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ISIS's War on Cultural Heritage and Memory

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Islamic State Background

Despite a new name, Islamic State (IS) has a considerable pedigree as a terrorist organization. Before taking its current name in June 2014, it was known as the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL), the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" or the "Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham" (ISIS, 2013-2014), the "Islamic State of Iraq" (ISI, 2006-2013), "Al-Qaeda in Iraq" (AQI, 2004-2006), and "The Organization for Monotheism and Jihad" (*Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*, then *Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al*-Rafidayn, 1999-2004).

On 29 June 2014, the group proclaimed itself to be a caliphate, with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi being named its caliph, and renamed itself "Islamic State" (*ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah*), leading to the acronym Da'ish or DAESH. As a "Caliphate," it claims religious, political and military authority over all Muslims. Nevertheless, the concept of a Caliphate and the name "Islamic State" has been rejected by governments and Muslim leaders worldwide. In June, the Islamic State declared Raqqa the seat of a new caliphate, presided over by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a fierce preacher who was once an American prisoner in Iraq. Why Raqqa? At the end of the eighth century, Harun al-Rashid, a caliph of the Abbasid dynasty, built a palace in Raqqa, on the

Euphrates River, in what is now Syria (Coll 2014). His empire stretched from modern Tunisia to Pakistan. It was an age of Islamic discovery in science, music, and art; Rashid's court of viziers inspired stories in "One Thousand and One Nights." Unfortunately, the city of Raqqa has lost its splendor, and became the scenario for "One Thousand and One Night-mares." Public executions are "a common spectacle" on Fridays in El Naim Square or at the Al Sa'a roundabout. ISIS fighters mount the dead on crucifixes, as a warning to local residents.

Ideology

Since declaring a caliphate, ISIS has targeted every ethno-sectarian group and even punished Sunnis who do not conform to its version of Islam. The group is trying to make permanent demographic changes in northwestern Iraq. The ethnic cleansing campaign began last summer with the forced exodus of minority groups from their towns. This saw hundreds of thousands of people displaced to the Kurdistan region and central and southern Iraq. Those who fought back were executed, elderly men and women were left to die slowly, women were taken as slaves, and young boys and girls were moved to other areas where they were to be trained as "soldiers" of the caliphate. This breaking up of communities aimed to crush any resistance from other areas, prevent women from being integrated back into their families due to the dishonor stigma in Middle Eastern cultures, where women have been raped, and indoctrinate a new army of young soldiers to fight their communities in the future.

Once the areas were depopulated the homes were marked with letters denoting the ethno-religious identity of the owners and the possessions looted or sold off. Then the homes themselves were destroyed, assigned to commanders or auctioned off to buyers. This has the effect of preventing quick resettlement in these areas if ISIS is defeated and the original inhabitants return. In short, the next generations will have no experience of the "Other" and so will not be tolerant or respectful, as ISIS wants.

The religious landscape of northern Iraq was changed. So, next came the churches and mosques that were blown up despite some being hundreds and thousands of years old, left intact during the times of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates.

Then came the graves that proved how these areas had always been settled by a particular community, with names and dates on tombstones that were clear to see. Sledgehammers and bulldozers were used to level these and now all trace of these graves has been wiped out.

In recent months, ISIS has destroyed priceless architecture and antiquities in northern Iraq. Libraries that housed invaluable manuscripts, detailing the heritage of Mosul and other towns were burned to the ground. Even books of Islamic studies were not spared, as they contained a version of Islam that ISIS rejects. This damage to local culture was meant to prevent education, and to maintain a distance between the caliphate and what these areas were like before. It was an attack on memory, society and civilization all at once.

Iconoclasm is the destruction of religious icons and other images or monuments for religious or political motives. ISIS's iconoclasm goes hand-in-hand with its attempt to construct an Islamic state. The so-called "purification" of its territory is a means of asserting its control over the local population and sending a message that this territory will, from now on, be governed along Islamic lines. As ISIS fights to define the frontiers of its co-called caliphate, "iconoclasm" represents a means of bridging the principles of theological and political unity.

Attacks on antiquities were perhaps the most publicized of these actions, with videos of statues being demolished in the Mosul museum circulating widely on social media. Strongly condemned by UNESCO and other organizations, these actions were meant to appeal to Muslims content with or not offended by the demolishing of the Bamiyan statues in Afghanistan in 2001. But they were also meant to turn these areas into places of little value for foreigners and government agencies. In that way, the outside world would have no interest in having a presence there, and ISIS could continue to find support in these areas.

