Rufuf Journal—Laboratory of Algerian Manuscripts—Volume 14—number 02 –(November 2026)-page 922 -934
ISSN: 2335-1381 EISSN: 2602-5949 LegalDeposit: 2013-6352

Mechanisms for the protection of Algerian cultural heritage: The role of archaeological expertise in the protection of cultural property discovered or seized.

آليات حماية التراث الثقافي الجزائري:

دور الخبرة الأثرية في حماية الممتلكات الثقافية المكتشفة أو المحتجزة.

Amokrane Nabil

Centre National de Recherche en Archéologie (Algérie), e-mail : amokrane.n@cnra.dz

Received: 22/07/2025	Accepted: 15/10/2026	Published:25/11/2026

Abstract

In this contribution, we aim to highlight the significance of archaeological expertise in safeguarding cultural heritage, so that stakeholders in this field can comprehend the roles of security services (National Gendarmerie, police, customs, etc.) and cultural institutions (cultural departments, national museums, etc.) that operate in the realm of combating threats to cultural property. This necessitates the execution of scientific expertise, which must be presented as evidence confirming the archaeological and historical value of seized or discovered objects. Understanding and determining the nature of archaeological items, whether they are original or counterfeit, is quite challenging, particularly given the availability of modern technical means that facilitate imitation. Therefore, an expertise report is essential for this purpose, enabling the relevant institutions to take the necessary measures to protect this cultural asset.

Keywords: Experience, cultural property, Protection of archaeological heritage, archaeological expert, archeology

الملخص: في هذه المساهمة، نعتزم تسليط الضوء على أهمية الخبرة الأثرية في حماية التراث الثقافي، حتى يفهم الفاعلون في هذا المجال، خاصة أسلاك الأمن (الدرك الوطني، الشرطة، الجمارك، إلخ) والمؤسسات الثقافية (مديريات الثقافة، المتاحف الوطنية، إلخ) التي تعمل في مجال مكافحة الاعتداءات على الممتلكات الثقافية، يتطلب منها إجراء الخبرة العلمية اللازمة التي يجب تقديمها كدليل يؤكد القيمة الأثرية والتاريخية للقى التي تم ضبطها أو اكتشافها. إن معرفة وتحديد طبيعة الأشياء الأثرية، سواء كانت أصلية أو مزيفة، أمر في غاية الصعوبة، خاصة مع توفر وسائل تقنية حديثة تساعد على التقليد، لذلك، فإن تقرير الخبرة ضروري لذلك، لكي تتخذ المؤسسات المعنية التدابير اللازمة لحماية هذا التراث الثقافي.

كلمات مفتاحية: الخبرة، الممتلك الثقافي، حماية التراث الأثري، خبير أثري، علم الأثار.

Corresponding author: Amokrane Nabil, e-mail: nabil.amokrane@ymail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

In light of the sudden archaeological discoveries and the seizure of numerous movable cultural properties by various security forces in Algeria, our efforts to protect cultural heritage in all its forms have become increasingly significant. Today, the role of the archaeological expert and the scientific reports they provide are crucial for understanding the nature and history of the civilization associated with these cultural properties. The field inspections and archaeological studies we conduct on the cultural properties uncovered during excavation work (unexpected discoveries), as well as the properties confiscated by security forces and deposited in museums, serve as essential references for the administrative and legal protection through inventory, classification, and enhancement of Algerian heritage. Therefore, who is the archaeological expert, what do they rely on in their studies to determine the nature of cultural properties, and what is the significance of their reports in safeguarding the discovered or confiscated cultural heritage?

2. The expert:

He is recognized as a source of expertise in a specific field of knowledge. For instance, in the realm of finance and commerce (financial or commercial expert), or in economics (economic expert), or in one of the branches of engineering (architectural expert), geological expert, building expert, structural expert, legal expert, archaeological expert, among others. Typically, an expert is an academic who has completed their university education, worked for several years, and gained extensive experience in their area of work. Furthermore, an expert can be a person deemed reliable for their profound knowledge in their field, possessing a deeper understanding of a specialized branch than an ordinary individual engaged in that profession (Tan, 2014).

