



Roles of Muslim museums in conserving the cultural heritage of Makkah: A case study of the Al-Amoudi museum

Nawawee Arawan^a and Rusdi Thaokloy^b

^aFaculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia, ^bFaculty of Shariah and Law, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Muslim museums in preserving Makkah's cultural heritage through a case study of the Al-Amoudi Museum, which displays objects and knowledge of traditional local lifeways. Using a qualitative approach documentary research and content analysis of academic sources, international reports, public materials, and on-site interviews in Makkah the research finds that Al-Amoudi functions as a site of collective memory and a mechanism for sustaining the identity of Makkah's Muslim community. Its displays (tools, clothing, household items, historical documents) reflect everyday life, link past and present, and raise awareness of cultural heritage among residents and pilgrims. The museum also serves educational and cross-cultural communication roles through lectures and programs that convey local history and promote understanding of Makkah's religious, social, and economic diversity. It supports conservation activities such as object restoration. The study concludes that cultural heritage is a social process tied to identity and memory, and recommends cooperation among government, private actors, and local communities to strengthen the museum's role as a sustainable cultural resource supporting Makkah's identity long term.

KEYWORDS

Muslim museums, cultural heritage, Makkah, Middle Eastern museum, conservation

CORRESPONDENCE

Nawawee Arawan (nawawee_thai@hotmail.com)

INTRODUCTION

Makkah is the foremost religious and cultural center in the Islamic world, as it is the site of the Ka'bah¹ and the destination of pilgrims from around the globe. Makkah is a city located in the western part of the Arabian Peninsula in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is home to Al-Masjid al-Haram, the principal destination for Muslims worldwide performing the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages. Makkah's religious significance gives the city a symbolic and spiritual role that transcends regional and national boundaries. From a historical perspective, Makkah has a long history: before the advent of Islam, it served as a trade and ritual center for Arab tribes, situated on major trade routes and hosting ancient cultic sites. The Kaaba once housed a variety of sacred objects before becoming the focal point of Islamic belief when the Prophet Muhammad established the religion in the 7th century (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

Geographically, Makkah is situated in a semi-desert area with a hot, arid climate and frequently high temperatures, especially during the summer months. High population density and the influx of pilgrims during the Hajj season pose significant challenges for infrastructure and resource management. Consequently, the city has developed transportation systems, accommodation, and extensive visitor facilities to accommodate large numbers of arrivals (Nabhan, et al., 2019).

Socially and culturally, Makkah is a space where religious dimensions, local culture, and commerce intersect. Local customs, cuisine, hospitality practices, and lifestyles tied to religious activities characterize the city. However, modern urban development, the construction of pilgrimage facilities, and the growth of the service sector have altered the traditional landscape and changed aspects of local community life (Alfelali, 2020).

Economically, Makkah relies primarily on pilgrimage and religious tourism. The service sector, hospitality industry, and trade generate the area's main income. The government also plays a crucial role in managing religious activities and developing infrastructure to ensure that rituals can be carried out safely and orderly (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1990).

In terms of cultural heritage and environmental management, Makkah faces challenges in conserving historic areas, managing development pressures, and preserving local identity. In this context, collaboration among government agencies, the private sector, and local communities is necessary to balance the city's religious role, economic demands, and the conservation of its cultural and environmental heritage.

The circulation of people from diverse regions over many centuries has produced cultural exchanges and localized lifeways across the Arabian Peninsula (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Consequently, the lifeways of Makkah's inhabitants combine religious, commercial, and local cultural dimensions. However, modern urban development in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has significantly impacted Makkah's cultural landscape. The expansion of pilgrimage-related infrastructure such as hotels, roads, and pilgrim facilities has led to the replacement or alteration of numerous historic areas (Lowenthal, 2015; UNESCO, 2015), putting intangible lifeways and traditional architecture at risk of loss. In this context, museums serve as crucial mechanisms for preserving, transmitting, and interpreting the past. Museums are not merely places for displaying objects but social institutions that generate knowledge, memory, and community identity (Bennett, 1995; Falk & Dierking, 2016). For Muslim societies, cultural heritage is closely linked to religion, since many traditions, lifeways, and social norms are rooted in Islamic principles (Al-Harithy, 2010).

The Al-Amoudi Museum in Makkah is a private museum started by local people who collected objects related to everyday life in old Makkah. The museum displays more than 15,000 items, from tools, kitchenware, and clothing to historical documents (Discover Makkah, n.d.; Saudi Arabia News Express, 2025). Because of this wide collection, the Al-Amoudi Museum is a suitable case study for examining the role of Muslim museums in conserving cultural heritage in the holy city (Ministry of Culture, Saudi Arabia, 2020).

In addition, Makkah's historical and social context creates complex challenges for heritage conservation political, economic, and cultural. Growth in religious tourism and

infrastructure investment puts pressure on historic areas, forcing some local communities to adapt or move and breaking the passing of knowledge between generations. In this situation, private museums like the Al Amoudi can help fill the gap. They do more than keep objects: they record cultural evidence by collecting oral histories, family records, and printed materials that may not be in official archives. Community activities such as conservation workshops, demonstrations of traditional crafts, and local memory projects help build a sense of ownership and public participation in preservation. At the same time, museums can link with universities and international organizations to gain expertise and modern conservation techniques. Such cooperation can lead to conservation strategies that respect local context while responding to urban development pressures, helping Makkah's cultural heritage survive in ways that fit its religious and social roles.

