultural theory in the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney, has argued:

What else do practices of historical restoration aspire to but the production of a site – a building, say, or a township – which will coincide as closely as possible, brick for brick and paling for paling, with an earlier model?⁶⁷³

When Pei blended the patterns, dome and lantern in his design for the MIA, he was employing the power of architectural composition.⁶⁷⁴ The use of architectural composition conveys the politicians'/narrators' identification of the building as Islamic. Presumably they believed that,

⁶⁷¹ Schubert, p. 114.

⁶⁷² Schubert, pp. 113-115.

⁶⁷³ Bennett, p. 128.

⁶⁷⁴ Crook, pp. 13-41.

by referring to the Ibn-Tulun ablution fountain as Pei's inspirational element, they were preserving and restoring a heritage of Islamic architecture. Therefore, this illusion of a resemblance between the Ibn-Tulun ablution fountain and the MIA was intended to reflect the original virtues of Islam. The politicians/narrators wished to impose one reading: that the Qataris are a community rich with centuries of history influenced by an earlier Islamic heritage, tradition and civilisation. This legacy, in its turn, has placed the country in a situation where it owes allegiance to its earlier heritage. Therefore, it was most advantageous for the MIA's design to celebrate Islamic civilisation as the architect of the country's initial history. They further aimed to relate the 'affiliations of memory and custom' and to show that they did not divorce their heritage from their early history and ancestry.⁶⁷⁵ David Lowenthal has stated that 'experience fortifies these linkages, making us aware of being someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle, citizen of a city, member of a guild or profession'.⁶⁷⁶ In order to emphasise this claim, Sheikha Al-Mayassa (Chair of The Board of Trustees of Qatar Museums Authority) has commented:

Having been given the responsibility of developing the MIA, this allowed us to enhance our knowledge of our previous rich Islamic civilisation. We shall take from this rich inheritance a means to preserve our own identity.⁶⁷⁷

Her words underline the wish of the politicians/narrators to proclaim that Qatar's past was not autonomous. Rather, a narrative of historical reference was used to emphasise this 'rich inheritance' and the claim for Qatari identity was pushed further and further back in time to gain an historical strength to support the current narrative of heritage and identity.⁶⁷⁸ The politicians/narrators were demonstrating their belief that 'references to the architecture of Islam will undoubtedly find a resonance

⁶⁷⁵ Bennett, p. 55.

⁶⁷⁶ Lowenthal (1998), p. 58.

⁶⁷⁷ 'The Emir and Sheikha Mozah Witness the Opening of the Museum of Islamic Art', *Al-Raya newspaper*, Appendix of the Opening of the Museum of Islamic Art, 23 November 2008, p. 2.

⁶⁷⁸ Lowenthal (1998), pp. 128-130.

with visitors from the region'.⁶⁷⁹ Nonetheless, did they recognise that even if their reproduction was visually identical to the original, it would convey different meanings? The meanings and messages differ according to the era and circumstances in which each 'copy' is created. The hybridity of the MIA's architecture highlights the paradox of the politicians'/narrators' claim and thus creates an increasingly contentious dialogue between the museum and its audiences, who found the illusion of naming the architecture 'Islamic' to be confusing.

The tension inherent in this reading was increased amongst those visitors who recognised the attempt to make global/local articulations.⁶⁸⁰ Via this simulacrum, the politicians/narrators hoped to indicate that modernity had not led them to forget their inheritance, whereas, for the audiences, modernity was viewed as having indeed made a space for the simulacrum to emerge. For those audiences, the reading of the hybrid form of Pei's architecture brought a fundamental question of where they would see themselves, their heritage and their history within this hybridity. For instance, Abdullmohsen Al-Mahmoud, an ethnographic collector from Saudi Arabia, was disappointed by what he saw. He noted the exaggeration in the MIA's pre-opening presentation, and commented:

When I entered the museum, I felt as if I was entering a ministry of defence with all the iron interior in evidence. I cannot feel the presence of the Islamic spirit in this architecture. This building does not provide any picture of Islam. Where are the minarets? Where are the domes? I can't see any suggestion of Islam. The designer had in this square building four directions. He could have filled each direction with a picture of Islam from various former Islamic areas, Islam in Europe, Islam in the Far East and Islam in the Middle East, for example.⁶⁸¹

The key point of Al-Mahmoud's critique of the site is that he judged this creation with reference to architectural forms traditionally understood as Islamic symbols. Consequently, within Pei's architectural language, Al-

⁶⁷⁹ Watson, p. 40.

⁶⁸⁰ Abdullmohsen Al-Mahmoud, visitor at the MIA, interviewed on 15 December 2008.

⁶⁸¹ Al-Mahmoud.

Mahmoud found nothing but deformity.⁶⁸² Furthermore, other visitors argued that the exterior architecture reminded them of a Buddhist setting rather than an Islamic monument: 'We think Pei's design is inspired more by his original culture, as is only natural with a creative artist'.⁶⁸³ Therefore, for these audiences, the MIA spoke more of the cultural capital of Pei's 'Western' brand, than of the new, Qatari brand that the narrators had hoped to create. This tense dialogue allowed the audiences to reject the politicians'/narrators' claim that they had created a new and distinct Islamic Qatari architectural experience.

Likewise, the architecture did not represent for local audiences a Western heritage either. The politicians/narrators may have wanted their audiences to have one 'correct' reading, but they had to face the fact that they cannot control people's subjective responses. For those audiences, the mood of hybridity allowed Pei to reflect his life and ambitions rather than the life, background and heritage of the local community.⁶⁸⁴ Thus, hybridity in Pei's architecture becomes a space that involves continual negotiation between international and intercultural practices. This, in turn, results in the 'interactions of deferential power'.⁶⁸⁵ In their attempt to initiate a novel project and make public their achievement, the politicians/narrators broke with tradition and claimed uniqueness at the expense of using elementary Islamic architectural elements. The novelty of its modern functions became 'participants in a revolutionary movement'.⁶⁸⁶ Architecture in Qatar is witnessing the movement from a reflection of a simple life to more complex themes, as life there is experiencing increasing change. This movement resembles the different difficult stages that the individual passes through in his/her life from

⁶⁸² Al-Mahmoud.

⁶⁸³ A group of visitors at the MIA, interviewed on 15 December 2008.

⁶⁸⁴ A group of visitors at the MIA, interviewed on 15 December 2008.

⁶⁸⁵ Kraidy, p. 317.

⁶⁸⁶ Venturi, pp. 16-20.

childhood to maturity.⁶⁸⁷ Thus, architecture in Qatar is moving from the merely functional to the symbolic.

I would argue that, to use the language of Baudrillard, the map of Qatar today precedes the territory, by which I mean that a simulacrum has been created by the attempt to identify a specific Qatari architectural language.⁶⁸⁸ This raises the issue that Pei was attempting to produce a reality that corresponded with his model, the Ibn-Tulun fountain. Therefore, there is no longer any question of an absolute reality within the MIA.⁶⁸⁹ Rather, it is the difference between the MIA's architecture and genuine Islamic architecture that creates the real, the simulation and the abstracted model.⁶⁹⁰ Pei has treated Islam too generically when local people expected to see something geographically specific. For those audiences, it cannot be just 'Islamic', it needed to be 'Qatari Islamic', as discussed in chapter two. However, Pei created an architectural language that Qatar did not have. What happens with simulacra is that the reality is produced and can be reproduced consistently and limitlessly from memory. The creation of the MIA's architecture does not need to be identical or rational, and it should not be measured against the ideal model of the ablution fountain of Ibn-Tulun. Reflecting on Al-Mahmoud's argument regarding the absence of the minarets or exterior domes, a simulacrum does not need them to perform its function/role, as there is no issue of imitation or duplication. On the contrary, it is an issue of 'substituting the signs of the real for the real'.⁶⁹¹ The problem for some was that their first encounter with the building did not convey a recognisable meaning. Therefore, their objection to the design was a result of their confusion as the politicians/narrators had labelled it publicly as 'Islamic'. Therefore, this particular sector of the audience had

⁶⁸⁷ Venturi, pp. 16-20.

⁶⁸⁸ Jean Baudrillard: *Selected Writings*, ed. by Mark Poster (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 166.

⁶⁸⁹ Baudrillard (1988), pp. 167-168.

⁶⁹⁰ Baudrillard (1988), pp. 167-168.

⁶⁹¹ Baudrillard (1981), p. 2.

refused to replace the simulacrum with their concept of Islamic symbolism.

Pei may have broken with the traditional features of Islamic architecture, but he still wished to give his building an Islamic essence. There is no doubt that Pei's architecture intertwined all the roles of the simulacra in which it becomes a play of illusions, metaphor and phantasm.⁶⁹² The phantasm in this 'imaginary' building is founded in the use and implication of a number of elements such as arcades, the dome, geometric patterns in the hanging circle and floor, rectangles, triangles, and the arch in the façade, that, it was thought, would create an Islamic essence. Conversely, for others, this complex 'imaginary' architecture created a successful simulacrum in which the Ibn-Tulun fountain was presented as an aspirational resource.

The use of this new form – the new architectural language of Pei – showed a determination to stress deeper values and functions, and reference a socio-political movement. Within this hybrid model, signs played a key role in constituting a strong architectural form, which is unique and different from previous traditional museum sites and helped generate an international response to the opening of the MIA. In this sense, the MIA is a great success as: 'Only here [the MIA] appear[s] ingenious, and offer[s] [itself] the luxury of existence', with its very own style.⁶⁹³

Style in the Architecture of the Museum of Islamic Art

To say that the MIA's architecture has no subject is a risky statement because its style is a matter of the development of a subject.⁶⁹⁴ Thus, regardless of the contentious dialogue with a certain sector of its

⁶⁹² Baudrillard (1981), pp. 19-27.

⁶⁹³ Poster, p. 201.

⁶⁹⁴ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: an Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publication Company, 1976), pp. 801-810.

audiences, the MIA has created its own style.⁶⁹⁵ Therefore, we should consider the fact that the differences in the features and wording that are characteristic of the MIA's architecture are actually the features of what is being said and what defines its style. Its style is more than an attribute. Instead, for those who understand it, it works as an introduction or an assistant that helps in absorbing and perceiving it. The absence of a visible correlation with factors such as a certain culture or heritage means that our perception of the style cannot be refined or extended or enforced by testing it with other existing models. As a result, it is interesting to consider the neighbouring projects in Abu-Dhabi, which would appear to be a natural comparison because of their concurrent development in the Gulf Region. The neighbouring projects in Abu-Dhabi, namely, the Guggenheim and the Louvre, have been criticised for being Western post-modernism whereby global brands have been bought and Western symbols have been copied in a way that does not reflect Abu-Dhabi's culture or even develop a new non-Western style [Figs 71-73].

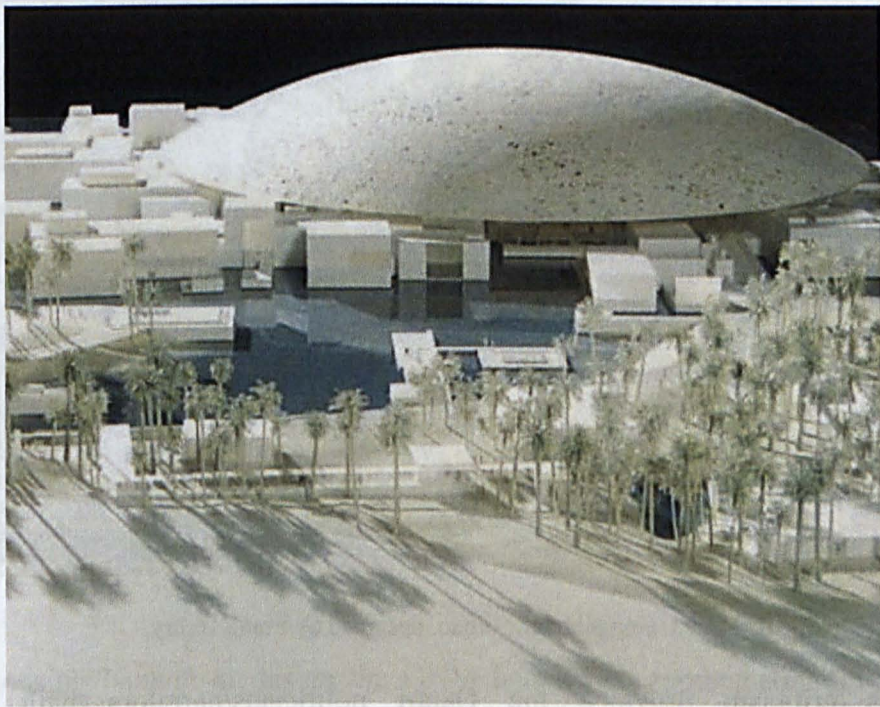


Fig. 71. A model of Abu-Dhabi's Louvre (2010).

⁶⁹⁵ Goodman, pp. 801-810.

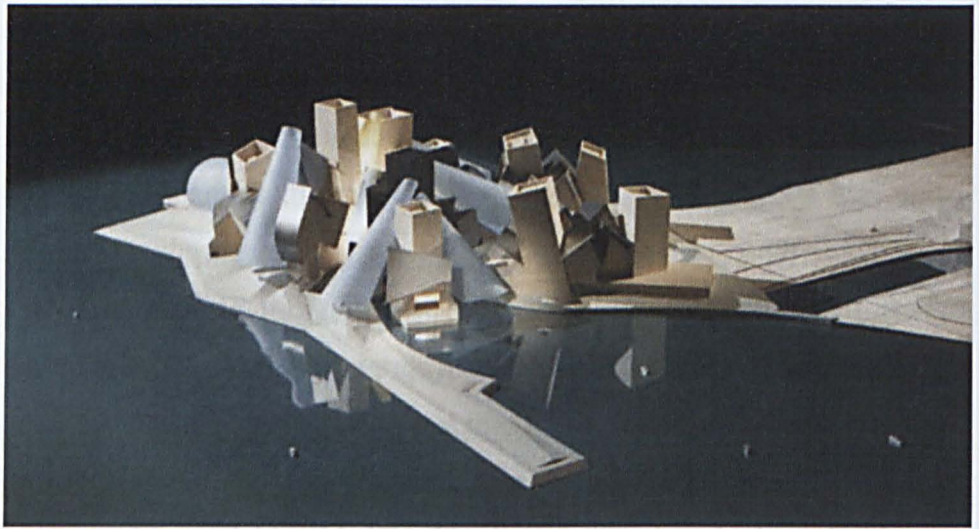


Fig. 72. The 450,000-square-foot Guggenheim Abu-Dhabi Museum will be located in the cultural district of Saddiyat. It has been designed by the internationally renowned architect Frank Gehry (2010).

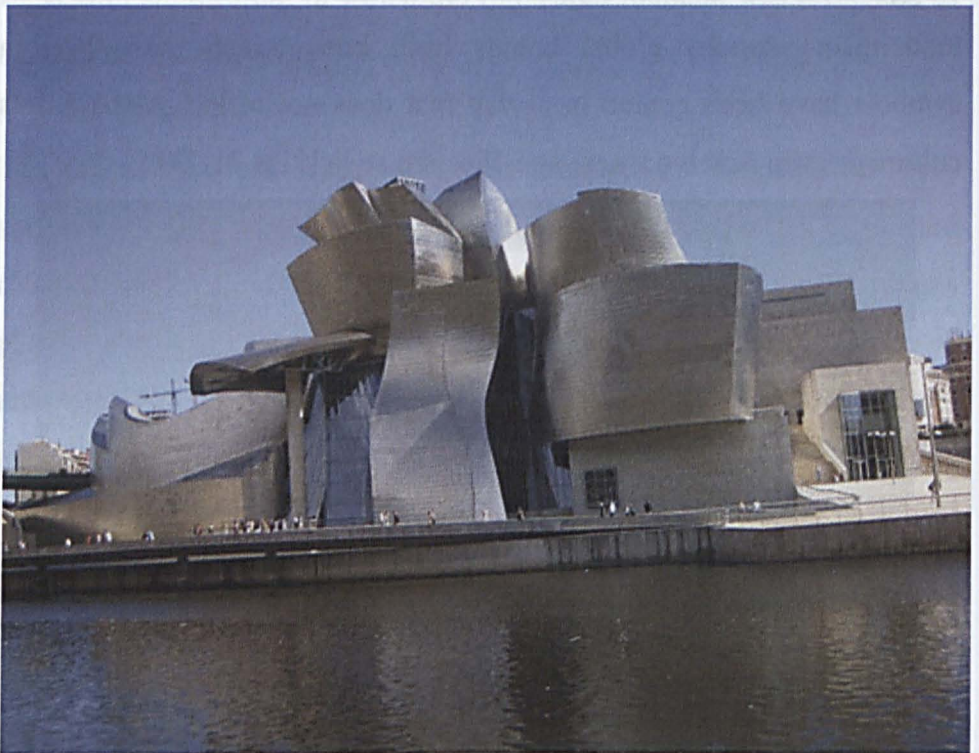


Fig.73. Guggenheim Bilbao, designed by Frank Gehry.

This criticism provided the Qatari politicians/narrators with an opportunity to create a comparative analytical narrative of their new architectural language; they wished to hide the paradox in their claims to present a Qatari or Islamic heritage within a post-modern building. The MIA has thus become the first step in a wider politicisation of museum

projects in the country. For instance, on 23 March 2010, sixteen months after the opening of the MIA, Qatar Museums Authority unveiled plans for a 430,000 ft² new National Museum of Qatar, which will be designed by Jean Nouvel. He also designed Abu-Dhabi's Louvre, however, the Qataris have claimed that their Nouvel project is different ideologically from those of Abu-Dhabi. James Reginato, who interviewed Sheikha Al-Mayassa for *W* magazine, commented on this attempt to develop a museum culture:

Qatar has been just as ambitious in its aspiration to become a cultural centre, but by starting with a focus specifically on Islamic culture, the country has been doing it in a more homegrown way. Unlike Abu Dhabi, furthermore, Qatar is not renting art. The arrangement with the Louvre, for the use of its name and loans of art, will reportedly cost Abu Dhabi \$1 billion.⁶⁹⁶

The politicians/narrators commissioned Nouvel to design something related to Qatari culture. Thus, Nouvel's design was inspired by the life of the Bedouin and the hot desert climate. This sustainable design, 'made up of a series of interlocking disks', suggests 'a caravanserai, which is a traditional enclosed marketplace that supported commerce and people who were moving across the desert'.⁶⁹⁷ Akin to the simulacrum of the MIA's architecture, the reconstruction of Qatar National Museum aims to reconstruct a memory of the Qatari Islamic past to make a statement about Qatar today and in the future. As such, we find a layering of myth upon myth to construct this notion about Qatar today. This is evidenced by the location of the Old Emiri Palace at the very heart of Nouvel's building, placing the Palace beyond historical time and recreating it within the space of modern Qatar.

Choosing Nouvel to design the QNM had led to another contradiction between the politicians'/narrators' and the audiences, which might also

⁶⁹⁶ Reginato, p. 176.

⁶⁹⁷ Bridgette Meinhold, 'Jean Nouvel Unveils Sustainably-Designed National Museum of Qatar', *Inhabitat* <<http://inhabitat.com/2010/03/24/jean-nouvel-unveils-sustainably-designed-national-museum-of-qatar/>> [accessed 6 November 2010].

produce tension between Qatar and UAE. This is because the narrators claimed that the Qatari projects differed from UAE's; in Qatar they were creating something Qatari, something unique that would represent the local culture. This is arguable, of course, as there are inherent contradictions in employing foreign, non-Muslim architects to design flagship museums in Qatar. This demonstrates that in Qatar, the politicians/narrators are still using a Western model to achieve their goals. Once the project of QNM is inaugurated, there will again be questions asked by the public: where will they see themselves within this architecture, especially given that it has been designed by a Western architect? Of course, this tension does not deny that the politicians/narrators are very determined to see this new architectural style in the language of the region. For example, in his article for the *Financial Times*, James Drummond commented:

The new Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, the Qatari capital, blends the best of Western architecture with traditional ideas of Islamic design, raising standards for the entire region [...] Unlike his peers at work in the Gulf, Mr Pei has clearly done some homework for this, his last commission. The building is uncluttered and spacious but the references to the Islamic world's architectural heritage are many.⁶⁹⁸

Doubtless, like Qatar, Abu-Dhabi is seeking global recognition, but it is using a different ideology, style and presentation. Abu-Dhabi has opted to borrow the distinctly Western styles of the renowned Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, Spain, because the Guggenheim in Abu-Dhabi has been designed by the same architect, Frank Gehry. Unlike Qatar, Abu-Dhabi has chosen not to focus on defending, clarifying or presenting its own culture to the world. Rather, the authorities in Abu-Dhabi planned these projects with the hope of attracting worldwide audiences. Prompting cultural tourism was the main focus of all their ambitions no matter whose culture it might be. The authorities in Abu-Dhabi are looking to

⁶⁹⁸ James Drummond, 'Doha Museum Sets Mark for Gulf Architects', *Financial Times*, 20 November 2008 <http://www.ft.com/cms/5/6f6c4fe4_b736_11dd-8c01-000779fd185dwp-uuid=c91807> [accessed 23 November 2008].

these establishments to help make their country a universal destination for the art trade and museum visitors.⁶⁹⁹ Sharon Heal has suggested:

Boosting international tourism is one of the key reasons behind the development, so just as Dubai has carved out a place for itself as a mass tourism destination, Abu-Dhabi is trying to recreate itself as a centre for cultural tourism.⁷⁰⁰

According to Barry Lord, co-president of the consultancy Lord Cultural Resources, 'There has been a decision on the part of the emirs and the royal families to place their culture in an international context and bring global culture to their people'.⁷⁰¹ Although both countries have ambitions to create a cultural presence and pride in their lands, each has done it in its own way. However, they do share some goals: to market culture to increase tourism and to put themselves on the map as cultural capitals. While Qatar's politicians/narrators aimed to place first their own specifically Islamic culture and then Qatari heritage in the international context, Abu-Dhabi has focused its policy on presenting worldwide knowledge and culture to its own people. Each country also has its own unique concept of the right architecture for displaying cultural artefacts. Whereas in the Qatari case, simulacrum was a fundamental tool in the process, in Abu-Dhabi, the practice of franchising museums was intended to build an extraordinary iconic structure such as had never been seen before in the Gulf region, as well as bringing to their community a branch of a world famous museum, the Guggenheim, already established in New York, Venice, Berlin and Bilbao. In *Empiricism and Sociology* (1973), Otto Neurath discussed the issue of museums in the future:

It was the same at one time with books: a famous manuscript entered into a collection, a unique treasure; but today, there are ten thousand reproductions of the same manuscript. In the future, museums will be manufactured, exactly as books are today.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁹ 'Abu-Dhabi will Become the Destination for European Museums and the Universal Art Trade', *Dw-World. De Deutsche Welle* <<http://www.dwworld.de/dw/article/0,,2377530,00.html>> [accessed 14 April 2009].

⁷⁰⁰ Heal, p. 29.

⁷⁰¹ Heal, p. 29.

⁷⁰² Otto Neurath: *Empiricism and Sociology*, ed. by Marie Neurath and Robert S. Cohen (Boston: Dr. Reidel Publishing Company, 1973), pp. 218-219.

Neurath's proposal of the possibility of mass-produced museums fits Abu-Dhabi's projects, where uniquely local characteristics are deliberately absent.⁷⁰³ Clearly Abu-Dhabi is seeking globalisation through the medium of 'brand museums'. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City, under the directorship of Thomas Krens, has endeavoured to turn itself into a global museum. In choosing the architect Frank Gehry, the authorities in Abu-Dhabi sought to attract international visitors in the same way as Gehry's Guggenheim project in Spain drew attention to the small and neglected port town of Bilbao.⁷⁰⁴ Heal poses a fundamental question concerning the development of 'brand museums' in Abu-Dhabi: 'Will Western European visitors be willing to fly to the Louvre in Abu-Dhabi when the 'real thing' is only a train ride away in Paris?'⁷⁰⁵ Yet Keith Gray, development director at Haley Sharpe, who has been working in the Gulf region for fifteen years, is quite optimistic about these developments. During his time in the region, Gray found that the United Arab Emirates had established the 'most important business hubs in the world',⁷⁰⁶ and so far, no business has failed, because these business projects follow specific agendas. This business experience makes the success of the brand museums more likely. Sue Underwood, who worked in the Sharja Museums Department for three years, views museum projects in the UAE as 'part of a long-term strategy'.⁷⁰⁷ The museums in Sharja were developed between fifteen and twenty years ago, and these institutions 'are bone fide, credible, important museums'.⁷⁰⁸ Perhaps the Abu-Dhabi authority's preference for foreign architecture was also driven by the fact that the acquisitions to be displayed in these museums would, for the most part, be borrowed from their original museums. The authorities in Abu-Dhabi aim to accommodate these loaned artefacts in

⁷⁰³ Neurath and Cohen, pp. 218-223.

⁷⁰⁴ Schubert, p. 113.

⁷⁰⁵ Heal, p. 29.

⁷⁰⁶ Heal, p. 29.

⁷⁰⁷ Heal, p. 30.

⁷⁰⁸ Heal, p. 30.

buildings whose architecture is inspired by Western style.⁷⁰⁹ Karsten Schubert proposed:

Museums with the most focused and high quality collections seem to succeed [...] To a large degree the nature of the collection will dictate the architecture, and focused collections inspire focused architecture.⁷¹⁰

One could argue, then, that the nature of the collection alongside the motivations of the politicians has determined the architecture of the Abu-Dhabi museums. These elements have created a character in the Abu-Dhabi projects that is far removed from the country's own culture and does not refer to its national identity. However, the Abu-Dhabi projects' main concern might not be the emphasis of national identity. The development of Western culture in Abu-Dhabi provides evidence that the authorities are dealing with culture as an ideology. Abu-Dhabi is applying a cross-cultural methodology that will improve understanding in the local community of the culture of others.⁷¹¹ This fits with the ideology of 'appreciating cultural differences rather than being threatened by them'.⁷¹² This allows the local community to explore the sense of contrasting cultures and the transformation and accommodation of another culture in their homeland, but without excluding respect and dignity for the local culture. Therefore, there is an aim to resolve the historical conflict between different cultures by finding a balance for hosting different cultural meanings in one social space. Garth Allen and Caroline Anson propose that true acquaintance is needed to facilitate the understanding of other cultures and stop prejudice; that is, to be familiar with a foreign culture and be in contact with it at close quarters, ensures acquaintance and knowledge of the culture and simultaneously reduces prejudice: 'To know something we have to know its opposite'.⁷¹³ The emphasis on establishing a national identity in Abu-Dhabi is happening in

⁷⁰⁹ Heal, pp. 28-31.

⁷¹⁰ Schubert, p. 99.

⁷¹¹ Garth Allen and Caroline Anson, *The Role of Museums in Creating Multi-Cultural Identities* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), pp. 61-65.

⁷¹² Allen and Anson, p. 65.

⁷¹³ Allen and Anson, p. 70.

an indirect way through the presentation of the other culture and identity. Perhaps through these establishments, the community in Abu-Dhabi, in part, will start to define its identity by seeing itself as distinct from the foreign aspects of life presented to them.⁷¹⁴

In the Qatari practice, therefore, it is the difference and complexity in the MIA's architectural style that might give it its unique quality and increases the motivation to explore it. Robert Venturi has argued that:

An architecture of complexity and contradiction has a special obligation toward the whole: its truth must be in its totality or its implications of totality. It must embody the different unity of inclusion rather than the easy unity of exclusion. More is not less.⁷¹⁵

When a style is less accessible this forces viewers to make adjustments and, therefore, the more insight and understanding audiences gain and achieve, the more their ability to discover the quality of the MIA's style is developed.⁷¹⁶ The MIA's complex style works as a trenchant metaphor, which does not accept reduction to the point where it becomes a literal formula. The MIA develops its very own style, the forms of which do not coincide with traditional forms of Islamic architecture or local heritage. Therefore, this could mean more for the audiences than traditional Islamic architecture would have meant. The Islamic architecture that these audiences are familiar with delivers its meanings straightforwardly via obvious elements of certain traditional features and forms. Islamic architecture has components that do not need further analysis as they are recognisable to most Muslims. In comparison, the hybrid architecture of the MIA becomes a matter of the 'affective and expressive'.⁷¹⁷ Pei's attempt to blend the interaction of Islamic architectural elements with new techniques has created for Qatar a new prestigious architectural language and a status landmark rather than 'Islamic architecture' *per se*. As such, the connection between the past and the present in Pei's

⁷¹⁴ Allen and Anson, pp. 61-87.

⁷¹⁵ Venturi, p. 16.

⁷¹⁶ Goodman, pp. 801-810.

⁷¹⁷ Goodman, p. 802.

architecture is absent, but the connection between the country's political, social and economic development and architectural form is apparent. In this site, as mentioned earlier, we see arches, a dome, a lamp, geometric patterns and limestone, all of which helped Pei to highlight the significance and language of his building and so develop a post-modern architecture in the region, which can be considered 'as a reward for taking up the initial challenge of "Hunt the symbol"'.⁷¹⁸ There is no doubt that the building symbolises a potent museum architecture in the region. The attention paid at the opening ceremony and the emphasis on the ways in which the museum's architecture draws inspiration from Islamic monuments suggest the intention of the politicians/narrators to make both museology and architecture engage in the process of constructing, exhibiting and representing the story of the place and times.⁷¹⁹ Hence, the accumulation of historical Islamic artefacts in a space inspired (as they claimed), by a thirteenth century Islamic monument, will illuminate Islamic art and its significance for contemporary audiences. The strategy of exhibiting and interpreting these collections in a museum also means a reactivation of the stories and memories associated with them along with the reconstruction of their history. This strategy of reconfiguring Islam at this site will remodel the assumption of what is appropriate by applying a forward-looking vision of Islamic culture.⁷²⁰

The politicians'/narrators' frank admission of the juxtaposition of old and new elements may also suggest a solution to the need to address these Islamic collections in a particular political climate. To examine the hidden relationships between the collection and the site, we can use Eileen Hooper-Greenhill's *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, in which she employs the word 'sympathy' to refer metaphorically to this relationship:

⁷¹⁸ Charles Jencks, *Towards a Symbolic Architecture* (London: Grand House Press, 1985), p. 66.

⁷¹⁹ *The Architecture of the Museum*, ed. by Michaela Giebelhausen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 55.

⁷²⁰ Said, p. 57.

It is sympathy which enables the sunflower to turn towards the sun, and makes the roots of growing plants seek out water. A basic task for sympathy is the drawing together of things, the revelation of the sameness of things.⁷²¹

Charles Jencks has asked, ‘What is aesthesia if not a land in which beautiful exaggerated signs distract the inhabitants from asking deeper questions – moral, spiritual and political?’⁷²² The MIA’s architectural form may reference success and power,⁷²³ but the aesthetic of this site could be a signifier of ‘where parts relate to each other and to a great totality’.⁷²⁴ It seems that this architecture affirms the notion of unifying and underlying ideas, using a language to express political and economic meanings for both Qatar and the world alike.⁷²⁵ Indeed, ‘architecture has a powerful role to play’,⁷²⁶ according to Michel Foucault, who drew attention to the fact that architecture can be used as a political tool.⁷²⁷ Foucault proposed that architects are not the masters of space, as people might think they are. Rather, their function is to apply the vision of their masters, the politicians. In *Towards a Symbolic Architecture*, Jencks indicated that prior to 1800, cultures ‘had a strong notion of where they were going’,⁷²⁸ especially within an agnostic society where history was divided into a beginning, a middle and either the end or destiny.⁷²⁹ This practice provided architecture with a meaningful context that made its implication clear to viewers and inhabitants.⁷³⁰ Jencks concludes:

The Greeks, Romans and Christians (like the Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists) knew what to ask of their architects. Indeed it is only in our own era that the client has walked off the job and stopped supplying the symbolic intentions and style.⁷³¹

⁷²¹ Eilean Hooper Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 14.

⁷²² Jencks (1985), p. 19.

⁷²³ Jencks (1985), pp. 15-35.

⁷²⁴ Jencks (1985), p. 19.

⁷²⁵ Jencks (1985), p. 19.

⁷²⁶ Rabinow, p. 44.

⁷²⁷ Rabinow, p. 240.

⁷²⁸ Jencks (1985), p. 21.

⁷²⁹ Jencks (1985), pp. 19-21.

⁷³⁰ Jencks (1985), p. 21.

⁷³¹ Jencks (1985), p. 21.

Jencks provides us with a useful and applicable example, the Egyptian Pyramids, to show how the pharaohs used architecture in their regimes. He suggests that the four isosceles triangles unite within themselves two meanings: eternity and power.⁷³² Eternal permanence is suggested by their heavy stonework and shape. The great height of the pyramid, which was aimed to penetrate the blue sky, represented in ancient Egypt the idea of 'a stairway to heaven [which] shall be laid down for [the king] that he may ascend to heaven',⁷³³ as the Pharaonic cult was linked to a cult of 'Re – the self-renewing sun god born again every morning from the east'.⁷³⁴ The pyramids reflect the ideology of the Pharaonic cult that linked cosmic time with everyday life.⁷³⁵ Life in Egypt was dependent on the River Nile annually flooding and then retreating and leaving behind a fertile deposit of black mud. Hence, the Nile was an axis of life set strongly within an architecture of death. This invests the pyramids with the symbolism of a fertile mountain and power, especially as the pyramids are set in the west bank facing the morning sun and the fertile Nile.⁷³⁶ Thus, the pharaohs used the Egyptian pyramids to represent specific symbols and ideas.

Venturi suggests that the desire for complexity and contradiction in architecture is 'relevant to both the medium of architecture and the programme in architecture'.⁷³⁷ This means that to understand the wide scope of the complex meanings in the MIA's architecture, we have first of all to examine the medium of the simulacrum and what it expresses. Moreover, audiences need to be aware of the function and the purpose of the new and growing complexities of the architecture.⁷³⁸ The apparent contradiction in the site, in the claimed combination of the Islamic with contemporary techniques, conjures up memories. However, it also offers the audience a richer visual experience opening the door to further

⁷³² Jencks (1985), pp. 19-21.

⁷³³ Jencks (1985), p. 22.

⁷³⁴ Jencks (1985), p. 21.

⁷³⁵ Jencks (1985), pp. 15-35.

⁷³⁶ Jencks (1985), pp. 15-35.

⁷³⁷ Venturi, p. 19.

⁷³⁸ Crook, p. 19.

thought about why this simulacrum existed in Qatar in the first place.⁷³⁹ Pei was not simply asked to design a building to host Islamic artefacts for Qatar but was instructed to visit the most famous Islamic monuments across the globe and study them in order to match and express the Emir's vision to his creation. As he said, 'I'm only an architect, but this building is very special to me. It helped me learn something, not just about building but about culture'.⁷⁴⁰ Although Pei did not have experience of architectural design in the Islamic or Arab worlds, he followed the Emir's instructions and took the opportunity to discover what was to him an unfamiliar culture to make a coherent expressive link between the exercise of political power and the form of architecture and space. Foucault stated that 'space is fundamental in any form of communal life. Space is fundamental in any exercise of power'.⁷⁴¹ Therefore, the use of political power is an important function of the MIA's style. So what the MIA's architecture aims to express, and how it expresses it, is an aspect of its style. Therefore, differences in what needs to be said and conducted would lead to differences in the style of expression.⁷⁴² Thus, what is expressed in the architecture of the MIA and the ways in which it is expressed are all integrated and involved in its overall style. Consequently, what will be expressed in Jean Nouvel's architecture for the national museum will also contribute to creating an architectural style for the national museums. Therefore, 'a feature of [the new museums'] style may be a feature of what is said, of what is exemplified, or of what is expressed'.⁷⁴³ Therefore, a deeper recognition of style is required.