2.1 Qualities of an Expert:

Among these qualities, we find: The expert recognizes significant relationships within problems, engages actively, and rarely makes mistakes. They possess a strong long-term and medium-term memory, pay attention to the root causes of issues, and avoid superficial perspectives. They dedicate considerable time to fruitful analysis and are capable of self-assessment, understanding the

limits of their experience. Their decisions are confined to the areas in which they have learned and gained expertise. The expert is appointed to provide their insights on a specific archaeological discovery (Figure 1). This discovery may be incidental, and they may be asked to offer their expertise on a similar operation, or it could involve a collection of various archaeological items seized by security services (National Gendarmerie or Customs…). Additionally, it may involve regular assessments of previous archaeological findings (Bideau, 2013).



Figure N°1: The area of expertise of the archaeology expert
(Credit for photos ; the author)

2.2 The Experience:

The general definition of experience refers to the accumulation of years spent working in a specific field, complemented by academic study. However, in reality, there is no precise description of experience, nor are there established criteria for measuring it. The reason for this is straightforward: experience is acquired; thus, it depends on the individual, including the skills they possess (whether the person has the ability to develop themselves or not) and the number of years they spend gaining experience. The number of years may not necessarily serve as a measure of experience. A simple example of this is two employees who hold the same job title, possess the same qualifications, and have the same number of years of service in a department or organization; upon comparison, one may be found to be superior to the other (Tan, 2014). Therefore, experience is contingent upon the individual and their capabilities, which is why one can find a competent employee, as opposed to one who is merely average in performance.

Consequently, experience is the acquisition of skill in a particular area over a defined period, enabling the individual to perform the same tasks in less time and with greater accuracy (Bideau, 2013).



Figure N°2: Field inspection and archaeological experience
(Credit for photos ; Inrap.com)

3. Experience in the archaeological field:

Why do we rely on the expertise of discovered or seized cultural properties? The significance of this study lies in establishing the temporal and archaeological (historical) context of each type of cultural property, whether movable or immovable, by utilizing a specific classification or previous reference studies, while also identifying what corresponds to each type in other studies, in order to ascertain whether the discovered or seized movable cultural property is:

- Ancient or modern
- Original or imitation
- An archaeological masterpiece or not
- Smuggled or stolen…etc.

Ensuring the security protection of cultural heritage is crucial, as the expertise of cultural property also involves determining security mechanisms and legal protection, examining the results of the archaeological study of the cultural property as a direct scientific reference in classification, inventory procedures,

and registration on the supplementary inventory list, while demonstrating and specifying the archaeological, historical, and cultural value of cultural properties, whether discovered or seized by competent security teams (Touil, 2023).



Figure N°3: movable cultural assets
A: sudden discovery
B: Various items seized by the Gendarmerie

4. Protecting cultural heritage within the institutional framework:

Cultural institutions and security services engaged in combating threats to cultural property (such as the National Gendarmerie, police, customs, etc.) play a vital and active role in safeguarding cultural heritage. They are required to leverage their academic expertise and field experiences, which are essential for presenting evidence that confirms the archaeological and historical significance of seized objects or discoveries in this field. Given the availability of technical means to assist in distinguishing between originals and imitations, as well as the urgency needed to address certain issues related to seized and fortuitously discovered cultural properties, a certain level of expertise (even if basic) is now necessary for these institutions and security agencies to identify, understand, and preliminarily assess the nature of these cultural assets. This includes determining whether they are originals or imitations (Figure. 4). Subsequently, it is imperative to consult an archaeological expert with the requisite knowledge to document and analyze the cultural property in a final report; thus, sufficient experience and scientific knowledge are essential for this process.