Perhaps the most tragic of all in this campaign was that ISIS relied on neighbors of those it attacked to carry out this ethnic cleansing. This element was perhaps the most destructive, for if buildings can be rebuilt, ties and bonds broken by blood cannot.

The future looks bleak for the various ethno-religious groups that were settled in northern Iraq, particularly Christians who also face being forced out from other countries. The Iraqi authorities, with the aid of the international community, must reverse each of these steps that ISIS has taken to ethnically cleanse northern Iraq (Jiyad 2015).

ISIS's Wealth

ISIS's operational potential comes from its extraordinary wealth. According to files seized by Iraqi intelligence before the attack on Mosul, ISIS had £515 million in cash and resources. ISIS has achieved this wealth mostly via captured oil facilities in Syria, the sale of rare antiquities seized in the conflict and in levying taxes on individuals and businesses in the regions it controls. ISIS oil production worth an estimated $800 million per year. Such revenues have allowed ISIS, the world's richest terrorist group, to govern and maintain self-sufficiency. In addition to this, it has also been funded by individuals in Kuwait, who appear to be supporting jihadist groups operating in Syria. Also, ISIS has undertaken a significant and sophisticated propaganda and media strategy, producing viral videos, showing their attacks on various targets. The group has also set up its own TV channel, and media app, such as "The Dawn of Glad Tidings", which was used to hack Twitter accounts to spread images such as the massacre of Shi'ite Iraqi troops by ISIS after the fall of Mosul. ISIS have shown considerable sophistication in both their military and their political strategy which, combined with their significant self-generated financial wealth and regional ambitions pose a grave threat to not only Iraq and Syria, but countries bordering those two states as well (Simms 2014).

It is not just destruction because, for ISIS, conflict pays. The ongoing conflict allows ISIS to pillage museums and excavate ancient sites for any gold coins and artifacts they can traffic and monetize. ISIS also exploits the high unemployment rates among the youth to create incentives for more pillaging of archeological and historical sites. ISIS issues permits to local residents to dig ancient sites and charges a percentage of the monetary value of their finds. The money in turn, allows ISIS to continue its onslaught on Iraqi civilians and its cultural heritage. It is estimated that ISIS raises US$200 million a year from cultural looting. The New York Times reported that ISIS works with mafia-like organized crime networks and traffickers, who at times make special orders and ask ISIS for specific types of antiquities to be dug up. Indeed, the revenues from trafficked artifacts come second only to oil. Compared to oil, however, artifacts are more easily looted and harder to stop militarily (Hartnell and Wahab 2015).

Isis's War on Cultural Heritage

Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, UNESCO has been trying to get various countries to help protect heritages sites. But with the death toll rising, few seemed to be paying attention. Some even criticized the agency for caring about antiquities when people were dying. "There was a huge humanitarian loss and people who were dying, refugees and internally displaced persons," said Irina Bokova, the head of UNESCO. "This isn't a choice between people or stone," said Deborah Lehr, chair of Antiquities Coalition. "Culture is part of who these people are, and this, ironically, is the cradle of civilization." Now, the link between protecting people and their heritage is better understood (Antiquity Now 2015).

The United Nations cultural agency called on March 6th, 2015 for global action to halt Islamic State's systematic destruction of archaeological sites, calling the bulldozing of the Assyrian city of Nimrud a "war crime" against humanity's ancient heritage. Irina Bokova said that Isis was carrying out a "cultural cleansing". Her comments came amid a mounting outcry over reports that militants had begun demolishing the site, south of Mosul, with heavy vehicles (Philp 2015).

Over the past month, the Islamic State has reportedly begun looting and razing the ancient Assyrian capital of Khorsabad, known for its statues of *lamassi*, bulls with wings and human heads. They are among the oldest artifacts in Iraq, but to ISIS they are nothing more than stones and precious metals forged to honor false gods. The destruction of the 2,700-year-old city, located northeast of Mosul, is the latest in a spate of ISIS attacks on cultural heritage sites across Iraq. The Khorsabad attack came days after ISIS militants blew up and bulldozed a 2,000-year-old archaeological site in Hatra, and similarly desecrated Nimrud, a 3,000-year-old ancient Assyrian city. In late February, ISIS released a video purporting to show militants taking sledgehammers to artifacts in the Nineveh Museum in Mosul, some of which are 6,000 years old (Prince 2015).