General descriptions of style emphasise form, expression and relationship. The system of these forms highlights its maker, whether it is a group or a culture or even an individual artist.⁷⁴⁴ Thus, for those able to

⁷³⁹ Venturi, p. 56.

⁷⁴⁰ Arlidge (2008), p. 12.

⁷⁴¹ Foucault, p. 252.

⁷⁴² Goodman, pp. 801-810.

⁷⁴³ Goodman, p. 806.

⁷⁴⁴ Meyer Schapiro, *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), pp. 51-58.

'read' the building, the style of the MIA acted as a vehicle of expression from which different values of social, economic, political and religious life could be communicated. Hence, style in the MIA has been used to create a certain effect.⁷⁴⁵ Therefore, a strong correlation between expression and form is obvious within the stylistic language of the architecture of the MIA. This correlation makes the style of the MIA an important provider of better understanding of the new Qatar.⁷⁴⁶ When observing the MIA, we should consider the fact that style is unstable and cannot not be classified systematically as it varies continuously. Therefore, what is important is not the style of the individual architect, but the overall form and quality of the work. Hence, what counts in the MIA are its aesthetic components, the relationships of the fabricated elements and their distributions, and the overall quality of the surfaces. These distributed elements allow for the emergence of an expressive structure and a coherent whole of the MIA.⁷⁴⁷ This expressive structure presents a simulacrum that expresses clearly the politicians'/narrators' desired image of Qatar today, especially as they perceived that a global architecture was representative of a modernised, tolerant, global participant and an open country. Therefore, the MIA's architecture speaks about the multiculturalism, hybridity, economic development and socio-political movements and policy that the country is witnessing. Thus, Pei has situated his design within the post-modern movement. Jencks has argued that the shift from a modern to a post-modern architecture was brought about by the failure of modernism.⁷⁴⁸ Jencks offered his definition for post-modern architecture as:

To this day I would define post-modernism as I did in 1973 as a double coding: the combination of modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order for architecture to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects. The point of this double coding was itself double. Modern architecture had failed to

⁷⁴⁵ Schapiro, pp. 81-88.

⁷⁴⁶ Schapiro, pp. 81-88.

⁷⁴⁷ Schapiro, pp. 81-88.

⁷⁴⁸ Charles Jencks, *What Is Post-Modernism?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 14-27.

remain credible partly because it didn't communicate effectively with its ultimate users [...] and partly because it didn't make effective links with the city and history.⁷⁴⁹

I would also argue that the concept of style 'is relative to the sense of some minds perceiving it'.⁷⁵⁰ The architecture of the MIA can be described as a shared style that tries to represent the cultural change desired by the narrators/politicians.

J. Mordaunt Crook has stated that 'style as understood since the Renaissance, [is] a conscious system of design, a visual code based on tectonic preference, a post-vernacular language of forms'.⁷⁵¹ Therefore, if we examine the MIA's design, we would probably conclude that Pei chose to address the dilemma of style, particularly if we consider that post-modern architecture usually produces an argument about why some elements may or may not have been applied. Pei's design instigated arguments and questions about why and where Islamic elements were placed in the design and what their function was. In *Towards a New Museum* (1998), Victoria Newhouse examined different international museum projects that had been realised over the previous decade.⁷⁵² She suggested that museums can be described within three categories: 'the nature of the collection, autonomy from outside (political) interference, and the curator's ability to determine or at least influence the nature of the architecture'.⁷⁵³ The world of museums has often witnessed a cohesive link with political practice in different cultures. What Qatar is experiencing today has been seen previously in the reorganisation of the Louvre as it was extended over three presidential eras.⁷⁵⁴ For the authorities, museums appear to be potent symbols of civic status as they indicate affluence and a move towards national improvement. With this in

⁷⁴⁹ Jencks (1989), p. 14.

⁷⁵⁰ Crook, p. 16.

⁷⁵¹ Crook, p. 13.

⁷⁵² Victoria Newhouse, *Towards A New Museum* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998), pp. 14-17.

⁷⁵³ Newhouse, pp. 14-17; Schubert, p. 100.

⁷⁵⁴ Schubert, pp. 88-99.

mind, the Qatari politicians'/narrators' ambition in using an internationally recognised architectural style (post-modernism) encourages us as focalisers to place the MIA in Newhouse's third category. The museum does not work autonomously; it underlines the politicians'/narrators' motivations, which makes it a subject directly linked to political purpose. The architecture presents the politicians'/narrators' 'struggle to develop an institutional identity' that establishes the MIA as a global Islamic museum, distinguished from other Islamic world museums.⁷⁵⁵ To achieve their goal, since the beginning of twenty-first century the narrators formulated a new policy for the design of museums in Qatar, which led the politicians/narrators to rethink their views on museum architecture. Therefore, it can be concluded that at the centre of Pei's architecture [Fig. 23], stands the global expansion policy of Qatar's Museum of Islamic Art.

The idea of globalisation was promoted by an abundance of different development projects in the country, in politics, the economy and the social sphere, as discussed earlier. The ambition was for the MIA to situate itself as a non-autonomous satellite institution in a national network that would present a modern picture of Qatar to visitors.⁷⁵⁶ Hence, with the establishment of the MIA, one can consider that the idea of globalisation has 'been applied to a cultural institution'.⁷⁵⁷ The politicians/narrators embraced this idea by selecting post-modernism as the architectural language to host the collection of Islamic artefacts, thereby diverging from the previous tendency to insist on accommodating artefacts in traditional buildings: the QNM in the Emiri Palace, the Al-Wakra Museum, the Al-Khur Museum, the Traditional House and the Al-Kout Castle.

⁷⁵⁵ Schubert, p. 113.

⁷⁵⁶ Schubert, pp. 99-119.

⁷⁵⁷ Schubert, p. 114.

It is important, therefore, to think not only about the building, but also to consider its site, placed, as it is, in close juxtaposition with the traditional Qatari harbour, Al-Farda [Figs 74-75], which speaks to us about Qatar past, present and in future. The site has a complex history. It has been used nostalgically to continue the narrative. Through exploring the MIA's location, we can explore further how this site embraces the narrators' vision of social, economic and political progress.

A Narrative of National Development through the Museum's location

Nowadays all of us must understand social correlations. It is not enough to be able to read and write and know something about arithmetic, science, literature and history: social changes have to be understood. However, the teaching in this field has hardly begun.⁷⁵⁸

Marie Neurath and Robert Cohen (1973) suggest that modern societies obtain their knowledge almost entirely within their leisure hours and through visual enjoyment.⁷⁵⁹ Accordingly the best way of disseminating knowledge about social progress is through a visual encounter.⁷⁶⁰ Gillian Rose (2001) proposes that the issue of visual culture is 'central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western society. It is now often suggested that much meaning is conveyed by visual images'.⁷⁶¹ To showcase social change effectively, therefore, we need a type of presentation that will 'bring all the facts of life into some recognisable relation with social processes [...] What we need is a schematic representation that can be understood immediately'.⁷⁶² In Figures 74 and 75 it is apparent that the Museum of Islamic Art's location stands in explicit juxtaposition to the very traditional Qatari harbour, Al-Farda, where boats similar to those used in the historic pearl trade are moored. Standing on the high bridge that leads to the museum, the visitor is directed to the MIA's entrance opposite the vast post-modern site of Doha

⁷⁵⁸ Neurath and Cohen, p. 214.

⁷⁵⁹ Neurath and Cohen, p. 215.

⁷⁶⁰ Neurath and Cohen, p. 215.

⁷⁶¹ Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), p. 6.

⁷⁶² Neurath and Cohen, p. 220.

that tells us so much about Qatar today. While standing on the same bridge and looking out, one can enjoy a panorama of the very traditional Farda, simple in its appearance and free of the high technology of privilege that lies on the north side. Opposite Al-Farda, across the road, stands the huge, modern building of the Emiri Diwan (from where the state is governed) with its vast gardens. Further down the corniche one finds the traditional buildings of the restored Souk Waqif. What 'significant questions are answered by such exhibition?'⁷⁶³ In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger maintains that 'seeing comes before words',⁷⁶⁴ and indeed the first mission of the Qatari politicians/narrators is visualised here, as their designers record the processes of rapid development in visual terms. In this arena two phenomena are evident, cultural hybridisation and the link between culture and socio-economic development.⁷⁶⁵

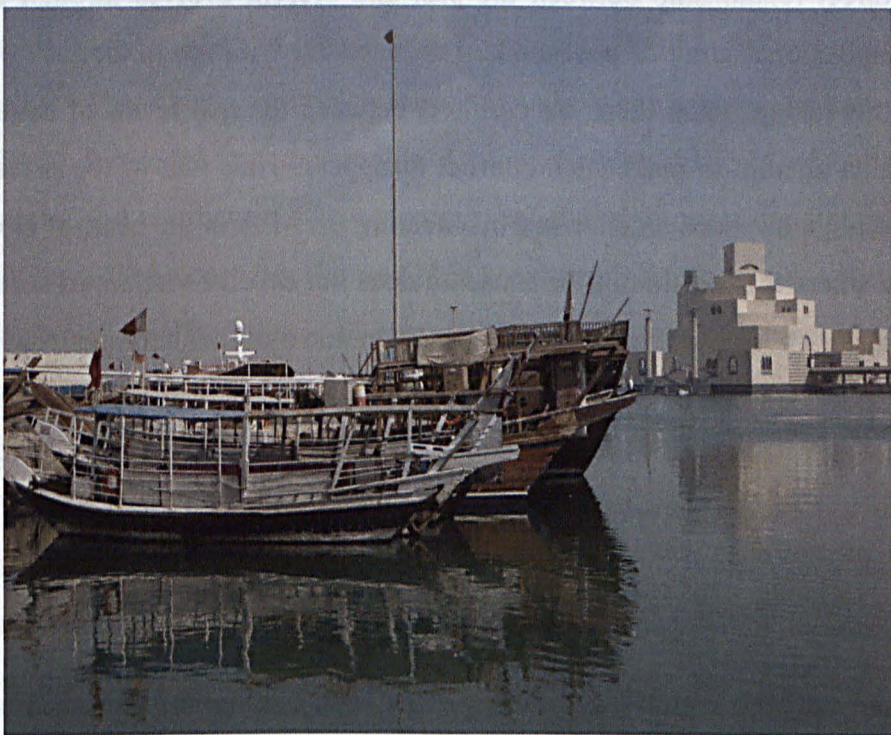


Fig. 74. The Qatari harbour where traditional fishing boats face the massive architecture of the MIA.

⁷⁶³ Neurath and Cohen, p. 219.

⁷⁶⁴ John Berger, *Way of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 7.

⁷⁶⁵ Kreps, pp. 14-15.



Fig. 75. The view from the MIA's entrance bridge, where visitors can enjoy a panoramic view of central Doha.

A direct relationship between the past and present evolves through the compositional unity of post-modern architecture with the traditional site. In this juxtaposition there are conflicts between the two levels of culture and an attempt to make such conflict disappear. Thus fear of the present or foreign has been ameliorated by situating the MIA in the heart of Doha city where the location of the museum does not deprive visitors of seeing Qatari traditions, and also offers them a panorama of this heritage from its bridge. The issue of cultural conservation is raised here. Christina Kreps states that:

Vernacular histories can be stored in myths, artefacts, festivals, ceremonies, or landscapes, and are vital resources for the ongoing construction and maintenance of places as well as social identities dependent on them.⁷⁶⁶

Qatari heritage within this landscape has been highlighted, enriched and conserved. The politicians/narrators were convinced that any architecture that was seen to devalue the local heritage would confuse people. Thus a national cultural scheme was developed to demonstrate active conservation. This scheme focuses on the value of national culture but

⁷⁶⁶ Kreps, p. 13.

also proposes a cultural hybrid, where the past can interact in harmony with the present. Kreps proposes:

When culture is integrated into development, it can enable the bearers of traditional culture to adapt their ideas and actions to a changing environment within the context of their own cultures and their own terms.⁷⁶⁷

Yet accommodating the MIA next to Al-Farda could have been motivated by a preoccupation with domestic heritage in the present, which denies the 'tendencies to set traditional culture in opposition to modern culture'.⁷⁶⁸ The location presents domestic Qatari culture as fluid and adaptable, evolving and flexible, rather than confrontational, bound and fixed. The hybrid cultural form created by this juxtaposition of modern and traditional forms has framed modern Qatari culture as innovative and accepting of change while continuing to survive and protect its own identity.⁷⁶⁹ Therefore, the panorama, with its mix of past and present, proves the possibility of intertwining 'elements of traditional and modern life'.⁷⁷⁰ The Qatari politicians/narrators have confidently looked for cultural heterogeneity, developing a 'contemporary process of cultural contact and exchange'.⁷⁷¹ According to the definition in Raymond Williams' *The Long Revolution* (1961), culture is a sense and a way of life giving specific values and meanings to the process of human or state perfection in different aspects of life, such as their daily interaction with individuals and institutions.⁷⁷² Williams proposes further that analysing culture using this definition clarifies the values and meanings of a particular way of life within a particular culture.⁷⁷³ With regard to the changing process of culture, Williams states that 'the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings – [leads] to the tensions and

⁷⁶⁷ Kreps, p. 13.

⁷⁶⁸ Kreps, p. 14.

⁷⁶⁹ Kreps, p. 15.

⁷⁷⁰ Kreps, p. 14.

⁷⁷¹ Kreps, p. 15.

⁷⁷² Williams, p. 80.

⁷⁷³ Williams, p. 80.

achievements of growth and change'.⁷⁷⁴ However, Stuart Hall suggests that the characteristics of cultural change:

[...] led us to expect, not the revival but the gradual disappearance of the nationalist passion. Attachments to nation, like those to tribe, region, place, religion, were thought to be archaic particularisms which capitalist modernity would, gradually or violently, dissolve or supersede.⁷⁷⁵

Yet the politicians/narrators in Qatar were aware of this issue and aimed in this juxtaposition to prevent the disappearance of the primary Qatari culture.⁷⁷⁶ Their handling of the question of the MIA's location is reminiscent of Lorena San Roman's suggestion that 'museums as mirrors of past and present societies show their progress and development, as well as their link with other societies influencing the world's development'.⁷⁷⁷

The location of the MIA, with its 'reordering across time and space', that brought about comparison has not resulted in the destruction of the values and meanings of Qatari cultural structures and identity.⁷⁷⁸ The actions of the Qatari politicians/narrators could help to prevent their society from being dislocated during the process of cultural change and development. In their mutual intention to develop the nation and protect national culture, they are trying to consider differences and simultaneously preserve rather than undermine them.⁷⁷⁹ This reflects a complex double movement. As Stuart Hall puts it, it is 'an attempt to capture the future by a determined long detour through the past'.⁷⁸⁰ Furthermore, protecting the national culture could avoid the Qatari leadership being seen as choosing 'goods of a single market' or sacrificing the national character and Qatari

⁷⁷⁴ Williams, p. 10.

⁷⁷⁵ Stuart Hall, 'Culture, Community, Nation', in *Representing the Nation: A Reader: Histories, Heritage and Museums*, ed. by David Boswell and Jessica Evans (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 34-44 (p. 36).

⁷⁷⁶ Hall, p. 36.

⁷⁷⁷ Lorena San Roman, 'Politics and the Role of Museums in the Rescue of Identity', in *Museums 2000*, ed. by Patrick Boylan (London and New York: Museums Association and Routledge, 1992), pp. 25-40 (p. 25).

⁷⁷⁸ Hall, p. 36.

⁷⁷⁹ Hall, pp. 37-39.

⁷⁸⁰ Hall, p. 39.

cultural identity.⁷⁸¹ The development of the museum provides evidence that the country has started building up its defences to protect its national culture, which might be seen as threatened by modern, global society.⁷⁸²

In his essay 'Modernity Again: The Museum as Trompe L'Oeil', Donald Preziosi suggests that museums can be social instruments that 'frame history, memory, and meaning'.⁷⁸³ The relationship between the MIA's location and its viewers situated on the entrance bridge suggests that the past has been staged 'as prologue to our presentness, predisposing that presence to a telling and narrative order'.⁷⁸⁴ On the bridge, the past is visually produced through retroaction, while the future is produced by anticipation. Visitors are subjects performing in the present and simultaneously are celebrants who enjoy and celebrate the past. In this respect, the MIA's location works as a window and provides evidence of the relationship between culture and socio-economic conditions.⁷⁸⁵ It seems that the politicians/narrators are attempting to combine two images; Qatar with its preserved past, and the present Qatar with its hopes for future development.⁷⁸⁶ Berger discusses the power of the image as follows:

Images were first made to conjure up the appearances of something that was absent. Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented; it then showed how something or somebody had once looked.⁷⁸⁷

The architecture and site of the MIA can be considered as providing an image of the whole process of economic and social history in the country

⁷⁸¹ Hall, p. 36.

⁷⁸² Hall, P. 36.

⁷⁸³ Donald Preziosi, 'Modernity Again: The Museum As Trompe L'Oeil', in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 141-150 (p. 141).

⁷⁸⁴ Preziosi, p. 141.

⁷⁸⁵ Preziosi, pp. 141-150.

⁷⁸⁶ Nader Vossoughian, 'The Modern Museum in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility: Otto Neurath and the Museum of Society and Economy in Vienna', in *European Modernism and the Information Society; Informing the Present, Understanding the Past*, ed. by W. Boyd Rayward (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 241-252 (p. 241).

⁷⁸⁷ Berger, p. 10.

from its initial dependence on the income from the pearl trade to the recent gas boom. On visualisation Berger says: 'It is seeing which establishes our place but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled'.⁷⁸⁸

The entrance bridge provides a view of a variety of traditional, modern and post-modern sites, such as Al-Farda, the Emiri Diwan, the Fanar Centre and other nearby buildings. This panorama demonstrates that Doha city has been planned systematically, and that, as its development has evolved, the essence of Qatari identity has been preserved. This is particularly true for the current regime.⁷⁸⁹ Hall suggests that the tendencies of globalisation and economic growth have had a negative effect on local culture, as he states:

The present intensified phase of globalisation has favoured the tendencies pushing nation-states towards supranational integration – economic, and, more reluctantly, political and cultural: weakening without destroying the nation-state and thereby opening up local and regional economies both to new dislocations and to new relations.⁷⁹⁰

It can be assumed that, to avoid the negative impact of economic growth and globalisation, the MIA's location was chosen with a particular mission in mind. Through its juxtaposed location, the MIA explains and documents the achievements of the current regime. It is particularly dedicated to highlighting the relationship between economic improvement and culture. The leadership has sought to prove through this arena that 'cultural development has been inseparable from overall national socio-economic development and modernization'.⁷⁹¹ Lorena San Roman states:

Museums are entities of expression for the life and development of the communities and because of the dynamism

⁷⁸⁸ Berger, p. 17.

⁷⁸⁹ Vossoughian, pp. 241-255.

⁷⁹⁰ Hall, pp. 36-37.

⁷⁹¹ Kreps, p. 35.

they are acquiring through us, they are becoming more and more important in the life of our communities. This means accepting more challenges and more responsibilities towards the community instead of being inactive and contemplative. Today, museums cannot be useless, because if they are they will disappear. They must play a role in the polemics of the country and in its socio-economical development.⁷⁹²

Indeed, the fact that museums in Qatar have been given a role in the country's socio-economic development is beyond doubt. In the location of the MIA, the politicians/narrators have sought to raise awareness of the constructive impact of the current regime upon national life. The Qatari politicians/narrators have reconsidered the mission of culture in an age that is dominated increasingly by mass information and technologies. Hence, through optical signals the MIA aims to make a profound statement to society about what the current regime offers. The physical model depicts macro-scale images of the impact of current political and economic systems in culture.⁷⁹³ The regime aims to highlight its investment of economic revenue in the cultural sector. As Berger suggests:

No other kind of relic or text from the past can offer such a direct testimony about the world which surrounded other people at other times. In this respect images are more precise and richer than literature.⁷⁹⁴

The political narrators in Qatar have recognised the power of the image. Perhaps also they have appreciated the notion 'that pictures and images [are] more universal than words'.⁷⁹⁵ Through the location of the MIA, they aim to express the phenomena of development. The uniqueness of the museum's image of past and present will play an essential role in framing the local and overseas visitors' understanding of the Qatari achievement. 'Museums are essentially a part of the political life of a country',⁷⁹⁶ and the MIA, with its juxtaposed location, presents an active voice in the Qatari national debate on the relative achievements of Sheikh

⁷⁹² Roman, pp. 29-30.

⁷⁹³ Roman, pp. 29-30.

⁷⁹⁴ Berger, p. 10.

⁷⁹⁵ Vossoughian, p. 244.

⁷⁹⁶ Roman, p. 33.

Hamad and his predecessors.⁷⁹⁷ ‘With these tools people will be able to discuss the [development] theme knowledgeably’.⁷⁹⁸ In creating this effect, the politicians/narrators in Qatar have visualised, ‘invisible phenomena, that is, social and economic processes that were not accessible to the naked eye’.⁷⁹⁹ The MIA works from its geographical location as a visual editor that facilitates and organises information to impact upon people’s perception. Each image is loaded with meaning. The gradual recognition of these scenes is a process that viewers can recognise. Neurath and Cohen propose:

At the first glance the most important aspect of the subject; obvious differences must be at once distinguishable. At the second glance, it should be possible to see the more important details; and at the third glance, whatever details there may be. A picture that has still further information to give at the fourth and fifth glance.⁸⁰⁰

The MIA has created a permanent site for a metaphoric message that the current politicians/narrators aim to make public. This proves particularly valid in respect to the national development of museums in Qatar, where they are adhering closely to government policy.⁸⁰¹ This raises the question of the extent to which this institution is concerned with an authentic image of Qatar. My main concern is to question what is more important in the Museum of Islamic Art: is it its architecture or its acquisitions? This narrative of Qatar’s development continues in the presentation of the objects and new acquisitions contained in the museum, which I will review and discuss in the next chapter.

⁷⁹⁷ Roman, pp. 25-41.

⁷⁹⁸ Roman, p. 27.

⁷⁹⁹ Vossoughian, p. 243.

⁸⁰⁰ Neurath and Cohen, p. 223.

⁸⁰¹ Roman, pp. 25-41.

CHAPTER FIVE. CURATORIAL PRACTICE: CONSTRUCTING A NARRATIVE THROUGH TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT EXHIBITIONS AT THE MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART

In the previous chapters, I have reviewed how Qatar Museums Authority was established and given fundamental responsibilities for the country's cultural development and the development of the Museum of Islamic Art. When QMA was established, it was purported to be an independent organisation. However, the issuing of Decree 26 (2009) during a ministerial re-shuffle officially placed QMA under the direct patronage of the Qatari Emir, which broke the myth of autonomy and uncovered important hidden facts. The supervision of the Emir, as well as the installation of his daughter Sheikha Al-Mayassa as the head of the organisation, proves that QMA is still politically controlled, just as the narrative of the 1990s was strongly politicised. This supports my suggestion that the narrative of the new museum philosophy is all about hierarchy and power, even though the politicians/narrators wish it to be seen as independent, in exactly the same way as they desire to portray Qatar as a democratic country. However, like Qatari 'democracy', the independent definition of the organisation of QMA is not truly independent, certainly not as the Western World would understand it. In Qatar, this independence means that QMA is a single autonomous organisation, independent of any other ministry or organisation in the country. Previously museums were placed under the patronage of the Media and Press Ministry and then under the National Council for Culture, Art and Heritage. Contrary to the rhetoric of independence, QMA actually falls under multiple layers of control and patronage. Thus, within its narrative, we have not just one narrative, but many layers of narration. These layers start right at the top, with the Emir, who is in fact the 'political party', as the first narrator; his daughter, the head of QMA is the second narrator; the QMA's curators become the third narrators; and finally the museums' curators are the fourth layer. Therefore, inevitably, there is a multiple construction of narrative upon narrative, and, on top of all these, is the narrative of the audiences. It is important, therefore, for

my thesis to explore why the politicians/narrators in Qatar are spending millions of pounds on buying collections and creating all these museum spaces. A possible answer will be explored through an examination of the exhibitions of the Museum of Islamic Art and the new museum philosophy in Qatar.

To begin, we should take account of the new museum practice in Qatar, which uses a new structure that is very different from the previous museum structure [Figs 76-77]. Khalid Al-Jabir, curator for the project to develop Qatar Natural History Museum, explains how the structure of recent museum development in Qatar has been organised. As Al-Jabir has said, it was agreed by the board of QMA that this structure would help to specify and organise the role of each department.⁸⁰² Consequently, each department would be able to identify its capacity, either in human resources or development and training programmes. This is in contrast to the structure that Qatar National Museum once had, where the museum's director had total control over curatorial decisions.

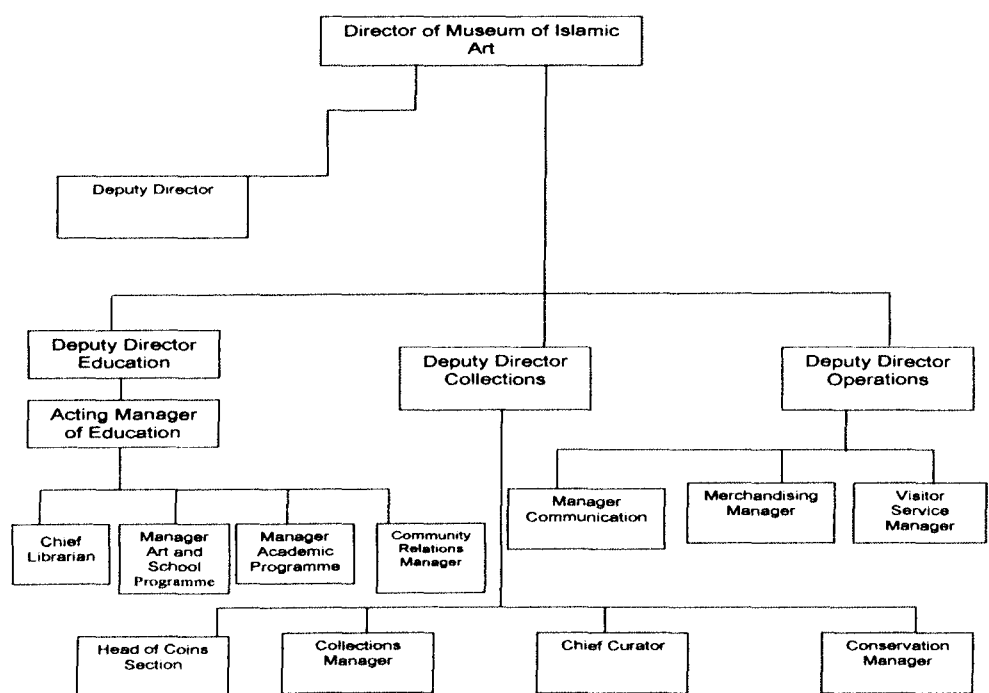


Fig. 76. Organisational Chart of the Museum of Islamic Art.

⁸⁰² Khalid Al-Jaber, interviewed on 25 March 2008.

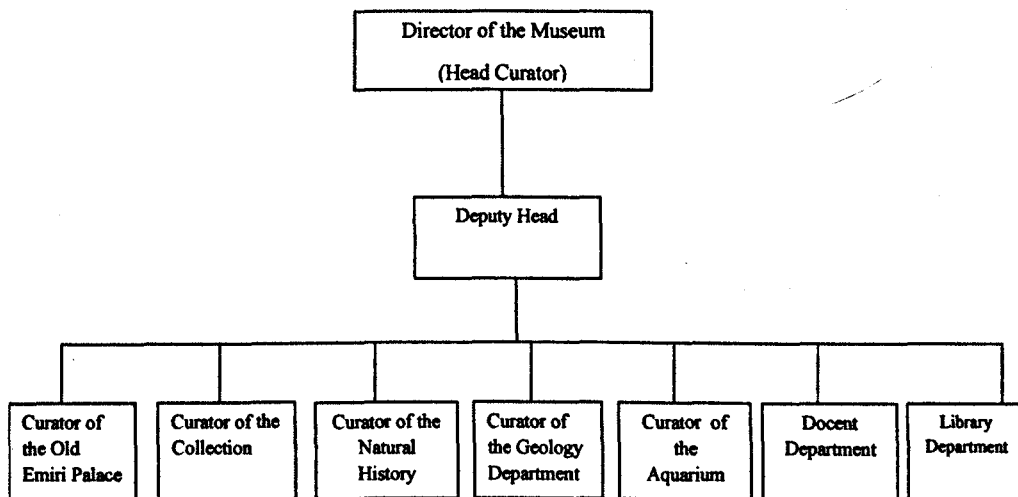


Fig. 77. Previous Organisational Chart of Qatar National Museum.

In Chapter Two, I analysed the Qatari government's recognition of the vital function of museums in the 1970s. However, this recognition was limited to the practice of constructing and developing a narrative of local heritage, via local ethnographical materials and history, which aimed to construct a national historical archive for the country.⁸⁰³ In the 1970s, Sheikh Khalifa believed in the powerful function of museums to move forward the spirit and mind of his community.⁸⁰⁴ He wished to enhance his community's knowledge through developing Qatar National Museum as an educational institution that facilitated the creation of a national narrative, knowledge and information using a great quantity of illustrations and films. As seen in Figures 78 and 79, the narrative of Bedouin weaving and the role of Bedouin women within this industry, focused on displaying the different materials used and items produced, along with photographs or films of women weaving or preparing wool, preparing the loom and displaying different patterns with their function.

⁸⁰³ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.

⁸⁰⁴ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.



Fig. 78. A display of weaving materials with different sizes and shapes of woven textiles demonstrates Bedouin weaving and the role of Bedouin women in this industry, as displayed at Qatar National Museum in 1999. The display was enhanced by videos and illustrations that showed how women prepared to weave.

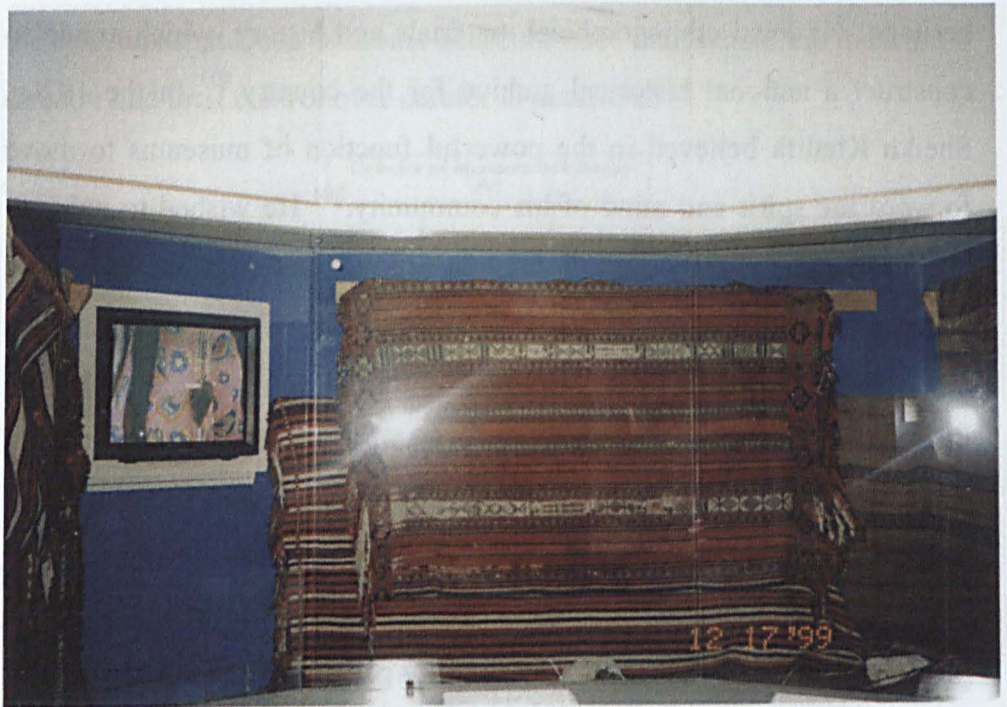


Fig. 79. A display of part of a woven tent and a video (at the back) demonstrating how a Bedouin woman prepared wool for weaving a tent, as displayed at Qatar National Museum in 1999.

Likewise, in Figures 80 and 81, the display of Qatari natural history was enhanced with specimens and a multitude of text panels, photographs and films. Nonetheless, different obstacles stood in the way of making the

educational function of the museum effective. Perhaps the greatest obstacle was the lack of communication between the museum, the public and schools, not helped by the poor presentation methods.⁸⁰⁵

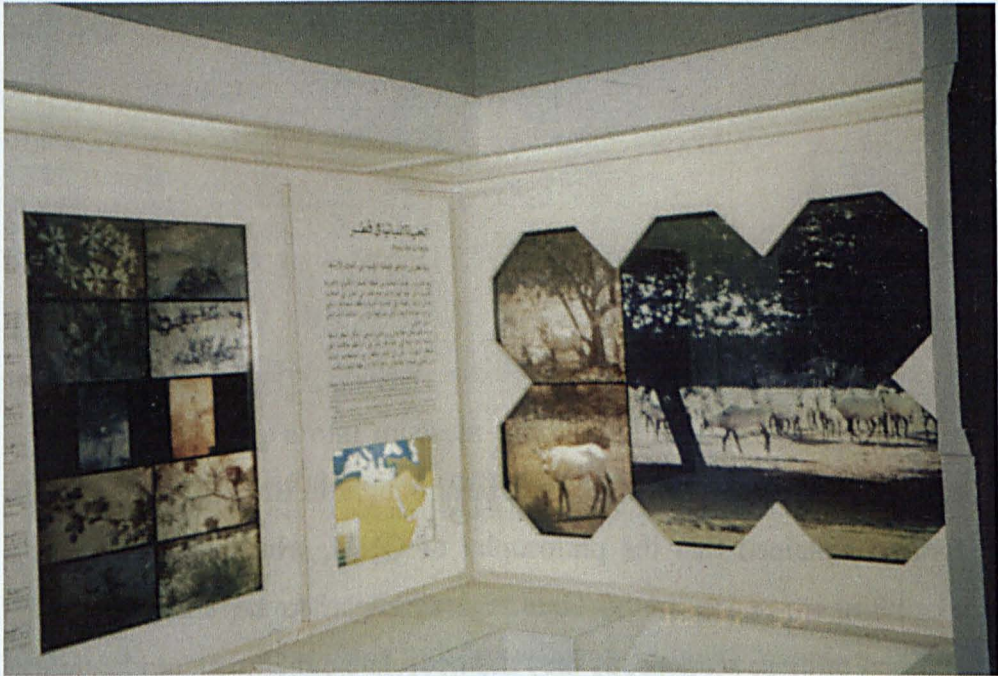


Fig. 80. Photographs, texts, specimens and video films were used in the natural history section to illustrate the wildlife of Qatar at Qatar National Museum in 1999.