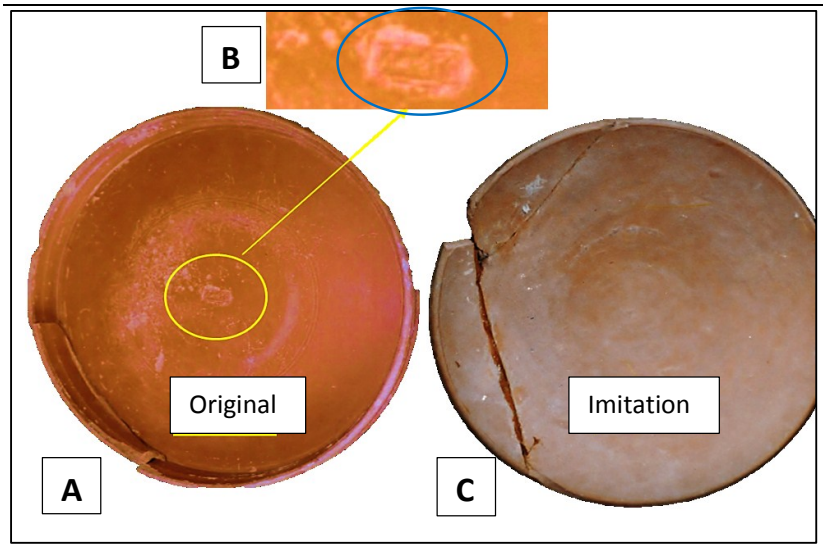


Figure N°4 : A model featuring two pottery vessels, one imitation and the other original.

A : Original vessel

B : Stamp bearing the name of the ancient potter

C : Imitation vessel

(Credit for photos ; the author)

5. Archaeological elements that assist experts in determining the nature of cultural heritage :

- **Pottery :**

Pottery serves as a significant source within archaeological records, as its numerous characteristics illuminate the technical, artistic, functional, and cultural aspects of society. The diversity of archaeological research areas has rendered this archaeological material a tool utilized as a chronological guide in archaeological investigations and studies. We draw upon previous studies that aid us in identifying the styles and forms of pottery based on their manufacturing methods, in accordance with renowned international classifications. We can ascertain the time period for each recognized form, providing dating for locally discovered shapes and distinguishing original pottery from imitations, both ancient and modern (figure.5). (Amokrane, 2021, p. 241-225).

- **Bone Remains :**

Bone remains are regarded as some of the most common artifacts discovered during systematic archaeological excavations and chance finds. Consequently, they are viewed as significant material evidence for archaeologists or archaeology experts to ascertain the nature of the find, specifying the period and type of discovery (whether new or ancient), as well as the types of funerary rituals employed, the method of burial, etc.

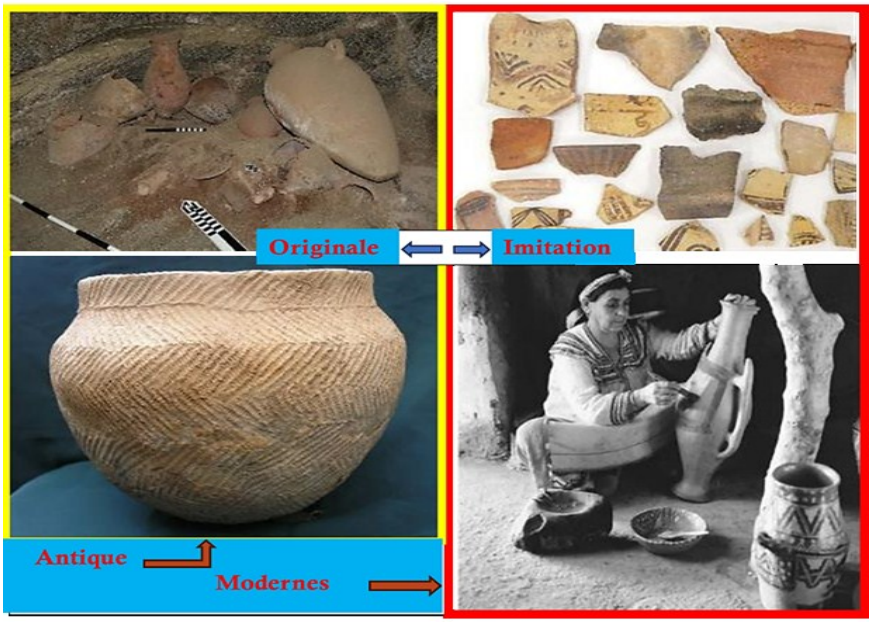


Figure N°5 : Distinguishing original pottery from imitation and modern pottery from ancient. (Credit for photos ; the author)

- **Architectural remnants :**

The discipline that encompasses both the art and science of designing, planning, and constructing homes and facilities to meet material needs employs various materials and construction methods. This practice aids the archaeological expert in discerning the nature of discoveries based on architectural remnants. (Figure. 6-E)