Research objectives

1. To examine the role of the Al-Amoudi Museum in conserving Makkah's cultural heritage. This examination will cover artifact preservation, collection database management and information dissemination, as well as the museum's social roles such as creating a space for collective memory and raising heritage awareness among local communities and pilgrims.
2. To analyze exhibition characteristics and content that reflect the lifeways and identity of the Muslim community. The analysis will focus on exhibition design, narrative strategies, label content, and use of media and technology to convey the everyday practices, traditions, and religious-social identity of Makkah's people, and will assess impacts on visitor perception (both local and international).
3. To propose policy and practical recommendations for developing Muslim museums to be more effective in heritage conservation. Recommendations will include policy measures to encourage government and private support, and practical actions covering staff capacity building, community engagement programs, systematic collection management, and networks with academic institutions and international conservation organizations to ensure the museum's sustainable role in preserving Makkah's heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of cultural heritage

UNESCO (n.d.) divides cultural heritage into two main types: tangible heritage, such as archaeological sites, buildings, and artifacts, and intangible heritage, such as customs, language, beliefs, and ways of life. Smith (2006) argues that "heritage" is not just things; it is a social process that involves choosing, interpreting, and giving meaning to what we call the past. According to UNESCO, tangible cultural heritage officially includes monuments,

buildings, artworks, and cultural landscapes that record historical and material value (UNESCO, 2015). Intangible cultural heritage, under the 2003 Convention, covers practices, rituals, knowledge, craft techniques, languages, and social memory expressions transmitted within communities (UNESCO, 2003).

Harrison (2013) points out that cultural heritage is linked to power over how a society defines its collective memory, and it reflects the relationship between past, present, and future. In a holy city like Makkah, cultural heritage is not limited to buildings or objects but also includes ways of life connected to religious practice.

The idea of heritage also emphasizes process and connections among different elements rather than seeing items as separate lists. Tangible elements—architecture, artifacts, and cultural landscapes—show traces of the past, while intangible elements—customs, beliefs, local languages, and craft skills—add meaning and context to those items. Understanding both kinds is necessary for sustainable conservation policy. References to heritage also express social power: those who decide what is remembered or ignored influence the shape of collective memory and community identity (Harrison, 2013). In Makkah's case, the religious context adds a special dimension, because religious practices, pilgrimage-related trade, and local daily life are tied to religious meaning. Conserving heritage in such a place must consider the site's sacredness, the needs of current users, and local community participation so that interpretations of the past are inclusive, flexible, and respectful of cultural and religious diversity (Waterton & Watson, 2011).

Therefore, Makkah constitutes intangible cultural heritage of ritual and belief-based practices (rituals, pilgrimage practices, oral traditions, and religious ways of life), important because it forms the core of religious identity, sustains cultural continuity, and shapes conservation approaches, visitor management, and local community participation.

The role of museums

Bennett (1995) explains that museums developed alongside the modern nation-state and serve to create an organized body of knowledge for the public. Falk and Dierking (2016) introduce the idea of the “museum experience,” stressing that learning in museums comes from interaction among objects, content, and the visitor's personal experience. Research on modern museums shows they have many roles informational, social, and practical. Museums do more than collect and store objects: they shape what those objects mean through exhibition design, story choices, and how items are classified. (Bennett, 1995). This reflects the power to produce public knowledge, as Bennett notes. Therefore, analyzing an exhibition should look not only at the objects themselves but also at the processes of selection and presentation. At the same time, Falk and Dierking's “museum experience” idea means that learning depends on the visitor, the content, and the visit context. This implies that thoughtful space design, participatory exhibits, and use of different media can improve cultural communication and learning for both local and international visitors.

Therefore, museums perform multiple roles: preserving heritage, producing public knowledge, fostering community participation, and supporting cultural tourism. Through

exhibition design and narrative selection, museums shape object meanings (Bennett, 1995). Falk and Dierking's "museum experience" supports these roles by arguing that learning arises from interactions among objects, content, and visitor experience, highlighting spatial design, participatory exhibits, and diverse media. This study will apply that framework to analyze exhibition design, evaluate visitor experience, and propose community-engagement practices for Muslim museums in Makkah.

Wollentz (2022) argues that contemporary museums should act as social spaces that encourage conversation and participation, not just storage for objects. They should promote community dialogue, run joint activities with local people, provide platforms for sharing memories, and include multiple perspectives when interpreting the past. These practices make museums more socially relevant and reduce a purely preservationist approach. Together, these ideas suggest that effective museums should combine preservation, scholarly interpretation, and ongoing community-based social learning.

Museum in the context of Muslim heritage and culture

Al-Harithy (2010) states that conserving historic cities in the Islamic world must consider the links between religion, community, and place, because architecture and ways of life are deeply tied to religious principles. Meryem (2025) found that museums in Saudi Arabia play a growing role in building national identity and supporting cultural tourism. Also, conserving historic cities in an Islamic context should not focus only on the physical buildings or sites. It must consider the religious dimensions and how local communities relate to those places—such as ritual areas, religious practices, and everyday life patterns woven into local architecture. Ignoring these contexts can cause conflicts with local faith and ways of life. Therefore, involving local communities in planning and decision making is necessary to ensure conservation respects religious and social meanings.

Meanwhile, Meryem (2025) indicates that museums in Saudi Arabia play an important role in building national identity and promoting cultural tourism, bringing economic opportunities and international recognition. However, promoting tourism must be balanced with preserving the sacredness and sustainability of heritage. Museum development in this context should include staff training, exhibition design that respects religious context, sustainable visitor management, and policies that support collaboration with communities, government agencies, and international organizations. These measures can create conservation approaches that integrate religious, social, and economic dimensions in a balanced and sustainable way.

Museum exhibition design

Exhibition design is a central factor shaping how objects communicate meaning and how visitors engage. Scholarship classifies exhibitions by purpose and format: permanent exhibitions that emphasize collection conservation and historical narrative; temporary

exhibitions that address specific topics or experiment with new themes; participatory or interactive exhibitions that encourage direct visitor engagement; and immersive/interpretive exhibitions that use mixed media, lighting, sound, and spatial arrangement to create emotional context and experiential learning. The curatorial choices of categorization and narrative framing chronological, thematic, or spatial affect interpretation, retention, and visitor pathways.