Fig. 81. Films show how the Qatari used the surrounding harsh desert environment, as displayed at Qatar National Museum in 1999.

⁸⁰⁵ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.

When I interviewed the archaeologist Mohammed Jassim Al-Khulaifi, he explained that, although QNM was developed with a clear philosophy of serving a new educational agenda and constructing the country's narrative by utilising national ethnographical materials, history and heritage, this aim was affected more or less by the curators' own interests.⁸⁰⁶ The original narrative of the cultural heritage of the country was frequently destroyed by the additions that certain curators introduced. For instance, the curator Darwish Al-Far followed his interests as a geologist and developed a geology gallery in which most of the collection had been brought from abroad, and in 1984 the curator Ibrahim Al-Jaber transformed the lecture hall of the museum into a gallery to display a collection of Islamic coins that had been bought in Britain.⁸⁰⁷ Al-Khulaifi further explained that the philosophy of QNM, which had begun as a pioneering museum in the Gulf region, began to be changed by the addition of these sections, as they did not relate either to Qatari history or ethnography.⁸⁰⁸ A major consequence of this activity was the neglect of galleries that had originally been intended to display Qatari archaeological and ethnographical materials. Many objects, such as those in Figure 82, were cluttered into a single cabinet in a random display with unsuitable backgrounds and lighting. Although these objects could have been used to narrate an important period in Qatari archaeological history, their display did not reflect this. Nor did it emphasise the importance of these objects as the few survivors of their kind. Instead they were displayed without real consideration of the actual narrative or effective display techniques, and were missing labels and vital explanations. This made them less attractive for visitors.

⁸⁰⁶ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.

⁸⁰⁷ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.

⁸⁰⁸ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.



Fig. 82. Archaeological objects were massed randomly in a single cabinet at Qatar National Museum in 1999.

The display in Figure 83, for example, was meant to recreate a traditional bridal room, the 'Al-Khala', the space in the bride's family home in which a newly married couple would historically have spent their wedding night.⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰⁹'Qatari Weddings'

<http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:MU8ikV6agQYJ:www.elanguages.org/files/20492+old+traditional+weeding+room+in+qatar&hl=en&gl=uk&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESirMOibv6xHN3LHCNrtGn1hZ09gBX_1u-ccDQBrjG-aawWwAxH_7fSxEUuTUQREBFxgzKsJQjiDB-xkxgFM55Wkg-onKXfgPneaGonjSpz2215dWab_OuAUcE9ub5zgqkqCKP&sig=AHIEtbQ78tCwAPxL5U2AlcVfK6ICfAIPZA> [accessed 23 September 2011].



Fig. 83. A random presentation of a traditional bride's room at Qatar National Museum in 1999.

Before the wedding day, the Al-Khala's four walls would have been decorated with green silk, mirrors and colourful baubles. The couple would spend their first week of marriage in this room receiving family and friends who would come to congratulate them, before they moved to their first home.⁸¹⁰ The display of this room demonstrated an important custom in Qatari society, focussing on traditional activities, people's relationships and how these were demonstrated through festivities and the roles women used to play in such occasions. However, visitors to the museum could only find one label with a brief title and no further explanation about why this room used to be decorated with such materials and colours. The display of the Al-Khala, therefore, missed the opportunity to narrate one of the most important and intimate relationships in Qatari society during the pre-oil period. Instead, the room's presentation meant that its inclusion in the exhibition was meaningless for most visitors. Likewise, the room set-up shown in Figure 84 was meant to present the simplicity of a traditional Qatari kitchen. The objects, however, were cluttered on the shelves and floor, with no labelling to identify them or explain their function. This contrasts with the

⁸¹⁰ 'Qatari weddings'.

more recent displays in the Museum of Islamic Art [Fig. 85], where objects are placed in a single cabinet that helps narrate their stories through various techniques such as layout, placement, juxtaposition with other objects and text. During his visit to the national museum in 2000, the collector Sheikh Hassan Bin Mohammed criticised the display of the Qatari ethnographical materials as one similar to the exhibitions that would have been organised in schools.⁸¹¹



Fig. 84. Everyday objects displayed without any taxonomic order at Qatar National Museum in 1999.

⁸¹¹ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.



Fig. 85. New presentation techniques used to display archaeological specimens in the Museum of Islamic Art in 2009.

Al-Khulaifi attributed the changes in the museum since the 1970s to various reasons, but particularly to the lack of interest in interpreting objects for a visiting public. In the 1990s the First Gulf War greatly affected the museum when concerns for the security of politicians and other official visitors forced the government to stop taking important State visitors on museum visits, and the government's interest in developing and maintaining the museum with its galleries was weakened.⁸¹² Neglect led to the deterioration of the colours in the illustrations and the fading of the backdrop in the cabinets, as can be seen in my illustrations.⁸¹³ Another vital reason for this neglect was the decision of the new government to reconstruct a national narrative by adopting a new model based on Western museums, on new ideologies and new functions that allowed people to view their 'traditional cultures in larger contexts'.⁸¹⁴ The recently reawakened recognition of the importance of the role of museums offers proof of this later assumption: this was the reason for the withdrawal of all new museum projects in the

⁸¹² Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.

⁸¹³ Al-Khulaifi, interviewed on 22 March 2008.

⁸¹⁴ Kreps, p. 13.

1970s until the decision to develop the Museum of Islamic Art and re-open Qatar National Museum with a new narrative based on a Western model. Sheikh Hassan emphasised that previous museum practice in Qatar was more folkloric and focused on the narrative of displaying local heritage and tradition, people's daily life and everyday objects. The MIA in contrast is more focused on the narrative of displaying and interpreting art, demonstrating Islamic achievement in different sciences and fields and evidencing Islamic influences in different cultures.⁸¹⁵

Curatorial Practice in the Temporary and Permanent Exhibitions at the Museum of Islamic Art: the Construction of a New Narrative

As stated earlier, the narrative of the 1990s consisted of layers of narratives and narrators. At the top of the layers stands the narrative of the politicians, who wished to deliver certain messages and interpretations in a global context. This political dimension was very important for, as Caroline Lang, John Reeve and Vicky Woollard state:

Anyone studying the place of museums and galleries in society has to understand both politics and government policy at national and local level. The relationship of the government, national and local, with its cultural institutions largely determines their function within the community and the type of service they deliver. Governments may see the role of museums in a variety of ways: as primarily representing a desirable identity for the nation; operating as a public space owned by the wider community; as an instrumental tool for social, economic and educational advancement [...] Politics can determine attitudes, standards and levels of services.⁸¹⁶

This is certainly the case with the MIA in Qatar, when Decree 26 revealed the myth of independence and instead announced QMA as a

⁸¹⁵ Ahmed Janabi, 'Qatar Unveils Islamic Arts Museum', *Al-Jazeera English Channel*, November 2008
<<http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/2008/11/20081122145957210396.html>> [accessed 30 May 2009].

⁸¹⁶ Caroline Lang, John Reeve and Vicky Woollard, 'The impact of Government Policy', in *The Responsive Museum: Working With Audiences in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. by Caroline Lang, John Reeve and Vicky Woollard (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 19-28 (p. 19).

governmentally- controlled organisation.⁸¹⁷ Decree 26 reflects the politicians'/narrators' intention to utilise the narrative of the museum imposed by labelling, texts, exhibition layouts, cases, space and the hierarchy of objects in such a way that the audience's experience and understanding was directed through the organisation of the exhibitions.⁸¹⁸ Consequently, this has meant that the narrators' mission has become more focused on the political dimension and museum policy has had to take account of the government's political agenda as presented by the politicians and curators. This marks a move from the politician as narrator to the curator as narrator. The narratives presented by the curators have sharp ideological and political edges. Therefore, when the curators/narrators write labels or texts or organise exhibitions, they are not simply doing their professional jobs they are also bringing to the objects a whole new set of political and ideological ideas that descend from the highest layer, the government. An important question to raise here is whether or not the curators/narrators were aware of how problematic it could be for them to become involved in such a political agenda?

Stephen Weil, a former deputy director of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC, proposes that museums 'are [mostly] mission-driven organizations and that an inherent tension exists between a museum's mission and its environment'.⁸¹⁹ The political environment surrounding the MIA in Qatar is such that the politicians/narrators are actively aiming to develop the international profile of the country, which obliges the curators/narrators to follow a particular strategy. As Gary Edson and David Dean argue:

The change today is from human-centered to global. In any case, the possibilities are so great and the directions so diverse, that although meaningful conclusions may be anticipated, the

⁸¹⁷ 'Sheikha Al-Mayassa Heads the Meeting of the Board of Trustees of QMA', *Al-Raya newspaper*, 8 June 2009, p. 12.

⁸¹⁸ Bal, pp. 96-99.

⁸¹⁹ Neil Kotler and Philip Kotler, *Museum Strategy and Marketing* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publisher, 1998), p. 31.

way of achieving them is confusing [...] The real challenge to museum workers is to have a broad view of global issues and to determine what can be done to make a difference. They must also consider how to make those issues available to the visitor.⁸²⁰

Adding value to the museum's mission in this global and political context is a critical issue as it means that curators/narrators will have to extend what they see as their role and consider how they can communicate more effectively with the public. Therefore, for the curators/narrators, a socially responsible museological practice ought to be the ideal. However, this does not mean that there will not be conflicts of interest and tensions between the public's interpretation and what the curators intended. Museum audiences do not always passively accept what interpretations are presented; on the contrary, they can be very active interpreters.⁸²¹ This, in turn, means that objects in museums have multiple meanings, educational purposes, and interpretations, all of which influence the creation of a narrative. Thus, there are multiple activities happening in the museum space.⁸²² When examining the curators'/narrators' mission and narrative in this chapter, I will demonstrate that the Qatari political agenda has had a significant impact on their work at the MIA. The political agenda of globalisation, in its turn, provides an established infrastructure of institutional networks for the curators/narrators. They depend on this to support their education and outreach activities and policies, the subjects of their exhibitions and educational programmes. In this context, curators function as sanctioned intermediaries between the politicians' vision and consumers such as the visitor.⁸²³ They become 'arbiters of taste and quality' and obtain their authority from the ideology that the politicians/narrators in Qatar have adopted in order to serve the country's interest in presenting itself as a peacemaker between Islam and

⁸²⁰ Gary Edson and David Dean, *The Handbook for Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 4-9.

⁸²¹ Bal, pp. 96-99.

⁸²² Kotler and Kotler, pp. 28-40.

⁸²³ Mari Carmen Ramirez, 'Brokering Identities: Art Curators and the Politics of Cultural Representation', in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 22-35 (p. 22).

other civilisations.⁸²⁴ Thus it is apparent that the development of a new narrative within the museum corresponds to the economic and political shifts that the country is witnessing at present.⁸²⁵ Curators/narrators involved in education and outreach have had to operate with new policies that correspond with the prevailing political ideology, no matter how much or little the politicians interfere in the cultural milieu. Figure 86 is one example of the strong link and influence of the country's political agenda on the museum narrative as a miniature of a cow and calf from a Mughal album has been displayed alongside the figures of a cow and her calf from Syria. The Mughal dynasty ruled India for more than three centuries; their albums of calligraphy and paintings help interpret the culture and history of this dynasty, which is an important period in Indian history.⁸²⁶ By displaying these pieces together, the curator/narrator suggests the influences of two different cultures on each other, or a common interest in spite of distances in time and place.

⁸²⁴ Ramirez, p. 22.

⁸²⁵ Schubert, pp. 67-80.

⁸²⁶ Elaine Wright, *Muraqqa': Imperial Mughal Albums* (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 2008), pp. 17-18.



Fig. 86. Cow and Calf miniature from the Mughal album, India, c.1570 displayed with a statue of a cow and calf from Syria, 2009.

The cow and calf miniature and figure have a particular symbolic value and status for the construction of the narrators' myth. They are used as one piece of a larger narrative, to the extent that they were placed together to conjure up previous times and memories. They celebrate the sense that Islamic culture was similar across time and space. They used this approach to portray an idealised, harmonious relationship between two different cultures that they presented as the same culture: Islamic. Thus, the curators/narrators juxtaposed the objects in order to manipulate how visitors viewed the past. In this way an imaginary, re-constructed past has been incorporated into a present-day narrative in order to facilitate and support the politicians'/narrators' policy.⁸²⁷ The objects have been abstracted from their original narrative and placed into constructed

⁸²⁷ Baudrillard (2005), pp. 43-46.

circumstances, relationships, and an atmosphere of the curators' own choosing. Together the objects become part of a certain system through which an imaginary narrative is constructed and facts are distorted so that they can be integrated into the wider structure of the museum's narrative. However, there is the potential for the audience to debate these juxtapositions. They may well refute the evidence and, in the process, become new narrators themselves, adding yet another layer of interpretation or meaning. Indeed, the audiences' approach to the objects and exhibitions may differ according to their background. The way we see objects, the way we understand and read them, varies from one individual to another.⁸²⁸

In the next section, I will analyse how the narrators meant their presentation of objects to be understood in the opening exhibition, 'Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures'.

The Political Narrative of the Opening Exhibition 'Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures' (22 November 2008-22 February 2009)

The opening ceremony of the Museum of Islamic Art coincided with the opening of the temporary exhibition, 'Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures'. Twenty-five museums from around the world were invited to participate with the loan of objects from their own Islamic collections. These institutions included the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum and the Rothschild Collection in the United Kingdom, the Metropolitan Museum and Los Angeles County Museum in the USA, the Louvre Museum in France, the Al-Zahra Archaeological Collection in Spain, the Indian National Museum, the Iranian National Museum, the Opera Museum in Italy, the Islamic Museum in Cairo, the Islamic Museum in Turkey, the Middle East Centre in Japan and the Divide Danish Collection.⁸²⁹ Each museum was asked to choose pieces

⁸²⁸ Baudrillard (2005), pp. 43-46.

⁸²⁹ Ayman Saqer, 'Museum of Islamic Arts: cultural antique', *Al-Sharq newspaper*, 10 August 2008, p. 27.

that represented the cultural variety of Islam.⁸³⁰ Qatar Museums Authority aimed to mark its establishment by presenting the MIA to the world as ‘a centre for dialogue’.⁸³¹ The Chief Executive Officer at Qatar Museums Authority, Abdulla Al-Najjar, introduced ‘Beyond Boundaries’ as a ‘universal exhibition’.⁸³² Al-Najjar use of this term in the global campaign is pertinent.⁸³³ In the ‘Declaration of the Importance and Value of Universal Museums’ (2003), the director of the British Museum, Neil MacGregor (along with eighteen other European and American museum directors) popularised this term in modern museum parlance in order to justify the existence of artefacts from around the world in their collections.⁸³⁴ In recent articles, MacGregor has explained that ‘universal exhibition’ refers to the importance of memory as part of an individual’s identity.⁸³⁵ Every society has its own time-specific systems, rituals and objects that help it remember or be remembered. Accordingly, galleries, museums and contemporary exhibitions create a direct link to our memories.⁸³⁶ Despite being a ‘hazardous activity’, accommodating objects from different cultures to create cross-cultural and cross-boundary exhibitions allows museums to encourage an intellectual dialogue within a range of human ideas and experiences from different cultures.⁸³⁷ Hence, the ‘universal exhibition’ is justified as both a theatre of memory and a fruitful space that allows ‘cross-cultural investigation’.⁸³⁸ As such, the term was used by Abdulla Al-Najjar to defend the accumulation of artefacts from many countries and collections at the MIA under the

⁸³⁰ Saqer, p. 27.

⁸³¹ ‘Museum for Islamic Art to be Opened in Qatar’, *World Bulletin* <http://www.worldbulletin.net/news_detail.php?id=23550> [accessed 8 June 2008].

⁸³² Saqer, p. 27.

⁸³³ Saqer, p. 27.

⁸³⁴ ‘Declaration of the Importance and Value of Universal Museums’, *ICOM News* (57) 1 <http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/ICOM_News/2004-1/eng/p4_2004-1.pdf> (Paris: ICOM, 2004) [accessed 18 September 2012].

⁸³⁵ ‘A History of Neil MacGregor’s Vision of the British Museum in One Hundred (Mostly Legitimately Acquired) Artefacts’, *Elginism* <<http://www.elginism.com/20101117/3256/>> [accessed 30 November 2010].

⁸³⁶ The British Museum, ‘The Museum of the Mind: Art and Memory in world cultures’, *Studio International* <<http://www.studio-international.co.uk/museology/museum.asp>>, 8 July 2003 [accessed 10 March 2009].

⁸³⁷ John Mack, *The Museum of the Mind: Art and Memory in World Cultures* (London: The British Museum Press, 2003), p. 9.

⁸³⁸ Mack, p. 9.

banner of 'Islamic' culture. How did Qatar Museums Authority gauge whether these cultural materials were representative of the variety of Islamic culture as a whole? Why did Qatar choose to borrow items for the museum's first exhibition? How did the exhibition aim to provoke such a narrative of universal dialogue? Most importantly, can we see this as a constructivist exhibition that allows an individual to construct his/her own meaning through individual engagement with the objects in the exhibition context? These questions are worthy of investigation, particularly when one considers the value of the indigenous collection that the MIA already owns and exhibits in the permanent galleries on the first and second floors.

Qatar Museums Authority stated in its advertising campaign that 'the museum's acquisitions include thousands of unique, important and rare pieces, which date back to the seventh to nineteenth centuries'.⁸³⁹ Al-Najjar has written that:

The Museum of Islamic Art is the pioneering project of Qatar Museums Authority, a true symbol of Islamic architecture and a state-of-the-art museum which reflects the history, influence and achievements of Islamic art.⁸⁴⁰

He further claimed that 'these pieces belong to historical Islamic civilizations believed to have extended into three continents, from west Spain to central Asia and east India'.⁸⁴¹ Confidently, QMA announced its belief that the MIA would be unique not only in the Gulf but worldwide and create a distinctive landmark in museum and archaeological history.⁸⁴²

This impacts on why the collection was borrowed and 'universal'. It could be argued that the exhibition involves two kinds of acts, the act of

⁸³⁹ 'Campaign for Islamic Art Museum ends in Berlin', *The Peninsula*, 22 June 2008 <http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/Display_news&month=june2008&file=local_news> [accessed 18 July 2008].

⁸⁴⁰ 'Campaign for Islamic Art Museum ends in Berlin'.

⁸⁴¹ Saqer, p. 27.

⁸⁴² Saqer, p. 27.

displaying these exhibits within a single representative exhibition, and the act of each participant choosing what meaning to derive from each exhibit. However, the effect of both acts will be used for the benefit of the whole museum's narrative, which presents Islamic culture as a monolith. Thus, the narrative concentrates on proving the existence of cultural dialogue and harmonious relationships between Islam and other cultures and religions. Within the exhibition, the subject of the narrators has been stated clearly. A clue to their intention can be found in Sheikha Al-Mayassa's forward to the exhibition catalogue for 'Beyond Boundaries' where she states:

The works gathered here express three aspects of an open-minded Islam throughout its history: an open interest in other religions, a generous interchange of artistic designs and a deep interest in scientific enquiry from whatever source [...] Examples of the absorption of artistic motifs, issuing from Islamic art and vice versa from neighbouring cultures, remain endless. Some have been chosen in order to demonstrate that when speaking of beauty, there is no boundary, neither dogmatic nor political. By the sheer precocity of their scientific output, we are reminded of the Arab world's immense contribution to saving the scientific heritage of Greek antiquity [...] It is time to remind the public at large that this Islamic generosity has prevailed in many other aspects of intellectual, religious and daily life for a multitude of peoples over many centuries.⁸⁴³

However, the concentration on narratives of cultural dialogue and harmonious relationships created an 'un-constructivist' exhibition. The exhibition offered a predetermined interpretation that lacked any acknowledgement of the possibilities of multiple interpretations and learning, lacked a 'presentation of a range of points of view' that would create room for the visitors to make a connection and link with familiar objects and concept, and failed to encourage comparison between the new mediated knowledge and experiences and familiar knowledge and experiences.⁸⁴⁴ Within the temporary exhibition, the curators/narrators

⁸⁴³ *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures*, exhibition guide (Doha: Museum of Islamic Art Press, 2008), p. 9.

⁸⁴⁴ Jane Deeth, 'Engaging Strangeness in the Art Museum: An Audience Development Strategy', *Museums and Society*, 10:1 (March 2012), 1-14.

used panels, labels and texts, and the objects were placed and arranged to create the narrative of a harmonious relationship. This narrative was created by juxtaposing objects or objects and texts or objects and panels. At the entrance to the exhibition, the directional labelling enhanced the politicians' narrative. Thus, a constant correlation between words and objects was used throughout the exhibition to influence the audiences' reading of the narrative. The example of a loan from the Zisa Museum in Italy is revealing. This institution, self-defined as an Islamic museum, holds items from the Arab world in Sicily. It participated in the exhibition by loaning a marble-encrusted Commemoration stone or stele in four languages [Fig. 87]. The four languages on the stone – Greek, Hebrew, Arabic and Latin – were utilised by the curators/narrators to provide testimony to the harmony between Islam and different religions in a period of Sicily's history during the reigns of King Roger I and his son Roger II. A text panel offered the interpretation of the stele as follows:

To some extent the Grisanto stele mirrors the period in which many cultures co-existed peacefully within the Norman Kingdom of Sicily. The Arab text shows the grandiloquent titles derived from standard usage of Muslim rulers. Roger II presents himself to his Muslim population in terms they understand and thus legitimises his rule in their eyes. He considers this large part of the population as his true subjects, no less than the communities of other faiths.



Fig. 87. The Commemoration Stone in Four Languages, dated 1149, coll. Zisa Museum, Italy, displayed at the first MIA Temporary Exhibition, Qatar.

According to Kenneth Burke, historians and curators must choose how to present 'matters of fact'.⁸⁴⁵ This allows each interpreter to characterise, summarise and locate the objects within a specific and subjective narrative and period. In the same interpretation, the museum can present its pieces individually or contrast them with pieces developed in the Islamic world, but belonging to different eras, countries and stages, thus creating a cultural dialogue.⁸⁴⁶ However, within the interpretation of the exhibition, the curators/narrators may not have considered the diversity of their audiences' interpretations, knowledge, concepts, understanding and readings. Therefore, instead of contextualising the objects, the interpretation that they imposed undermined any opportunity for any other interpretations and narratives. Thus, audiences might find that there were no paths to make connections with the new experiences or construct their own interpretations. Rather, the curators/narrators point of view was intended to dominate. Therefore, it could be argued that the absence of a constructivist approach meant that the art works in the exhibition were

⁸⁴⁵ Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1945), p. 50.

⁸⁴⁶ Burke, p. 50.

used as evidence for 'historical facts' about these cultural materials and relationships, instead of offering engagement with the artworks themselves. This interpretation was established using a wide range of texts, but these were mainly imaginary rather than based on historical fact. The value of the objects, therefore, was seen in the connection made between the reason and circumstances of their production and the relationships between producers and consumers.⁸⁴⁷ I would argue here that this value and interpretation cannot be regarded as a direct experience or engagement with the objects presented. To engage directly with objects, they should be put in a broader context where audiences could be offered a variety of interpretations such as the social context of the object's production, why and for whom it had been produced, how it had been made and understood over time and its material life. While the exhibition successfully introduced artefacts from various cultures, its strategy in creating a predetermined narrative did not seek to promote the audiences' direct engagement with the artworks nor did it provide multiple points and methods of access. Instead, it provided access to the objects through one single point, 'Islamic culture as a monolith'. The only thing the audience was asked to do was observe and accept the curators'/narrators' narrative, rather than exploring the objects themselves. In this context, the objects became active, while audiences' imaginations became correspondingly passive.⁸⁴⁸ Visitors were discouraged from constructing their own interpretations.⁸⁴⁹ The curators/narrators omitted any consideration of important aspects of visual thinking strategies, which could allow for an implicit understanding of the object, such as:

Constructive viewers who determine value in terms of their sense of what is realistic; viewers who adopt the analytical and critical stance of the art historian [...] leading to exploration; viewers who experience a personal encounter with art through appreciation of the subtleties of line and shape and colour.⁸⁵⁰

⁸⁴⁷ Deeth, pp. 4-7.

⁸⁴⁸ Deeth, pp. 4-7.

⁸⁴⁹ Deeth, pp. 4-7.

⁸⁵⁰ Deeth, p. 6.

It is worth remembering that audiences sometimes visit a museum because they wish to share personal experience and knowledge with others through engagement with objects. This might also be driven by the need 'to define and affirm their identity'.⁸⁵¹ Therefore, a predetermined narrative does not provide them with an opportunity to explore and interpret their own experiences. Objects that act as triggers, which enable an audience to conjure up a picture or portrayal of what might have happened historically, are frequently used in museums. In the temporary exhibition 'Beyond Boundaries', such triggers were specifically used as evidence of 'historical facts'.⁸⁵² Perhaps this is why this 'un-constructivist' exhibition used multiple texts that aimed to prevent viewers from developing their own interpretation based on experience and observation. The objects displayed in the opening exhibition did not necessarily represent narratives of harmonious relationships and cultural dialogue. Nevertheless, the MIA's curators/narrators display them with the deliberate purpose of promoting such narratives. By emphasising the apparent harmony between Islam and other religions, the ambition was to encourage visitors to accept the existence of this positive dialogue. For example, in the exhibition entrance, the introductory panel stated 'this exhibition enlarges the field to include interactions between the world of Islam and that of other cultures and religions'.⁸⁵³

Visitors to the exhibition were instructed, via the interpretation systems and the juxtaposition of objects, to view these artefacts as functioning in a larger dialogue. From the beginning, the MIA was determined to influence its audience's thinking. This was realised via different methods and techniques, for example, the exhibition used large panels, each referring directly to a specific religion alongside Islam [Fig. 88].

⁸⁵¹ Deeth, p. 11.

⁸⁵² Deeth, pp. 11-12.

⁸⁵³ Introduction poster for the exhibition, 'Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures', 22 November-17 March 2009.



Fig. 88. A view of the temporary exhibition and its panels identifying the major world religions.



Fig. 89. A closer view of the panels, making direct reference to Western cultures.



Fig. 90. Panels at the Museum of Islamic Art's temporarily exhibition, referring to the relationships between Islam and Hinduism and China (Buddhism).

The panels did not say anything about the other religions; their main function was only to stress the interaction between Islam and its neighbours from other religions or cultures during different historical periods. For instance, the panels shown in Figures 89 and 90 associated Italy with Islamic Spain, Venice with the Ottoman Empire, Christian Europe with Islamic Spain, Hinduism and Islam, and Islam and Buddhism (using China as representative). Here the narrators/curators exploited the politics of interpretation in order to further their own ends by presenting a new, less contentious image of Islam to the world. This aim developed into an ideology that they used to tell the story of Islam to their visitors as part of the new narrative of museum culture in Qatar, which not only influenced museum displays but frequently restricted the individual curator's freedom.⁸⁵⁴

In practice this has meant that the curators are conscious that they must often ignore the opportunity to create alternative groupings of objects,

⁸⁵⁴ Spivak (1985), p. 259.

thus restricting their potential historical meaning. The curators/narrators were concerned with constructing a global narrative and, as such, this ideological interpretation has interfered with other potential interpretations of Islamic history. By juxtaposing Islam with other world cultures and religions, the panels gave a strong impression that Islam had been involved in world culture and trade for centuries, but the extent to which a claim was made for the dominance of Islam may not be historically accurate. The curators/narrators claimed that they had researched the history of these objects and uncovered the circumstances of their production, which, in their interpretation, proved their link to Islam. A new narrative was created around the objects by detaching them from their original cultural context and re-plotting them in a new exhibition. This gave legitimacy to the myth of Islamic harmony and historical cross-cultural and global relationships as the curators/narrators assumed that this approach would reduce or even prevent the audience making any other, equally subjective, interpretations. However, their assumption was problematic because there is always a temptation to place politically motivated interpretations under a microscope. Therefore, the temptation is to analyse further the relationship between pure object and applied narrative. This in turn can be reduced to a comparison between the narrative that was constructed and the objects that were thus interpreted. Either the viewer accepts the 'story' that has been 'written' by the exhibition or rejects it because it has been applied to the socio-political narrative. The ideology of the narrative sustains its meaning only if one accepts the hierarchy of its main creators.⁸⁵⁵ There are those who use the broader concept of this ideology – uniting culture, art, politics, economic and social concepts in their philosophy – to serve their simulacrum and hegemonic narrative. The panels, which were meant to direct attention to the relationships between Islam and certain specified cultures, could also invoke many readings of these relationships rather than just a harmonious one. Furthermore, if these harmonious

⁸⁵⁵ Bal, pp. 87-96.

relationships had actually existed, their continuity and sustainability would be demonstrable as well.

Sheikha Al-Mayassa has suggested that the interpretation of the exhibition and the suggestions made in the panels were deliberately intended to change perceptions of Islamic culture. Yet, the use of this ideology 'to interpret [...] in order to transform' appears somewhat optimistic.⁸⁵⁶ If, instead, the curators/narrators had concentrated on researching, theorising and documenting the complex and often contradictory nature of ancient cross-cultural relationships, they might have produced a narrative that encouraged deeper questioning of the relationship between Islam and other civilisations. The rewriting of history is always subjective and frequently hegemonic when we document historical events for certain purposes in a particular context. At best, a simulacrum of international relations has been created artificially, and further enhanced by textual suggestion. Regardless of whether or not such assumed inter-relationships ever existed, they have been used to some extent to create an imitation or substitute narrative, a simulacrum.⁸⁵⁷ This describes neither an ancient Qatari Islamic culture nor 'Islamic culture', because there is more than one 'Islamic culture'. It is evident from the way the narrators presented Islamic culture that they wanted 'to formulate a coherent notion of explanation and culture that would accommodate all of us as belonging to that one culture'.⁸⁵⁸ However, those Qatari visitors who are conscious of their own identity did not find themselves in this presentation of Islamic culture, as it did not represent diverse Islamic countries and their actual relationships with others. Within the exhibition, there were multiple ideas of what Islamic culture might be, but the curators/narrators tapped into these multiple ideas and selectively chose what served to convey their own ideas and narrative. Therefore, the panels aimed to provide an answer to the nature of ancient

⁸⁵⁶ Spivak (1985), p. 271.

⁸⁵⁷ Spivak (1988), pp. 139-160.

⁸⁵⁸ Spivak (1988), p. 141.

Islamic culture and its relationships as somehow representative of our relationships or 'us' or 'we', but this was incomprehensible to many visitors. In fact, the curators'/narrators' desire to explain the nature of ancient relationships was symptomatic of their desire to explore 'self'.⁸⁵⁹ This imagined 'self' could transfer, control and solve global relationships with Islamic culture. However, I would argue that this presentation suggests that there is one 'correct self analysis'.⁸⁶⁰ Thus, a deconstructive approach allows us to reverse and direct such analysis toward ourselves. Presuming that the presentation of these panels is constitutive and regulative their ability to alter one's knowledge is questionable.⁸⁶¹ Deconstruction teaches us, as focalisers, to question and offer a critique of 'all transcendental idealisms' (ideas that are used to create an utopic narrative around Islamic culture).⁸⁶² Within the temporary exhibition, speculation was introduced as historical fact. The panels and the artefacts helped to create the narrators' socio-political-historical platform. They became a programme constituted of semiotic and symptomatic readings that refer to other hidden meanings. Historical relationships and events were discursively constituted and narrated in different ways. How these events existed, how these harmonious relationships occurred, were all produced within a discursive formation. This is a formation of knowledge, a formation of concept and a formation of ideology. This political agenda is evidenced by the Emir's speech at the third Conference on the Dialogue of Religions (29 June 2005):

It is known that an atmosphere of caution has prevailed for a long time between Muslims and others, some traces of which are still present until now, which appear for instance in some publications of one party or the other. Therefore, one of the main obstacles that has to be surpassed so that our dialogue can be fruitful is a psychological obstacle which is directly related to the cultural legacy of long epochs. The start now must be based on an earnest desire to re-establish communication with the civilisational and cultural heritage of the other so as to form a joint human system free of aggressiveness. There must be

⁸⁵⁹ Spivak (1988), pp. 139-160.

⁸⁶⁰ Spivak (1988), p. 141.

⁸⁶¹ Spivak (1988), pp. 139-160.

⁸⁶² Spivak (1988), p. 140.

conviction in the autonomy of cultures, self-respect and difference of basic references, without discrediting the other or excluding him from the general picture of humanity. Such a start can be established on the common denominators derived from the civilisational environments of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, which were intertwined and intermingled through time. That is why we think that the dialogue between religions is apt to positively reflect on the dialogue between civilisations.⁸⁶³

These panels and artefacts use metaphors as vehicles for greater and broader meanings, as the ideology that constructed them is strongly informed by the politicians'/narrators' agenda.⁸⁶⁴ It is informed by an hegemonic presentation of self and others. The MIA contributed to the exhibition from its own collection with a display of two ceramic tiles and a bowl [Fig. 91] that aimed to demonstrate the co-existence of different religions with Islam. This intention was stated clearly in the display panels:

The decline of the Iznik ceramics during the 17th century in Turkey left the field open for other centres of production, among which was Kutaya, 200 km east of Istanbul. As a town with a large Armenian Christian population, its workshops were particularly patronised by Christian customers, as shown by this bowl with the twelve Christian apostles. The two ceramic tiles are from a very small studio in Aleppo in Syria. One of the tiles shows Saint George slaying the dragon and the second shows the victory of the prophet Elijah over the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. These works remind us that the Islamic world has always been a mosaic of people, cultures and religions that lived together, worked together and for each other, and traded their wares across considerable distances.⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶³ 'H.H. the Emir of Qatar's Speech at the Conference of the Dialogue of Religions 29 June 2005', Doha, *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive* [accessed 15 May 2009].

⁸⁶⁴ Spivak (1988), p. 151.

⁸⁶⁵ Poster in the opening exhibition, 'Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art across Cultures'.



Fig. 91. Christian polychrome bowl Kutaya, Turkey, early 18th century and two Christian tiles from Aleppo, Syria, 1699, as displayed at Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, in 2008.

In this quotation the MIA demonstrated its determination to focus specifically on the trade links between the two religions, Islam and Christianity. The ancient Syrian city of Aleppo, currently known to Arabs as Halab, became part of the Ottoman Empire in 1516 and remained a part of it until the collapse of the Empire in the early nineteenth century.⁸⁶⁶ Therefore the date of the tiles' production (1699) provided the MIA's curators/narrators with evidence to suggest that the tiles had been produced in a Muslim studio. They also suggested that it may have been normal at that time for Muslim craftsmen to produce goods for both Muslim and non-Muslim markets.⁸⁶⁷ However, the date alone cannot be used as evidence of production in a Muslim studio as was claimed by the curators, particularly when one takes into account the size of Aleppo's Christian community and its history as an important trading post, 'at the crossroads of two trade routes [where it] mediated the trade from India, the Tigris and Euphrates regions and the route coming from Damascus in

⁸⁶⁶ 'Brief History of Aleppo: A Great World City Now in the Grip of War', *Time World* <<http://world.time.com/2012/07/27/brief-history-of-aleppo-a-great-world-city-now-in-the-grip-of-war/>> [accessed 29 September 2012].