- **Sculpted statues :**

The art of sculpture, particularly in the realm of reliefs, is regarded as one of the most exquisite creative expressions of ancient art. The creation of statues was also present, albeit limited to honorific statues erected on bases that supported the

statues within columns adorning the streets and courtyards of temples. Reliefs, on the other hand, were intended for the ornamentation and decoration of funerary monuments and temples, thereby assisting the expert in their studies. (Figure. 6-A)

- **Bone industry :**

The bone industries uncovered during archaeological excavations indicate the existence of human activity in very ancient periods (Stone Age). Their studies enable precise determination of the exploitation period as well as the nature and role of these utilized industries. (Figure. 6-D)

- **Lithic industry :**

The lithic industry encompasses tools that are either partially or wholly crafted from stone. Certain human societies still rely on these tools in their daily lives today ; however, their usage has become limited, or even non-existent, in many parts of the world. Consequently, they are now regarded as relics of prehistoric times, particularly from ancient cultures. Stone tools play a significant role in the history of prehistoric human cultures, and archaeologists heavily depend on them to gain insights into these societies. Throughout human history, stones have been utilized to create a variety of tools, including arrowheads, spear blades, and picks. (Figure. 6-J).

- **Mosaic Table :**

The mosaic represents an evolution of landscape photography that dates back thousands of years, originating from the ancient peoples' desire to capture the beauty of nature, which reflects humanity's enduring connection to the land. This connection is illustrated through the depictions found on the walls of tombs, showcasing scenes of wheat harvesting, river fishing, and wild chicken hunting in marshes, all of which accompanied individuals into the afterlife. These artistic representations and manufacturing techniques assist specialists in determining the period, type of pavement, and the civilization to which they belong. (Figure.6-B)

- **Rock Engravings :**

These are illustrations created by removing portions of the rock surface through incising, engraving, and drawing. Some inscriptions carry profound cultural and

religious significance for the societies that carved them and for those that followed. Additionally, certain inscriptions feature forms or languages that remain undeciphered. Rock engravings serve as a vital source of historical writing, as they are stunning visual documents that testify to ancient times when human civilizations thrived. (Figure. 6-C)

- **Numismatics :**

In ancient times, coins were utilized for trade, allowing their holders to acquire portions of wine or food that were distributed and sold. Most coins featured images on both the obverse and reverse sides. It is quite challenging to categorize these coins within a specific timeframe due to the lack of precise dating indicators. Nevertheless, their style and the manner in which they are inscribed suggest that many of them provide opportunities for dating. (Figure. 6-F)

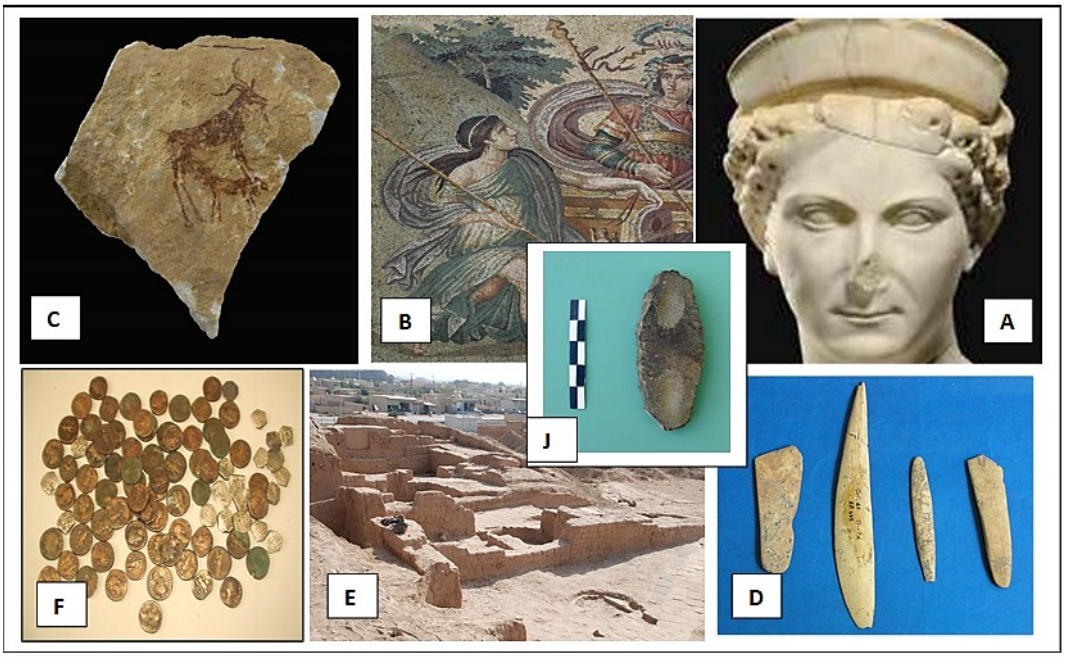


Figure N°6 : Archaeological objects that assist the archaeology expert
(Credit for photos ; the author)