From the museum learning perspective, Falk and Dierking's "museum experience" framework underscores that learning emerges from interactions among objects, content, and the visitor's personal context. Therefore, designs that consider visitor routes, label clarity, tactile or interactive opportunities, and complementary programming increase the potential for meaningful learning. Design must also address accessibility, cultural diversity, and sensitivity to religious context particularly in Makkah where displays should respect sacredness and anticipate pilgrim behaviors.

For the Al-Amoudi Museum case, analysis should identify existing exhibition types, evaluate levels of visitor participation, narrative techniques, and media usage to determine which design elements support heritage conservation, local identity transmission, and collective memory formation. Attention should be paid to how spatial sequencing, object interpretation, and community-contributed content (oral histories, donated items) function together to create ownership and recognition. The study should also assess the impact of exhibition design on visitor flow management and religious sensitivity, proposing balanced practices that integrate learning objectives, conservation needs, and cultural respect. Grounding findings in Falk and Dierking's framework will link observed visitor experiences to design choices and inform recommendations for museum practice in sacred urban contexts.

The literature review across four areas concepts of cultural heritage, the role of museums, Museums in the context of Muslim heritage and culture, and museum exhibition design. Heritage theory highlights the necessity of addressing both tangible and intangible elements and the social power involved in shaping collective memory, which informs value-based conservation assessments. Museum studies offer guidance on exhibition curation, visitor experience design, and the museum's role as a civic space to develop participatory, meaning-making practices. The Muslim heritage perspective foregrounds sacredness, community participation, and balancing religious tourism with preservation. These strands will inform policy recommendations and practical approaches that respect religious context, enhance public learning, and support sustainable heritage development in Makkah through the Al-Amoudi Museum case study.

Research gap

From the literature review above, studies related to museums in the Islamic world and heritage conservation indicate that most research focuses on state museums and large archaeological sites as ideological instruments and drivers of cultural tourism, while private

and community museums in Makkah have received relatively little academic attention, particularly regarding their social and cultural roles for local communities.

Therefore, although scholarship on museums and heritage conservation in the Islamic world has addressed major topics such as state museums, national narratives, and large archaeological sites as ideological instruments and drivers of cultural tourism important gaps remain, especially in the context of Makkah. Existing studies largely overlook private and community museums that mediate everyday religious life and local identity. This gap includes a lack of practical research on exhibition design, visitor management, visitor experience, and community participation within a sacred urban setting. There is also insufficient integration of tangible and intangible heritage perspectives, and little guidance on handling sacredness when hosting large numbers of pilgrims. The scarcity of empirical work focused on local museums in Makkah means policy recommendations and practice guidelines grounded in museum learning theory and sustainable conservation are limited. A focused case study of institutions such as the Al-Amoudi Museum is therefore needed to fill these gaps, providing evidence-based strategies that respect religious context, promote community engagement, and support sustainable heritage management in Makkah.

1. Existing studies often focus on tangible heritage—such as artifacts, buildings, or sacred architecture—while intangible heritage like local lifeways, collective memory, and residents’ experiences remains under studied in relation to museum settings. This gap shows there is no clear research explaining how private museums can act as places for transmitting the memories and identity of Makkah’s communities (Al-Harithy, 2010).

2. Most research on museums in Makkah focuses on religion and Islamic history at a large scale, emphasizing the city’s role as a global pilgrimage center. However, very few studies look at museums as places that show the everyday lives of past residents — a microhistory perspective. This gap leaves understanding of Makkah’s local culture incomplete and often overshadowed by the city’s image only as a religious center (Meryem, 2025).

3. Methodologically, many existing studies rely mainly on document analysis and secondary sources and lack field data collection, such as interviews with museum staff and visitors or observation of visitor learning behavior on site. As a result, they cannot fully explain the museum’s impact on how society perceives the value of cultural heritage.

Therefore, the key research gap is the lack of in-depth studies that view private museums in Makkah as cultural spaces linking tangible heritage, memory heritage, and people’s experiences from the past to the present. Research on this topic is needed to expand knowledge in museum studies and heritage in the Muslim world and to provide a clearer, systematic understanding of the museum’s role for local communities in a holy city like Makkah.

METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative research using documentary research and content analysis to examine the role of Al-Amoudi Museum in conserving the cultural heritage of the city of Makkah. The choice of a qualitative methodology is appropriate for a study that emphasizes understanding cultural meanings and the museum's social roles rather than quantitative measurement (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Research Framework and Operational Diagram under topic "Roles of Muslim Museums in Conserving the Cultural Heritage of Makkah: A Case Study of the Al-Amoudi Museum"

In addition, this study employs in-depth interviews developed from a conceptual framework concerning the museum's role in heritage conservation, social identity, and the community's collective memory. The research instruments are divided into three sets according to the main informant groups, and each group has five informants as follows:

- (1) Those involved with the Al-Amoudi Museum, such as curators and staff.

Table 1: In-depth Interview Instrument for Museum Stakeholders

Informant group	Objective of questions	Interview questions
Museum caretakers / staff	To examine the museum's role in conserving cultural heritage	1. How do you see the museum's role in conserving Makkah's cultural heritage, both in terms of objects and knowledge?
	To analyze the transmission of local identity	2. How do displays of objects related to everyday life help convey local identity?
	To study methods of interpreting object meanings	3. What approaches does the museum use to help visitors understand the historical and cultural meanings of objects?
	To analyze the role in collective memory	4. In your view, can the museum function as a space of collective memory for the community? How?
	To examine problems and obstacles	5. What do you consider the main challenges the museum currently faces in conserving cultural heritage?