Hatra is on the UNESCO World Heritage list, and Nimrud is a proposed UNESCO World Heritage Site; Iraq has submitted an application requesting its recognition as a fully-fledged site. Destroying artifacts in both cities could be considered a war crime under the "Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court". UNESCO is continuing to assess the destruction at the various sites, but no one has been able to confirm what and how much has been damaged, for security reasons.

“It’s an eradication of culture,” said Deborah Lehr, chair of the Washington, D.C.-based Antiquities Coalition, a group that works with governments to protect ancient sites and materials. “It’s a part of striking at those beliefs that differ from [ISIS’s] extremist view: views of tolerance, views of religious freedom, and views of expression.”

ISIS has been justifying its destruction through religion, calling the targeted statues and shrines “false idols.” But Cairo-based Al-Azhar, the leading religious authority on Sunni Islam, said ISIS’s actions were “a major crime against the whole world.” And the jihadist group has been selling some of these antiquities to private collectors, a lucrative trade and one that has nothing to do with religion.

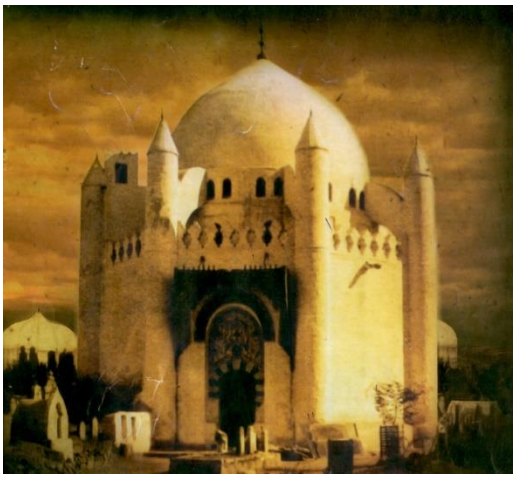
While ancient sites in and around Iraq and Syria remain at risk, cultural heritage advocates now fear Libya could be ISIS’s next target. In December, ISIS set up a training camp in the port city of Derna; in February were beheaded 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians, and last week were kidnapped nine foreign oil workers. The country also has a number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including the archaeological sites of Cyrene, a Hellenic city, and Sabratha, an ancient trading post (Westcott 2015).

“Cultural cleansing” background

The Islamic State is waging a campaign of destruction against the cultural heritage of Iraq and Syria, a theologically-motivated rampage on a scale believed to be without precedent in modern history. Ancient churches and tombs are being demolished; irreplaceable statues are being smashed.

But, ISIS's hostility towards historical artifacts is shared by other militant Sunni Islamist groups, dating back at least to the 18th century religious revival that led to the birth of modern Saudi Arabia. More recently, Islamists' work has seen treasures destroyed from Afghanistan to Somalia. But ISIS has upped the game well beyond any of its modern peers, damaging and destroying invaluable antiquities. But this "cultural cleansing" is not new, as can be explained by photographs and videos of 11 historic artifacts and sites lost to the world at the hands of different Islamist groups.

1) 1920s: Saudi Arabia destroys the al-Baqi cemetery.



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Saudi authorities destroyed this mausoleum, part of the al-Baqi cemetery in Medina, in early 1926, shortly after taking power in the city in the prior year. In fact they flattened the entire site, which dated back to the 7th century and is thought to contain the bodies of some of the Prophet Muhammed's early compatriots. The Saudis didn't just do this on a whim. They were, and still are, aligned with a religious faction called the Wahhabis, a group of Sunni fundamentalists who reject any form of worship through religious shrines and icons. Theologically, Wahhabis and other Islamists trace this back to the story of the golden calf that appears in the Koran and the Bible, in which the Israelites build and pray to an idol, sparking God’s fury. A number of Muslims see the story as a blanket prohibition against the worship of images and shrines altogether.

2) 2001: the Taliban blows up Afghanistan's Bamiyan Buddhas.

© Jean-Claude Chapon. AFP. Getty Images

In 2001, the Taliban blew up two 1,700 year old statues of Buddha carved into a cliff in central Afghanistan's Bamiyan valley. They were the tallest statues of Buddha in the world, one standing about 165 high.