In addition to these archaeological elements that the archaeology expert relies on in their studies and reports, they also draw upon ancient written sources, prior references, and classification catalogs to enhance their expert report.
(كونتريراس، 2023)

6. Administrative procedures upon the discovery or seizure of cultural property :

Before the archaeologist engages in the study and determination of the nature of cultural property, whether immovable or movable (whether discovered fortuitously or seized), this phase will have been preceded by administrative and judicial actions taken by the relevant authorities responsible for the management of cultural property. This is to ensure that the cultural property has the legal capacity for protection, based on the findings provided by the expert in a report following the study, as illustrated in the diagram below (Figure. 7) :

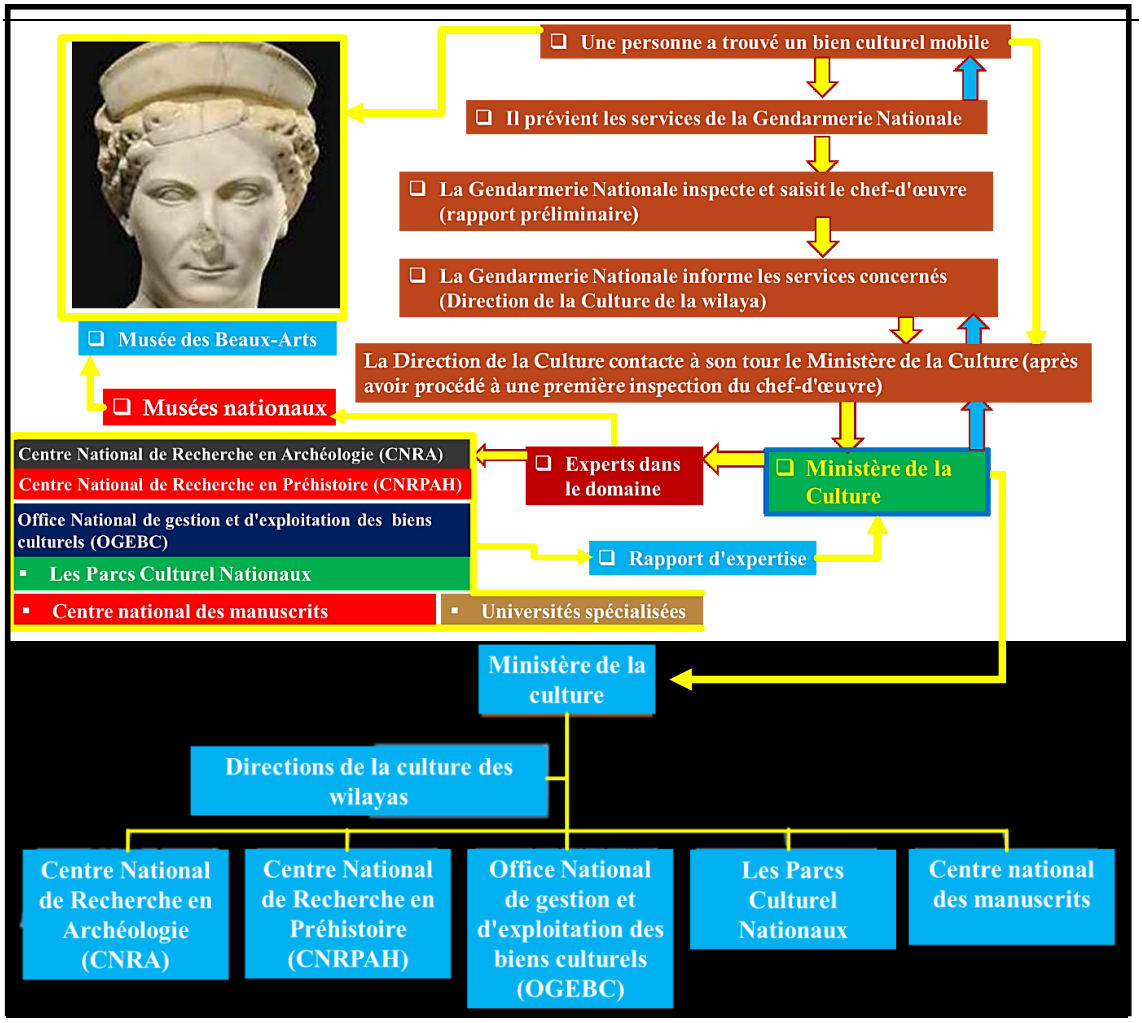


Figure N°6 : Administrative procedures during the discovery or seizure of cultural property (Credit for photos ; the author)

7. Technical sheet of the archaeology expert (chance discovery/ seized objects) :

The expert records in their report the following elements :

- ❖ An analytical presentation of what they have inspected within the scope of the task assigned to them.
- ❖ Experimenting with the results. (As stipulated in the legal article and civil and administrative procedures)

The expert report must include essential data, notably (Amouri, 2020) :

 The name, first name, and address of the expert (researcher), their specialty, and an indication of whether they are a specialist (registered or not in the approved register),
 The entity and institution that appointed them.
 The entity and institution where they are employed.
 The entity assigned to the tasks.
 The scope or field of the on-site inspection.
 Location, date, and time of the execution of their work.
 Steps and methods of property extraction.
 Initial statements and observations made during the discovery or seizure.
 Documents issued by the company/person... indicating the individual who issued them.
 An analytical presentation of the fieldwork they conducted.
 Results of their studies/expertise.
 Attachments to the report (photos, maps...)
 Signature of the report.

8. CONCLUSION