- (2) Scholars in history and culture.

Table 2: In-depth interview instrument for scholars of history and culture

Informant group	Objective of questions	Interview questions
Scholars	Assess the role of private museums	1. How do you evaluate the role of private museums in Makkah in conserving cultural heritage?
	Analyze the presentation of everyday life	2. Does the presentation of everyday life in museums help supplement understanding of Makkah beyond its religious dimension? If so, how?
	Connect to the theoretical framework of collective memory	3. Theoretically, how can museums function as spaces of "collective memory" and community identity?
	Assess the role in learning	4. To what extent do you think museum exhibitions contribute to visitors' historical and cultural learning?
	Analyze academic limitations	5. From an academic perspective, what limitations do you see in using museums as tools for conserving Makkah's cultural heritage?

(3) Pilgrims or museum visitors.

Table 3: In-depth interview instrument for pilgrims or museum visitors

Informant group	Objective of questions	Interview questions
Visitors	Examine impact on historical understanding	1. After visiting the museum, in which do aspects have your understanding of the history and past way of life of Makkah's people increased?
	Analyze linkage between religion and daily life	2. Which exhibit section is most clearly showed the connection between Islam and people's everyday lives in the past?
	Assess impact on heritage awareness	3. Did visiting the museum increase your awareness of the value of Makkah's cultural heritage? If so, how?
	Analyze transmission of identity	4. Do you think the museum helps convey the identity of the Makkah community to visitors? How?
	Evaluate the museum's overall role	5. Overall, how significant do you consider this museum's role in conserving Makkah's cultural heritage?

The interview structure consists of five open-ended questions per set, designed to align with the research objectives and discussion topics: the museum's role in heritage conservation, transmission of local identity, creation of collective memory, and impacts on visitor learning. Questions are flexible, allowing informants to freely describe their experiences, perspectives, and recommendations. Data were collected through individual interviews, lasting approximately 30 minutes each, with notes taken (with the informant's consent). The collected data were then analyzed to synthesize issues related to the museum's role in conserving the cultural heritage of the city of Makkah.

Additionally, participant observation was conducted in the exhibition spaces, educational activities, and interactions between visitors and the exhibits, which enabled direct capture of learning behaviors and interpretation processes.

Sources

The sources used in this research include:

1. Academic literature on museum studies, cultural heritage, and the history of Makkah.
2. Reports and articles from Saudi cultural agencies.
3. Websites and news about the Al-Amoudi Museum, such as Discover Makkah and tourism/culture news outlets (Discover Makkah, n.d.; Saudi Arabia News Express, 2025; Flight News 24, 2025)

In addition to the sources listed above, the study used secondary and contextual sources to broaden the analysis, including translations, articles from local and international media, and images and social media posts related to the Al-Amoudi Museum. Sources were selected based on credibility, relevance to the research goals, and timeliness to reflect Makkah's current context. Using diverse sources also allowed triangulation between theoretical documents, field data from interviews, and on-site observations. This reduces bias from single sources and strengthens the credibility of interpretations. On ethics, the researcher obtained consent from informants, kept data confidential, and protected personal information. Expected limitations include restricted access to some archived documents, possible respondent bias, and language differences. The researchers sought to reduce these effects by checking sources and conducting multiple in-depth interviews to verify information.

Data collection and analysis

The researcher collected data from relevant documents and online sources. The materials were read, analyzed, and categorized according to the following main themes:

1. History and general characteristics of the museum: Criteria/indicators: founding year, mission/policy, site area, ownership/management, number of flagship programs. What to observe: founding documents, archival photos, organizational chart, public information (brochures, strategic plans), signage, and institutional narratives. As far as the information can be accessed.
2. Types of exhibited objects: Criteria/indicators: classification (ritual items, community documents, crafts, etc.), condition/age, provenance, links to intangible heritage. What to observe: object labels, collection inventories, acquisition records, exhibit narratives linking objects to local practices. As far as the information can be accessed.
3. Exhibition formats: Criteria/indicators: permanent vs. temporary, interactivity, technologies used, narrative style, accessibility. What to observe: floor plans, visitor routes, labels, multimedia displays, complementary programs, and levels of visitor engagement. As far as the information can be accessed.
4. Roles in conservation and education: Criteria/indicators: conservation projects, public education programs, community curricula, learning outcomes, partnerships. What to observe: project reports, workshop/education schedules, visitor evaluation forms, records of community involvement, and partnership agreements. As far as the information can be accessed.

The content analysis used thematic interpretation to synthesize common patterns in the museum's roles and cultural meanings. The researcher collected data from academic literature, news websites, and online sources related to the Al-Amoudi Museum and the Makkah context. All documents were screened for relevance, credibility, and timeliness, then read in depth to take notes and extract key information on the main topics: the museum's history and general characteristics; types of exhibited objects; exhibition formats; and roles in conservation and education. In addition to documents, the researcher gathered field data through in-depth interviews with museum staff and visitors, and conducted

participant observation in exhibition spaces and educational activities to record visitor behavior and responses to the displays.

RESULTS

After conducting the study titled “Muslim Museums and the Conservation of Makkah’s Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of the Al-Amoudi Museum,” the findings can be presented as follows.

General characteristics of the Al-Amoudi Museum

The Al-Amoudi Museum is a private museum founded by local individuals to collect and preserve objects related to the traditional lifeways of the Makkah community. The museum has several exhibition rooms and holds more than 15,000 items, including work tools, household utensils, traditional clothing, coins, and historical documents (Discover Makkah, n.d.; Saudi Arabia News Express, 2025). The museum building is designed in the Hijazi architectural style, using materials and structures that reflect traditional homes, such as thick walls, wooden window screens, and interior layouts similar to old residential houses. The physical features of the building therefore form part of the cultural content on display, not just a container for objects (Saudi Arabia News Express, 2025).