3) 2006: al-Qaeda bombs Iraq's 1000-year-old al-Askari mosque.

© Getty Images.

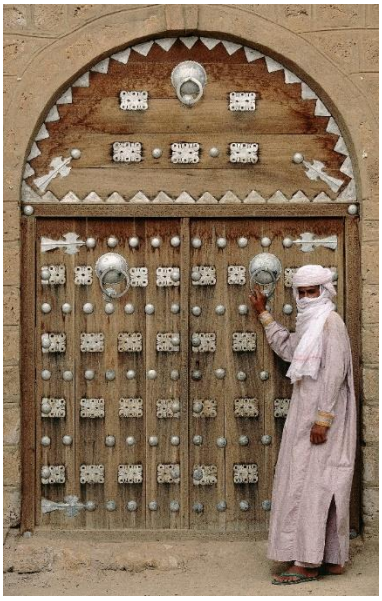
According to Beauchamp (2015), “the motivation of this kind of destruction is not always purely theological: sometimes, it can serve more mundane political aims.” In 2006, the height of

the Iraqi civil war, al-Qaeda in Iraq bombed the al-Askari mosque, one of the world's holiest Shia shrines, built in the city of Samarra in the year 944. The mosque's iconic golden dome was reduced to rubble in an attempt by a Sunni militant group to further inflame Iraq's sectarian war. Al-Qaeda in Iraq would later evolve into ISIS, and the al-Askari mosque bombing, in many ways, presages the ISIS rampage that would follow it.

4) 2008: al-Shabaab destroys Sufi graves and shrines in Somalia.

In 2008, the Somali group al-Shabaab destroyed Sufi (mystical Islamist) graves and shrines in Kismayo, Somalia's third-largest city. Previously, they had destroyed an old church. It did not seem to matter that not a single Christian lived in the city at the time.

5) 2012: al-Qaeda and Ansar Dine run in Timbuktu.



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In 2012, Islamists from al-Qaeda and Ansar Dine overran the ancient city of Timbuktu in Mali, a UN World Heritage Site. This picture shows the ornate front door of Timbuktu's Sidi Yahya mosque. Legend had it that the door would stay shut until the apocalypse; but the Islamists smashed

it. At least half of the roughly 600 year-old shrines in the city were destroyed before an international force pushed the militants out.

6) 2014: ISIS blows up the ancient Assyrian church of Tikrit.

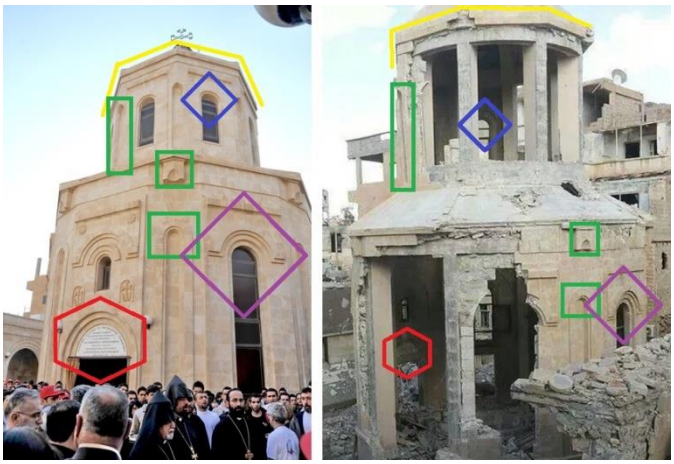
© Rome Reports

In September 2014, reports emerged that ISIS had blown up the Assyrian Green Church in Tikrit, originally built in the year 700.

7) 2014: ISIS bombs the tomb of a Biblical prophet.

According to Dana Ford (CNN), many videos show ISIS detonating the tomb of the Biblical prophet Jonah (or Yunus) in Mosul, Iraq (Ford and Tawfeeq 2014). The holy site is said to be the burial place of the prophet Jonah, who was swallowed by a whale or great fish in the Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions. He spends a few days in the belly of the whale/fish before emerging alive to follow God's instruction to go to Nineveh.

8) 2014: ISIS defaces Syria's Armenian Genocide Memorial Church in Deir ez-Zor, Syria.



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9) 2015: ISIS destroys the statue of the ancient king of Hatra.

© Christopher Jones.