⁸⁶⁷ *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art across Cultures*, p. 30.

the South'.⁸⁶⁸ At the time of the tiles' production, Aleppo had the second largest Christian community in the Middle East (after Beirut). While around seventy percent of Aleppo's inhabitants were Suni Arabic Muslims, the remainder (some fifteen to twenty percent) were largely made up of Orthodox Christians, their numbers swelled by the influx, prior to the twentieth century, of Syriac and Armenian refugees.⁸⁶⁹ Therefore, the tiles could have been produced independently by one or more immigrant craftsmen and may represent the co-existence of two different styles and techniques. This co-existence creates a further question, what kind of relationships allowed for the co-existence of styles in these objects in the first instance? The curators/narrators demonstrated their determination to focus specifically on trade links between two religions, Islam and Christianity, and present this as a cultural dialogue. However, I would argue that cultural dialogue is not just a random exchange of commodities, technologies, styles or information. This kind of commercial exchange can leave cultures disengaged and the mutual understanding desirable in a genuine cultural dialogue is often absent.⁸⁷⁰ Instead, cultural dialogue should allow full communication of ideas and a sympathetic understanding of each other's culture in order to consider each other's 'intrinsic worth'.⁸⁷¹ This consideration of worth should also depend on respect and care hence differences should be incompatible within this relationship.⁸⁷² Thus, the idea of a dialogue with an equal partner does not involve power differentials.⁸⁷³ I would ask here if the curators/narrators considered the invocation of equality within their narrative? The invocation of equality is necessary to convey the co-existence of cultural dialogue. So how far is a measure of equality preserved within this presentation? How can this presentation be offered without promoting the idea of hegemony? Contrary to the narrators' wish,

⁸⁶⁸ 'Brief History of Aleppo: A Great World City Now in the Grip of War'.

⁸⁶⁹ 'Brief History of Aleppo: A Great World City Now in the Grip of War'.

⁸⁷⁰ Fred Dallmayr, *Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 66-84.

⁸⁷¹ Dallmayr, p. 67.

⁸⁷² Dallmayr, pp. 66-70.

⁸⁷³ Dallmayr, pp. 66-70.

the presentation might also be seen to highlight the differences between Islam and other cultures. A damaging history, a domination of a hegemonic power, unequal relationships, power differentials with all their consequences economically, socially and politically, might be highlighted and sharpened by this presentation as well. For example, the history of Aleppo at the time of the tiles' production might also demonstrate that the co-existence of styles in the production was part of a political inequality that may have involved violence and confrontation. Therefore, this example could indicate power, inequality and social conflict between Muslims and Christians during this time. Carr suggests that selecting and managing information and facts is the most effective way to influence opinion.⁸⁷⁴ Therefore, given the fact that the curators have necessarily been selective, the belief in their objective interpretations as 'historical facts' would be a 'preposterous fallacy'.⁸⁷⁵ Hence, Carr urges us to use our common sense when receiving knowledge, to separate object and subject.⁸⁷⁶ 'This is what may be called the common-sense view of history'.⁸⁷⁷

The objects in the exhibition were mostly chosen to represent different religions, and here the Museum tried, through labelling, to identify them solely as pieces created in a Muslim milieu or inspired by Islamic culture regardless of the kind of encounter involved. For example, a bowl dating from 1050-1100 [Fig. 92] was labelled as having originated in Egypt, which at this period was dominated by the Muslim Fatimid dynasty. Harmony between Islam and the Coptic faith is seen to be represented here in the bowl's depiction of a priest. The curators/narrators suggested that the depiction of the priest did not indicate that the bowl was a Coptic Christian artefact.⁸⁷⁸

⁸⁷⁴ Carr, p. 5.

⁸⁷⁵ Carr, p. 6.

⁸⁷⁶ Carr, p. 3.

⁸⁷⁷ Carr, p. 3.

⁸⁷⁸ *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art across Cultures*, p. 26.



Fig. 92. A bowl with an image of a Coptic priest, Egypt, probably 1050-1100, displayed at the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, in 2008.

Their interpretation of this bowl evoked a number of cultural ideas that ran throughout the exhibition. The bowl's label stood not simply as a description of its formal characteristics, but also as a subjective guide to the visitors' understanding of the wider concept of the link between different religious systems and thought.⁸⁷⁹ In presenting one opinion, other interpretations were obscured.⁸⁸⁰ This point can be demonstrated further when one looks at the label for the same bowl:

On the outside of the bowl, the Arabic word Sa'da (happiness) is written backward. On the inside of the bowl is a hooded figure carrying a censer suspended on chains. He has been identified as a Coptic priest, that is, a priest of Egypt's independent Christian church. This image does not make the bowl 'Coptic', however. It belongs to the broader Islamic culture that prevailed in Egypt at this time, and in which Copts, like other Christians and Jews, played an important part [...].

⁸⁷⁹ Michael Baxandall, 'Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects', in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 33-41 (p. 34).

⁸⁸⁰ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1-13.

The bowl therefore illustrates the diverse religious life of the Islamic Middle East.⁸⁸¹

Such labelling acts as a marker to signify two different groups belonging within one space. The label was written to communicate positive attitudes that may once have been existed where one group, the 'Muslim', allowed the other, 'Coptic', to exist. This hidden agenda aims to change today's socio-political attitudes. The argument here is that such an interpretation has clearly and deliberately denied the visitor's ability to recognise the 'subtleties and complexities of daily life' that may have existed (and still do) between both groups.⁸⁸² In this account, the label differentiates between Coptic and Muslim societies in Egypt. Therefore, it was not simply a description; rather, it highlighted and differentiated sensitive relationships and an historical issue.⁸⁸³ Historically the relationships between different cultures and religions have been complex, often marked by conflict or tension and intermittent periods of reconciliation. This kind of relationship derives from 'disparities of political power'.⁸⁸⁴ However, in the labelling the curators/narrators seemed to ignore such tensions.

Each of the labels in the opening exhibition had a political and polemical stance. The objects were used specifically to demonstrate the politicians'/narrators'/curators' aim to highlight the close and integrated structure of the Muslim faith with other world religions, a pertinent cause at a time of global unease after recent terrorist attacks and during the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. It is undeniable that there was an attempt to present a positive image of Islam. This attempt was just as important as the decision by the Emirs of the Gulf to globalise their cultures by placing the new museum projects in an international context. When sending the Cyrus Cylinder back to Iran in 2011, Neil MacGregor announced his

⁸⁸¹ *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art across Cultures*, p. 26.

⁸⁸² Helen Graham, 'To Label the Label? 'Learning Disability' and Exhibiting 'Critical Proximity', in *Re-Presenting Disability: Activism and Agency in the Museum*, ed. by Richard Sandell, Jocelyn Dodd and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 115-129 (p. 115).

⁸⁸³ Graham, pp. 117-119.

⁸⁸⁴ Dallmayr, p. 69.

belief that cultural artefacts could do what politicians have failed to do and bring 'antagonistic countries closer together'.⁸⁸⁵ MacGregor, further defined the power of the culture, using the term 'cultural diplomacy', recalling the attempts of the British Museum to use history to build a bridge with countries such as Afghanistan, China, countries of Middle East and Africa through establishing exhibitions, curatorial training and object exchange.⁸⁸⁶ To build a similar bridge with the globe, the Emir aimed to treat the museum as a centre for demonstrating the meaning and influence of Islam rather than as a space for simply displaying art. In order to draw the world's attention to Qatar and address culture in the rhetoric of globalisation, the Emir and his appointed collectors aimed to select and exhibit substantial, global collections of Islamic artefacts within their new narrative.⁸⁸⁷ It is for this reason such labelling should be viewed with caution. The attempt to naturalise and make sense of historical relationships using different memories, actions, objects, religious backgrounds and social and political practices would make the exhibition a place that presented 'cultures-in-difference'.⁸⁸⁸ The counterargument for such an interpretation lies in the fact that if the analysis and explanation have been lost, the loss of political history will be inevitable.⁸⁸⁹ The label for the Coptic bowl, for example, reveals the curators'/narrators' intention to communicate specific political identities for both groups. However, such explicit reference to a harmonious relationship between two different groups may confuse and distort a true understanding of such relationships.⁸⁹⁰ The curators/narrators detached certain objects such as the Coptic bowl, the Mary of Humility, the Commemoration stone, a page from Akbar's Ramayana and others, from their places and context of origin and accommodated them in the

⁸⁸⁵ Ben Hoyle, 'The Fine Art of Diplomacy: How Did Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, Succeed in Iran Where the Foreign Office Failed?', *The Times* [UK], 20 April 2011, p. 10.

⁸⁸⁶ Hoyle, p. 10.

⁸⁸⁷ Lewis, pp. 97-98.

⁸⁸⁸ Graham, p. 116.

⁸⁸⁹ Graham, pp. 115-117.

⁸⁹⁰ Graham, pp. 117-121.

temporary exhibition within a new environmental narrative.⁸⁹¹ If we review the presentation of some of these objects in their permanent museum ‘homes’, we find for example that the Coptic bowl (owned by the V&A) is interpreted by referring to the Coptic fondness for painting religious figures and scenes from the Bible as well as paintings of daily life at home and in church.⁸⁹² In the MIA’s exhibition, these objects were made to suggest the existence of a peaceful relationship between East and West, between Islam and Christianity, between Islam and Hinduism and between Islam and Judaism. It was the juxtaposition of these various elements that enabled the curators/narrators to impose their own ideology on the narrative.⁸⁹³ However, we must also be aware of our own narrative.⁸⁹⁴ The curators/narrators believed that their metaphorical presentation of the objects was vital for the ideological bias of their narrative. Aids such as synecdoche, metonymy and metaphor all played a role in their strategy, helping the curators/narrators to construct their narrative.⁸⁹⁵ These three elements influenced the meaning of the temporary exhibition. A part (the exotic object) stood synecdochically for the ‘wholeness’ of a culture, then placed this culture in a harmonious position within Islamic culture, as we have seen in the example of the Coptic bowl. Metonymy, where one object stands for another object from the same culture or environment, can be seen in the example of the Iznik bowl and tiles. The curators/narrators carefully selected these objects to produce the story of an influential and commercial narrative between the members of two different religious and cultures. The presentation of the Mary of Humility uses metaphor, when one thing stands for another because both have something in common. This piece is used to represent the sharing of a common interest in calligraphy between Christians and

⁸⁹¹ Bal, pp. 92-96.

⁸⁹² ‘A Fatimid Bowl From the 11th Century Depicting A Coptic Priest’, *On Coptic Nationalism* < <http://copticliterature.wordpress.com/2011/03/24/a-fatimid-bowl-from-the-11th-century-depicting-a-coptic-priest/> > [accessed 30 September 2012].

⁸⁹³ Bal, pp. 92-96.

⁸⁹⁴ Bal, pp. 92-96.

⁸⁹⁵ Bal, pp. 92-96.

Muslims.⁸⁹⁶ Through their presentation, the objects functioned as meaning-making elements. They described situations, characters, places, events and made statements about cultures that consisted of people sharing common interests, skills, commercial relations, social relations, influences and experiences.⁸⁹⁷ These three different elements – synecdoche, metonymy and metaphor – are all problematic because each assumes that one thing stands for something else, either by similarity or through a relationship in time or place. Instead they stand for some meaning that is actually not there.⁸⁹⁸ Producing meaning in the temporary exhibition was a paradoxical process. The act of de-othering objects of other cultures was done in order to extend the limit of self and, at the same time, to satisfy the hegemonic desire of the narrators. The curators/narrators used statements that created a bias as they described historical characters, objects, situations, events, atmospheres, relationships and places using their own ideology. While the curators/narrators claimed that they were being academically factual and placing ‘evidence’ before the visitor, there are strong indications, as we have seen, that this was not so. The belief in objects and what they represent is frequently subjective and a process of people’s perception and attitudes. This ‘socially accessible objecthood’ becomes intrinsically entwined in people’s subjective reading.⁸⁹⁹ Yet, this makes narratives suspiciously fictional. Consequently, there was a contradiction between the curators’/narrators’ objectives and what the audience actually took away from the exhibition. The narrators told their stories in a non-verbal way through their presentation of the objects but the narrative was actually bound by a double vision that was embodied in the audiences’ uniquely personal interpretations.

⁸⁹⁶ Bal, pp. 92-96.

⁸⁹⁷ Bal, p. 85.

⁸⁹⁸ Bal, pp. 92-96.

⁸⁹⁹ Bal, p. 85.

The Museum's Acquisition Policy and its Definition of Islam

Qatar Museums Authority chose to direct its opening campaign at a number of countries with which it had established political, economic and cultural links, such as the USA, the UK, Germany and France.⁹⁰⁰ The MIA's opening exhibition hosted objects hailing from countries as diverse as Turkey, Syria and Egypt, as well as Western collections, but 'Western' museums were the main focus for the campaign. When asked why, Al-Najjar commented:

In fact some other countries to those had been chosen, and we prepared an introductory conference for the MIA in both Turkey and Egypt. However, because of the limitations on time and staff we could not manage to carry this forward. Thus we decided to focus on the *main* countries in the world: America, Britain, Germany and France.⁹⁰¹

In addition to their good political and economic relations with Qatar, these countries in particular have recently shown an interest in understanding and observing the Muslim world and its art works.⁹⁰² The objects in their national collections have been displayed for some two hundred years, but have recently been reinterpreted in the light of current cultural and political debate. This reinterpretation is evidenced at the Victoria and Albert Museum, where approximately ten million pounds has been spent on renovating its Islamic Galleries, sponsored by the billionaire David Khalili, who has also established a personal collection in London.⁹⁰³ The Islamic collections have also been strengthened in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and the Louvre in Paris is estimated to have spent around twice the amount of the Victoria and Albert Museum in setting up a new space to host its Islamic collection.⁹⁰⁴

⁹⁰⁰ Saqer, p. 27.

⁹⁰¹ Abdulla Al-Najjar, Chief Executive of QMA, interviewed 25 August 2009. The italicisation is mine, as I found it interesting that Al-Najjar thinks of these countries in that way.

⁹⁰² Saqer, p. 27.

⁹⁰³ Lucien de Guise, 'Bridging the Gulf', in *Art and Antiques* <<http://www.Artandantiques.net/articles/a-a-news/2007/january/bridging-the-gulf.asp>> [accessed 9 November 2008].

⁹⁰⁴ 'Islamic Collection Opens at the V&A', *The Independent* <<http://license.icopyright.net/user/viewFreeUse.act?fuid=MjAzODAyMA%3D%3D>> [accessed 23 November 2008].

Further afield, other countries are evidencing a renewed interest in Islamic Art. In Toronto, for example, the Canadians are developing the Aga Khan Museum.⁹⁰⁵ As such, the more valuable and important historical Islamic collections are often in 'foreign' hands. This raises fundamental questions about the ideological, historical, political, commercial and social functions that these collections have in the West. What makes these collections so desirable and why has the way we interpret them changed? Equally importantly, what will the significance be of the move to display such objects in Qatar?

Establishing the Museum of Islamic Art was an important move for the politicians/narrators. It is particularly significant that, when the idea of establishing the MIA was discussed and agreed, the Qatari government created a seemingly limitless fund in order to acquire a collection for the proposed museum. As a result of their interest, the prices for desirable Islamic objects were inflated sharply in auction houses such as Christie's, Bonhams, and Sotheby's.⁹⁰⁶ Georgina Adam's article, 'That's Not All Folks', in the *Financial Times* hints at the purchasing attitude of Sheikh Saud (the Chairman of National Council of Culture, Art and Heritage at that time):

Some weeks ago I wrote about a Persian carpet that I thought might fetch more than £500,000 at auction. Well, it has just sold in New York for £2.3m, a new auction record for a carpet [...]. Who bought it? No one is saying, though some think it could have been Sheikh Saud Al-Thani, cousin of the ruler of Qatar, who brought together a wonderful textile collection for the new Museum of Islamic Art.⁹⁰⁷

Adam's speculation provides evidence of how far and how quickly Sheikh Saud became a name to note in the auction world. His desire to

⁹⁰⁵ 'Aga Khan Museum' <http://www.akdn.org/publications/akm_project_brief.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2010].

⁹⁰⁶ Georgina Adam, 'Michael Frances Speaks out in the Sheikh Saud Scandal', *Oriental Rugs 2005* <<http://orientalrugblog.blogspot.com/2005/11/rugnotes-michael-frances-speaks-out-in-the-Sheikh-Saud-Scandal>> [accessed 9 November 2008].

⁹⁰⁷ Georgina Adam, 'That's Not All Folks', *Financial Times*, 16 June 2009 <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7ccd3bd4-39ab-11dd-90d7-000779fd2ac.html>> [accessed 9 November 2008].

get what he wanted at any cost resulted in price inflation because it was impossible to outbid him.⁹⁰⁸ The breathtaking scope of his purchases led to him being described as ‘a buyer of any high-priced lot’.⁹⁰⁹ The Sheikh was also described as ‘prepared to pay well over estimate if necessary, spending sometimes a disproportionate amount of money to secure items he really wanted’.⁹¹⁰ Buying for five museum projects in Qatar and simultaneously for himself led to his identification as the world’s biggest collector.⁹¹¹ However, the significant rise in purchasing, using public money, estimated to have reached one billion pounds, alarmed the Qatari government who dismissed Sheikh Saud from his position as chairman for NCCAH in 2005.⁹¹²

The extent of the Sheikh’s spending offers evidence to support the idea that the artefacts were acquired for an alternative significance rather than their monetary or aesthetic value. An analysis of this spending offers evidence of the wider goals for culture in Qatar. An interview with the Qatari artist Yousef Ahmed, conducted during the summer of 2007, supports this. When asked about the origin of the idea of establishing a chain of museums in Qatar, he was unable to name a specific person who made this decision. He was certain, however, that it was the Emir who led the call to establish the Museum of Islamic Art.⁹¹³ The QMA’s statements during its publicity campaign support this thesis as it was apparent throughout that Qatar Museums Authority intended to make an Islamic museum a central part of the project. This is seen clearly in their extravagant use of the word ‘Islam’ such as ‘Islamic treasure’, ‘Islamic culture’, ‘Islamic art’, ‘Islamic architecture’ and so on in the pre-opening campaign, a practice not seen before. Moreover, Sheikha Al-Mayassa used the word ‘Islam’ in her speech at the opening ceremony in order to emphasise her intention to present the museum as a means by which an

⁹⁰⁸ Adam, ‘Michael Frances Speaks out in the Sheikh Saud Scandal’.

⁹⁰⁹ Adam, ‘Michael Frances Speaks out in the Sheikh Saud Scandal’.

⁹¹⁰ Adam, ‘Michael Frances Speaks out in the Sheikh Saud Scandal’.

⁹¹¹ Adam, ‘Michael Frances Speaks out in the Sheikh Saud Scandal’.

⁹¹² Adam, ‘Michael Frances Speaks out in the Sheikh Saud Scandal’.

⁹¹³ Ahmed, interviewed on 28 July 2008.

alternative view of the Islamic religion would be emphasised. As she put it, 'via this museum we wish to present Islam as a peaceful progressive religion, especially amongst those who do not view Islamic civilisation from an objective point of view'.⁹¹⁴

Why has there been an emphasis on, and determination to, present the museum with the religious appellation of 'Islam'? There are no museums in the Western world entitled 'Christian Museums', with the exception of the Christian Museum in Rome founded in 1854 by Pope Pius IX in the Lateran Palace in Rome and later moved to the Vatican Museums by Pope John XXIII, the Museum of Biblical Art and the forthcoming Museum of the Bible.⁹¹⁵ There are, however, a number of museums with collections that are displayed as Islamic art and many 'Jewish' museums. The attempt to define what constitutes a 'Jewish Museum' has had the explicit effect of representing Jews as 'ultranationalist'.⁹¹⁶ Writers such as Ehud Sprinzak, Dan Stone, James E. Young and Peter Chametzky have written books and articles on this subject.⁹¹⁷ The ceremony to mark the

⁹¹⁴ 'The State President Witnessed with Heads of State Opening the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar' <<http://www.alittihad.ae/print.php?id=48316&adate=2008>>, p. 1 [accessed 23 November 2008].

⁹¹⁵ 'Musei Vaticani' <<http://www.christusrex.org/www1/vaticano/0-Musei.html>> [accessed 3 August 2010].

⁹¹⁶ Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 9-21.

⁹¹⁷ There has often been a tendency to portray Jewish Israelis as ultranationalist and to describe them as representing the 'radical right', especially in the 1950s and 1960s. Ehud Sprinzak sees the birth of the radical right as resulting from several concerns such as the minority status of Jews, repressed national pride and 'violated' geographical borders. As a significant part of this move to identify the status of the Jewish state, the Jewish museum was developed as a means of self-assertion and self-reflection. See *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. by Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 508-532. To commemorate a catastrophic time in Jewish history, Holocaust museums have also been developed. Andreas Huyssen notes that: 'The increasing frequency with which Holocaust museums are built and monuments erected in Israel, Germany and Europe, as well as the United States, is clearly part of the cultural phenomenon of memory'. (Dan Stone, 'Memory, Memorials and Museums', in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. by Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 508-532). For Israeli legislators, there was a palpable link between the establishment of the state and the Holocaust, between national rebirth and rehabilitation. The nation effectively used the memory of the Holocaust to 'bind present and past generations, to unify a world outlook, to create a vicariously shared national experience'. (James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 246). Young argues that each new generation has different reasons for

establishment of the Jewish State of Israel in 1949 was, for example, hosted in the Jewish Museum of Art in Jerusalem.⁹¹⁸ This suggests that such religious communities are trying through the museum to identify themselves as independently, historically and politically significant.

In the case of Qatar, we shall see that the government aimed to achieve several political goals with the establishment of the MIA, and particularly to address the reputation of Islam as a space of terror. The Association of Islamic Fiqh Council in Mecca has defined the word 'terrorism' as:

An outrageous attack carried out either by individuals, groups or states against the human being (his religion, life, intellect, property and honour). It includes all forms of intimidation, harm, threatening, killing without just cause and everything connected with any form of armed robbery, hence making pathways insecure, banditry, every act of violence or threatening intended to fulfil a criminal scheme individually or collectively, so as to terrify and horrify people by hurting them or by exposing their lives, liberty, security or conditions to danger; it can also take the form of inflicting damage on the environment or on a public or a private utility or exposing a national or natural resource to danger.⁹¹⁹

Using this definition at its sixteenth session (10-15 January 2002), the Islamic Fiqh Council emphasised the fact that terrorism with all its

memory. If the survivors of the Holocaust remember their experiences and the loved ones they lost, their children will build memorials to locate themselves in the past and remember occasions they never experienced and knew. In *The Texture of Memory*, Alex Krieger, a child of Holocaust survivors, proposed memorials because: 'It's not for my parents that I pursue this endeavour [...] This memorial will be for me. Because I was not there, and did not suffer, I cannot remember. Therefore, I very much need to be reminded. This memorial will be for my six-month-old daughter, who will need to be reminded even more. It will be for her children who will need to be reminded still more' (Young, p. 246). Therefore, for Jewish people, Holocaust museums build and activate memories for 'post-Holocaust generations'. The Holocaust museums and memorials were built to present both the shame of victimisation and pride in heroism, to build a culture of joint remembrance for the victims and heroes. For instance, the Jewish Museum in Berlin was established to represent Jewish history in a city with a traumatic past. The architecture of the museum was employed as a language to allude to the loss of millions of Jews during the Nazi era (1933-1945) as well as to demonstrate the history of the Jewish community. See Peter Chametzky, 'Not What We Expected: The Jewish Museum Berlin in Practice', *Museum and Society*, 6 (November 2008), 216-240.

⁹¹⁸ 'The Catastrophe of Palestine 1948', *Al-Jazeera Channel*, CD volume 4 (Doha: Al-Jazeera Press, 2008).

⁹¹⁹ 'Terrorism: Islam's Viewpoint' in *Muslim World League* <<http://muslim-canada.org/fiqhcouncil.html>> [accessed 6 August 2010].

aspects of violence and extremism had no connection with Islam.⁹²⁰ This stereotype may be the result of the expansion of Islam and its reputation for 'conversion by the sword'. Islamic culture and religion grew rapidly after the prophet Mohammed's death in the sixth century. In quick succession, Persia, Syria and Egypt fell under the domination of Islam. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Turkey, North Africa, then Spain, Sicily and parts of France were all dominated by Muslims.⁹²¹ These Islamic conquests led to some Western historical records, from the eleventh century onwards, associating Arab communities with the word 'devastation'.⁹²² For instance, the cleric Erchembert from Monte Cassino described the Muslim armies who invaded Sicily in the eleventh century as:

[Having] the appearance of a swarm of bees, but with a heavy hand [...] They devastated everything, and all around, and at length took the famous city called Palermo [...] (they) overthrew many cities and towns in the island, and soon they subjected almost all of it to their rule.⁹²³

The presentation of Islam as a symbol of terror clearly has historical roots as the relationship between the Islamic world and the West has been constantly interpreted and disputed.⁹²⁴ For instance, Norman Daniel in his study *Islam and the West* (1975) explains that Islam has often been condemned for violence and its refusal to allow a rational dialogue with other faith groups.⁹²⁵ As a result, Christian depictions of the Muslim community have often been violent.⁹²⁶ For instance in September 2005, Flemming Rose, artist and editor of the Danish newspaper *Fyllands Posten*, illustrated twelve cartoons of the prophet Mohamed, an image that many Muslim communities regarded as extremely insulting,

⁹²⁰ 'Terrorism: Islam's Viewpoint'

⁹²¹ Norman Daniel, *The Arab and Mediaeval Europe* (London: Butler and Tanner Ltd, 1975), p. 56.

⁹²² Daniel, p. 56.

⁹²³ Daniel, p. 56.

⁹²⁴ Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: the Making of an Image* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 1997), pp. 3-43.

⁹²⁵ Daniel (1997), pp. 3-43.

⁹²⁶ Meghnad Desai, *Rethinking Islamism: The Ideology of the New Terror* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 6-10.

especially as one of the cartoons depicted the prophet wearing a turban 'shaped like a bomb'.⁹²⁷ Meghnad Desai used a video speech by Mohammad Sidique Khan, one of the London 7/7 bombers, as evidence demonstrating the exchange of views between Muslim and Western communities, when Khan stated:

Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters. Until we feel security you will be our targets and until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people we will not stop this fight.⁹²⁸

Desai argues that this statement, on the one hand, reflects a belief in the existence of a conflict between Western governments and their citizens and on the other hand, between Western governments and Muslim communities worldwide. Furthermore, early in the 1990s, Samuel Huntington, a professor at Harvard University wrote a book on confrontation between the West and Muslims, *The Coming Clash of Civilization and Remaking of the World Order* (1996), in which he anticipated incidents that resemble Mohammad Sidique Khan's statement. Desai argues that Huntington's point of view has been adopted by Al-Qaeda as Osama Bin Laden's view depended on 'a clash between two 'wholes' – the crusader West and the Muslim community'.⁹²⁹ Desai argues that Islam (like all world religions) is a peaceful religion, and that the problem is not with the religion, but with how such religions are used politically.⁹³⁰ During the early history of the Islamic religion, Christians believed that incidents such as conquests might relate to the rule of Islam and that they might be the reason for Islamic force. They assumed particularly that the rapid spread of Islam in its earliest time was as a

⁹²⁷ Desai, p. 7.

⁹²⁸ Desai, p. 6.

⁹²⁹ Desai, p. 7.

⁹³⁰ Desai, p. 12.

result of its armed strength; therefore, what they feared was conversion by the sword.⁹³¹

The idea of Islam as symbolising terror had all but disappeared for centuries until it was raised again by incidents in the late twentieth and twenty first centuries, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,⁹³² the attacks in America on 11 September 2001, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁹³³ In his seminal study *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said explored the way in which the Western world has seen and depicted the Orient and Islam.⁹³⁴ He described how this view had been built up throughout history, using the ideas of the fable, the journey, the stereotype, and polemical confrontation.⁹³⁵ Said, instead, called for society to;

Stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as a version of a previously known thing.⁹³⁶

Said believed that looking at Islam through this new ‘median category’ would result in new information on, and a new conception of, Islam.⁹³⁷ It is most likely that the recognition of an existence of a Western stereotypical view of Islam motivated Qatar to focus its first new museum project on ‘Islamic’ art. In his global campaign for the museum, Al-Najjar highlighted that:

The grand opening of the Museum of Islamic Art will be a distinctive chapter in the history of Qatar, as it forms a basic centre for showing Islamic art and culture to the world. The Museum of Islamic Art is a permanent platform for dialogue and cultural and artistic exchange.⁹³⁸

⁹³¹ Daniel (1997), p. 146.

⁹³² A consequence of the November 1917 Balfour Declaration, the official British support for founding a Jewish state in Palestine.

⁹³³ Greg Philo and Mike Berry, *Bad News From Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), pp. 5-13.

⁹³⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), p. 58.

⁹³⁵ Said, p. 58.

⁹³⁶ Said, p. 58.

⁹³⁷ Said, p. 58.

⁹³⁸ ‘Museum for Islamic Art to be Opened in Qatar’ <<http://www.worldbulletin-net>> [accessed 8 July 2008].

It seems that the curators/narrators believed that establishing a Museum of Islamic Art, with objects of art from many different periods and places, would create a space for a renewed analysis of work that has been grouped under the term 'Islam'. Even if these narratives have to be invented, it is hoped that this museum will also allow Qatar to demonstrate the variety and richness of Islamic culture as well as the development of this culture during different eras.⁹³⁹ Prior to opening, Qatar Museums Authority pursued a worldwide campaign to raise support and awareness of the MIA project. During the campaign Sheikha Al-Mayassa announced in Paris that the project could not have been completed without the determination of the Emir. Furthermore, she confirmed that the Emir himself had collected many of the objects over a period of fifteen years and donated them to his citizens and to the whole world.⁹⁴⁰ This proclamation needs to be explored in its political and social context to understand why Qatar needed worldwide recognition of the Emir's generosity.

My presumption is that the Emir employed visual arts and the museum as a narrative site, given that he depended upon visitors' interaction with the constructed historical and cultural stories in order to produce an 'effective presentation of history', within the narrative of the simulacrum.⁹⁴¹ Vision is predominantly the sense used when we visit museums. This underlines the fact that the way we make connections, the way we tell the stories and the way we read the narrative is always guided by the curators'/narrators' and the layout of the objects. Through labels and layout they construct and contextualise objects and galleries. The Emir's ambition was to make a bridge with the globe, a point he constantly expresses publicly. In the 4th United Nations Alliance of Civilisations Forum in Doha, Sheikh Hamad announced:

⁹³⁹ 'The Beginning of the Campaign for the Museum of Islamic Art in Paris', *Al-Raya newspaper*, 15 May 2008, p.12.

⁹⁴⁰ Tony Shamiya, 'Sheikha Al-Mayassa: All Museum's Acquisitions are Donations from the Emir' <<http://www.eduqatar.com>> [accessed 31 August 2008].

⁹⁴¹ Lewis, pp. 97-109.

No surprise that you are aware of the importance of dialogue and alliance, and we are facing two matters at the same time, namely: an opportunity and a challenge. The result is linked to what we would do to establish a better tomorrow [...] There is no doubt that the world is in the grip of contradiction that is tantamount in some cases to a collision caused by stereotyping or not knowing the other, even if the worst scenario is the lack of recognition of the other.⁹⁴²

Thus, the politicians/narrators fetishised the objects, thus illustrating their 'paradoxical subjectivation' of them.⁹⁴³ What makes the politicians' ideology and visual presentation relevant is the deceptive nature of its objectivity. As such, for the politicians/narrators, vision was considered as important and reliable as the texts. Thus, the curators/narrators tried within the MIA's exhibition to utilise the visual aspect of fetishism, as well as to manipulate relations between the subjects they were imposing and the objects they were presenting. The curators/narrators made vision and texts the main actors in their core ideology, where the sense of vision in particular was manipulated to provide a 'positive knowledge perverting subjectivity'.⁹⁴⁴ Therefore, there is a political and polemical stance within the MIA's galleries, exhibitions, layout, and presentation of objects, cabinets and texts.

The focus on the seventh to the nineteenth centuries in the collection provokes further questions. Why was the MIA's purchasing concentrated specifically on this period? Does this epoch represent a time of peak productivity in Islamic civilisation? And, if so, for whom does this epoch represent a peak?

Recent publications such as *Islamic Civilization by Numbers* (2008) by Mohamed Al-Masry have aimed to reassess the contribution of Islamic culture to advances in the arts, sciences, music, philosophy, literature,

⁹⁴² 'Qatar keen on dialogue and alliance, says Emir', *Qworks*
<http://qatarworks.com/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=576:qatar-keen-on-dialogue-and-alliance-says-emir-&catid=62:interviews&Itemid=79>
[accessed 9 August 2012].

⁹⁴³ Bal, p. 94.

⁹⁴⁴ Bal, p. 95.

medicine and so on.⁹⁴⁵ In March 2011, the French Embassy jointly with the Institute of Arab World Studies in Paris organised the ‘Golden Age of Arab Sciences’ exhibition at the Cultural Village ‘Katara’ in Qatar. The exhibition highlighted the advancement and achievement of Islamic technology and science between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, known as the ‘Golden Age of Arab Civilisations’,⁹⁴⁶ when the production of textiles, manuscripts, woodwork, ceramics, metalwork, lustrous glazing and illuminated glass flourished. Examples of the influence of this flourishing of Islamic art can be seen clearly in the work of Italian potters during the Renaissance, when Islamic lustre-painted ceramics were often imitated.⁹⁴⁷ The BBC website introduces a wide range of programmes and topics that cover Islamic culture and its influence on other cultures, such as The Art of the Qur’an Religious Education; Using the Work of other Artists to Develop Ideas – Art and Design; Skills-wise-Teaching Inspirations; Islamic Architecture; Introduction to Islamic Art, and so on. Through such programming, the BBC shows how different Islamic subjects such as calligraphy, Qur’anic manuscripts and non-figurative subject matter provide stimulus materials for non-Muslim artists.⁹⁴⁸ Furthermore, in her article ‘East Influences West; the Inspiration of Islamic Art in Nineteenth Century Britain’, Suhad Jarrar-Browne discussed how Islamic art became an exotic version of the Grand Tour that attracted artists, writers and travellers who established a new taste within their collecting activities and collected Oriental objects. Thus, large collections of Islamic ceramics, textiles, pottery and tiles became

⁹⁴⁵ Mohamed Al-Masry, ‘Islamic Civilization by Numbers’, *Islamic Research Foundation International* <http://www.irfi.org/articles_1801_1850/islamic%20civilization%20by%20> [accessed 10 November 2008].

⁹⁴⁶ Aisha Sid Ahmed, ‘Golden Age of Arab Sciences Expo Opens’, *Qatar Tribune*, 17 March 2011, pp. 17-18 <<http://www.qatar-tribunc.com/data/20110317/pdf/nation.pdf>> [accessed 12 September 2011].