In addition to the basic information above, the Al-Amoudi Museum has several special features that make it an important cultural resource and a good subject for anthropological and cultural research. One feature is the variety of its collection, which goes beyond valuable antiques to include everyday items that reflect daily life, such as earthenware, tools used for building and repair, local textiles, and jewelry. These objects provide behavioral information, like work methods and consumption patterns. The coin and document collections also help link Makkah’s past economy and trade networks to the surrounding region.

In its layout and interpretation, the museum uses themed exhibitions, arranging rooms by topics such as household life, trade and pilgrimage, crafts, and religious rituals. Each room has labels that explain an object’s origin, use, and related stories. Some exhibits include old photos and historic maps to help visitors connect objects to place and time. The museum also emphasizes community participation: it invites local elders to share memories, runs workshops demonstrating traditional crafts, and accepts donations of family items that may have little monetary value but high symbolic meaning for the community. These activities not only add meaning to the objects but also build a sense of ownership and public recognition of the museum as a place of shared memory. All of these elements such as themed exhibitions, labels, narratives, and community activities align with museum experience theory, which emphasizes interactions among objects, content, and visitors.

In conservation, the museum uses basic storage practices such as controlling exhibition room conditions, using appropriate packing materials, and performing minor repairs for fragile objects. However, technical capacity is limited, so the museum seeks partnerships with

conservation institutes and universities to raise standards for preservation and collection documentation. Another important point is the building's spatial meaning. The museum's Hijazi style design is not just a container but part of the exhibition experience: thick walls help control temperature, wooden window screens filter light, and the interior layout reflects traditional house use. All these features create atmosphere and realism when presenting local history. Although the museum has many strengths, it faces challenges such as limited resources for advanced conservation, lack of a full digital collection database, and the need to develop staff skills in exhibition interpretation and public education. Addressing these limitations through cooperation with government bodies, private partners, and academic institutions can help the Al Amoudi Museum grow from a storage place into a sustainable center for learning and local heritage conservation that fits Makkah's multicultural context. These findings were obtained through a combination of qualitative methods, including:

- Site/participant observation in exhibition spaces and museum activities (field notes).
- Documentary and secondary-source research (museum reports, policy documents, archival photographs).
- In-depth interviews with key informants (museum staff, scholars, visitors).

In interviews with all groups of informants, all participants consistently stated that this museum is highly beneficial for both Saudi Arabian citizens and foreign visitors who come for educational visits, particularly pilgrims traveling to Makkah. Visitors to the museum gain knowledge about the history, ancient culture, traditional ways of life, and past livelihoods of the community. The museum therefore serves as an important and meaningful source for expanding understanding of local cultural heritage and community traditions.

Types of exhibited objects and how they reflect lifeways

The museum's exhibits can be grouped into main categories:

1. Work and tool items, such as farming equipment, construction tools, and craft instruments.
2. Daily household items, such as pottery, kitchenware, and furniture.
3. Traditional clothing and jewelry.
4. Documents and objects related to trade and hosting pilgrims.

These objects reflect the economic and social structure of historic Makkah, linked to trade, services for pilgrims, and the daily life of a sacred city community (Al-Rasheed, 2010). The displays do not focus only on religious items but also cover everyday life, which fits the idea of cultural heritage as both material and social (UNESCO, 2003; Smith, 2006).

Beyond the basic object categories, each kind of exhibit also provides different insights into past lifeways, social relations, and Makkah's economy. Work and craft tools—such as farming implements, construction tools, and craft instruments—not only show local production technologies and skills but also reflect employment patterns, household labor divisions, and exchange networks between the community and pilgrims. These tools tell stories of reliance on local resources and of adapting to environmental conditions and market demands.

- Daily household items, such as pottery, kitchenware, and furniture, provide information about consumption patterns, food habits, and household management, as well as tastes in materials and decoration. These objects help make past daily life tangible and can also reflect social status differences based on the quality and style of the items (see figure 2 and 3).

- Traditional clothing and jewelry reveal cultural identity markers, such as fabric patterns, tailoring, and material use that reflect climate, beliefs, and contact with outside cultures. Clothing items also indicate gender roles, rituals, and special occasions in community life (see figure 4).

- Documents and objects related to trade and hosting pilgrims—such as receipts, account books, or shipping containers—help link Makkah’s economic context to pilgrimage and regional transport. They point to the service systems that supported travel, such as lodging, merchants, service providers, and cross border trade networks. Taken together, the different object types work as an interlocking information network from production technologies to consumption patterns and social exchange which allows the museum to tell a richer and more complete story of community life in Makkah.

Presenting these objects together with elders’ oral histories, old photographs, and historic maps adds cultural meaning and helps visitors better understand the social and economic context. In addition, comparative analysis with regional sources helps expand understanding of Makkah’s role within trade and religious travel networks. This includes the use of vehicles in travel to connect trade networks, an interesting topic in the history of transport and logistics in Arab societies (see figure 5).



Figure 2. Cooking and kitchenware used for food preparation found in the Al-Amoudi Museum

Image source: Photograph by the researcher on 06/24/2025.



Figure 3. Vessels used to draw water from a well, representing the daily life of ancient Arabs
Image source: Photograph by the researcher on 06/24/2025.



Figure 4. Traditional Arab clothing and jewelry from the past that are still used today in royal ceremonies (e.g., weddings)

Image source: Photograph by the researcher on 06/24/2025.



Figure 5. Camels, used by ancient Arabs as everyday transport—for carrying goods and linking Makkah’s economy to regional trade and transport. / Image source: Photograph by the researcher on 06/24/2025.