ISIS doesn't just destroy religious buildings. According to Christopher Jones, a PhD student in Near Eastern history at Columbia, “the statue being destroyed here (part of the Mosul Museum

collection) depicts an ancient king of Hatra. Hatra is an Iraqi city-state from the Roman era, and not a major part of Islamic theology".

10) 2015: ISIS destroys the city of Hatra.

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The news from Hatra (1st Century BCE - 2nd Century AD) is also likely to be dire: the city was the first Iraqi cultural site listed on the World Heritage register. In its later stages, it was the capital of the first Arab kingdom in history. The site is famous for its cosmopolitan mix of religious ideas and cultural styles, including Greek, Parthian, Roman, and Arab. Whatever antiquities remain at Hatra are being systematically torn down and broken up. If Nineveh and Nimrud represents northern Iraq's glorious past, Hatra surely represents its legacy of tolerance. Its destruction or looting would represent the destruction of the best alternative to ISIS, an identity built on a sense of shared humanity amongst the different faiths and cultures (Hartnell and Wahab 2015).

"The destruction of Hatra marks a turning point in the appalling strategy of cultural cleansing underway in Iraq," UNESCO director Irina Bokova said in joint statement with Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijr, director of an organization devoted to preserving Islamic cultural

heritage. "This is a direct attack against the history of Islamic Arab cities, and it confirms the role of destruction of heritage in the propaganda of extremists groups." (Beauchamp 2015).

11) 2015: ISIS bulldozes the Assyrian city of Nimrud.

© Karim Sahib. AFP. Getty Images.

ISIS has also allegedly bulldozed Nimrud, an ancient Assyrian city in northern Iraq. The city shares a name with the biblical figure Nimrod, so there could be some theological motivation here. But it's important to note that ISIS also profits on the sale of antiquities. "They destroy antiquities for effect, and they likely use the smokescreen of destruction to cover themselves while they move more transportable items for profit," Mark Vlasic, an Adjunct Professor at the Georgetown University Law Center, told US News. "It is, after all, a criminal organization." (Beauchamp 2015).

At Nimrud, the Neo-Assyrian capital of Assurnasirpal II (883 - 859 BCE), ISIS created improvised explosives to blow up the palace and associated administrative quarters of the city. Visitors to the later Neo-Assyrian capital of Nineveh would walk through the city's Nergal Gate, the same gate that ancient residents would have used. Here, ISIS used industrial tools to deface the gate's winged bulls, thus destroying an irreplaceable link to the past (Hartnell and Wahab 2015).

Eradication of cultural heritage and historical memory

The Islamic State's swath of destruction across the Middle East has taken a disturbing turn. At the end of February, a video surfaced showing militants taking sledgehammers and drills to ancient statues and other artifacts at the Mosul Museum in Iraq. According to the *International Business Times*, the statues destroyed by militants in the tape date back to the Assyrian Empire, which spread across the region between 2500 BCE to 605 BCE. Their reason for the wanton destruction? The relics, some of which were nearly 3000 years old, represented idolatry against the Prophet Muhammad.

As I mentioned before, this isn't the first time the Islamic State has waged a jihad against Iraqi Heritage. *Al-Shorfa* reports that since taking Mosul in July of 2014, ISIS has destroyed at least 28 historical religious buildings across the city, on top of dozens of others across Iraq and Syria since the group began its bloody rampage in 2014. Secretary of State John Kerry has condemned the "purposeful ideological destruction" that had "destroyed irreplaceable evidence of ancient life and society" across Iraq and Syria. Thomas Campbell, the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, decried the destruction as "a tragic assault not only on the Mosul Museum, but on our universal commitment to use art to unite people and promote human understanding" (AFP February 27th, 2015).

But, it's UNESCO, the UN's cultural heritage arm, that's delivered the most forceful and powerful denunciation, declaring the deliberate destruction of Iraq's cultural heritage as a "war crime" under Section 8 of the "Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court". UNESCO chief Irina Bokova dubbed the vandalism and destruction of ISIS militants the equivalent of "cultural cleansing" in a statement. "This tragedy is far from just a cultural issue: it's an issue of major security," she said. "We see clearly how terrorists use the destruction of heritage in their strategy to destabilize and manipulate populations so that they can assure their own domination."

As Keller (2015), she was right to do so: "ISIS's campaign against Iraq's cultural heritage isn't just a violation of international law, but a genocidal assault on the core of a civilization. Not only is there a legal precedent for calling ISIS's destruction a war crime, but also a historical one paved by virtually every genocide of the 20th century".