⁹⁴⁷ Zachariah Matthews, ‘The Golden Age of Islam’, *Islamic Research Foundation International* <http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_401_450/golden_age_of_islam.htm> [accessed 30 September 2012]

⁹⁴⁸ ‘Religion and Ethics’, *BBC* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/search/islamic_art> [accessed 12 September 2011].

popular at that time.⁹⁴⁹ The article 'the Islamic Golden Age' (2008) notes, for example, that the first university to issue diploma degrees was recorded in the medieval Islamic world, at the Bimaristan.⁹⁵⁰ In addition, the appearance of polymaths was a common feature in this era, with each of these men making significant contributions in more than one field of religious and secular knowledge. These included Al-Adrisi, Al-Biruni, Al-Kindi, Ibn Tufail and Ibn Al-Nafis, who were variously experts in education, science, economics, engineering, industry, labour, technology, astronomy, music and philosophy of the medieval Islamic era. Innovation and invention were then in the ascendancy. This has led some historians to see the year of 1300AD as a key point in the development of Islamic culture.⁹⁵¹ The era is regarded as an Islamic golden age in studies such as *A Thousand Years of Faith and Power* (2002) by Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam* (1992) by Joel L. Kraemer and *Arab Science in the Golden Age 750-1225 and Today* (2006) by Mathew E. Falagas, Effie Zarkadulia and George Samonis. However, some scholars have recently extended this idea of a golden age to the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries.⁹⁵² Thus, a display of compasses at the MIA, for example, aims to represent a history of Islamic achievement in different sciences, such as algebra, mathematics and astronomy [Figs 93-96]. It is interesting that the MIA attempts to portray the whole story of this civilisation in a museum of 'Islamic Art'.

⁹⁴⁹ Suhad Jarrar-Browne, 'East Influences West; the inspiration of Islamic Art in Nineteenth Century Britain' < <http://www.ecademy.com/node.php?id=122190> > [accessed 30 September 2012].

⁹⁵⁰ This organisation was based in hospitals to teach and award a degree in medicine to newly graduated physicians, which enables them to be licensed to practice as doctors of medicine.

⁹⁵¹ Matthews, 'The Golden Age of Islam'.

⁹⁵² Matthews, 'The Golden Age of Islam'.

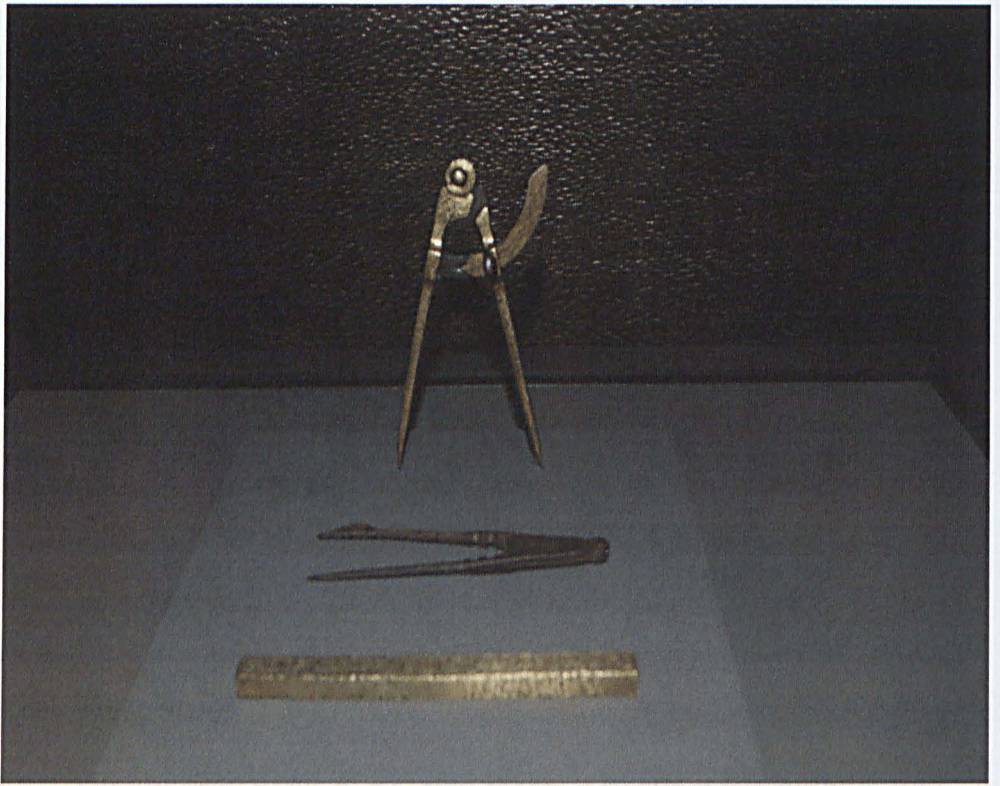


Fig. 93. A compass and other mathematical tools as displayed at Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, in 2008.



Fig. 94. An historical Islamic mathematical report with Arabic numbers, displayed at Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, in 2008.



Fig. 95. Different sizes of astrolabe, displayed at the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, in 2008.



Fig. 96. A diagram of a human dissection, displayed at the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, in 2008.

Although the museum is called the Museum of Islamic Art, it does not contain a single historical Islamic painting. Does the lack of Islamic paintings in the MIA mean that paintings were not attempted for their own sake in Islam, indicating that the production of art was exclusively devoted to fulfilling a specific religious function? Islamic art differs in meaning from person to person. To a Muslim, for example, it might reflect an expression of religion and faith, whereas to a non-Muslim it might simply signify the cultural origin of the craftsman and the object's use-value. However, for collectors, specialists and curators, these objects are used to help decipher Islamic heritage and the civilisation that created it.⁹⁵³ This leads us to question whether the Qatari authorities considered their visitors when they considered the quality of the museum's collection.

Why has the museum not chosen to display contemporary 'Islamic' art, especially since worldwide attention is currently focused on exhibitions such as Charles Saatchi's *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East* at the Saatchi Gallery in London (30 January – 6 May 2009)? The critic Jackie Wullschlager stated that Saatchi, who has promoted contemporary artists in Britain such as Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst, had chosen this time to cast his net further afield.⁹⁵⁴ As a result of Saatchi's new interest in the Middle East, Wullschlager criticised him as:

A collector whose only obsession is the rush for the new, he has alighted on the Middle East as the latest global novelty, amassed dull, predictable work made for the art-fair circuit and website markets such as Saatchi's own, and delivered back to us our prejudices about this culture as, the other.⁹⁵⁵

The answer may simply be that the QMA was planning to open a contemporary art museum (Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art) thus they chose not to include contemporary artwork in the MIA. The Mathaf

⁹⁵³ Barbara Brend, *Islamic Art* (London: British Museum Press, 1991), p. 10.

⁹⁵⁴ Jackie Wullschlager, 'Saatchi and Middle East Art', *Financial Times*, 30 January 2009 <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f86bea7e-ee5a-11dd-b791-0000779fd2ac.html#axzz291K6K6Ad>> [accessed 5 February 2009].

⁹⁵⁵ Wullschlager.

was opened on 30 December 2010, with six thousand artworks by twentieth-century artists from the Middle East, Qatar, North Africa and the Arab diaspora and artworks that have been inspired by Arab artists. The Mathaf aims to act as 'a centre for scholarship and dialogue about contemporary art and culture'.⁹⁵⁶ Artworks in the Mathaf include figurative pieces. As Wassam Al-Khudhairi, Director and Chief Curator of the museum, states:

All museums censor by selecting the works they want to include in exhibitions. We have no reason to remove any work, but don't know what will happen. If there is an issue, we will have to negotiate and use our best judgement.⁹⁵⁷

The shift in Qatari curatorial practice has allowed for the establishment of new venues for the appreciation, evaluation and acceptance of what had been previously marginalised in the country's museums. Within previous museum practice in Qatar, displays of figurative artefacts were rarely seen. The politicians who championed the display of controversial artefacts from previously marginal areas can thus claim that they have expanded the borders of Islamic art and achieved a new recognition for it. As can be seen in Figures 97 and 98, for example, traditional costumes were originally displayed on hangers instead of mannequins to minimise the risk of showing the human body, as figurative art in Islam is prohibited and seen as idolatry.⁹⁵⁸ According to most Islamic theologians, on the day of the Last Judgment, the artist who produced representational art would be asked to put life into their creation of figurative objects, and when they failed to do so would be tossed into hell. Consequently, this prohibition affected Islamic art in various ways and a new form of sacred art was produced through writing and calligraphy.⁹⁵⁹ Yet, in the MIA and Mathaf, audiences can find examples of figurative pieces displayed in the permanent exhibition [Figs 99-101]. The adoption of this new philosophy

⁹⁵⁶ Atkinson, p. 30.

⁹⁵⁷ Atkinson, p. 31.

⁹⁵⁸ Oleg Grabar, 'Art and Culture in the Islamic World', in *Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. by Markus Hattstein and Peter Delius (no location given: H.F. Ullmann, 2007), pp. 35-43 (p. 39).

⁹⁵⁹ Grabar, pp. 35-43.

of museum culture has been a challenging one for the narrators; one adopted in order to reach out globally to illustrate a modernised image of Qatari heritage. Undoubtedly, a Muslim's perceptions of such objects will vary. For some, these figures, with their specific production of seating, their colours and their body ornamented with patterns and figures all could be considered as a presentation of idols, which are being worshipped and regarded with blind admiration in some cultures. A feeling of unease is very likely, bringing conflict and rejection in those audiences who might question what Islamic art or culture meant. For other groups, however, these figures will represent works of art and produce admiration for the skills and techniques of ancient craftsmen. This creates a paradox, especially when huge amounts are being spent buying and presenting such objects. Interestingly, when the Head of the Docents at the MIA was asked to justify the display of such representational art, she answered 'we would tell them that these artefacts were produced before Islamic civilisation'.⁹⁶⁰



Fig. 97. Traditional Qatari costumes displayed at Qatar National Museum in 1999.

⁹⁶⁰ Docent at the MIA, interviewed on 16 March 2011.



Fig. 98. Traditional Qatari costumes displayed at Qatar National Museum in 1999.



Fig. 99. Monkey, Iran (Kashan), c.1200 fritware, coloured glaze, displayed in the permanent gallery of the Museum of Islamic Art, in 2009.



Fig. 100. Metal censer, in the form of a lion, Iran or Asia, bronze, twelve century, displayed in the permanent gallery of the Museum of Islamic Art in 2009.



Fig. 101. A censer displayed at the Museum of Islamic Art in 2009.

Through new curatorial practices, politicians in Qatar are demanding a different approach and a new notion of the nature of Qatari identity.⁹⁶¹ Their political endeavours in the last decade to integrate the state of Qatar into a dynamic 'new world order' are associated with the development of the nation's capital city, emphasising the country's status as a global financial centre.⁹⁶² Economic development is reflected in museum practice, where cultural materials are seen by politicians as 'marketable and consumable cultural symbols' that aim to resolve conflict between Islamic culture and other cultures.⁹⁶³ Mari Carmen Ramirez comments on 'the particular notions of identity promoted by transnational markets'.⁹⁶⁴ Thus, whereas previous museological practice in Qatar had functioned to preserve a concept of the nation state, the new museology is used as a global marketing tool for this state.⁹⁶⁵ An article entitled 'The Qatari Renaissance' by Nawaf Al-Thani has linked the recent impact of economic development of the Qatari cultural and education sectors to the European Renaissance.⁹⁶⁶ Al-Thani investigates the possible desire to see Qatar become the lynchpin of Islamic civilisation in the Gulf region, just as Italy did when it preserved irreplaceable examples of European art by the establishment of museums and cultural institutions. In the nineteenth century, after decades of European investment in secular issues, such as capitalism and industrial revolution, France followed Italy's approach to collecting art. This led to France being considered as a legitimate heir of the European Renaissance.⁹⁶⁷ Since then, the identity of the legitimate

⁹⁶¹ The Chief Executive of QMA, Abdulla Al-Najjar, believes that the establishment of a campus from UCL in Qatar will encourage new curatorial practices that will shift further away from previous practice. The plan is for UCL to teach and train around 150 students a year in various fields such as conservation, archaeology and museum studies. I interviewed him on 25 August 2009.

⁹⁶² Ramirez, p. 25.

⁹⁶³ Ramirez, p. 26.

⁹⁶⁴ Ramirez, p. 34.

⁹⁶⁵ Ramirez, p. 35.

⁹⁶⁶ Nawaf Mobaral Al-Thani, 'The Qatari Renaissance', *Al-Raya newspaper*, 26 November 2008, p. 5.

⁹⁶⁷ Al-Thani, p. 5.

reviver of Islamic civilisation has been raised frequently.⁹⁶⁸ Nawaf Mobarak believes that:

Throughout recent years the answer to this question has become apparent: Qatar would be the leader who would be the heir of the Islamic and Arabic renaissance era, as during the twenty-first century, Qatar has taken on the task of reviving Islamic science, culture and art. Still, the work has not yet finished, as the MIA is only the country's first step towards that revival [...] we are waiting for work to be finished and for the opening of the Cultural Village and the Qatari Opera Theatre, which would play a significant role in completing that renaissance.⁹⁶⁹

However, one might question how long the local culture and heritage will be able to hold its strength with the influx of all the new heritage modes and philosophy that are being led by the rhetoric of globalisation and modernisation. The Arabian Gulf has witnessed a period of rapid cultural development, particularly in Abu-Dhabi and Qatar. Rebecca Atkinson has argued that Qatari museum practice does not copy existing Western museum models, but rather acknowledges local differences, 'and therefore creates negotiations between the local and the global'.⁹⁷⁰ However, her interpretation may be challenged, especially when one investigates the presentation of the MIA's permanent exhibition, where a new philosophy and Western models have been merged. The ways in which the narrators made their museum message effective among the local community and what they did to help them deliver their narrative are important areas to consider especially as, for the first two decades after the establishment of Qatar National Museum, there was no strong link between the community in Qatar and its museums. Martyn Best, director of Consultant Cultural Innovations, has worked in the Middle East for around twenty years and in Qatar since 1998. He suggests that the Qatari practice is unique, as it shifts away from considering museum development as part of its tourist agenda towards the realisation of its

⁹⁶⁸ Al-Thani, p. 5.

⁹⁶⁹ Al-Thani, p. 5.

⁹⁷⁰ Atkinson, p. 29.

global ambitions via a local perspective. This ambition can also be seen in the construction of a narrative in the permanent galleries at the MIA.⁹⁷¹

Constructing a Narrative in the Permanent Exhibition

Museums, particularly Western museums, have been criticised for their attempt to introduce and display non-Western cultures and history through their own, and potentially biased interpretation of these cultures. This denies power and decision making to the 'original' culture over how these objects should be articulated, viewed and understood publicly.⁹⁷² Within the galleries of the permanent exhibition at the MIA, the Western-based model is apparent in the museum's attempt to present the 'fact', the 'reality' of Islamic culture, as articulated, imagined and defined through the curators'/narrators' lenses. They have made a decision to give a certain voice to the artefacts by manipulating the visual presentation of the collection. The recognition that the powerful voice of the museum could be 'heard' by many people may have encouraged the politicians/narrators and curators/narrators to offer these galleries as venues for communicating ideas, definitions and beliefs.⁹⁷³

Figure 102 shows how that voice has been distributed across some five thousand metres of permanent gallery space into two distinct areas. The first gallery – the Language of Islamic Art – is comprised of nine rooms, the first of which is called The Introduction. Its purpose is to introduce visitors to the capacity of Muslim artists to create various types of masterpiece. The first panel states that 'the aim of the artist in the Islamic world is to make ordinary objects beautiful'.⁹⁷⁴ The remaining eight rooms are dedicated to displaying figurative art, writing and calligraphy. The second gallery – the Journey of Islamic Art – comprises nine rooms,

⁹⁷¹ Atkinson, pp. 29-31.

⁹⁷² Jonathan Haas, 'Power, objects, and a voice for Anthropology', *Current Anthropology*, 37:1 (February 1996), S1-S22 (pp. S7-S8).

⁹⁷³ Haas, pp. S7-S8.

⁹⁷⁴ 'Introduction', *The Collection*

<<http://www.mia.org.qa/english/index.html#collection/galler2>> [accessed 10 June 2009].

and examines Islamic civilisation from around the seventh century to the nineteenth century, spanning several continents.⁹⁷⁵ The first Director of the MIA, Dr. Oliver Watson, described the design of the permanent galleries as follows:

The galleries have a number of large showcases recessed into the walls, but each one is individualized through variations in the showcase design and different textures are applied to the finishes of the cladding materials. The central space of each gallery is generally reserved for large glass showcases or objects on open display.⁹⁷⁶

Therefore, in contrast to the temporary exhibition, the curators/narrators have tried to ask different questions about the quality, skill, beauty, and aesthetic impact of the objects by using a variety of visual techniques.⁹⁷⁷

⁹⁷⁵ Watson, pp. 8-9.

⁹⁷⁶ Watson, p. 46.

⁹⁷⁷ Sharon Macdonald, 'Exhibitions of Power and Powers of Exhibition: An Introduction to the Politics of Display', in *The Politics of Display*, ed. by Sharon Macdonald (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 1-19.



Fig. 102. The MIA's plan shows how the galleries are divided: the first floor typologically and the second floor chronologically.

Unlike the temporary exhibition, the permanent exhibition minimises the use of texts and depends instead on the collection's layout, juxtapositions, background and environmental effects to deliver the politicians'/narrators' narrative of Islamic civilisation. This is the main reason why Qatari acquisition and collecting has focused so much on Islamic artefacts, and their purchasing has risen so significantly in the last two decades. In an attempt to change the global perspective of Islam, the

visual presentation in the permanent galleries is heavily concentrated on presenting a picture of a peaceful civilisation. Therefore, the arrangement of the objects into the 'Language of Islamic Art' and the 'Journey of Islamic Art' aims to offer the opportunity for visitors to get a 'real' interpretation and understanding of Islamic civilisation,⁹⁷⁸ especially those people or cultures who struggle to understand what this civilisation might be. Thus, the curators/narrators have made it their responsibility to establish a new interpretation and record of Islamic civilisation. These responsibilities and roles are open to criticism as they have the power and ability to control people's perspectives. The resulting visual presentation of the collection became particularly important as it provided durable and tangible evidence of the influence of Islamic culture as a whole.⁹⁷⁹ The material remains of Islamic culture have become a tangible manifestation of the curatorial narrative as part of the intention to capture the curiosity, interest and imagination of the audiences. The shelves and cabinets are filled with objects of curiosity. These artefacts are not only valued for their uniqueness, but also for the artistic skill of their makers and their beauty. This is enhanced by using visual techniques that serve as avenues to better reveal Islamic civilisation. They are displayed as prizes, offered for close and careful inspection by the audience.⁹⁸⁰ The MIA's curators/narrators announced that:

A strong vision has been the driving force in putting together the Doha collection, seeking the best with the idea of 'masterpieces' in mind. Although in some cases the pieces, as 'masterpieces', are unanimously agreed upon as such, in the case of the Doha collection the vision embraces masterpieces as artistic expressions also made special with their touch of particularity – artefacts with the touch of the unusual [...] The collection is less concerned with quantity as much as it is concerned with the formidable.⁹⁸¹

As such, we find that the labels of some of these artefacts only speculate about the date or place of production. For instance, the war mask in

⁹⁷⁸ Haas, pp. S7-S8.

⁹⁷⁹ Haas, pp. S7-S8.

⁹⁸⁰ Greenblatt, pp. 42-54.

⁹⁸¹ 'Overview', *The Collection*

<<http://www.mia.org.qa/english/index.html#collection/over>> [accessed 10 June 2009].

Figure 103 is thought to be from either Eastern Turkey or Western Iran, while pages from a Qur'an in Hijazi script (ancient Arabic scripts produced in the Hijaz region) are thought to be from the Arabian Peninsula or Syria [Fig. 104].⁹⁸²

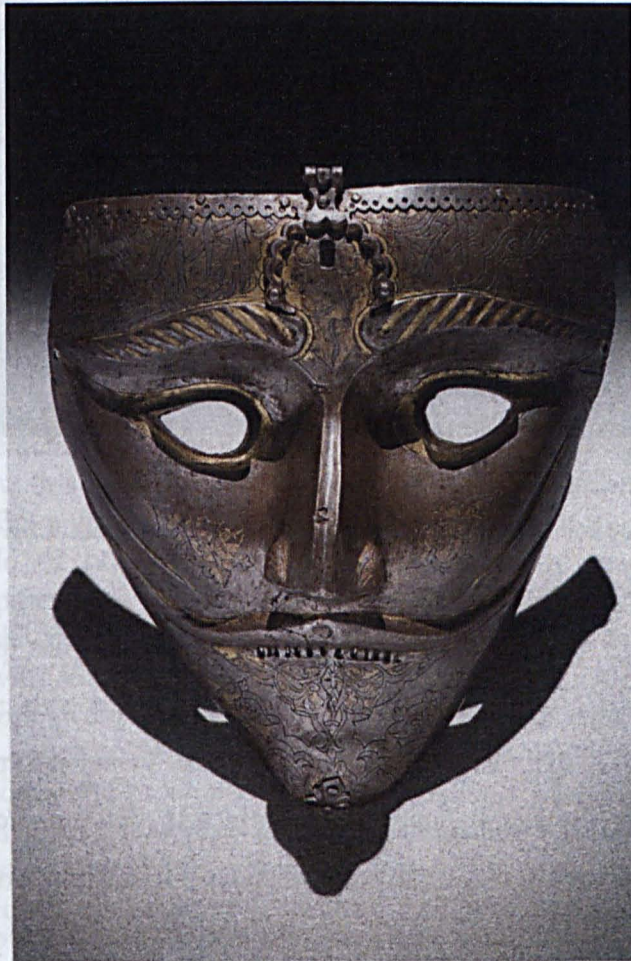


Fig. 103. War Mask, Eastern Turkey or Western Iran, fifteenth century, steel with gold inlay.

⁹⁸² Watson, p. 82



Fig. 104. Pages from a Qur'an in Hijazi script, Arabian Peninsula or Syria, seventh to early eighth century, ink on parchment.

In addition to the labels, the permanent collection has provided the curators/narrators with the opportunity to create a systematic visual interpretation of their narrative. However, such visual interpretation has been used to showcase hundreds of artefacts derived from different Islamic heritages, with different lifestyles, traditions and historical backgrounds, under one collection, one narrative and one picture.⁹⁸³ I would argue here that, within this attempt to present Islamic civilisation as one whole entity, the special efforts of the MIA to influence global knowledge about, and attitudes to, Islam are lost. What we have here is a challenging presentation that marginalises differences and, rather than presenting Islamic culture as 'us' and its relationships with 'them', here the curators/narrators are trying to present a new positive interpretation of 'us'.⁹⁸⁴ However, building the 'us' and a powerful positive relationship with 'them', alters the crucial question about the central role of the

⁹⁸³ Haas, pp. S7-S9.

⁹⁸⁴ Haas, pp. S7-S9.

artefacts in the politicians'/narrators' political game.⁹⁸⁵ The public today is increasingly sceptical of what kind of knowledge they are being offered. Furthermore, marginalising the differences in Islamic heritage might lead visitors to question whether the MIA can play a crucial role in the globe as a voice to the world about Islamic civilisation. This question and others result from the unfortunate fact that the narrative of the MIA is an 'own-goal'.⁹⁸⁶ In his interview with the Al-Jazeera English Channel, Sheikh Hassan Bin Mohamed, Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees for Qatar Museums Authority, announced that:

What distinguishes us [in the MIA] is that we are focused. We are not folkloric; we are not a museum which deals with what people used in their daily lives, what they wore, what they ate and so on. We are dedicated to art, and Islamic arts specifically; we are hoping to reveal to the world the achievements and contributions of Islam to world civilisations and how this helped the Muslims achieve the pinnacle of their scientific and artistic glory. Let me offer you one small example of how Islamic arts and sciences influenced the development of human history and innovation. Until the fifteenth century, the Vatican used to embroider the Papal robes with Arabic letters. During the Middle Ages, china plates in Europe were found to have been inscribed with Islamic motifs, specifically calligraphy of the words Mohammed (in reference to the prophet of Islam) and Allah [...] I would like to say that for 1,000 years the path of civilisation was from east to west. However, for centuries now that path has been reversed to be from west to east [...] and tomorrow who knows?⁹⁸⁷

What Sheikh Hassan suggests here, is that we can separate the aesthetic effect from the social life of an object. His argument depends on the belief that there is a difference between art and social artefacts. However, this separation is viewed by the social historian Jeffery Alexander as very problematic. Alexander argues that an artwork's aesthetic can act as 'a

⁹⁸⁵ Haas, pp. S7-S9.

⁹⁸⁶ Haas, pp. S1-S9.

⁹⁸⁷ Ahmed Janabi, 'Qatar Unveils Islamic Arts Museum', *Al-Jazeera English Channel Net* November 2008 <
<http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/2008/11/20081122145957210396.html>> [accessed December 2008].

window into [its] social life'.⁹⁸⁸ He highlights the significant sociological point that artists could use materials as tools to take us deeper into the object's meaning and emotional experiences.⁹⁸⁹ It is a 'movement from surface to depth representing immersion in the materiality of social life'.⁹⁹⁰ According to Alexander, then, the aesthetic and social life of the object complement each other.⁹⁹¹ In contrast, Laurens Bakker classifies museums by subject matter when he argues that ethnographic museums and exhibitions differ from art exhibitions.⁹⁹² Bakker has identified the function of the ethnographic museum as 'inform[ing] the viewing public about other cultures, and not so much to highlight the objects' aesthetic or sublime characteristics'.⁹⁹³ Gary Edson and David Dean propose that the role of curators should be much more than simply displaying cultural artefacts and specimens. Rather they should display ideas, meaning that museums should provide viewers with an understanding of objects and be clear about the purpose of their exhibitions. Most importantly, an awareness of cultural pluralism must be the basis for exhibitions, collections and museums. Edson and Dean have commented on the idea of bringing the global community closer together through museums:

Globalisation, worldwide economic and cultural interaction requires future thinking rather than a response to existing conditions [...]. The real challenge to museum works is to have a broad view of global issues and determine what can be done to make a difference. They must also consider how to make those issues available to the visitor.⁹⁹⁴

This idea of cultural pluralism may have encouraged the curators/narrators to seek new ways of enticing tourists into the new museums in Qatar. The flexibility of this new trend in heritage tourism

⁹⁸⁸ Jeffery C. Alexander, 'Iconic Experience in Art and Life: Surface/Depth Beginning with Giacometti's Standing Woman', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25:1 (September 2008), 1-19 (p. 1).

⁹⁸⁹ Alexander, pp. 1-19.

⁹⁹⁰ Alexander, p. 6.

⁹⁹¹ Alexander, pp. 1-19.

⁹⁹² Laurens Bakker, 'At Nias or From Nias? Museum Displays, National Images and Local Reality in *A West Indonesian Island*', in *Performing Objects: Museums, Material Culture and Performance in Southeast Asia*, ed. by Fiona Kerlogue (London: The Horniman Museum and Gardens, 2004), pp. 47-67 (p. 47).

⁹⁹³ Bakker, p. 47.

⁹⁹⁴ Edson and Dean, pp. 5-9.

creates a new area of intellectual partnership between Qatar and others.⁹⁹⁵ Therefore the curators/narrators have used the flexibility of the heritage market within their wider global goals and turned what could potentially be a negative image into a positive one. For example, the interpretation of a wooden door in the temporary exhibition downstairs has turned a potential story of tension and conflict between Muslim Mamluk and Christian in Cairo into a harmonious, positive relationship [Fig. 105].



Fig. 105. A wooden door with ebony, cedar, walnut and ivory or bone inlay, fourteenth century, displayed at the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, in 2008.

By masking a potential story of conflict and discord, the power and flexibility of the heritage industry allows a new story to be told once such

⁹⁹⁵ Richard Prentice, 'Heritage a Key Sector in the New Tourism', in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 243-256.

objects are rebranded as tourist materials and used to demonstrate historical partnership and friendship with non-Islamic cultures.⁹⁹⁶ Therefore, the MIA is clearly being part of the wider rhetoric of globalisation and modernisation. The establishment of the narrative of the MIA may only be a starting point for the wider development of a mass heritage industry in Qatar. This is why its narrative promotes a global view instead of depending only on local consumption. However, in ‘the dichotomy between appreciation and understanding, form and meaning’, there is a critical concern about mounting an exhibition that looks for a broader audience.⁹⁹⁷ Susan Vogel has discussed the issue of Western observation and appreciation for non-Western arts. She restates the fundamental question that the anthropologist Ivan Karp first raised when he stated:

I’m really torn between the arguments that are made for universal aesthetic criteria and the idea that we can only truly appreciate something from the point of view of the people for whom it was originally made – that aesthetics are ‘culture bound’.⁹⁹⁸

Perhaps solving Karp’s question requires us to rethink the effectiveness of aesthetic display. We should ask ourselves how audiences from different cultures appreciate and understand the work of art that is derived from cultures that they do not know or understand. It is worth considering the issue of the difference between form and content. Vogel argues that audiences do not react to art works in predictable or standardised ways. On the contrary, audiences react to them ‘with their total humanity’.⁹⁹⁹ Speaking from his own experience, the Nigerian archaeologist Kpo Eyo, suggests that ‘an intermingling of scholarship and emotional aesthetic response leads to understanding’.¹⁰⁰⁰ Eyo goes further to suggest that the more thoughtfully the individual looks at objects, the more he or she will

⁹⁹⁶ Prentice, pp. 243-256.

⁹⁹⁷ Susan Vogel, ‘Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion’, in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 191-204 (p.194).

⁹⁹⁸ Vogel, p. 194.

⁹⁹⁹ Vogel, p. 195.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Vogel, p. 195.

evaluate and appreciate their beauty: 'It's like having a baby; you look at the baby all the time, and you begin to discover many things about it which you could not see at first'.¹⁰⁰¹ Western museums have exhibited Islamic objects for many centuries. Take, for example, the British Museum, which has a section dedicated to Islamic objects, some of which contain calligraphy. The Western display of Islamic civilisation at the British Museum is designed not to propose a direct historical relationship or highlight artistic skills, but to present information about an ancient civilisation and its early achievements in various aspects of life. Audiences are encouraged to explore Islam as an historic civilisation when the curators of the British Museum ask them to:

Explore the Medieval Islamic world. Find out about the importance of religion, science and technology, travel and trade, and courtly life [...] explore the beauty and meaning of Arabic writing through inscribed objects and examples of calligraphy from all over the Islamic lands.

What distinguishes the display of these objects at the MIA to similar objects in the British Museum is the presentation method, which aims to emphasise their aesthetic value and to present a picture of Islamic interaction and cooperation with the rest of the world. Ivan Karp states that:

The isolation of the object in a vitrine with minimal information is done to emphasise the similarities between the aesthetic that is involved in appreciating the object in a museum and the aesthetic assumed to have been involved in the making.¹⁰⁰²

In the permanent exhibition one can clearly see how the consideration of content, such as the purpose for which the pieces may have been produced, an examination of the objects' use, and even the history of the objects have been totally omitted 'from the analysis that may serve to shape the final form of the object'.¹⁰⁰³ On the contrary, these objects have

¹⁰⁰¹ Vogel, p. 195.

¹⁰⁰² Ivan Karp, 'Other Cultures in Museum Perspective', in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 373-385 (p. 376).

¹⁰⁰³ Karp, p. 376.

been installed with a sense that the main activity of the audience would be simply looking and then linking what they look at to the museum's main narrative.¹⁰⁰⁴ Ken Arnold has stated that 'any object that can physically be brought into a museum and kept there can be used to convey some meaning'.¹⁰⁰⁵ Furthermore, he has proposed that a significant issue about the display of objects, highlighted by Roland Barthes and Bernard Leach, is 'the ability of objects to carry a true part of the past into the present, but also to bear perpetual symbolic reinterpretation'.¹⁰⁰⁶ The objects in the MIA's permanent exhibition are displayed as symbols of the development of Islamic art, through its social interaction with other cultures. With limited information, the permanent exhibition becomes a spectacle of the narrative of Islamic achievement.¹⁰⁰⁷ This might explain why very limited information is given in some labels. For instance, a Mamluk door [Fig. 105] was labelled in the temporary exhibition as:

During the Mamluk period the city of Cairo witnessed a surge in the arts, with sultans showing enthusiasm in both the building and restoration of mosques and Madrasses. As architecture flourished so did the production of woodcarvings, which were delicately inlaid with ivory and precious woods. The pair of doors was commissioned by a Christian patron and probably intended for one of the churches of Cairo. Churches are finished with a characteristic Islamic ornament using geometry and calligraphy alongside the typical Christian narrative iconography and icons.¹⁰⁰⁸

In contrast, an identical door that belongs to the same dynasty and era is labelled in the permanent exhibition with only the following 'Egypt (Cairo) fourteenth century wood (pine) with ebony, cedar, walnut and ivory or bone inlay'.¹⁰⁰⁹ The contrast in the labelling of the objects in both exhibitions suggests that the curators of the permanent collection wished to present the MIA's objects aesthetically through the effect of visual encounter rather than through text. Arnold argues that the more

¹⁰⁰⁴ Baxandall, pp. 33-41.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ken Arnold, *Cabinet for the Curious: Looking Back at Early English Museums* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 91-92.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Arnold, p. 94.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Arnold, pp. 91-94.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Label of the Mamluk door in the MIA temporary exhibition 'Beyond Boundaries'.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Label of the Mamluk door in the MIA permanent exhibition 'Beyond Boundaries'.

information given on a label, such as an object's date, material, place and maker, the more likely it is inspire an endless series of questions.¹⁰¹⁰ In 'The Discursive Object' Edwina Taborsky identifies the concept of 'signification'. She argues that 'an object [has] meaning which is not inherent in that object, but which is socially assigned to it'.¹⁰¹¹ Taborsky goes further and defines the sign as a meaning that exists within 'an information structure that is mentally encoded by human beings'.¹⁰¹² Beauty, therefore, becomes a sign containing social behaviour that involves the interaction and communication between viewers and objects.¹⁰¹³ However, we should consider that this sign, the perception of beauty, is problematic because its meaning is not really inherent in any object. On the contrary, sign and meaning are ascribed to objects by groups of people in order to convey cultural content. 'Meaning is socially determined and assigned. We do not gather meaning directly from the object, but create it using our own "fore-knowledge" about our society'.¹⁰¹⁴ Therefore, the meaning of objects becomes mutable as their signs are a social creation. As such the way that the meanings of the objects are delivered is different in the permanent exhibition, where seeing becomes (for the curators/narrators) a very significant practice that allows audiences to read the intended narrative of the exhibition.¹⁰¹⁵ Early museum critics from the eighteenth century such as Quatremère de Quincy called for contextualisation when viewing artefacts. They concluded that 'even the elaborate decors of palace-museums and of Beaux-Arts purpose-built galleries provided insufficient compensation for the original settings of these objects'.¹⁰¹⁶ Despite this early outcry, according to Victoria Newhouse 'museum interiors [in the twentieth

¹⁰¹⁰ Arnold, p. 99.

¹⁰¹¹ Edwina Taborsky, 'The Discursive Object', in *Objects of Knowledge*, ed. by Susan Pearce (London and Atlantic Highlands: The Athlone Press, 1990), pp. 50-77 (p. 52).

¹⁰¹² Taborsky, p. 52.

¹⁰¹³ Taborsky, pp. 50-55.

¹⁰¹⁴ Taborsky, p. 52.

¹⁰¹⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, 'Resonance and Wonder', in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), pp. 42-56 (p. 51).