Moreover, all interviewees shared the same view that the objects exhibited in the museum such as household utensils, agricultural tools, traditional clothing, and local handicrafts clearly reflect the lifestyles, beliefs, and culture of people in the past. These artifacts help visitors better understand patterns of daily life, occupations, and the relationship between Arab communities and their surrounding environment in earlier times.

Exhibition formats and meaning interpretation

The Al Amoudi Museum arranges objects to recreate real use contexts, such as traditional kitchens, guest rooms, and tool storage areas. This display style helps visitors connect objects to past ways of life in a concrete way. This approach aligns with Falk and Dierking (2016), who argue that learning in museums comes from the interaction between objects and the visitor’s experience rather than from text alone. Using local architecture as part of the display also creates a spatial experience that lets visitors feel the atmosphere of the past (Gustav, 2022).

In addition to recreating functional spaces, the Al Amoudi Museum applies multiple display techniques. It means using dioramas, short labels, narrative captions, interactive media, and thematic groupings together to enhance interpretation and visitor engagement. These elements will help in studying to deepen object interpretation and encourage visitor participation. Placing objects in scenes that resemble their real use helps visitors immediately

imagine how items were used and their social context. Short clear labels, narrative captions, and themed groupings (e.g., household, trade, rituals) create storylines linking objects to people's lives.

The museum also uses mixed media old photographs and audio recordings of elders' memories to support varied learning styles for both local and international visitors. Participatory activities, such as craft demonstration workshops, historical talks, and guided tours by local guides, turn passive viewing into active engagement and create spaces for knowledge exchange.

In terms of interpretation, the museum tries to present diverse viewpoints by combining community stories with historical evidence to avoid a single narrative and to create a pluralistic understanding. However, there are interpretation challenges, such as a lack of complete reference sources, the risk of romanticized or sensationalized readings, and limited resources for developing modern media. To improve interpretation, the museum should develop a clear exhibition framework, link labels to empirical evidence, train staff in cultural communication, and expand collaboration with scholars and the community to co-produce content. Introducing a digital collections database and interactive media would also broaden access and serve diverse visitor groups, making displays not only attractive but also valuable for learning and sustainable conservation (Crooke, 2008).

Role in cultural heritage conservation

The data analysis found that Al-Amoudi Museum plays an important role in conserving the cultural heritage of Makkah at three levels:

Material aspect

The museum preserves cultural objects that might disappear from modern society, such as old tools and traditional clothes. This matches the basic role of museums in protecting tangible heritage (Harrison, 2013).

The Al-Amoudi Museum also acts as a center for careful, practical conservation of cultural items. It does more than store objects: it checks their condition, repairs damaged parts, and controls storage conditions (temperature, humidity, light, and pest protection). These actions help lengthen the life of objects and slow their decay. The museum also creates labels and keeps systematic records, which are important for learning and historical research. Finally, the museum trains local staff in conservation and object care, promoting community knowledge and shared responsibility for protecting Mecca's material heritage.

Knowledge and memory aspect

Displaying objects with descriptions helps convey stories about the past way of life of Makkah's people, making the museum a space of the community's collective memory (Smith, 2006). Beyond displaying objects with labels, the Al-Amoudi Museum plays an important role in weaving together community knowledge and memory through exhibition design that links social, economic, and ritual contexts of Mecca's past. These exhibitions do more than present facts; they create narratives that help visitors understand changes in daily life, values, and social relationships. The use of text, photographs, audio recordings, and video interviews with elders adds emotional dimension and personal experience, enriching the collective memory with diversity and vitality.

The museum also organizes interactive activities such as workshops, storytelling sessions, and discussions between older and younger generations to pass on practical knowledge and memories. In addition, building digital archives and oral-recording collections preserves intangible memories as resources for long-term research and study. Thus, the museum serves both as a learning center and a public space that supports reflection, reinterpretation, and the sustainable preservation of Mecca's cultural identity.

The evidence for this comes from interview data collected from all groups of informants, which consistently reflected the same themes. In particular, the group of visitors who are pilgrims reported that visiting the museum allows them to gain a deeper understanding of the history, culture, and traditional ways of life of the people of Makkah. This helps them comprehend the context of this sacred place in a more profound dimension. It also fosters a sense of shared understanding and respect for the cultural diversity encountered during their pilgrimage journey.

In some cases, a pilgrim may have only one opportunity in their lifetime to visit Makkah, as the foundations of Islam require every Muslim to perform the pilgrimage at least once in their life. Some individuals save money throughout their entire lives in order to make this journey to the holy city. Therefore, the museum becomes a meaningful and memorable experience, worthy of remembrance and reflection, especially given the uncertainty of whether they will ever have the chance to return again.

Social and educational aspect

The museum offers opportunities for youth, scholars, and pilgrims to learn local history, which helps raise awareness of the value of cultural heritage and supports the transmission of the Muslim community's identity in Mecca (UNESCO, 2015; Meryem, 2025).

The museum also serves as an out of classroom learning space that promotes participatory learning for youth, scholars, and pilgrims by offering a variety of activities such as school field trips, hands-on workshops, academic lectures, and career guidance programs in anthropology, history, and conservation. Exhibits and inquiry based displays encourage visitors to ask questions, critique, and connect knowledge to contemporary contexts, helping to develop critical thinking skills and deeper understanding of cultural roots.

In terms of interview data, all informants consistently agreed that the museum has a positive impact on the community and society. In particular, the group of academic informants emphasized that the museum serves as an important data source and a networking hub that supports collaborative research among universities, local institutions, and international organizations. The collections of exhibited objects and oral history records facilitate further studies that expand the scope of knowledge.