Also, the *Wall Street Journal*'s Eric Gibson points out that a "war crimes" declaration has legal precedent. During World War II, Hitler had thousands of works of art and personal cultural

artifacts appropriated and even destroyed through the organized looting of Jewish communities under the Final Solution. After the war, the UN adopted the Hague Convention of 1954, which requires signatories to protect "cultural property"—movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people—from destruction and misappropriation even in times of armed conflict. And Article 8(b)(ix) of the Rome Statute, which falls under the category of "war crimes," finds a "serious violation" if the "perpetrator intentionally directs attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not military objectives." In fact, UNESCO Director Bokova's words aren't simply an expression of anger; they have the force of UN doctrine behind them.

According to Keller (2015), such a legal classification may leave some scratching their heads: Compared to ISIS's other videotaped atrocities—the brutal decapitation of journalists and aid workers, the systematic execution of civilians, the use of children in warfare, and the extermination of ethnic minorities—destroying a few ancient statues seems like small potatoes, a crime, though heinous, that doesn't rise to the level of "war crime."

He added "I don't believe that anyone would weigh the value of a 3,000 statues against human life, but history shows that crimes against culture are inseparable from crimes against persons and communities." For example, the extermination of 1.5 million men, women and children during the Armenian Genocide was accompanied by the destruction of Armenian churches and monuments, museums and libraries. According to historian Robert Bevan, there were 2,549 religious sites under the control of Istanbul's Armenian Patriarchate, including more than 200 monasteries and 1,600 churches. Their destruction helped reduce a millennia-old culture and its ecclesiastical traditions to a shadow of its former self. Also, historians have documented how the Khmer Rouge regime destroyed temples, forbade traditional celebration, and left "no space for cultural expression beyond propaganda for the regime" during the Cambodian genocide of the 1970s. During the Bosnian genocide of the early 1990s, Serbian forces attempted to eradicate all traces of Muslim culture from occupied regions by destroying libraries, mosques and other significant cultural sites.

Rafael Lemkin, the Polish-Jewish lawyer who originated the term genocide in his attempt to effective describe the previously unseen crimes of the Third Reich, called the horrors of World War II "the destruction of whole populations—of national, racial and religious groups—both

biologically and culturally." It's this definition that identifies the totalitarian nature of genocide, the sort of biological and institutional totalitarianism that came to define states like Nazi Germany. UNESCO chief Bokova's statement about using cultural terrorism as a tactic to subjugate resonates with every bloody conflict of the modern era: To control people, you have to control culture, the context on which civil society is built. It's not enough simply to slaughter every Jew, Armenian, Bosnian Muslim, or Yazidi in a geographical area. True domination comes from the complete and utter control and destruction every aspect of a population, including culture and historical memory. Wiping it off the face of the Earth is only part of the equation: While enclaves of a civilization may survive elsewhere as refugees, the destruction of cultural sites introduces degradation and instability into a culture, reducing it to the level of oral tradition. This is what total annihilation really looks like.

While human rights lawyers can debate the legal nuances of the Rome Statute, crimes that rise to that horizon of "crimes against humanity" will always require that we consider them against culture. After all, the Rome Statute doesn't just define the jurisdiction of the ICC (International Criminal Court) and how the institutions of international justice can prosecute individuals. It reflects and codifies the normative definition of crimes against civilized society, including genocide and "crimes against humanity." The inclusion of cultural objects in the ICC's doctrine on war crimes recognizes the all-encompassing nature of humanity's evilest manifestations.

ISIS, often derided as a "vicious death cult" in its tactics and intention, is more like a burgeoning authoritarian state with a carefully considered ideology of cultural and religious purity. Not only is the militant group a portrait of brutality, but its implementation of Sharia Law and destruction of cultural artifacts suggests an organization on par with totalitarian states that seek to subjugate its citizens and strip them of all cultural and social individuality. Not only does this fall under the legal definition of a "war crime", but it fits the profile defined by "genocidal organizations" before it (Keller 2015).