¹⁰¹⁶ Newhouse, p. 47.

century] became even less contextual than they had been earlier'.¹⁰¹⁷ Now, in the twenty-first century, in order to enhance an aesthetic presentation, the contextual method is relatively absent in the MIA's permanent exhibition. This absence was also meant to allow the emergence of a contemporary museum practice that would preserve Qatari heritage within the rhetoric of globalisation and modernisation. The concept of a sacred space was enhanced by the design of the galleries by the French interior designer Jean-Michel Wilmotte. He replaced the traditional museum display method of squeezing artefacts into tableaux with a contemporary style that he describes as 'theatrical'.¹⁰¹⁸ Sharon Macdonald states that applying certain forms of presentation implies a distribution of power over the objects, where power can be reduced or increased according to the presentation style that is applied. Thus, an investigation into the politics of display is vital. Macdonald argues that:

Politics lies not just in policy statements and intentions (though they are important) but also in apparently non-political and even 'minor' details, such as the architecture of buildings, the classification and juxtaposition of artefacts in an exhibition, the use of glass cases [...] This is not to say that we will necessarily be able to detect the direct influence of, say, 'the state' in the design of such details.¹⁰¹⁹

On the other hand, Jean-Michel Wilmotte describes how his interior design interacts smoothly with Pei's architecture to enhance the presentation of objects. To preserve the quality of Pei's overall design, Wilmotte organised the galleries in a regular geometric style that allows open views from one gallery to another: 'The dark architectural finishes – Louro Faya wood and Porphyry stone – were selected for their rich and subtle texture that does not intrude on the delicate intricacy of the Islamic artefacts'.¹⁰²⁰ Hence, the specimens are accommodated within a sacred space 'formed by the showcases', which were designed in a way that

¹⁰¹⁷ Newhouse, p. 48.

¹⁰¹⁸ Watson, p. 43.

¹⁰¹⁹ Nelia Dias, 'The Visibility of Difference: Nineteenth-Century French Anthropological Collections', in *The Politics of Display*, ed. by Sharon Macdonald (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 36-52.

¹⁰²⁰ Jean-Michel Wilmotte, 'The Making of A Masterpiece', *Showcase Click Nether Field Magazine* (2009), 12-15 (p. 15).

minimises the visual impact of the glass.¹⁰²¹ To obtain the impression of a sacred space, many galleries of the MIA have several displays recessed into the walls, and Wilmotte has individualised each of them with different designs and textures. The cases thus 'vanish' inside the ceilings and walls, with their support structures either minimised or concealed entirely.¹⁰²² Objects often play a part in searching for a new numerical and visual language.¹⁰²³ Thus, for curators/narrators, investigating objects can be a means of simultaneously illustrating, demonstrating and displaying arguments. It is necessary to give the public general ideas through collections, which 'speak to the eyes', in a way that ensures the audience receives the message easily.¹⁰²⁴ In setting the objects in the MIA, Wilmotte aimed to 'let the object speak for itself',¹⁰²⁵ as it seems that he encased each individual object in glass in such a way that the object has to be gazed upon and admired.¹⁰²⁶ Thus visitors feel that they are being invited to undertake a trip in time and space and simultaneously be spectators who discover and examine the essence of the beauty that is revealed in front of their eyes.¹⁰²⁷ As is the nature of most sacred spaces, Wilmotte has stripped the interior design of the MIA of all distracting details [Fig. 106].¹⁰²⁸

¹⁰²¹ Wilmotte, p. 15.

¹⁰²² Watson, pp. 43-51.

¹⁰²³ Dias, p. 50.

¹⁰²⁴ Dias, p. 45.

¹⁰²⁵ Kevin Moore, *Stones Can Speak and Objects Sign* (London and Washington: Leicester University Press, 1997), p. 55.

¹⁰²⁶ Macdonald, pp. 1-18.

¹⁰²⁷ Dias, pp. 36-44.

¹⁰²⁸ Newhouse, p. 55.



Fig. 106. An exhibition space at the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, in 2008.

The objects are framed by showcases that were installed to minimise any possibility of visual obstacles.¹⁰²⁹ Accordingly, the art in this collection becomes visual; the Iranian coffin, the Indian necklaces, the science collection, and so on. Artistic skills are illuminated by the abstract presentation in a Western style that aims to integrate the art works with the architecture. In the guidebook to the MIA, Oliver Watson commented on the collaborative work that brought Pei and Wilmotte together in the Doha project: 'Bringing together the talents of I.M. Pei and Jean-Michel Wilmotte, the Doha Museum of Islamic Art takes its rightful place amongst the most significant cultural buildings of the early twenty-first century'.¹⁰³⁰

Wilmotte and Pei first worked together on the renovation of the Louvre in Paris, where they developed the temporary exhibition spaces, restaurants, and a bookshop in the area beneath Pei's pyramid. Wilmotte described the experience of working closely with Pei on the Louvre project as an opportunity 'to have a very interesting dialogue'.¹⁰³¹ Subsequent to his

¹⁰²⁹ Wilmotte, p. 15.

¹⁰³⁰ Watson, p. 51.

¹⁰³¹ Watson, p. 43.

work at the Louvre, Wilmotte became involved in interior design in the museum field in Europe and elsewhere. He is currently working on museum projects in China, Korea, Lebanon, Bahrain and Luxembourg.¹⁰³² The harmonious collaboration between Wilmotte and Pei encouraged the architect to ask for Wilmotte to be appointed as the interior designer of the Doha Project. Commenting on Pei's request, Wilmotte said:

I have known I.M. Pei for quite some time, and I believe that in the context of this complex project he did not wish to call on architects with whom he had not worked in the past [...]. We have an easy, natural rapport and that has greatly facilitated the process.¹⁰³³

Rather than simply designing the galleries' interiors, Wilmotte went on to design all the signage, furniture and light fixtures, and developed a visual identity for the entire museum. That identity, Wilmotte believes, will draw audiences to the objects.¹⁰³⁴ However, the shared critical view of the artist George Baselitz, William Robin, and the artist Dorothea Pockburne rejects the attempt of postmodern architects such as Hans Hollein, Robert Venturi, James Stirling, Frank Gehry and Denise Scott Brown to link art works to architectural design. Through such attempts, postmodern architects wish to restore a visual context to the art through creating a dynamic interplay between architecture and art. Yet these critics refuse to accept the integration of the work of architects with the art works exhibited, because they consider it an 'abuse of art'.¹⁰³⁵ Furthermore, Baselitz has called for 'high walls, few doors, no side windows, light from above, no partitions, no baseboards, no shiny floors and finally, no colours either'.¹⁰³⁶ Contrary to the opinion of the above critics, Wilmotte 'placed himself at the service of a project that concerns architecture and art', where it is hoped to bring together architecture and art, design and

¹⁰³² Watson, pp. 43-51.

¹⁰³³ Wilmotte, p. 45.

¹⁰³⁴ Watson, pp. 43-51.

¹⁰³⁵ Newhouse, p. 50.

¹⁰³⁶ Newhouse, p. 50.

craftsmanship.¹⁰³⁷ The Director of the MIA, Oliver Watson, describes the integration of the architecture and Wilmotte's interior design in the following terms:

Using unusually large panes of non-reflective glass, the gallery design revolves around the idea of making the display cases so large that they almost disappear, becoming a 'form of architecture in and of themselves'.¹⁰³⁸

In Figure 107, for example, Wilmotte has used for the 'first time in the museum's interior design' glass panes that go 'up to four and a half meters high and three meters wide'.¹⁰³⁹ Installing this kind of display case allowed 'an unimpeded view of the objects, which almost appear to float in space'.¹⁰⁴⁰ The postmodern architecture provided an opportunity to utilise the exhibition spaces, offering Wilmotte the prospect of creating a 'dynamic interaction between art and architecture'.¹⁰⁴¹ Thinking of future displays, Wilmotte has provided a flexible system that will allow the curators/narrators to change the displayed artefacts easily:

I think we have brought a number of technical and aesthetic improvements to the new design [...]. We are using a sophisticated electronic system that permits the curators to open the exhibition cases without actually being obliged to touch the large glass doors.¹⁰⁴²

¹⁰³⁷ Watson, p. 51.

¹⁰³⁸ Watson, p. 46.

¹⁰³⁹ Watson, p. 46.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Watson, p. 47.

¹⁰⁴¹ Newhouse, p. 50.

¹⁰⁴² Watson, p. 48.



Fig. 107. Display cases rise to the ceiling at the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha.

Wilmotte's presentation acts as an ancillary to the production of a sense of wonder. The atmosphere of the permanent exhibition is designed to maximise this sense of wonder by influencing the visual experiences of the audience.¹⁰⁴³ As such, in their presentation the museum curators/narrators offer viewers not only what Qatar possesses in the way of artefacts, but also a sense of astonishment within specially designed dark rooms in a minimalist atmosphere that openly suggest a sacred space.¹⁰⁴⁴ This idea of sacred spaces began in Europe in the 1820s when the purpose of building museums symbolised a new way of viewing and thinking about art. Displaying art in museums, therefore, was no longer dedicated to mere pleasure. Museums developed for the appreciation and worship of art, paralleled religious places such as mosques, churches, chapels, and so on, which had been developed for the worship of God.¹⁰⁴⁵ Perhaps the creation of sacred space was actually inspired by the role of these religious places. For instance, churches have often had a connection and relationship with objects that were kept by the clergy, especially, those objects that were claimed to have magical power, such as paintings

¹⁰⁴³ Greenblatt, pp. 42-45.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Duncan, pp. 133-134.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Newhouse, pp. 46-51.

or sculptures of the Lamb of God, the image of the Virgin, and so on.¹⁰⁴⁶ Thus, patronage of the objects had often been linked to religious practices, but also the gathering of wealthy collections in people's home to reflect the emerging status of the richer citizens. This development did not exist until the middle of the fifteenth century.¹⁰⁴⁷ In Florence, particularly, both patronage and collecting began to be combined at a time when the display of position and wealth created a new demand for extravagant furniture, decorative art and rare artefacts.¹⁰⁴⁸ The architects reinforced the message of sacred spaces throughout their designs, for example, using church imagery, incorporating domes into museum buildings, or isolating the museums in parks far away from other buildings.¹⁰⁴⁹ This idea of isolating the building from any surrounding distractions was meant to focus the audiences' attention on their worship of the art.¹⁰⁵⁰ In the same way, Wilmotte attempted to create a sacred space, which aids the appreciation and worship of art pieces in the MIA. He has isolated the specimens from any distraction. The galleries are sealed and detached from the surrounding sea view. The use of windowless galleries with their dimmed lighting is intended to banish all exterior and interior distractions 'for fear that the eye might stray from the art'.¹⁰⁵¹ Within this presentation, a sacred space is created, which is supposed to provoke awe in the audiences and create an appreciation of the pleasures of confronting and scrutinising art. Carol Duncan's work has focused on the idea of ritual and sacred space in the museum:

Just as images of saints were, by example, supposed to trigger in the initiated a quest for spiritual transcendence, so in the museum, art objects focus and organize the viewer's attention, activating by their very form an inner spiritual or imaginative act. The museum setting, immaculately white and stripped of all distracting ornament, promotes this intense concentration [...] The art objects thus provide both the content and structure of the ritual performance. Through them, viewers enact a

¹⁰⁴⁶ Hooper-Greenhill (2001), pp. 53-57.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Hooper-Greenhill (2001), pp. 53-57.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Hooper-Greenhill (2001), pp. 53-57.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Newhouse, pp. 46-51.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Newhouse, pp. 46-51.

¹⁰⁵¹ Newhouse, p. 47.

drama of enlightenment in which spiritual freedom is won by repeatedly overcoming and moving beyond the visible, material world.¹⁰⁵²

However, Duncan argues that such sacred space would not be effective if visitors did not learn how to use the artefacts knowledgeably as ritual pieces.¹⁰⁵³ In Wilmotte's design for the museum's interior, it seems that he has installed the permanent exhibition in such a way as to support the overarching narrative. From various pronouncements by the curators/narrators, it becomes clear that the political narrative of a peaceful civilisation has been focused on the skill used in the creation of Islamic art. In Figures 108 and 109, we can see that Wilmotte's attempt to create a sacred space has removed any extraneous elements that are unrelated to the practice of viewing art. High wall cases are filled with relatively small and sometimes tiny objects and examples of capitals have been placed on columns or pillars in a well-ordered repetitive display. This kind of in-line presentation confronts visitors with a ritualised encounter that casts the ancient Islamic artefacts into relief and allows visitors ample space to gaze at the spectacle.¹⁰⁵⁴ These cases and pillars act to strengthen and protect the meaning of the pieces. In their repetitive method of presentation, the ritual character of the artefacts is meant to dominate.¹⁰⁵⁵

¹⁰⁵² Duncan, p. 110.

¹⁰⁵³ Duncan, pp. 110-111.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Duncan, pp. 110-111.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Duncan, pp. 110-111.



Fig. 108. Capitals displayed on pillars in the middle of a gallery at the Museum of Islamic Art.

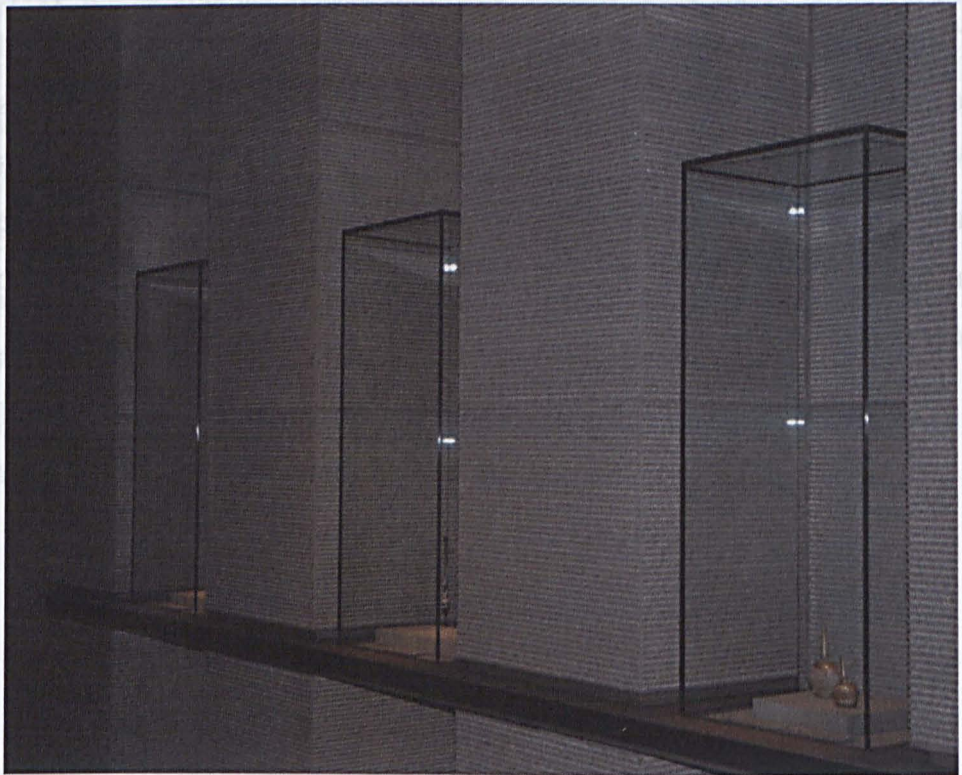


Fig. 109. Display cases recessed into the gallery walls almost disappear around the objects in the Museum of Islamic Art.

However one might question how long this presentation will be interesting for audiences. The atmosphere is deliberately employed to

reveal the great cultural power of these 'masterpieces',¹⁰⁵⁶ and the designer has commented that it has 'an atmosphere that truly allows the objects to be seen and appreciated'.¹⁰⁵⁷ Thus we can say that the 'masterpieces' in the permanent exhibition, organised and presented in a Western style, are 'ideally displayed in such a way as to heighten [their] charisma, to compel and reward the intensity of the viewer's gaze, to manifest artistic genius'.¹⁰⁵⁸ The ancient Islamic relics are commodified as ingredients for contemporary consumption. As such, addressing these artefacts in the context of a modern presentation suggests a debate on the role of the past and the meaning and role of contemporary display, as well as a debate on how presentation is congruent with the political progress of Qatar as its Islamic heritage is visualised as a strategic resource to encourage a new concept of Islam and to encourage Qatar's development in education, knowledge and the tourist market.¹⁰⁵⁹ Brian Graham, Gregory John Ashworth and John Tunbridge comment:

If heritage knowledge is situated in particular social and intellectual circumstances, it is time-specific and thus its meaning(s) can be altered as texts are re-read in changing times, circumstances and constructs of place and scale. Consequently, it is inevitable that such knowledge are also fields of contestation.¹⁰⁶⁰

Accommodating these masterpieces in this context has helped the curators/narrators to 'make the past beneficial to people'.¹⁰⁶¹ Although the curators/narrators at the MIA regard Islamic heritage as a cultural product, it is also considered as a crucial socio-political resource and tool. This experience emerges from within the permanent exhibition in the raft of ideas and ideologies that underlie their interpretation of the early

¹⁰⁵⁶ Greenblatt, pp. 42-54.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Watson, p. 47.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Greenblatt, p. 51.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Deirdre C. Stam, 'The Informed Muse: The Implication of 'The New Museology' for Museum Practice', in *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader*, ed. by Gerard Corsane (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 54-70, (p. 63).

¹⁰⁶⁰ Brian Graham, Gregory John Ashworth and John E. Tunbridge, 'The Uses and Abuses of Heritage', in *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader*, ed. by Gerard Corsane (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 26-37 (p. 30).

¹⁰⁶¹ Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, p. 30.

history of Islamic civilisation.¹⁰⁶² This has helped the politicians/narrators to deliver their global message about Qatar, first as a modernised, tolerant country; then about Islamic civilisation as a culture with ancient achievements and an interest in others, in beauty and in art.

Amongst the spectacle of the permanent exhibition spaces, however, there are a few exhibits that appear to contradict the overarching aesthetic interpretation and link to the ideology of the temporary exhibition 'Beyond Boundaries'. Deirdre Stam argues that curators using new museological theory in their exhibitions must consider three main actors and the product of their relationships in order to make their collection accessible to further debate and speculation.¹⁰⁶³ She states that:

Makers of objects, exhibitors of those objects and viewers, these players come into contact somewhere between the objects and the label. The active relationships of these parties in an exhibition should be exploited, with the final integration left to the viewers.¹⁰⁶⁴

To illustrate a concrete example of what Stam argues, we could take the MIA's exhibit of a figure in silk velvet, wrapped silk and silk embroidery, originally from seventeenth century Iran, and observe that the label refers to three factors: the maker of the silk, the MIA curators'/narrators analysis and the attitudes of the viewers [Fig. 110]. The label reads:

The large size of the repeat image, the multiple textures and the remarkable range of colours put this piece amongst the great achievements of Islamic weaving [...] Such textiles were often cut up to make coats in Safavid Iran and it is recorded that these figurative coats shocked the more Orthodox Ottomans. This example has been altered in some places in order to change the role of the female figures; later embroidery has changed the wine flasks and cups they carry into flower vases.¹⁰⁶⁵

In contrast to the aesthetic display technique used elsewhere in the permanent exhibition, this label identifies the textile maker's origin and

¹⁰⁶² Greenblatt, pp. 50–51.

¹⁰⁶³ Stam, pp. 30–33.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Stam, p. 63.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Watson, p. 78.

presents a specific historical context for the Iranian artefact. The label presents this piece as exemplifying general artistic principles in Iran in the mid-seventeenth century. However, when the curators/narrators of the MIA added the information about the Orthodox Ottomans' reaction to the depiction, and the information concerning the later alteration, they managed to 'enhance the clarity of the presentation and the authority of the museum'.¹⁰⁶⁶ Nonetheless, they had pushed themselves into a paradoxical situation. The presentation of the reaction of the Orthodox Ottomans in the text contradicts the curators'/narrators' ideology of presenting Islamic culture as interested in others. Rather, the alteration of the role of the female figures is an acknowledgement of rejection, inequality, domination and the extension of political power. It is testimony to the image of distinguishing 'self' from 'others'. Here, the MIA would appear to be more concerned with the narrative of others, their differences, unequal relationship with 'us' and 'our' domination, contrary to the museum's claim about harmonious inter-relationships. The silk velvet marginalises the 'others' and symbolically centralise 'us'.¹⁰⁶⁷

¹⁰⁶⁶ Stam, p. 64.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Haas, pp. S7-S8.



Fig. 110. Silk velvet with female figures, Iran, seventeenth century.

This information will impact on the visitors' appreciation of the object, as they may add their own analysis. Therefore, in this label, three factors were involved in the narration of its data. Moreover, speculation about the real nature of Islamic relationships with others was left open.¹⁰⁶⁸ Stam proposes that:

It is not [...] physical alteration that is called for, but rather attitudinal change. Central to this change is the recognition of information as a basic and shared museum resource. The peculiar qualities of information allow it to penetrate physical walls and thus to foster closer links among parts of the museum, and closer contact with the outside world.¹⁰⁶⁹

The mission of the MIA contains an obvious hybrid that moves between the claim of offering the objects for broader thinking, offering an insight

¹⁰⁶⁸ Stam, p. 63.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Stam, p. 67.

into historical inter-relationships and cultural pluralism and, most importantly, presenting a specific political narrative. Take, for example, the museum's claim to motivate 'broad thinking'. The museum proclaimed that it was attempting to make good use of its collections through strategic planning in order to explain to visitors how and why these objects were produced in Islamic culture. As such, the MIA's strategic planning concentrated for the most part on the Museum's external relations and environment and the way in which both locals and tourists could interact with the collections and their narratives.¹⁰⁷⁰ Hence on 10 October 2009, approximately a year after the opening of the museum, an education centre was opened. The centre hosts several facilities, including classrooms, a computer laboratory and workshops, and a library that contains approximately ten thousand titles on Islamic art from around the world in Arabic and other languages.¹⁰⁷¹ Within this establishment, different programmes and activities have been created in order to enhance the interaction between the audiences and the collections.¹⁰⁷² It was claimed that the museum wished to create an atmosphere of knowledge by encouraging the audiences not only to view Islamic art and consider the museum as a centre to preserve Islamic artefacts, but also to analyse the artefacts and think about their meanings. This is a paradoxical claim, as the MIA had a specific political narrative in mind. From the beginning of its inauguration, the curators/narrators endeavoured to deliver the politicians'/narrators' message about Islam and its relationships. The curators/narrators claimed that it hoped these artefacts would be a meaningful and valuable resource for the audiences' artistic skills and creations.¹⁰⁷³ This claim was meant to mask the apparent problem in the presentation of objects that makes the visitors passive actors. To enhance this claim, visitors are allowed into spaces that were once reserved exclusively for museum staff, such as conservation

¹⁰⁷⁰ Stam, pp. 54-56.

¹⁰⁷¹ 'Education Centre, Introduction', *Electronic Archive of the Museum of Islamic Art* <<http://www.mia.org.qa/edu/en/>> [accessed 30 October 2009].

¹⁰⁷² 'Education Centre, Introduction', *Electronic Archive of the Museum of Islamic Art*.

¹⁰⁷³ Lobna Shaalan, 'The opening of the Partnership Conference', *Al-Sharq newspaper* <<http://www.al-sharq.com/articles/more.php?id=164419>> [accessed 31 October 2009].

centres and storage rooms. Through such open access, Qatar Museums Authority state that the MIA will become a source of knowledge and culture for ‘key’ audiences such as scholars, students, teachers and researchers.¹⁰⁷⁴ As such, a paradoxical situation has been created, whereby they claim to be offering the artefacts to encourage broad thinking, and yet their imposed narrative simultaneously discourages visitors from thinking for themselves. Mari Carmen Remirez, summarises the position and function of professional curators in cultural presentation:

Curators are, above all, the institutionally recognized experts of the art world establishment, whether they operate inside an institution or independently. More than art critics or gallery dealers, they establish the meaning and status of contemporary art through its acquisition, exhibition, and interpretation.¹⁰⁷⁵

Globalisation, modernisation and cultural pluralism have raised many conflicting challenges for heritage and museological practice in Qatar.¹⁰⁷⁶ Conventional understandings of interpretation, representation and narrative have concentrated on an awareness of the dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘others’. The presentation of ‘us’ and ‘others’ has led to complexity in understanding who ‘we’ are in relation to the presentation of ‘otherness’. Perhaps, this complexity has led to the emergence of a new hybrid approach based on cross-cultural dialogue and cultural pluralism. Thus, the curators/narrators through their ‘interculturally hybrid’ presentation are trying to establish a bridge and partnership with ‘others’.¹⁰⁷⁷ This intention is highlighted further in the following discussion, where I explore the dialogue between the temporary and permanent exhibitions.

The Dialogue Between Temporary and Permanent Exhibitions

The curators/narrators at the MIA announced their mission in the inaugural catalogue in the following way:

¹⁰⁷⁴ ‘Education Centre, Introduction’, *Electronic Archive of the Museum of Islamic Art*.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Remirez, p. 22.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, ‘Multiculturalism and Museums: Discourse about others in the Age of Globalisation’, in *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: Introductory Reader*, ed. by Gerard Corsane (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 163-183 (p. 163).

¹⁰⁷⁷ Pieterse, (2005) p. 163.

The Museum of Islamic Art is dedicated to reflecting the full vitality, complexity and diversity of all art of the Islamic world. It is a world-class collection, which preserves, studies and exhibits masterpieces spanning three continents and thirteen centuries. As a centre for information, research and creativity, the museum aspires to reach the widest possible global audiences through interactive engagement and, through a strong platform of partnerships with the Museum of Islamic Art, setting the foundations to establish the state of Qatar as a centre of expertise in the field of Islamic art, and as a global capital of culture.¹⁰⁷⁸

This mission statement raises a number of questions: If the MIA was focused on the development of a permanent exhibition, why was the early focus on the temporary exhibition different? What was represented in this exhibition that justified its choice as the opening event? More importantly, what are the differences between the temporary and the permanent exhibitions? Interestingly, the mission statement suggests that the temporary exhibition was arranged with an issue of partnership in mind. Museum culture in Qatar has entirely changed to accommodate the age of globalisation. Therefore, the curators/narrators developed ideas about 'us' and 'others' into a glossy presentation that was driven by nostalgia to encourage the idea of establishing global cultural partnerships.¹⁰⁷⁹ As such, the issue of partnership has informed the displays in the MIA where cultural evolutionism and relativism are used to reproduce new interpretations around the objects. The desire for partnerships did not negate cultural conflictions and differences; it opened up ideas of cultural flux and hybridisation for the curators/narrators. Thus, the exhibition strategy in the MIA comes with a prominent 'melange of newness and nostalgia'.¹⁰⁸⁰ Partnership has also encouraged the curators/narrators to treat the objects as art works, which is an effective way to communicate a sense of cross-cultural meaning, quality and importance.¹⁰⁸¹ This treatment emphasises the sharing of aesthetic criteria between the viewers and the producers of the objects. However, this

¹⁰⁷⁸ 'Museum of Islamic Art Inauguration', *Qatar TV*, 22 November 2008, CD.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Pieterse, (2005), p. 164.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Pieterse, (2005), p. 164.

¹⁰⁸¹ Pieterse, (2005), p. 164.

hybrid exhibition strategy, with its nostalgic mood, can be criticised as it is hegemonic and allows curators/narrators to treat the memories and the lives of other worlds as a Qatari playground from whence nostalgic presentation has fed ‘the hunger of differences’ instead of encouraging a partnership or commonality.¹⁰⁸² Karsten Schubert refers to the ways in which museums today view their permanent and temporary exhibitions:

The public perception of the museum [has] shifted from educational to recreational, from research and display to a more audience-driven and service-oriented approach. Instead of understanding themselves as both standard-setting and elitist store-houses of cultural prototypes that were presented to the public without further discussion and explanation, museums increasingly began to view their permanent collections and temporary exhibitions as invitations to an open dialogue between curators and viewer. In a way, museums during the past two decades have actually come closer to fulfilling Fared Barr’s vision of the institution as a laboratory and the visitor as an active participant.¹⁰⁸³

If one examines the speeches delivered during the pre-opening campaign, one can see that they concentrated on praising the new acquisitions:

The acquisitions of the MIA include a big collection of ivory and silk, some of them going back to more than six hundred years. However, their appearance, colours and materials are still preserved. These glorious objects relate to the Islamic art school, and their roots go back to the empires and countries that were reached by the Islamic conquests.¹⁰⁸⁴

This, combined with the emphasis, advertising and labelling in the temporary exhibition, makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that it was meant to act as an invitation to stimulate the audience to visit the permanent exhibition in the upper floors where an ‘open dialogue’ would be encouraged. Most notably, the temporary exhibition was the starting point for the curators/narrators to register their new curatorial voice and practice. The theme for the first temporary exhibition was clearly focused on highlighting historical relationships between Islam and other cultures. Through the temporary exhibition, the curators/narrators seem to have

¹⁰⁸² Pieterse, (2005), p. 164.

¹⁰⁸³ Schubert, p. 67.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Saqer, p. 27.

produced an introductory message that aimed to facilitate and transmit the institution's mission that was then demonstrated in the permanent exhibition. Yet the story the curators/narrators created was inherently vulnerable and fragile.¹⁰⁸⁵ For instance, in Figures 88-90, the very visible hanging panels act as anticipatory tools to present the curators'/narrators' ideas. Thereafter, the relationships between countries and religions proposed on these panels suggest a clear political interpretation of the objects. The audiences visited the exhibition with the aim of seeing examples of the relationship between Islam and other civilisations that they were led to believe existed. To help to fulfil such ambitions, the curators/narrators organised a two-day conference that had the same name 'Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures'. The conference, which hosted scholars and specialists in Islamic art and students from four continents, discussed the impact of ethnic background, religions, culture and trade on the development of Islamic art. In his closing speech, Oliver Watson announced that these discussions offered opportunities to exchange ideas about Islamic art during different eras, and its interactions, relationships and use in different civilisations. He further emphasised the role that the MIA and its curators would play in presenting and discussing these issues in the future.¹⁰⁸⁶ In the process of delivering the museum's mission, curatorial practice was focused on seeking out new audiences from different cultures and religions, those who might benefit from the discussion of the proposed relationships in the temporary exhibition and analyse this further in the permanent exhibition. Through the temporary exhibition, the curators/narrators worked hard to put new organisational structures in place that were in line with the politicians' aims.¹⁰⁸⁷ The rhetoric of globalisation influenced the curators'/narrators' strategy, which became an engine of 'global diplomacy' that tried to sell a new, glossier image of Islamic

¹⁰⁸⁵ Schubert, p. 67.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ashraf Mumtaz, 'Closure of the Conference Beyond Boundaries', *Al-Raya newspaper*, 26 November 2008, p. 17.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Schubert, p. 67.

civilisation.¹⁰⁸⁸ Targeting the globe, these interpretations created specific memories and moments of international social, economic and political power relations. Therefore, the curators/narrators gave an active role to the cultural artefacts within the wider aims of international diplomacy and, within that diplomacy, they produced and introduced a correlation between beauty and power. This power, which was disguised under the theme of harmony, appeared as a theoretical operation and performance in the creation of mission of the exhibition.¹⁰⁸⁹ Thus, they tried hard not to interpret the artefacts as emblems of hegemonic power relations. However, I would argue that power became a reflexive representation, where it was fetishised within the objects rather than interrogated by them. The curators/narrators simply distributed their ideological messages and techniques using soft tools. This presentation was, and is, crucial yet sensitive when it is remembered that the Qatari have become a demographic minority in their own country. Therefore, it would appear that the minority are playing a profound role in shaping a global knowledge of Islam as well as reshaping its relationships with the globe.¹⁰⁹⁰ The curators/narrators perhaps recognised that various cultural groupings which had been largely invisible in Qatari society were no longer accepting of this status, especially as a huge influx of recent immigrants from many parts of the world has altered fundamentally the social mix. These groups have become significant social forces, able to exert their own cultural influence among the communities in Qatar.¹⁰⁹¹ The new demography undoubtedly affected the new cultural heritage model, which evolved as an inevitable consequence of this demographic change. Thus, museums that used to exclusively tell the story, history and heritage of Qatar will now have to be more inclusive to be effective.¹⁰⁹² Through this new heritage model, the curators/narrators were trying to

¹⁰⁸⁸ Pieterse, (2005), p. 175.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Pieterse, (2005), p. 175.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Edmund Barry Gaither, “‘Hey! That’s Mine’: Thoughts on Pluralism and American Museums”, in *Museum and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. by Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), pp. 56-64 (pp. 56-57).

¹⁰⁹¹ Gaither, p. 57.

¹⁰⁹² Gaither, p. 57.

assert the inclusiveness of the Qatari experience and simultaneously adopt a global model.¹⁰⁹³ It was to be a public message indicating that Qatari society belongs inseparably to both itself and the world. Thus, to honour and celebrate Qatar's diversity, museum heritage in Qatar must serve an ever-larger community in even more open and broader ways.¹⁰⁹⁴

The museum curators/narrators were aware of the scale of their task in the temporary exhibition, as they had to clearly articulate government policy: to raise a global debate about the nature and principles of Islam, and to alter perceived images of that civilisation. The Qatari authorities have been consistently involved in this debate. For instance, Qatar has hosted several events and conferences dedicated to the issue of Islam, such as the conference on the Dialogue of Religions, first held in 2003.¹⁰⁹⁵ Qatar founded, hosts and organises 'this annual global forum for dialogue among scholars of the three faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, with a view to promoting reciprocal communication and mutual understanding among followers of these religions'.¹⁰⁹⁶ Another international event was the USA and Islamic World Relations conference,¹⁰⁹⁷ 'designed to bring together key figures in the fields of politics, business, media, academia, and civil society from across the Muslim world and the United States'.¹⁰⁹⁸

¹⁰⁹³ Gaither, p. 57.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Gaither, p. 57.

¹⁰⁹⁵ The conference participants came from various countries related to the three faiths. Qatar considers the conference to be a connecting link between a series of conferences through which participants can realise the lofty goal of bringing people of faith and specialists together in order to explore avenues of mutual understanding and prospects for cooperation so that peace and amicable affection will prevail throughout the globe's distinguished audience. 'Doha 4th Interfaith Conference kicks off', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive* <<http://www.qatar-conferences.org/new-dialogue/english/index.php>> [accessed 3 October 2009].

¹⁰⁹⁶ 'Doha 4th Interfaith Conference kicks off', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Electronic Archive*.