In addition, pilgrims from various regions who learn about local history through the exhibitions help foster mutual understanding, reduce prejudice, and promote respect for cultural diversity. Overall, the museum plays not only a role in preserving cultural heritage but also in building social capital and cultural sustainability in Makkah through education and long-term community engagement.

DISCUSSION

The study's findings indicate that the Al-Amoudi Museum plays an important role in conserving and conveying Mecca's cultural heritage across multiple dimensions: material, knowledge, and social identity. The display of objects related to everyday life—such as work tools, household items, and traditional clothing—shows that the museum does not aim to present history solely within the framework of religion and ritual. Rather, it broadens public perception to include social and economic history at the microhistorical level, helping to complete the picture of Mecca as a space of everyday life for its residents, not merely as an international pilgrimage center.

In terms of conservation roles, the research findings can be described at three levels: material, knowledge and memory, and social and educational. At the material level, the museum preserves culturally valuable objects that are likely to be lost from contemporary society due to urban development and economic change. At the knowledge and memory level, displaying objects with contextual descriptions prevents them from being seen as merely old items; instead, they serve as mediums for conveying stories about past ways of life, social relationships, and the community's economic systems. At the social and educational level, the museum functions as a learning resource that raises awareness of the value of cultural heritage among visitors, including youth, scholars, and pilgrims.

The findings also reflect that the Al Amoudi Museum's exhibition style, which emphasizes recreating objects' original contexts, helps create a spatial experience that supports meaningful learning beyond mere textual information. This approach aligns with contemporary museum theory that places visitors at the center of the learning process and emphasizes the relationships among objects, space, and visitor experience (Bitgood, 2013). However, the research also points to some limitations. The content presentation remains focused mainly on tangible heritage, while intangible dimensions—such as community narratives and elders' memories—have not been systematically integrated into displays. This limitation highlights the need to develop museum management approaches that combine object presentation with ethnographic and oral historical information, so the museum can function as a space for cultural dialogue rather than merely a static exhibition venue.

Exhibition design should integrate tangible and intangible heritage using community narratives, archival photographs, and interactive media to foster engagement. Findings indicating this need include the object centered displays and the lack of integration of elders' memories, among others.

In summary, the discussion indicates that the Al Amoudi Museum is an important example of a private museum with the potential to conserve and transmit Makkah's cultural heritage across multiple dimensions, serving effectively as a cultural mechanism that links past and present. To support the policy objective, the researchers can recommend measures such as formal policies for private museums, budget allocations and partnerships with conservation institutes, staff training, development of a digital collections database, and operational guidelines that respect the religious context and promote community participation. These measures will help enrich the museum's multidimensional role in the future (International Council of Museums, n.d.).

CONCLUSION

This study on Muslim museums and the conservation of Makkah's cultural heritage — a case study of the Al Amoudi Museum — aimed to examine the role of a private museum in conserving and transmitting cultural heritage within the context of a sacred city. The findings indicate that the Al Amoudi Museum functions not merely as a repository for antiquities but as a cultural learning space that links the community's social history in Mecca with broader religious and pilgrimage contexts at the global level.

Regarding the characteristics of the exhibited objects, most items reflect the everyday life of the local community across work, livelihoods, and social relations. The findings indicate that Mecca's cultural heritage is not limited to monuments or religious artifacts but also encompasses the life systems and collective memories of its inhabitants as integral components of urban history. Exhibiting objects within reconstructed usage contexts enables visitors to grasp their cultural meanings in a concrete and tangible manner.

In terms of conservation roles, the Al Amoudi Museum plays a significant role at three levels: the preservation of tangible cultural heritage, the transmission of community knowledge and collective memory, and the promotion of social learning among visitors. These roles demonstrate that a museum can function as a cultural mechanism that helps sustain local social identity amid changes brought by modernization and globalization.

The findings also highlight the importance of private museums in Mecca, which have received comparatively limited academic attention relative to state museums or large archaeological sites. The case study of the Al Amoudi Museum helps fill a gap in museological knowledge within the Muslim world and demonstrates that cultural heritage conservation can be effectively pursued through private-sector and community-based mechanisms. In summary, this study confirms that the Al Amoudi Museum plays a significant role in conserving and transmitting Mecca's cultural heritage at the material, knowledge, and social-identity levels, and that it can serve as a practical model for developing Muslim museums in other sacred-city contexts.

Recommendations

Practical Implications

1. The museum should develop digital exhibition content, such as an online database or multimedia materials, to broaden access for interested users outside the area and to accommodate pilgrims who speak different languages.
2. Increase learning activities for youth and students, e.g., cultural field-trip programs or hands-on workshops, to promote community awareness of the value of cultural heritage.
3. State cultural agencies can use private museums like the Al-Amoudi Museum as models for developing other local museums, particularly in collecting local objects and presenting narratives of everyday life.

Future Research

1. A comparative study should be conducted between private museums and state-run museums in Mecca or other sacred cities to understand differences in roles and management approaches. Such research should consider governance structures, funding models, collection acquisition policies, curatorial practices, community engagement strategies, and educational programming. The study would identify strengths and weaknesses of each sector—for example, the flexibility and local responsiveness of private museums versus the resources and legal mandates of state institutions. Comparative analysis would clarify how both types contribute to heritage conservation, tourism, and social cohesion, and could inform policy recommendations, collaborative frameworks, and sustainable museum development in sacred city contexts.
2. The study framework should be expanded to include cultural tourism and the creative economy to analyze how museums can contribute to sustainable development. This expansion should examine the links between museum activities and the attraction of cultural tourists, as well as the economic impacts on local communities, such as job creation, support for local crafts, and the development of related services. Research should assess the museum's potential to act as a network node connecting creative entrepreneurs, public spaces, and cultural-tourism routes, while also considering measures to mitigate negative effects of mass tourism so that development is economically, socially, and culturally sustainable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research, “Roles of Muslim Museums in Conserving the Cultural Heritage of Makkah: A Case Study of the Al-Amoudi Museum” was completed with the support of many individuals and organizations. The researchers sincerely thank experts, cultural agencies, and the staff of the Al-Amoudi Museum for their valuable guidance, data, and cooperation throughout the study. Appreciation is also extended to family and colleagues for their encouragement and academic support. The researchers hope this study contributes to museology and cultural heritage conservation in the Muslim world and serves as a reference for future research and museum development.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The two authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest. This study is an academic research project conducted, and data collected by the research team using the researchers’ own funding; the researchers did not receive research funding or any benefits from any organization.