This study, through the initial expert report, serves as a reference and a foundational classification. The examination of archaeological expertise is referred to as decision support for understanding the archaeological risks associated with projects (for instance: a development and construction project). Through the impact study, it guides the project within the construction process, taking into account the heritage and its significance).

The expert report enhances our understanding of the lifestyles of ancient societies. This study facilitates the identification of the nature of cultural assets (originals, imitations, ancient, new...), and the archaeologist's expert sheet is regarded as a scientific and legal basis for classifying, inventorying, and safeguarding cultural properties.

In conclusion, we deduce from the above that the archaeological expert represents a crucial and stable link within the administrative and scientific framework for the protection and preservation of cultural assets. This is achieved through the insights presented in their reports and field and literary studies, based on their practical and academic experiences, thus establishing them as an essential reference for the classification and legal protection of cultural properties for stakeholders in this field within our country.

5. Bibliography List:

-أمقران نبيل. (2021). التواجد الفينيقي بالساحل الغرب الجزائري من خلال المجموعات الفخارية، *JOURNAL OF MODERN SCIENCE AND HERITAGE) ONLINE ISSN: 2001-6611 PRINT ISSN: 2001-662X*، الصفحات 241-225.

-فرناندو كونتريراس، تاتيانا فالينتي، أليشا ألونسو. (2023). *استخدام التقنيات الحديثة في مجال مسح وتوثيق الآثار*. تم الاسترداد من https://engage.moc.gov.sa/HERITAGE_ABILITIES_05

- Amouri, M. E. (2020). *Rapport archéologique de la campagne de Survey rov environnemental mise en œuvre par setec - in vivo en rade de Marseille.* . Survey rov/ Marseille.

- Bideau, F. G. (2013). Le rôle des experts dans la création de l'inventaire du patrimoine culturel immatériel en Suisse. *https://books.openedition.org/*. Récupéré sur books.openedition.org : https://books.openedition.org/editionsmsh/16072?lang=fr#anchor-persons

- Tan, C.C. (2014). « Rapport de diagnostic archéologique » tours diagnostic du site du « hallebardier ». *Service de l'archéologie du département d'Indre-et-Loire Conseil général - Hôtel du département 37927 Tours Cedex 9.*

-Touil, A. (2023, 10 06). Les abords des biens culturels immobiliers-Du concept importé à la définition du concept local. *Jour*, pp. 93-120.