¹⁰⁹⁷ The participants of the conference included representatives from thirty five countries; Afghanistan, Belgium, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, UAE, USA, United Kingdom, Palestine, along with representatives from the World Bank and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

¹⁰⁹⁸ The US-Islamic World Forum 'Overview' <<http://www.qatar-conferences.org/usislamic2009/overview.php>> [accessed 4 October 2009]

This conference sought ‘to address the critical issues dividing the United States and the Muslim world by providing a unique platform for frank dialogue, learning, and the development of positive partnerships between key politicians and opinion shapers from both sides’.¹⁰⁹⁹ The Muslim-Christian Seminar, held between 7 and 9 April 2003, aimed to look ‘for the sake of peace’ to revive the sublime values and ideals of both Islam and Christianity, that believe in the oneness of the Almighty God, and call for fraternity, equality, tolerance, moderation, rejecting violence, respecting human rights, and maintaining man’s dignity, life and property’.¹¹⁰⁰ The Islamic Conference for Cultural Ministers, with participants from various Arab, Asian and African Islamic countries, discussed issues concerning Islamic heritage. This conference set in place plans for ‘renewing cultural policies in the Islamic World’ such as presenting to the world community the rich historical heritage of Islam, initiating several projects that aimed to ensure security such as strengthening Islamic solidarity, preventing wars and strengthening cross-cultural dialogue between civilised nations.¹¹⁰¹ At the opening session Sheikh Hamad said: ‘Your conference is being held under critical international circumstances, the negative impacts and repercussions of which are reflected on the norms of life and the set of values and concepts’.¹¹⁰²

This conference in particular was significant as its aims were to expose the true image and spirit of Islamic civilisation to the non-Muslim

¹⁰⁹⁹ The US-Islamic World Forum.

¹¹⁰⁰ ‘The Emir’s Speech at the Opening Session of the Muslim-Christian Seminar in Doha 7-9 April 2003’, *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive* <http://www.diwan.gov.qa/english/the_Emir/the_Emir_speech_31.htm> [accessed 4 October 2009]

¹¹⁰¹ ‘H.H. the Emir of Qatar’s speech at the opening of the Third Islamic Conference for Cultural Ministries I Qatar 29th December 2001’, *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive* <http://www.diwan.gov.qa/english/the_Emir/the_Emir_speech_31.htm> [accessed 4 October 2009]

¹¹⁰² ‘H.H. the Emir of Qatar’s speech at the opening of the Third Islamic Conference for Cultural Ministries I Qatar 29th December 2001’, *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*. http://www.diwan.gov.qa/english/the_Emir/the_Emir_speech_31.htm.

world.¹¹⁰³ The conference emphasised the implementation of a cultural strategy in Islamic countries that could encourage them to resume thinking about the role of their culture and civilisation in the dialogue and communication with non-Muslim civilisations and which aimed to overcome any possible clash between different cultures: 'We repeat our calls for the dialogue of cultures, without which humanity will not be secure, nor will peace prevail'; using current global communication technology, such as satellites, the internet and any other communication means.¹¹⁰⁴ Qatar was given a golden opportunity to build a cross-cultural dialogue when Doha was nominated as Capital of Arabic Culture in 2010. This witnessed the foundation of a Cultural Village, hosting an opera house, a Roman theatre, halls for various cultural uses and the Doha Cultural Forum.¹¹⁰⁵ In 1996, the Arabic Group in UNESCO proposed the idea of hosting the Capital of Arabic Culture event each year in a different country. This idea relied on participating countries emphasising and demonstrating the important role of culture in developing societies.¹¹⁰⁶ The programme aimed to stimulate interest in the cultural legacy, value, and appreciation of the host country as well as to emphasise that country's intellectual riches.¹¹⁰⁷ The host country's role was seen as demonstrating the nature of its civilisation, heritage and cultural values by supporting intellectual creations, art, and culture; it should strengthen cross-cultural dialogue and interaction and demonstrate openness towards other cultures and civilisations, respect the privacy of different cultures, and show understanding of the need for relationships and peaceful co-

¹¹⁰³ 'H.H. the Emir of Qatar's speech at the opening of the Third Islamic Conference for Cultural Ministries I Qatar 29th December 2001', *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*.

¹¹⁰⁴ 'H.H. the Emir of Qatar's speech at the opening of the Third Islamic Conference for Cultural Ministries I Qatar 29th December 2001', *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*.

¹¹⁰⁵ Adeel Marzouq, 'Qatar Preparing to be the Capital of Arabic Culture', *Al-Wasat* <<http://www.alwasatnews.com/1672/news/read/224452/1.html>> [accessed 5 October 2009].

¹¹⁰⁶ 'UNESCON: The Capital of Arabic Culture', *Sharjah Commerce Tourism Development Authority* <<http://www.sharjah-welcome.com/ar/home>> [accessed 30 October 2009].

¹¹⁰⁷ 'UNESCON: The Capital of Arabic Culture', *Sharjah Commerce Tourism Development Authority*.

existence.¹¹⁰⁸ Since being proposed in 1996, the event has been hosted by fifteen different countries.¹¹⁰⁹ The Qatari Culture Minister, Dr. Hamad Abdulaziz Al-Kuwari, announced that the events in Doha Capital of Culture would vary between hosting cultural weeks, publications, art exhibitions, theatres, cinema, poetry events, environmental events and human rights events. Thus, musical groups from different countries participated in the occasion. Some of these countries are Arabic, such as Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, while others are non-Arabic but have historical links to Islamic culture or sizable Muslim populations, such as Turkey, China, India, Spain and Iran. Countries from Latin America participated as well, such as Venezuela, which, through its participation in a culture week, focused on reflecting the relationships that link Arabic and Islamic countries with countries in Latin America.¹¹¹⁰ The aim seemed to be to host overseas cultural events and encourage cultural openness and dialogue rather than concentrating solely on Qatar.¹¹¹¹ As the occasion had an important universal cultural value for Qatar, the Emir attended the opening ceremony with guest heads of state, international journalists, culture ministers and businessmen.¹¹¹² The ceremony commenced with a theatrical play, 'Bet Al-Hikmah' (The House of Wisdom), which presented an era known as the golden Islamic era of the Abbasid Dynasty during the reigns of Al-Rashid and Al-Maamoun (786-813). Al-Kuwari added further that Qatar's aim was to create a general cultural atmosphere that would endure beyond 2010 to transform the country into a permanent universal cultural centre.¹¹¹³ Al-Kuwari states:

Qatar has achieved a good reputation in its previous success in organising Olympic games, and economic and politic

¹¹⁰⁸ Randa Raafat, 'Doha the Capital of Arabic Culture 2010', *Diwan Al-Arab* <<http://www.diwanalarab.com/spip.php?article 199931>> [accessed 27 January 2010].

¹¹⁰⁹ Egypt (1996), Tunisia (1997), Sharjah in UAE (1998), Lebanon (1999), Saudi Arabia (2000), Kuwait (2001), Jordan (2002), Morocco (2003), Yemen (2004), Sudan (2005), Oman (2006), Algeria (2007), Syria (2008), Palestine (2009), Qatar (2010), Libya (2011), Bahrain (2012) and Iraq (2013). See Raafat.

¹¹¹⁰ 'Press Conference 4 January 2010', *Doha the Capital of Arabic Culture* <<http://www.diwanalarab.com/spip.php?article 199931>> [accessed 27 January 2010].

¹¹¹¹ 'Press Conference 4 January 2010', *Doha the Capital of Arabic Culture*.

¹¹¹² Jassim Salman, 'The Opening of the Festival Doha the Capital of Arabic Culture 2010', *Awan* <<http://www.awan.com/pages/lasth/293035>> [accessed 27 January 2010].

¹¹¹³ Salman.

conferences. It will prove its capability in hosting cultural events as well, and it will be a capital of culture and dialogue.¹¹¹⁴

Throughout the festival, local events were organised to interact with overseas activities instead of competing with them.¹¹¹⁵ The events emphasised Arabic and Islamic activities, highlighting the depth of Qatari identity and demonstrating its culture to be an open one, interested in integrating with other civilisations.¹¹¹⁶ Al-Kuwari comments:

Sometimes, culture can achieve what the political sector cannot achieve, such as creating interaction with other civilisations. The Emir wishes that Doha, through its cultural events, can play a significant part in that interaction; we undertake this challenge and we will win.¹¹¹⁷

Presumably the emphasis on Islamic and Arabic identity for Qatar was the reason for choosing the MIA as it is the first museum to be inaugurated from the various museum projects that QMA wished to establish. In 'Museums, Social, Responsibility and the Future We Desire', Robert Janes argues:

It is commonly understood that museums are key agents in the creation of meaning. That is, they create and transfer information and knowledge in an effort to engage visitors in issues that are relevant and significant to them personally and their communities.¹¹¹⁸

¹¹¹⁴ 'Press Conference 4 January 2010' <<http://www.diwanalarab.com/spip.php?article199931>> [accessed 27 January 2010].

¹¹¹⁵ The MIA participated in the occasion with a programme as the main sponsor for Doha Capital of Arabic Culture 2010. The QMA's activities included: a Pearl Exhibition opened in January-June 2010 by Sheikha Mozah and a Magnum Photography Exhibition that ran from March-July 2010. There was also a Qatar Heritage Building Symposium in April; the Horse Sport and Horse Games held April-August; Qatar National Museum Pre-Launch opened in June-September; a MIA Recent Acquisitions Show held in July-September; and an exhibition 'A Journey into the World of the Ottomans' opened in October-December 2010; Modern Arab Art Academic Symposium held in November-December; Mathaf, the Arab Museum of Modern Art (AMOMA) opened in December; Emerging Arab Artists in December; and Modern Art Installation (Living Artists) on December. Most of these events were hosted at the MIA. (Documents provided by the Archive of the National Council for Culture, Heritage and Art).

¹¹¹⁶ 'Doha the Capital of Arabic Culture 2010 with Islamic Essence' <<http://www.iraqina.com/showthis.php?tnid=45912>> [accessed 27 January 2010].

¹¹¹⁷ 'Doha the Capital of Arabic Culture 2010 with Islamic Essence'.

¹¹¹⁸ Robert R. Janes, 'Museums, Social Responsibility and the Future We Desire', in *Museum Revolutions*, ed. by Simon J. Knell, Suzanne Macleod and Sheila Watson (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 134-146 (p. 135).

The intention to build a socially responsive museum would also explain the MIA's policy on free admission at a time when European museums are suffering funding shortages and when 'the days of free entry may be coming to an end'.¹¹¹⁹ Thus, as the central funder, the government can require the museum to demonstrate state beliefs and values to the community and international visitors, in order to appear inclusive and to generate greater tolerance of Qatar's belief system in the communities around the country. As Roger Silverstone has stated:

The museum is no longer, if ever it was, an institution which can be understood in its own terms as innocently engaged in the processes of the collection, conservation, classification and display of objects. On the contrary, it is one among many components in a complex array of cultural and leisure industries, no longer certain of its role, no longer secure in its identity, no longer isolated from political and economic pressures or from the explosion of images and meanings which are, arguably, transforming our relationships in contemporary society to time, space and reality.¹¹²⁰

Janes clearly states that, among other contemporary organisations, museums are uniquely placed to make the moral, practical and social legacies of human society visible and accessible.¹¹²¹ More interestingly, he likens the socially responsible museum to a grandmother. He comments, that 'museums are empowered to transmit the world's wisdom in a manner similar to a first nation elder telling meaning-laden stories to her grandchild'.¹¹²² New curatorial practice has brought about recognition of how social practice has become critically important in museum practice today. In Qatar, where museum work of this sort had been in decline and many people were losing interest, Al-Khulaifi has commented:

What happened is that [curators] misunderstood the value of the museum's work [...] the country also began to turn its

¹¹¹⁹ Macv Kennedy, 'It Started as a Whisper, but the Calls to End Free Entry are Getting Louder', *Museums Journal* (June, 2009), 17.

¹¹²⁰ Roger Silverstone, 'The Medium is the Museum: On objects and logics in times and spaces', in *Museums and the Public Understanding of Science*, ed. by John Durant (London: NMSI Trading Ltd, Science Museum, 1992), pp. 34-42 (p. 34).

¹¹²¹ Janes, p. 139.

¹¹²² Janes, p. 139.

attention towards other important things [...] Furthermore, in the 1980s there were economic cut backs [...] in the country and the government asked the department to economise in its spending, and the annual funding was reduced.¹¹²³

There is now new recognition of the social role of museum practice, and recognition of the museum as a social instrument that can re-generate, refresh and provide meaningful connections in Qatar.¹¹²⁴ The curators/narrators of the MIA are using the museum as a medium of communication similar to any other media tool in the country such as radio, television and newspapers. However, museums differ specifically because they occupy a physical space that hosts a collection that can be used to narrate stories, construct arguments, inform and entertain.¹¹²⁵

Thus an enormous amount of time and effort on the part of the curators/narrators and other museum staff have been invested in building a coherent and engaged role for the museum that could bring the museum and the community closer together. However, these efforts, which included paradoxical claims and attitudes, produced a mixed reception. The audiences did not receive the new form of cultural heritage without questioning its affect on Qatari culture. Local audiences argued that the new cultural heritage, which seeks to reflect Qatar's diversity, really just reflects the curators'/narrators' condescending attitude to local heritage and values.¹¹²⁶ Furthermore, that attitude is criticised as the new ideology seems to be more concerned with satisfying expatriates and global audiences at the expense of abandoning the protection of local heritage.¹¹²⁷ Therefore, we should recognise that Qatar Museums Authority actions raise crucial questions about whether or not the new museum models will have a positive impact. Of course, the answer to this question is complex and has multiple dimensions. First, QMA should

¹¹²³ Al-Khulafi, pp. 7-8.

¹¹²⁴ Janes, p. 140.

¹¹²⁵ Robert F. Mager, *Preparing Instructional Objectives* (Atlanta: Fearon, 1975), pp. 19-22.

¹¹²⁶ A group of Visitors at the MIA, interviewed on 15 December 2008.

¹¹²⁷ A group of Visitors at the MIA, interviewed on 15 December 2008.

prove to the Qatari that it is attempting a balanced attitude in its programming, so that its programmes not only delight expatriates and global audiences but also preserve and display local heritage and enhance the understanding of cultural co-existence with its pluralistic values.¹¹²⁸

The establishment of the Community Department represents an example of the curators'/narrators' wish to prove that they are offering a balanced programme. The department is dedicated to linking different organisations and communities in Qatar with the Museum of Islamic Art. Consequently the curators/narrators have considered their new responsibility to be one of creating a socially focused museum practice by considering values such as intimacy, idealism and interconnection.¹¹²⁹ To illustrate this, we can look at curatorial practice in Qatar prior to and following the opening of the MIA. Firstly, the curators and staff at the MIA tried to foster an intimate connection with local and overseas communities during the global campaign to introduce the temporary and, more importantly, the permanent exhibitions. This resulted in the generation of an enthusiasm and eagerness for the establishment of the museum. As reported in *Al-Raya newspaper*:

Qatari arts and heritage interested the community and millions of the world's communities are waiting for the opening of the MIA, which would be such an historical event for the country that different media, such as newspapers and television, will broadcast it. The opening of that museum is the occasion we are all waiting for eagerly and enthusiastically; Qatari communities, either abroad or in Qatar, are very proud to host such an institution in the land.¹¹³⁰

Nonetheless, the enthusiasm soon faded when the new cultural heritage was introduced because local people viewed it as exotic and foreign. As mentioned previously, this created tension with the local population as they could not locate their place and role within the new heritage model and began to question where their traditions, history, culture and

¹¹²⁸ Gaither, p. 58.

¹¹²⁹ Janes, pp. 143-144.

¹¹³⁰ 'Sheikha Al-Mayassa Leads the Campaign to Introduce Globally the Museum of Islamic Art', *Al-Raya newspaper*, 22 November 2008, p. 13.

architectural heritage were placed within that model. To ease this tension, the curators'/narrators' tried to demonstrate to local audiences that the construction of this new heritage was meant for them as they are both local and part of a larger community.¹¹³¹ Thus, they employed an image of idealism, which in Janes's words, 'means thinking about the way things could be, and then taking action, rather than simply accepting the way things are'.¹¹³² To develop a socially focused interpretive strategy, the curators chose to engage with a burning issue that has been of concern to politicians and local and international communities, namely the Islamic-Western conflict. Mick Dodd, Chief Executive of Sheffield Museums, comments:

The story [behind an exhibition] is really important [...] It needs also to have some kind of zeitgeist to be a really great show. You need to hit a moment of some kind and the really great shows do that [...] It's the ability to try and capture something that is meaningful to people now and it's the reason why they might go.¹¹³³

For the curators/narrators, there was significant research available on this issue; for instance Kerry Moore, Paul Mason and Justin Lewis from Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies carried out a study on the 'Image of Islam in the UK' (2008). They studied the media coverage of British Muslims by analysing the content of roughly 974 newspaper articles and stories written between 2000 and 2008. They suggested that the coverage of British Muslims 'has increased significantly since 2000, peaking in 2006, and remaining at high levels in 2007 and 2008'.¹¹³⁴ Moore, Mason and Lewis reported that:

This rise is partly explained by the increase in coverage devoted to terrorism and terrorism related stories – 36% of stories about British Muslims overall are about terrorism. This is especially notable after the terrorist attacks in the US and the

¹¹³¹ Gaither, p. 58.

¹¹³² Janes, p. 141.

¹¹³³ Julian Anderson, 'What Makes A Great Show and Why We Put them on', *Museums Journal* (May 2009), 24-31 (p. 26).

¹¹³⁴ Kerry Moore, Paul Mason and Justin Lewis, 'Images of Islam in the UK: The Representation of British Muslims in the National Print News Media 2000–2008' (Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, 7 July 2008) <http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf/media_muslims.pdf> [accessed 5 February 2010], p. 4.

UK in 2001 and 2005 [...] In sum, we found that the bulk of coverage of British Muslims – around two thirds – focuses on Muslims as a threat (in relation to terrorism), a problem (in terms of differences in values) or both (Muslim extremism in general) [...] The idea that Islam is dangerous, backward or irrational is present in 26% of stories. By contrast, only 2% of stories contained the proposition that Muslims supported dominant moral values. Similarly, we found that the most common nouns used in relation to British Muslims were *terrorist*, *extremist*, *Islamist*, *suicide bomber* and *militant*, with very few positive nouns (such as ‘scholar’) used.¹¹³⁵

I would argue here that the press coverage actually aims to be sensationalist in order to attract people. Thus, for example, covering peaceful Muslim integration in Western countries is not considered newsworthy. We have to acknowledge the fact that after 11 September 2001 and 7 July 2007, these stories sell newspapers, even if they are not an accurate reflection of what the British public thinks about Islam. When read in isolation, especially by those who have not visited Britain, the country appears racist and class-ridden and where no one ever mixes or makes an effort to change. The MIA’s curators rejected this narrow view of the Islamic world and created the temporary exhibition to suggest how Islamic civilisation could be viewed. They chose to create a contextual exhibition to introduce their main subject, that of positive, creative relationships between Islam and other cultures and religions during different historical eras. Bearing in mind the probability that ‘audiences are not passive and [are] willing to be influenced by objects or information’,¹¹³⁶ the curators used panels containing very limited information, usually no more than three pertinent words. An example of such a panel can be seen in Figures 89-90. To suggest the exhibition’s story effectively, the curators needed to invest a vast amount of time and resources. They thought carefully about the presentation, dividing the exhibition into sections according to the subjects they wanted to communicate: ‘Islam and world religions’, ‘Islam and the transformation of design’, and ‘Islam and the transformation of knowledge’. Moreover,

¹¹³⁵ Moore, Mason and Lewis, p. 4.

¹¹³⁶ Bakker, p. 48.

the exhibition's artefacts were not chosen for their size, value and rarity; they were chosen for their potential to fit with a pre-determined narrative. The curators announced that each specimen demonstrated the variety of Islamic civilisation; thus, together these pieces aimed to highlight the concept of the peaceful coexistence that had distinguished Islamic civilisation in the past. To communicate their intention to narrate the concept of peaceful coexistence clearly, the curators found an ideal example in the manuscript of the Ramayana of 1594 [Fig. 111]. They used this to highlight and evidence the sensitivity and tolerance of the Indian emperor Akbar towards different religions, such as Islam, Hinduism and Christianity, from which he was inspired to create his own religion.¹¹³⁷ The colophon of the book indicates that it was 'translated by order of his Royal Majesty' especially for his mother Hamida Banu Begum, who was also called Mariam Makani.¹¹³⁸ The curators commented:

Why would Akbar have ordered this translation of the Ramayana for his mother to whom he was much devoted? Most probably to enlighten her with a greater understanding of this major Hindu epic, which is nothing less than an allegory of the combat between good and evil. The emperor sought to calm the anguish of his mother who believed he was abandoning faith in Islam.¹¹³⁹

¹¹³⁷ Ashraf Mumtaz, 'Sheikha Al-Mayassa Opens the Islamic Art Museum's Exhibition', *Al-Raya newspaper*, 25 November 2008, p. 19.

¹¹³⁸ *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art across Cultures*, p. 12.

¹¹³⁹ *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art across Cultures*, p. 12.



Fig. 111. A page from Akbar's Ramayana, Mughal, c.1594, watercolour, gold and ink on paper, 37.8x 25.6 cm, David Collection, Denmark.

In creating values for the objects, the MIA shared their purpose with the politicians to represent the museum as an authentic base for socially responsible work.¹¹⁴⁰ The MIA became fully engaged with the socio-political concerns of the leaders. The temporary exhibition was a key player in introducing the development of the whole mission of the museum.

Previously museums in Qatar had aimed to preserve and display local objects that demonstrated Qatari ethnography, and the curators had acted as protectors of cultural materials. This attitude has changed recently to

¹¹⁴⁰ Janes, pp. 134-144.

include the idea that the audience should be served by the museum. Through their new philosophy and approach, the curators/narrators tried to demonstrate to the local community that museums have an important role in protecting local culture and the peaceful co-existence and exchange with global community within and without Qatar. At TED's conference in December 2010 (a conference 'devoted to ideas worth spreading'), Sheikha Al-Mayassa explained that the creation of a new cultural heritage creates a unique identity for a country, which can be shared with wider world and vice versa. 'We don't want to be all the same, but we do want to understand each other', she commented, thus, justifying the new cultural practice in Qatar through emphasising Richard Wilk's analogy of 'globalising the local and localising the global'.¹¹⁴¹ The presentation of cultural diversity and the construction of a new heritage model, therefore, is being justified by that role. This is a crucial point, which also refers to the significant role museums in Qatar could have in reshaping their communities.¹¹⁴² Hence, the museum was positioned as an agent of social reform to promote an inclusive society through its role in the community.¹¹⁴³ In the temporary and permanent exhibitions, the curators/narrators aimed to make the MIA a catalyst for social regeneration, to empower the community and increase their own and tourists' appreciation of Islam.¹¹⁴⁴ Evidence of this can be found in the accompanying symposium, which was attended by the Emir, his wife, the head of the Museums Authority and the Prime Minister. The guest speakers were a leading Egyptian reviewer and journalist, Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, and the former French Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin.¹¹⁴⁵ The symposium discussions focussed on the role of culture and art in shaping society's attitudes and views. The audience was

¹¹⁴¹ 'Sheikha Al Mayassa: Globalizing the Local, Localizing the Global', *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading* <<http://www.ted.com/>> [accessed 2 October 2012].

¹¹⁴² Gaither, pp. 56-64.

¹¹⁴³ Edson and Dean, p. 6.

¹¹⁴⁴ Richard Sandell, 'Social Inclusion, the Museum and the Dynamics of Sectoral Change', *Museum and Society*, 1 (March 2003), pp. 45-62 (p. 45) <<http://www.le.ac.uk/ms/museumsociety.html>> [accessed November 2008].

¹¹⁴⁵ Ashraf Mumtaz, 'The Emir and Sheikha Mozah Attend Keikal and De Villepins' Symposium', *Al-Raya newspaper*, 25 November 2009, p. 18.

encouraged to scrutinise the history of Islamic culture to find convincing solutions to current political and cultural issues. In her response to his speech Sheikha Mozah asked de Villepin, how culture could be utilised to develop a dialogue for the sake of peace. De Villepin's answer was that a social reformation between communities either within one country or with other countries could be created using the tools of culture and education.¹¹⁴⁶ This is in the line with what Edson and Dean observe:

That museums are a reflection of a high level of social development [...] The modern museum by definition must meet and embrace a number of specialised functions. It must be informative, professional, systematic (in its collection care), enjoyable, and a socially acceptable institution. To meet these often seemingly contradictory goals, traditional methods and practices of management are becoming unwieldy and increasingly obsolete.¹¹⁴⁷

The influence of curators' museological thinking can be heard in Sheikha Al-Mayassa's statement, 'As I envisage it, this museum will be a platform of expression, opening up debate on such significant issues as the definition of Islam within a global context'.¹¹⁴⁸ Through creative dialogue, the curators/narrators were challenged to stimulate further thinking that would galvanise the attention of the outside world to the museum. Therefore, the curators/narrators decided that their new museological practice 'should question every assumption and generate new perspectives through critical analysis, discussion [and] debate'.¹¹⁴⁹ In his article 'Social Inclusion, the Museum and the Dynamics of Sectoral Change', Richard Sandell states that 'Museums, through the representation of inclusive communities within collections and displays, have the potential to promote tolerance, inter-community respect and to challenge stereotypes'.¹¹⁵⁰

¹¹⁴⁶ Mumtaz, p. 18.

¹¹⁴⁷ Edson and Dean, p. 6.

¹¹⁴⁸ *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures*, p. 9.

¹¹⁴⁹ Janes (2002) p. 135.

¹¹⁵⁰ Sandell, p. 45.

The statements made by different participants in the organisation of QMA acknowledged the fundamental change that the new curatorial practice demanded in the role of the museum as a whole, and in the exhibition in particular, in relation to audiences (especially those from abroad). It sounds as if the curators/narrators were suggesting that foreigners had more to learn about the Qatari. The Emir's daughter, Sheikha Al-Mayassa, claimed to be anxious about how little Westerners know about Qatari culture when she said 'I am not sure how many of you in Washington DC know about cultural development in the region'.¹¹⁵¹ Thus, the curators/narrators realised that culture can connect people and draw them together locally, regionally and internationally. Thus, an awareness of Qatari culture would allow for better understanding of the national identity and better exchange, discussion and sharing ideas.¹¹⁵² The idea of a political role for the museum can also be found in Dr. Oliver Watson's speech in which he clarified the significance of the museum:

[The museum] is important in providing the citizens of Qatar with key means by which to appreciate and understand their rightful legacy, not simply a national legacy, but as inheritors of an international culture. It is important in showing Muslims worldwide the historic global connections of the Islamic lands and, through art, the excellence and pre-eminence of their intellectual and economic life. And, in particular for non-Muslims throughout the world today, it is important in demonstrating how Islam has continually been a tolerant and progressive force, adopting, adapting and passing on ideas within and across its borders.¹¹⁵³

The curators had to demonstrate their ability to reinforce current political policy by 'setting out the government's new expectations of the sector'.¹¹⁵⁴ Ernst Vegelin, Director of the Courtauld Gallery, London, comments that:

There is a strong case for doing exhibitions because you believe you've got something to say about that particular

¹¹⁵¹ 'Sheikha Al Mayassa: Globalizing the Local, Localizing the Global', *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading* <<http://www.ted.com/>> [accessed 2 October 2012].

¹¹⁵² 'Sheikha Al Mayassa: Globalizing the Local, Localizing the Global'.

¹¹⁵³ Watson, pp. 8-9.

¹¹⁵⁴ Sandell (2003), p. 46.

subject matter and its importance, and people will find their own relevance in it.¹¹⁵⁵

The exhibition aimed to emphasise an historically harmonious relationship in commerce, society and politics between Christian, Jewish, Hindu and Islamic civilisations; the kind of relationship that the Qatari politicians today wish to promote internationally.¹¹⁵⁶

In the exhibition catalogue Sheikha Al-Mayassa commented on the politicians' vision for the exhibition:

The new Museum of Islamic Art offers the opportunity to look at art across space and through time in the Islamic world. The exhibition 'Beyond Boundaries' enlarges the field to include interactions between the world of Islam and that of other cultures and religions. We cannot continue to associate Islam with a reign of violence. This persists as an error in the media, attempting to reduce any situation to its worst elements and overlooking the good.¹¹⁵⁷

What the curators/narrators tried to do within the exhibition corresponds with Baudrillard's first category of simulacra. Here Baudrillard described simulacra as 'natural, naturalist, founded on the image, on imitation and counterfeit',¹¹⁵⁸ and argued that within this category of simulacra lay the 'imaginary of the utopia [sic]'. Through various examples in the exhibition, the curators/narrators tried explicitly to project a utopian narrative that demonstrated how Islamic civilisation contributed to the design of artefacts, either by spotlighting their place of origin as Islamic, or as objects which had been traded between Muslims and non-Muslims.¹¹⁵⁹ For instance, if we return to the example of the Mamluk door illustrated in Figure 104, the label continued by stating:

The design on this pair of door panels is a fine example, displaying both triangular and geometric compositions and a mastery of the arabesque design. Two surviving rectangular

¹¹⁵⁵ Anderson (2009), p. 24.

¹¹⁵⁶ *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures*, p. 1. See also 'H.H. the Emir of Qatar's Speech at the Conference of the Dialogue of Religions 29th June 2005', *The Emiri Diwan Electronic Archive*.

¹¹⁵⁷ 'Al-Mayassa Bint Hamad Forward', *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures*, p. 1.

¹¹⁵⁸ Baudrillard (1994), p. 121.

¹¹⁵⁹ *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures*, p. 1.

panels at the top and at the base of the doors carry Arabic inscriptions written in a cursive script against a background of scrolling stems. The content of the inscriptions determine a Christian provenance as they are excerpts from the Bible: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth (peace)' – Luke 2:14; 'The daughters of kings have delighted thee in thy glory' Psalm 44:10. The pair of doors was commissioned by a Christian patron and probably intended for one of the churches of Cairo, in which are found distinctively Islamic Mamluk panels inscribed with Arabic hymns or passages.¹¹⁶⁰

The emphasis in this utopian narrative in its turn widened the dissociation from the real world, which addressed the curators'/narrators' narrative in an opposed situation to the real history. Therefore, these objects in the temporary exhibition do not just produce an imaginative reflection of reality but rather a creation of the real through anticipating a simulacrum of what could once have been there. Thus, what was needed to create this simulacrum was only an occasion to manipulate these models through the use of different media such as the controlled set up of presentation, interpretation and scenarios, which is what they did. Therefore, the narrative of the exhibition is actually dominated by the principle of simulacra and what claims to be 'real' history is actually achieved by the manipulation and presentation of the objects.¹¹⁶¹ Thus, objects were used to contrive certain stories that served to create the feeling that they were presenting real lived experiences. Therefore, the temporary exhibition functioned as an introductory articulation of the relationship between political power and cultural artefacts, and served as a platform for constructing core ideas within its discursive formations. This is also the aim of the Museum's permanent exhibition.¹¹⁶² The simulacrum found in the temporary exhibition was organised geographically, and the artefacts' type, date and material were not the primary curatorial concern. Instead the focus was on the relationships between different civilisations and

¹¹⁶⁰ Label of a pair of wooden doors in the exhibition 'Beyond Boundaries', Museum of Islamic Art, Doha.

¹¹⁶¹ Baudrillard (1994), p. 121.

¹¹⁶² Tony Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Complex', in *Presenting the Nation: A Reader, History, Heritage and Museums*, ed. by David Boswell and Jessica Evans (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 332-361 (p. 332).

Islam. An ancient atlas was a clear example of the curators'/narrators' desire to emphasise the utopian narrative of the relationship between Islam and other cultures [Fig. 112]. This object was interpreted as follows:

A successful 'Conqueror' like Mehemed II needed a detailed grasp of geography: the nature of the locality, the form of the land, the contours, the rivers, the islands, the towns and villages [...] Knowledge of all is vital for conquest [...] When published, the Atlas Major was one of the most expensive books ever printed with its 600 maps covering the entire world. For more than a century, this atlas dominated the world of cartography [...] The volume shown here discusses the whole globe: the seas, the continents, as well as much information about the travels of Magellan and Columbus [...] This book shows us that the Islamic world was far from being isolated, but was curious and eager for knowledge. Arabic scholars had in earlier centuries rescued from oblivion the cosmographic works of the Greeks.¹¹⁶³

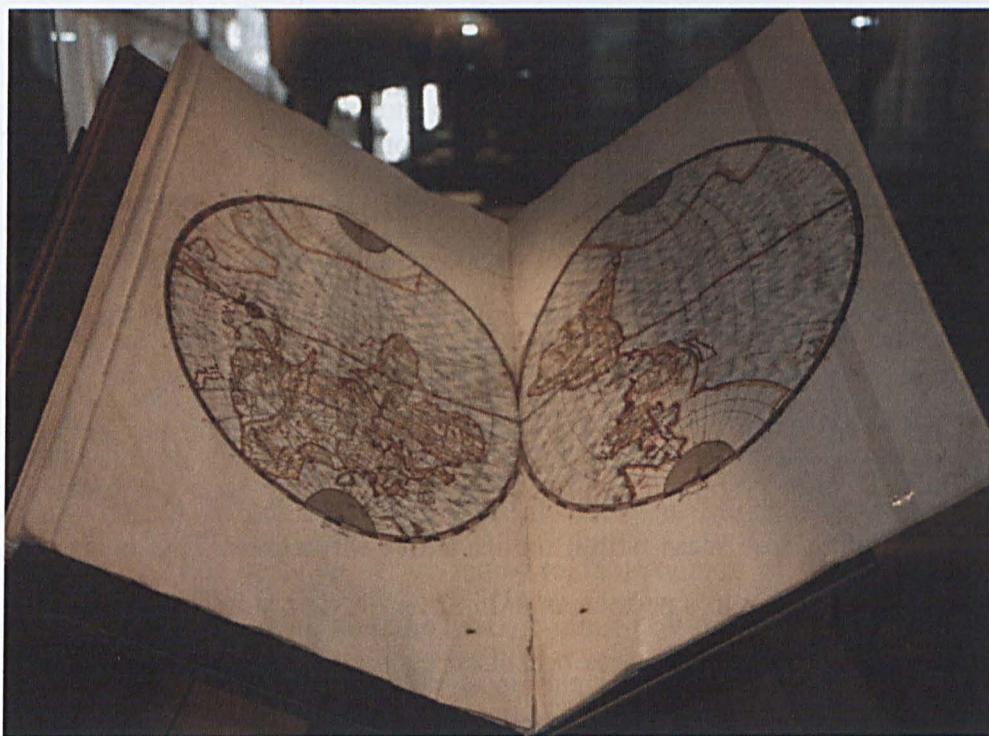


Fig. 112. Atlas Major, by Ebubekir el-Behram el-Dimiski, Istanbul, 1675-1685, ink, gold and watercolour on paper, 44cm X 60cm, coll. Topkapi Sarayi Museum, Istanbul.

When considering the presentation of the atlas and the setting of the whole collection, it is quite clear that the curators/narrators linked the

¹¹⁶³ *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures*, p. 82.

artefacts to Islam in order to enhance their suggestion that the Islamic world had wide-ranging contacts with the rest of the world. However, their presentation of this wide-ranging contact encourages us to question why a successful 'conqueror' might have been interested in this sort of knowledge about the other world? This may represent a fear of the unknown and the benefit that a conqueror derives from his (intended) conquered territories. Therefore, I would argue here that within the presentation of the atlas there is an apparent tension between isolation and conquest. Contrary to the curators'/narrators' simulacrum of harmonious relationships, the presentation here highlights the fear of isolation and Islamic relationships with other cultures in light of conquest. Thus, I would argue in the light of the nature of this contact that Islamic civilisation, perhaps, did stay metaphorically and emotionally isolated from other cultures. In *Cabinet for the Curious*, Ken Arnold argues that both the physical installation and the socio-geographical position of an object's display are vital for grasping the museological idea of building up stories for a museum's exhibitions.¹¹⁶⁴ In examining the curators'/narrators' presentation of the idea of wide ranging contact, we would see that in addition to the atlas they displayed panels introducing Islamic Spain and Europe, Islamic Fatimid¹¹⁶⁵ and Coptic Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, Islam and Sicily etc. [Figs 89-90].