Protection of Cultural Heritage

The World Heritage Convention is not the only international tool that UNESCO has made available to support conservation. In fact, since its inception in the aftermath of the Second World War, UNESCO has given life to several conventions in the field of cultural heritage conservation,

reflecting the growing concern of the international community for conservation, a concern justified by the threats and destruction – voluntary and involuntary – that have taken place in the past and are witnessed every day. The conventions are: a) 1954 Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (Hague Convention), and its Protocols of 1992 and 1999; b) 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Cultural Property; c) 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage; d) 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage; e) 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; and f) 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

As part of UNESCO activities in support of heritage conservation during conflicts and in post-conflict situations, the World Heritage Convention has played a significant role in safeguarding sites. World Heritage sites have often been the target of military action, looters and poachers in the lawless situations created by conflict.

Following the intentional destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan (Afghanistan), in 2003 the General Conference of UNESCO adopted a Declaration Concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage (Hladik, 2004). This Declaration encourages states to become signatories to the 1954 Convention (http://www.unesco.org/culture/laws/intentional/declare.pdf). It also requests them to "take all appropriate measures to prevent, avoid, stop and suppress acts of intentional destruction of cultural heritage, wherever such heritage is located", in peacetime or in the event of armed conflict (Boylan 1993). Article VI stresses in particular that "a State that intentionally destroys or intentionally fails to take appropriate measures to prohibit, prevent, stop, and punish any intentional destruction of cultural heritage of great importance for humanity, whether or not it is inscribed on a list maintained by UNESCO or another international organization, bears the responsibility for such destruction, to the extent provided for by international law" (*World Heritage Challenges for the Millennium*, 2007: 67).

Armed conflicts can be triggered by different causes, such as culture, religion, ethnicity, territory, distribution of wealth, or a general breakdown in governance (*World Heritage - Challenges for the Millennium*, 2007: 174). Possible impacts of war include: a) destruction by bombs, shells and subsequent fire of sites; b) loss of stability of buildings, as a result of shelling partly destroying walls and roofs; c) damage to objects, collections and significant interior features and fittings by heat, smoke and combustion byproducts; d) water damage resulting from efforts to

arrest fire; e) obliteration of landscape patterns and features through shelling and associated fire; f) danger of future damage to people and property due to buried landmines; g) destruction and/or displacement of animals and their habitats; h) displacement of local communities; i) looting of artifacts; j) breakdown of management, protection, conservation and surveillance programmes; and k) overuse of natural resources (Stovel, 1998: 85).

In some instances, damage to heritage has not just been an outcome of war but it is the heritage itself which has been targeted, for iconoclastic reasons or centuries-old internecine or religious conflicts, and has consequently suffered irreparable damage, as occurred for example in the Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley (Afghanistan), the Old Bridge Area of the Old City of Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the Old City of Dubrovnik (Croatia). In other cases, such as Los Katíos National Park (Colombia), heritage is affected indirectly as the large scale social and economic disruption caused by conflict leads to breakdown in law and order.

Besides encouraging countries to ratify the 1954 Convention and its two Protocols (*World Heritage - Challenges for the Millennium*, 2007: 66-68), the World Heritage Committee has also encouraged measures to celebrate and share the importance of heritage sites with others (e.g. listing sites in Iraq during times of conflict). World Heritage listing may be one way to reconcile previously polarized communities, breaking down longstanding enmities that can result in attacks on the cultural heritage of another group. The reconstruction of the Old Bridge of Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), inscribed in 2005 on the World Heritage List, is a symbol of reconciliation, international cooperation and celebration of the coexistence of diverse cultural, ethnic and religious communities.

Existing guidelines for reducing the impact of armed conflict advise: a) the inclusion of impact assessments of armed conflicts and opportunities for mitigation in strategic contingency plannings in regions where political instability exists or is likely to occur in future; b) the maintenance of a presence during conflicts and whenever and wherever possible, by conservation organizations in protected areas and other heritage places. This was the case in the five World Heritage sites in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Providing materials and giving moral support to staff should be a high priority to ensure success in maintaining a presence in protected areas in armed conflict; c) collaboration with others in the conservation community and the relief and development sector to increase conservation effectiveness during conflicts; and d) working

with the local communities during conflicts and helping them meet their needs to put the least strain possible on natural resources (Oglethorpe *et al.* 2004: 2-8; Stovel, 1998; cf. *The International Committee of the Blue Shield*).