NOTE

1. The Kaaba (also spelled Kabah or Ka’bah) is Islam’s most sacred structure. It is a cuboid building at the center of the Grand Mosque (Masjid al-Haram) in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Key points:
 - Religious role: Muslims worldwide face the Kaaba when performing the five daily prayers (qibla).
 - Pilgrimage: It is the focal point of the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages; pilgrims perform tawaf (circumambulation) by walking around it seven times.

REFERENCES

- Alfelali, M. (2020). Numū al-Masjid al-Haram fī Makkah wa al-tashrī‘ al-awwal li-himāyat al-turāth fī al-Mamlakah al-‘Arabīyah al-Su‘ūdīyah (1955-2010). Al-‘Imārah wa al-Funūn al-Turāthīyah al-Islāmīyah, 197, 65-76.
- Al-Harithy, H. (2010). *Duroos fī al-ḥifẓ: al-mudun al-tārīkhīyah fī al-‘ālam al-islāmī*. World Monuments Fund.
- Al-Rasheed, M. (2010). *A history of Saudi Arabia* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511993510>
- Bennett, T. (1995). *The birth of the museum: History, theory, politics*. Routledge.
- Bitgood, S. (2013). *Attention and value: Keys to understanding museum visitors*. Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Nov. 16, 1972, 1037 U.N.T.S. 151 (entered into force Sept. 17, 1975).
<https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>

- Crooke, E. (2008). *Museums and community: Ideas, issues and challenges*. Routledge.
- Discover Makkah. (n.d.). *Abu Bakr Al-Amoudi Museum*. <https://www.discovermakkah.sa/en/places-worth-visiting/landmarks/abu-bakr-al-amoudi-museum>
- Eickelman, D. F., & Piscatori, J. (1990). *Muslim travellers: Pilgrimage, migration, and the religious imagination*. University of California Press.
- Falk, J. H., & Dierking, L. D. (2016). *The museum experience revisited*. Routledge.
- Flight News 24. (2025). *Al-Amoudi Museum: Makkah's cultural treasure preserving 150 years of heritage and tradition*. <https://flightnews24.com/travel-explore/1150>
- Harrison, R. (2013). *Heritage: Critical approaches*. Routledge.
- International Council of Museums. (n.d). Museum definition, objectives and activities. <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>
- Lowenthal, D. (2015). *The past is a foreign country – Revisited*. Cambridge University Press.
- Meryem, B. (2025). The role of museums in preserving intangible cultural heritage: between transmission and innovation. *International Journal of humanities and educational research*, 7(2), 100–110.
- Ministry of Culture, Saudi Arabia. (2020). *Museums in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* [Report]. Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Culture.
- Nabhan, Y. M., Alsolami, B. M., Lamit, H., & Azizul, M. F. (2019). The physical forms of the urban regenerated places in the holy city of Makkah, Saudi Arabia. In *Proceedings of the International Conference of Built Environment and Surveying (GBES 2019)* (Vol. 1, pp. 145-152). Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.
- Saudi Arabia News Express. (2025, July 22). *Al-Amoudi Museum: Makkah's cultural gem showcases rich heritage*. <https://saudiarabianewsexpress.com/al-amoudi-museum-makkahs-cultural-gem-showcases-rich-heritage/>
- Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of heritage*. Routledge.
- UNESCO. (n.d.). Text of the *Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage*. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (2015). Policy document for the integration of a sustainable development perspective into the processes of the World Heritage Convention [Policy document]. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/sustainabledevelopment/>
- Waterton, E. & Watson, S. (Eds.). (2011). *Heritage and community engagement: Collaboration or contestation?* Routledge.
- Wollentz, G., Djupdræt, M. B., Hansen, A., Sonne, L., & Banik, V. K. (2022). The museum as a social space and a place for lifelong learning. *Nordisk Museologi*, 34(2), 23-42. <https://doi.org/10.5617/nm.10069>

BIODATA

Nawawee Arawan is a doctoral graduate from the Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Currently an assistant researcher at the Centre of Excellence in Translation, Interpreting, and Intercultural Communication, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

Rusdy Thaokloy is doctoral graduate from the Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Currently Lecturer at the Faculty of Shariah and Law, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia.

How to cite this article:

Arawan, N. & Thaokloy, R. (2026). Roles of Muslim museums in conserving the cultural heritage of Makkah: A case study of the Al-Amoudi museum. *Journal of Language and Culture*, 45(2), 42–65.

Received: 27 February 2026

Revised: 9 May 2026

Accepted: 31 May 2026

© The Author(s) 2026. *Journal of Language and Culture* published by Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Mahidol University. This article is open access under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, permitting the use, sharing, adaptation, distribution, and reproduction in any medium or format. Users are required to provide appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, include a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if any changes were made. The images or other third-party materials included in this article fall under the article's Creative Commons license unless otherwise specified in a credit line. If the material is not covered by the article's Creative Commons license or if your intended use goes beyond what is permitted by statutory regulation, you must seek permission directly from the copyright holder.