The curators'/narrators' text panels and the atlas reflects the desire to promote the idea of wide-ranging contacts in the Islamic world. However, to depict different racial or religious backgrounds and employ these

¹¹⁶⁴ Arnold, p. 99.

¹¹⁶⁵ The Fatimid Caliphate was an Arab Shi'a dynasty that ruled over varying areas of the Maghreb, Egypt, Sicily, Malta and the Levant from 5 January 909 to 1171. The caliphate was ruled by the Fatimids, who established the Egyptian city of Cairo as their capital. The term *Fatimite* is sometimes used to refer to the citizens of this caliphate. The decline of the Fatimids began when they started to become dependent on mercenaries, suffered from religious intolerance, and were defeated by the Normans and Crusaders in the eleventh century. The rival Abbasids finally succeeded them in Egypt in 1171. The Fatimid Dynasty had a remarkable impact on the North African way of life as it is known today. The roots of Shi'ism still hang on in Africa to this day. The power and strength that the Fatimids showed in their reign set an example for successive dynasties.

differences to serve a certain narrative is problematic.¹¹⁶⁶ There is always the potential danger of moving between different collective identities to build up a political simulacrum. Such movement increases the danger of fetishising the authenticity and genuineness of certain experiences. The attempt to stabilise values and meaning through a certain collective narrative offers audiences an opportunity to negotiate what has been interpreted for them. Take, for example, the text panels that accompanied the atlas. These included information about the conquered nations, and presumably nations that had not been conquered. Gathering these panels, atlas and the objects in one space as a way of expressing wide-ranging Islamic influence, political openness and tolerance could provoke a challenging situation for Islamic culture. It could revive memories of historical, political and social dominance. When reading the atlas's presentation, one would presume that it was produced for the conqueror Mehemed II for the purposes of conquest. I would argue here that this presentation is mistaken. It was meant to enhance the impression of contact and harmony; however, bringing up the word 'conquest', with the atlas as a supportive tool, emphasises cultures such as those of Spain and Sicily that had been conquered. These presentations, therefore, are linked directly to the question of the ability of such presentations to support a utopian narrative of relationships. The presentation of the atlas and panels could be antagonistic rather than nostalgic or utopian. Unfortunately, the MIA here has been placed in a sensitive situation by relying on this type of narrative and classification to portray Islamic relations with other cultures.¹¹⁶⁷ Through the meta-narrative the curators/narrators were attempting to unify many and multiple lives, experiences and objects within one framework. Thus, they centralised the museum's voice and made these objects elements in one coherent narrative.¹¹⁶⁸ In its turn, this single-vocal approach of understanding placed the interpretive hierarchy under the curators'/narrators' complete control; they were now not only

¹¹⁶⁶ Graham, p. 116.

¹¹⁶⁷ Graham, p. 116.

¹¹⁶⁸ Graham, p. 116.

showing, but telling and explaining.¹¹⁶⁹ However, by using one central voice, they did not consider the vital role of the audience. Little concern was given to the audience as active rather than passive in the space of the museum.¹¹⁷⁰ Through their one voice, the curators/narrators opted to refer explicitly to other religions as an opportunity to create a positive presentation. As such, they hoped to motivate a better understanding of how such different religions interacted.

In these panels repetitive emphasis on associating Islam's harmonious relationship with other civilisations acted as a background to further texts that could help persuade visitors of this simulacrum.¹¹⁷¹ The repetition of this suggestion would surely have influenced the audience; on the one hand, through the power of curatorial interpretation and, on the other, by developing this interpretation. While the curators at the MIA were concerned with providing their audiences with evidence of historical harmonious relationships between religions, when those same objects were displayed in their permanent Italian and English institutions they were used to illustrate artistic skill and aesthetic effects. For example, the MIA's label for 'The Mary of Humility' by Gentile da Fabriano, coll. Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa [Fig. 113] considered the circumstances under which the pseudo-Kufic inscription in the halo around Mary's head was produced in the Italian studio. The label stated that:

The artist Gentile da Fabriano worked in Northern Italy between 1400 and 1425, notably in Florence [...] Much has been written on the use of Arabic texts in paintings. Very often they are simply used to introduce an exotic element [...] In Gentile's case, however, other elements contribute. This artist would gradually transform mere decorative effect into a well-mastered Arabic calligraphy leaving nothing to chance. This tendency emerging in the 1420s is certainly linked to Florentine foreign politics during the period. Florence had in fact engaged in a closer relationship with the Moslem coasts of the Mediterranean. The result was an initial commercial treaty

¹¹⁶⁹ Graham, pp. 116-117.

¹¹⁷⁰ Graham, pp. 116-117.

¹¹⁷¹ Greenblatt, pp. 44-45.

with Tunis in 1421, then with Egypt for which a treaty was signed in 1423 [...] It seems evident that these commercial treaties resulted in the diffusion of works of art in brass bearing ornamental lettering.¹¹⁷²



Fig. 113. Gentile da Fabriano, 'The Mary of Humility', c.1370-1427, tempera on wood, 56cm X 41cm, coll. Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa, Italy. This shows the use of Islamic pseudo-Kufic script in Mary's halo. The painting was displayed at the Museum of Islamic Art in 2008.

The label indicates the historical period when, during the early Renaissance, the imitation of the Arabic Kufic script (known as pseudo-Kufic or Kufesque or pseudo-Arabic) was very common amongst European artists.¹¹⁷³ Some of these imitations go back to the eighth century when the English king, Offa of Mercia (r. 757-796), produced

¹¹⁷² *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures*, p. 24.

¹¹⁷³ Pseudo-Kufic refers to imitations of the Arabic Kufic, made in a non-Arabic context during the Italian Renaissance, borrowing the term for an Arabic script that emphasises straight and angular strokes, and is most commonly used in Islamic architectural decoration.

gold coins imitating Islamic dinars.¹¹⁷⁴ From roughly the 1450s onwards, Italian artists such as Francesco Squarcione, Andrea Mantegna, Masaccio, Paolo Veneziano and Gentile de Fabriano began to incorporate decorative pseudo-Islamic elements in their paintings.¹¹⁷⁵ Gentile has been defined as an itinerant painter who played a part in promulgating an international Gothic style in Rome, Florence and Venice.¹¹⁷⁶ His work has been described as the culmination of international Gothic art, because his paintings demonstrate a mingling of Renaissance novelties from Florence with the sciences and influences of international schools.¹¹⁷⁷ Nonetheless, in contrast to the MIA's interpretation of 'The Mary of Humility', the website of the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo interprets the same painting with no mention of any Islamic influence:

[A] Mother and Child, regally clad, sitting on the ground in a garden. It is an outstanding example of the artist's brilliant use of elegant and luxurious materials, painted with such extraordinary naturalness that they seem real, as well as the splendid gold and the silver the artist often modelled onto the surface of his paintings.¹¹⁷⁸

Another example of a painting incorporating Arabic script in the Virgin's halo is in the recently established Medieval and Renaissance galleries at the Victoria & Albert Museum [Fig. 114]. 'The Virgin and Child with Angels' by Pellegrino di Giovanni, is described by the V&A in following way:

¹¹⁷⁴ 'Pseudo-Kufic', *Information from Answers.com*

<<http://www.answers.com/topic/pseudo-kufic>> [accessed 22 January 2010].

¹¹⁷⁵ 'Pseudo-Kufic', *Information from Answers.com*.

¹¹⁷⁶ 'Gentile da Fabriano (c.1370-1427)', 'Early Renaissance Painter, International Gothic Style: Biography' <<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/old-masters/gentile-da-fabriano.htm>> [Accessed 22 January 2010].

¹¹⁷⁷ International Gothic is a phase of art that developed in Burgundy, Bohemia, France and northern Italy in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. It is the period when artists and portable works such as illuminated manuscripts travelled widely around the continent, creating a common aesthetic among royalty and the higher nobility and considerably reducing the variation in national styles among works produced for the courtly élites. 'International Gothic Style', *Web Museum Paris* <<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/tl/gothic/international.html>> [accessed 21 January 2010].

¹¹⁷⁸ 'Gentile da Fabriano, Forerunner to the Renaissance'

<<http://www.initaly.com/regions/artists/gentilefabalb.htm>> [accessed 21 January 2010].

This was the central panel of a large altarpiece of the apostles in San Domenico Perugia. The panel has been cut down on both sides, but its decorative gable survives. Gold and an expensive blue pigment known as ultramarine are used to honour the Virgin and the grand setting.¹¹⁷⁹

The V&A's new gallery includes some works that were influenced by Islamic art; however, their interpretation does not offer any further explanation of how the influence occurred. Rather, the V&A text panel focuses more on what one sees. Another example is an ivory horn [Fig. 115], which is labelled:

An oliphant is an ivory horn. This one is carved with a network of interconnected circles containing birds, antelopes, hares and other, more fantastic creatures. The style of decoration is derived from Islamic art, possibly textiles or ceramics produced in Cairo between the 10th and 12th centuries.¹¹⁸⁰

In contrast to the V&A's interpretation, the interpretation of a similar ivory displayed in the MIA [Fig. 116], emphasises the Islamic influence and even suggests it might have been Muslim made. The object here becomes another reference to the possible encounter between Muslim and non-Muslim worlds:

This is essentially a European object following the Islamic aesthetic which was much admired by the Normans in Sicily at the time. Made from a single piece of elephant tusk and probably in an Italian workshop that employed Muslim artisans.¹¹⁸¹

¹¹⁷⁹ Label at the Renaissance Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum, December 2009.

¹¹⁸⁰ Victoria and Albert Museum, December 2009.

¹¹⁸¹ Watson, p. 142.



Fig. 114. Pellegrino di Giovanni, 'Virgin and Child with Angels', 1428, tempera and gold on poplar, coll. V&A Museum, London, 2010.



Fig. 115. An ivory horn, 1000-1100 AD, coll. V&A Museum, London, 2010.



Fig. 116. Italian (Sicily?) oliphant or hunting horn, eleventh to twelfth centuries, carved ivory and brass, 49cm long, weight 1505 g, displayed at the Museum of Islamic Art in 2008.

Thus, we can see that although Gentile, like his fellow artists of the Renaissance, used the pseudo-Kufic style, the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo Museum's labelling of Gentile's 'Mary of Humility' does not refer to that influence as a result of the possibility of trading or political contact with Muslims. Nor is any other evidence of the Islamic influence found in the interpretation of the objects in the V&A's new gallery highlighted nor any information given regarding particular contact with Islam. The interpretative ideology of the MIA relates to the objects' location in the Middle East. Thus, these objects have been interpreted differently and their meanings and values have been changed. The 'Mary of Humility' and the ivory horn are interpreted radically differently when placed in 'Beyond Boundaries'. Physically, as objects they remained the same, however, their semiotic signs changed once they were placed in a different context.¹¹⁸² Thus, through the ideological interpretation, the curators/narrators aimed to work as inaugurators and promoters of new

¹¹⁸² Bal, pp. 96-98.

values and concepts. The interpretation at the MIA exchanged the value of work, ritual, and knowledge for the creation of new values of historical, political, cultural, social and economic relationships. The MIA curators' interpretation was justified by their reasons for the display, acquisition, loan and conservation of the objects.¹¹⁸³ Around thirty-two pieces were incorporated in the temporary exhibition, of which only seven pieces were owned by the MIA.¹¹⁸⁴ Within the temporary change of place and interpretation, more than one biography for the objects has been highlighted. As Roger Silverstone argues:

Objects have biographies. They move through a world of public and private arenas, and in and out of the world of goods and commodities. Born in a factory, an artist's studio or a craftsman's workshop, they may end up on a scrap-heap, on a mantelpiece, or in the glass case of a museum: now on display, now hidden in the bowels of our or others' domesticity.¹¹⁸⁵

Silverstone argues that an object does not exist only in the life of one individual, but rather it gains its value and meaning through the interplay of various economic, political, social and cultural environments.¹¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, Charles Saumarez Smith suggests that neither the biography of an object nor the contribution of the museum to that biography are straightforward, noting that these objects gain various significances and meanings during their travels through their different historical eras and physical standing.¹¹⁸⁷ To clarify his argument, Saumarez Smith used the example of a statue of Thuner, Saxon god of thunder, by J.M. Rysbrack [Fig. 117].

¹¹⁸³ Greenblatt, pp. 44-45.

¹¹⁸⁴ The rest of the objects were on loan from different European and Middle Eastern museums, such as a page from Akbar's Ramayana from the David Collection, Copenhagen, Denmark; an Indonesian Genealogical Chronicle (1800s) from Denver Art Museum, Colorado, USA; a Ceremonial Cup, East Persian world, late eleventh to twelfth century AD, from Dar al-Athar al Ismaiyyah, Kuwait; a bowl with an image of a Coptic priest, Egypt 1050-1100, from Victoria and Albert Museum, and so on. (*Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art across Cultures*).

¹¹⁸⁵ Silverstone, p. 35.

¹¹⁸⁶ Silverstone, p. 35.

¹¹⁸⁷ Charles Saumarez Smith, 'Museums, Artefacts, and Meanings', in *The New Museology*, ed. by Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1989), pp. 6-21 (p. 11).



Fig. 117. John Michael Rysbrack (1693-1770), *Thuner, Saxon God of Thunder*, limestone, coll. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The statue was first commissioned as a monument to the antiquarian learning and political beliefs of its owner Lord Cobham, ‘by reference to the freedom of the Saxon state in contrast to [Robert] Walpole’s England’.¹¹⁸⁸ However, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the statue was neglected and forgotten.¹¹⁸⁹ A change in its value occurred when the press suddenly became interested in it as a lost work of art, when it was in danger of being exported, and yet again when the Georgian Group tried to block the sale ‘on the grounds of its being a garden fixture’.¹¹⁹⁰ In Saumarez Smith’s example, we see clearly how the significance and meaning of the statue was affected and manipulated by different readings. Saumarez Smith further proposes that, even in

¹¹⁸⁸ Saumarez Smith, p. 11.

¹¹⁸⁹ Saumarez Smith, p. 10.

¹¹⁹⁰ Saumarez Smith, p. 12.

museums, there is life after death, where the object reaches its last destination of rest and has been given new significance.¹¹⁹¹ However, having reached the museum, it still does not have a single biography. He argues that:

The literature of the transformation of goods as they travel through a life-cycle suggests that once artefacts appear in museums they enter a safe and neutral ground, outside the arena where they are subjected to multiple pressures of meaning. This is not true; on the contrary, museums present all sorts of different territories for display, with the result that the complexities of epistemological reading continue.¹¹⁹²

Roger Silverstone makes a vital point about the state of the object in the museum, when he argues that it is important for us to understand that the object does not stand in isolation.¹¹⁹³ Rather, it is part of a collection, 'a collection that itself has inevitably something of the arbitrary about it, but which nevertheless is "the fiction" upon which, once again, much of the authority of the museum as medium is sustained'.¹¹⁹⁴ He further suggests that the meaning of either the object or the exhibition is subject to curatorial interpretation, through which the meaning of the objects can be re-inscribed into an individual culture of experience and memory.¹¹⁹⁵ Yet, this reconstruction of meaning 'is premised on the prior existence of a display which may or may not be ordered by the logic which informed the collection'.¹¹⁹⁶ This is why we must question the logic of displays in both the temporary and permanent exhibitions at the MIA. The interpretation activities that museums engage in are an attempt to create realistic, conceivable biographies and texts. This is described by the social historian Donna Haraway as the 'technologies of enforced meaning'.¹¹⁹⁷ If we consider that all exhibitions, museums and galleries are in reality no

¹¹⁹¹ Saumarez Smith, pp. 6-12.

¹¹⁹² Saumarez Smith, p. 12.

¹¹⁹³ Roger Silverstone, 'The Medium is the Museum: on Objects and Logics in Times and Spaces', in *Towards the Museum of the Future*, ed. by Roger Miles and Lauro Zavala (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 161-179 (p. 165).

¹¹⁹⁴ Silverstone (1994), p. 165.

¹¹⁹⁵ Silverstone (1994), p. 165.

¹¹⁹⁶ Silverstone (1994), p. 165.

¹¹⁹⁷ Donna Haraway, 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936', *Social Text*, 11 (Winter 1984-1985), 20-64 (p. 30).

more than texts, their constructions must then follow a logic. These texts are the conclusion to a complex interplay of organisational and curatorial forces.¹¹⁹⁸ They are utilised differently by various visitors, each of whom has unique tastes and interests. However, these texts are organised in a system that depends upon a methodology of rhetoric.¹¹⁹⁹ Curatorial methodologies aim to persuade the audience that what is being read or seen of the biographies of the objects is important, extraordinary, beautiful or even true.¹²⁰⁰ Janet Hoskins argues that ‘the object is given its significance by its placement within a human story, by the way it becomes part of a narrative of self-presentation’.¹²⁰¹ Therefore, we can see the powerful role that curators can play in creating significant biographies for objects, such as those we see in the example of ‘The Mary of Humility’.¹²⁰² Igor Kopytoff stresses that, in a cultural context, biographies have been introduced in different ways.¹²⁰³ Curators can produce a silent representation, obscuring the biographies of the objects, or they can choose to select a specific biography from the object’s history, or they can choose to bring to this biography a certain kind of preconception of subject(s) on which an audience can focus.¹²⁰⁴ However, a theoretically and intellectually constructed biography is the more demanding one, which Kopytoff describes as being:

[...] based on a reasonable number of actual life histories. It presents the range of biographical possibilities that the society in question offers and examines the manner in which these possibilities are realized in the life stories of various categories of people. And it examines idealized biographies that are considered to be desirable models in the society and the way real-life departures from the models are perceived.¹²⁰⁵

¹¹⁹⁸ Haraway, pp. 29-30.

¹¹⁹⁹ Haraway, pp. 29-30.

¹²⁰⁰ Silverstone (1994), p. 35.

¹²⁰¹ Janet Hoskins, *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People’s Lives* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 184.

¹²⁰² Igor Kopytoff, ‘The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process’, in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge and New York: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1986), pp. 64-89.

¹²⁰³ Kopytoff, p. 66.

¹²⁰⁴ Kopytoff, p. 66.

¹²⁰⁵ Kopytoff, p. 66.

To understand cultural artefacts, it seems that we have to look at what biographies reside in them. Kopytoff suggests that an object's biography may focus on innumerable issues and events.¹²⁰⁶ Thus to create a biography he argues that several questions should be asked:

Ask questions similar to those one asks about people: what, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its 'status' and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized 'ages' or periods in the thing's 'life', and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?¹²⁰⁷

These questions informed the decision making when the MIA's curators/narrators were searching for specific events in the biographies of the collection for the temporary exhibition. The temporary exhibition functioned partly by contributing to a picture offering an insight into a neglected period of cultural relations in Islam. Both the figurative artefacts and the proposed culturally religious relations may be compelling as testimony to the accessibility of these materials in Islam and as signs that mark out the Muslim craftsmen's skills in carving or depicting these figures. The text of the exhibition thus claimed as it interprets a period of Islamic civilisation that had been effaced in the process of the emergence of different Islamic eras.¹²⁰⁸ What the curators/narrators of the MIA have imagined to be harmonious relationships cannot be accepted in reality. Each of the objects is presented as a simulacrum of economic, politic and social relationships. Nonetheless, this simulacrum does not mean that these proposed relations are completely invented, but they might have existed in a different form from those presented in the museum. What is arguable, however, is not difference between real relationships or fake relationships but the lack of distinction between the real nature of these historical relationships.

¹²⁰⁶ Kopytoff, pp. 66-73.

¹²⁰⁷ Kopytoff, pp. 66-67.

¹²⁰⁸ Greenblatt, pp. 42-49.

Through their new narrative, the curators/narrators claimed credibility and integrity for their application of the new museology. Consequently, the social role of the museum has been changed by this new energy. Baudrillard argues that, when things are socialised, the machine of society stops and its dynamic reverses. This means that the whole system of social practice becomes a residue. The exhibitions of the MIA promoted an idea of ‘reviving’ a potentially false memory. On the one hand, we have reminders of invented harmonious relationships and, on the other, we have reminders of the Golden Age of Islamic civilisation. However, there is a possibility for these reminders to be unstable and unconvincing. Nonetheless, this fact does not deny that these cultural materials have now become verbal and visual stimulators, in which most of the resonant moments occur in the contextual presentation. As Stephen Greenblatt comments:

A Resonant exhibition often pulls the viewer away from the celebration of isolated objects and toward a series of implied only half-visible relationships and questions: How did the objects come to be displayed? What is at stake in categorizing them as ‘museum quality’? How were they originally used?¹²⁰⁹

To provide examples of this, we can look at the pieces of a fresco showing a woman’s face and the statue of a man, both from the Umayyad palace Qasr Al-Hay al-Garbi in Syria, used in the exhibition to illustrate an era when the ‘Umayyad caliphs acted as patrons of new art’ [Figs 118-119].¹²¹⁰

¹²⁰⁹ Greenblatt, p. 45.

¹²¹⁰ *Beyond Boundaries: Islamic Art Across Cultures*, p. 50.



Fig. 118. Fresco showing a woman's face, Qaser al-Hay al-Gharbi, Syria, coll. National Museum, Damascus, displayed at the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, in 2008.



Fig. 119. Statue of a man, Qaser al-Hay al-Gharbi, Syria, coll. National Museum, Damascus, displayed at the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, in 2008.

These pieces were used by the curators to illustrate the influence of the Graeco-Roman tradition on Islamic art, when Muslim craftsmen began to apply the forbidden imprint of human figures on their products.

Something similar was attempted in the permanent exhibition, where the display of a head from a statue leads visitors to question their assumptions, particularly those who refuse to believe or who are not convinced that Muslim artists produced such things [Fig. 120]. The label on the object indicates that:

This impressive stucco head of a male figure is a rare example of three-dimensional human representation in the medieval Islamic world. It is attributable to the Saljuq period, which is specially known for its use of figural representation.¹²¹¹

Therefore, the audiences' questions would seem to have been answered through the curators'/narrators' interpretation of why and how these artefacts were produced.

¹²¹¹ 'The Language of Islamic Arts: Iran and Central Asia, 12th-14th Century', *The Collections* <<http://www.mia.org.qa/english/index.html#collection/galler3>> [accessed 10 June 2009].



Fig. 120. Head from a statue, Iran, c.1200, stucco and paint.

The display of these objects stimulated a sense of wonder, which might have conjured up questions in visitors' minds about the reasons for their production, when and why they were made, and for whom. The exhibition did not attempt to answer these questions, but merely addressed the 'facts' that made their production possible. Deirdre Stam argues that new museological theory and practice reject and criticise the directive and pre-

interpreted narrative that is found in most history museums.¹²¹² She suggests instead that museum curators ought to be more concerned about creating a sense of wonder.¹²¹³ I would argue here that curatorial use of contextual exhibitions, especially in ‘Beyond Boundaries’, is about reducing the discordance between remembering and viewing, by building an informative presentation that visually stimulates and shapes the audience’s knowledge about the museum and its collections. Nonetheless, a sense of wonder was simulated by the very fact that these objects had never been displayed in Qatar before. As George Stocking states:

Recontextualized objects may be said to exert a power over their viewers – a power not simply inherent in the objects, but given to them by the museum as an institution within a particular historical socio-cultural setting.¹²¹⁴

It was hoped this sense of wonder would stimulate the audiences’ curiosity to the extent that they would want to visit the permanent exhibition.¹²¹⁵ The interpretation strategies of the two exhibitions introduced the mission of the Museum of Islamic Art.

¹²¹² Stam, p. 63.

¹²¹³ Stam, p. 63.

¹²¹⁴ Arnold, p. 98.

¹²¹⁵ Greenblatt, p. 50.

CHAPTER SIX. CONCLUSION

It is helpful to begin this conclusion with Carol Duncan's statement:

Exhibitions in art museums do not of themselves change the world. Nor should they have to. But, as a form of public space, they constitute an arena in which a community may test, examine and imaginatively live both older truths and possibilities of new ones. It is often said that without a sense of the past, we cannot envisage a future.¹²¹⁶

I have argued in this thesis that, since their inception, museums in Qatar have been vital contributors to the political and social development of the country. Throughout this study, it has become clear how often cultural practice has been linked directly to the country's political movement and change. Museum practice, as such, has been consistently included in the political agenda since the 1970s. Perhaps this is because the museums' own ideological power provides the government with a functional space through which it can promote its messages in a diplomatic and indirect way. Cultural institutions in Qatar have taken bold steps to narrate different historical eras for the nation. The birth of the first museum in Qatar came in conjunction with the country gaining its independence after decades of British protection, and was a part of the construction of a modern Qatar in the 1970s. By the creation of a museum culture, the new independent government aimed to highlight its role, achievements and position to the local population and to stress its interest in preserving the country's heritage. This led the government to choose the Old Emiri Palace as the site of the national museum, allowing the visitor to compare its traditional architecture with the new modern constructions surrounding it and demonstrating the economic and social shift in Qatar. Simultaneously, the icon of the Old Emiri Palace became a tool to demonstrate the country's ancient political history while highlighting the success of the reign of Sheikh Khalifa in comparison with that of Qatar's former rulers. My research has explored an important aspect of museum practice in Qatar; how cultural policy has been employed to tell the story

¹²¹⁶ Duncan, p. 133.

of national development. This can be seen explicitly in the flurry of museums established only a few years after independence. These museums focused on presenting local history and ethnography. For Sheikh Khalifa's government, the establishment of museums in the 1970s and 1980s was as important as administrative and legislative reforms. This resulted in the movement of previously ineffective artefacts from storage into new exhibition spaces, where ultimately they gained new meaning, value, significance and appreciation. Thus, the government viewed museum culture, its presentation and preservation of cultural heritage, as a tool to strengthen the political power of the ruler.

During Sheikh Khalifa's reign, museums became social institutions. Consequently, concepts of tradition, heritage, memory, national history and local identities were interpreted for the Qatari communities via the museum. Establishing a national museum in the 1970s made national heritage accessible for all sectors of the society, particularly women, for the first time. This can be considered as a revolutionary act that broke the taboos of both tradition and custom. Sheikh Khalifa recognised the important part that museums could play in the process of reclaiming national history while the country was preparing to open up to the world through its trade in oil. As such, we can assume that the national museum was used as a protector of national identity. National artefacts were displayed and arranged by period and type as part of a narrative that told the story of the difference between Qatar in the past and in the present. The presentation at Qatar National Museum was organised to imply continuity between different periods in the history of the country. Consequently, a similar method of presenting the past was also adopted in the regional museums. Annette van den Bosch states that '[t]he museum is important in the public life of a nation-state, in the education of its

citizens [...] and increasingly in the representation of national identity'.¹²¹⁷

In the late twentieth century museums in Qatar rediscovered objects of historical significance, treated them differently from in the past and displayed them within exhibitions that reflected their own cultural contexts. This encouraged a direct relationship with the everyday life of the people, as the objects acted as models, with the ambition that each of them illustrated their 'original' function in their 'original' environment. Integrating the country's development with protecting local culture made culture a critical determinant for the success or failure of the national development project that the government undertook. Furthermore, the national museum, with its emphasis on national identity, was meant to act as a tool for empowering citizens who were supposed 'to take control over their own course of [self-educational] development'.¹²¹⁸ Recognition of the impossibility of measuring economic growth or achieving national development without protecting culture can be seen in this early museum practice. The government believed that economics alone, without a root in culture and heritage, could not improve the living conditions of their society. To offer the public a familiar framework presented within a local context, while acknowledging modern technology and change, the government divided the work into two phases as detailed in chapter two. Phase one involved commissioning a committee of Qatari men to build a collection for the National Museum by acquiring 'essential' Qatari cultural materials. The knowledge and ability of this committee meant that they were allowed to choose their own cultural materials for display. In the second phase, an overtly British model was used to organise the modest collections in such a way that the objects became fundamental to demonstrating the process of the country's development. This made the alien idea of a museum interesting and acceptable among the locals.

¹²¹⁷ Annette van den Bosch, 'Museums: Constructing a Public Culture in the Global Age', in *Museums and Their Communities*, ed. by Sheila Watson (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 501-509 (p. 504).

¹²¹⁸ Kreps, p. 115.

Approaching the British consultant Michael Rice to help develop and organise the national museum, however, opened a new distinct chapter in British-Qatari relations. Sheikh Khalifa succeeded in transforming a historical-political relationship into a cultural one. Co-operation was also thought to make clear the commitment to the new creation of a museum culture, given the experience Britain had in museum practice. Rice organised the museum in accordance with a pedagogical method to fulfil the Emir's wish to provide his communities with an educational institution.

Since 1995, the government of Sheikh Hamad, has had wider ambitions to open the country to the world, place it on the tourist map, and engage the widest possible community with its culture. These ambitions are part of his wider wish to build a more modern Islamic Qatar that will be considered as a knowledge and culture hub on the world map. Indeed, the country has witnessed a paradigm shift that has opened the government's eyes to the crucial role museums can play, particularly considering that Qatar aims to demonstrate its new status globally. This new aim has required the government to rethink its previous museum practice and has meant that curators are now required to look far beyond a focus on ethnographic cultural materials. The main difference between the new museology and previous practice, which focused on national identity and on preserving local ethnography, is the emphasis on its Islamic identity and Qatar's global image. Qatar's decision to put its oil fortune into creating a new museum culture and establishing specialist museums forms an interesting contrast to recent museum trends elsewhere in the Arabian Gulf – the establishment of Western 'brand museums' that display globally valued collections. As I have demonstrated in chapters three-five, Qatar's new museum culture has brought with it various contradictions that have made cultural heritage in Qatar the subject of public debate. Locals who did not see that the new museum narrative as representative of themselves became concerned with the negative impact

such new Western models and global ambitions might have on traditional customs and attitudes.

This public debate has seen the Qatari question how to globalise and modernise without Westernising Qatar and its heritage. Could the government protect Qatari values and tradition while creating a new cultural heritage? These questions and their answers are important points that I have explored in this thesis. In common with the apparent hybridity that lies at the heart of the new Qatari heritage model, I have found myself in a hybrid situation because I am both part of this new heritage model as a curator at Qatar Museums Authority and simultaneously a student at the University of Leeds critiquing this development from the 'outside'. This has created tension as I have had to step outside myself and my identity as a Qatari citizen. However, this challenging situation has benefited me as I have been able to access histories and debates, and interview the main protagonists, in a way that is privileged by my status as a curator and citizen.

Without doubt, recent political incidents across the world have framed Qatari political ambitions, which are constantly engaged with changing the West's perceived view of the East. Consequently, the new museology in Qatar has received government backing, as the audiences they wish to attract are both the local population and foreign tourists. Globalisation for the new government does not mean providing the country with a new system of technology; rather, it means investing economic growth into establishing a new profile for Qatar. Therefore, the challenge for the new museology in Qatar is to formulate policies that focus on presenting an Islamic identity for Qatar, as well as demonstrating the country's new demography. I demonstrated a global influence on the creation of new narrative of heritage, a new architectural language and the insistence on choosing globally iconic architects such as I.M. Pei and Jean Nouvel. The effect of the growth in cultural tourism is apparent in this new practice. The vital role of museums in tourism and urban development is

recognised in Qatar and has resulted in the Qatar Museums Authority initiating its museum projects with the Museum of Islamic Art, whose building has already become an international icon for the country. The museum authority recognised the popular trend in museum building and, as a result, museum architecture in Qatar is being rearticulated. Entering the Museum of Islamic Art becomes more like entering a hotel lobby where there is a reception area, staff are cheerful and welcoming, and visitors are greeted by a sparkling Islamic-inspired fountain. Pei's design, which created much tension when it was defined as Islamic, quickly became an icon for the marketing of Doha in the same way that the Opera House has been for Sydney. Pei's design has given voice to Qatari ambitions, and simultaneously paved the way to the construction of a cultural hub, in order to draw Western attention to this small Middle Eastern country. Various forms of Arabic and Islamic architecture have been adopted and blended with an international post-modern style via the architect's vision, as I explored in chapter three.

The entrance bridge to the museum is an open invitation to visitors to enter and helps incorporate both traditional and modern aspects of Doha. The Museum of Islamic Art allows politicians to present Qatar as a country of highly diverse cultures that is open to the globe. In the museum, the division of space allows for the display of various subjects: the collection; Pei's architectural creation; and the traditional architecture that contrasts the Museum of Islamic Art with Qatar of the past through the panorama of traditional boats, and Qatar in the present through the panorama of skyscrapers [Figs 74 and 75]. Via the articulated spaces of the MIA, visitors witness the museum's attempt to produce an image of the new Qatar. As such, the Museum of Islamic Art, with its division of spaces and subjects, represents an example of culturally led economic regeneration. The narrative of the collections is largely employed to demonstrate the policy of the politicians, who wish to portray Islamic culture as a peaceful, forgiving, creative and developed one. Throughout the museum, both architecture and artefacts are drawn together to frame

ancient Islamic culture. A powerful new museum practice has emerged. As Hooper-Greenhill suggests, 'Display is a one-way method of mass communication'.¹²¹⁹

During the reign of the current Emir, the idea of the museum is being reborn in Qatar. This new museum practice is characterised by the use of the essence of the past to envisage the future. For example, the development of the Education Centre aims to demonstrate that the Museum of Islamic Art's function is not only to safeguard Islamic heritage, but also to be a space that enhances the interest and engagement of diverse sections of the public. The Education Centre has become an active arena for shaping knowledge and assists the ideological interpretation created by the politician/narrators and curators/narrators. As such, the Museum of Islamic Art is used for wider activities such as conferences, festivals and university graduation ceremonies.

My analysis of the history of museums in Qatar has demonstrated how a narrative has been constructed in order to meet the desire to build a new national and global identity for the country. The radical potential of a new Qatari museum culture has been recognised. As long as museum culture in the country is able to assist the government, new meanings can be presented, new relationships can be built, new interpretations can be added and new roles for objects can be created. The end of one collecting narrative in Qatar has been the start of a new one with its own ideological narrative and structure. I am suggesting here that in Qatar we will keep layering narrative upon narrative. Hooper-Greenhill suggests that the radical potential of cultural artefacts and materials to contain endless message possibilities and readings can be discovered and constructed, rediscovered and reconstructed.¹²²⁰ Presumably the success of museum practice in Qatar will rely on the Museums Authority's ability to control the complex mechanisms of museum practice to suggest its function,

¹²¹⁹ Hooper-Greenhill (2000), p. 151.

¹²²⁰ Hooper-Greenhill (2001), pp. 191-215.

direct and redirect its meanings and regulate the role of current and future museums in the country. That leads me to question what the basis of future museum plans in Qatar will be. What narratives, philosophy, debates, messages and meanings will they carry? What audiences will they target? Certainly in the time it has taken to write this thesis the government's plans, as delivered by Qatar Museums Authority, have altered and progressed. During the period of my study, the Museum of Islamic Art and the Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art have opened, and 2014 will see the relaunch of Qatar National Museum. In this time what has remained stable is the commitment of the Qatari leaders to celebrate and interpret the country's culture for a national and global audience.

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