Theft, war, civil disorder, terrorism, neglect and vandalism are human factors in the accidental or willful destruction of our heritage (Teijgeler, 2006). Of these threats, armed conflict remains particularly intractable and disturbing. Regrettably, we have experienced more than once how shocking the effects of a violent struggle can be on the heritage of countries such as the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Statues are blown up because they are considered an insult to the "only and right religion", archaeological sites are occupied by foreign troops and destroyed in the process, and archives are deliberately obliterated as part of an ethnic cleansing policy. Undoubtedly, the final decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21th century were marked by destruction of heritage on a symbolic scale that has been unrivalled for the past several centuries.

The conflicts in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq demonstrate that cultural heritage remains vulnerable during armed conflict. In Sarajevo the national library was burned, and the facade of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina was pockmarked by snipers; in Afghanistan, objects in the Kabul Museum were defaced, destroyed, or looted and sold abroad, and the great Buddhas at Bamiyan were obliterated; and in April 2003, the Iraq National Museum was looted, and the ongoing lack of security elsewhere in the country allows the continued looting and destruction of thousands of archaeological sites (Wegener and Otter 2008).

The civil unrest that took place across the Arab world from early 2011 onwards, spreading from Tunisia and also affecting Libya, Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, led to the collapse of long-standing political regimes in the countries involved and in some cases to prolonged disorder or civil conflict. In Egypt, institutions, including museums and heritage sites, have been at the risk of looting or other damage. While some objects were stolen at the Egyptian Museum, the Egyptian public showed outstanding commitment to the protection of the heritage of Egypt and, for example, formed a human chain around the museum. Although some damage has been done, it could have been much worse without their help (ECHO News 2011). Also, Egyptian conservators have quickly been mobilized to treat documents that were damaged in the recent fire at the Institute of Egypt (UNESCO News 2012).

Since its beginnings in 2011, armed conflict in Syria has escalated dramatically with major human loss, hundreds of thousands of refugees, and extensive damage to infrastructure and properties. Cultural heritage in all its forms has suffered from the direct and indirect effects of this ongoing conflict. Syria's World Heritage sites together with numerous cultural properties of national and local significance are at serious risk. In 2012-2013, the World Heritage Committee has decided to include on the List of World Heritage in danger, in accordance with Article 11 (4) of the Convention, the following sites threatened by armed conflicts: Timbuktu (Timbuktu Region, Mali); the Tomb of Askia (Gao Region, Mali); the Ancient cities of Aleppo, Bosra and Damascus (Syria); the Ancient Villages of Northern Syria; the Crac des Chevaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din (the Fortress of Saladin), and the site of Palmyra (Syria) (cf. http://whc.unesco.org/en/danger/).

Ancient city of Aleppo, market quarter

© Aleppo Media Center (AMC) and Bassem Mroue, The Associated Press

From time immemorial, war has gone hand in hand with widespread destruction and the "right to booty". Today, man-made disasters strike worldwide. It is estimated that at the beginning of the 21th century nearly a quarter of the world's population was facing some type of crisis or post-conflict situation, and that two-thirds of the poorest countries were suffering as a result of current or recent conflicts. A Disaster Management Cycle should address issues relevant to all phases of the disaster cycle: preparedness, response, recovery, rebuilding, prevention and mitigation (cf. Conservation OnLine, 2005). The disaster cycle could in the event of war be subdivided into actions to be taken before the outbreak of an armed conflict (pre-conflict), during the conflict (peri-conflict) and after the conflict (post-conflict). In terms of international

development, most attention is paid to post-conflict situations and not so much to the two preceding phases (Teijgeler 2006).

The first stirrings of a wish to protect works of art appeared during the Renaissance. The concept was further developed in the 16th and 17th centuries by writers on international law, such as Jacob Przyluski. In his "*Leges seu statuta ac privilegia Regni Polonaie*" (Cracow, 1553), Jacob Przyluski [Jacobus Prilusius] put forward the idea that "every belligerent should show regard for a work of art, but not solely because of its religious nature" (Toman 1996: 4-5). The protection of cultural property was also considered in non-western civilizations. Under Islamic law, the obligation to distinguish between civilian and military objects is clearly imperative and permits no exception. In accordance with the orders of the first Caliph Abu Bakr (AD 632-634) attacks should be "strictly confined to military targets" (i.e. objects that by their nature or use are intended for the pursuit of hostilities). Thus, the Islamic concept presumes "all objects to be civilian unless proven otherwise" (Toman 1996).

Over the past sixty years, UNESCO has been a key international player in heritage conservation. The World Heritage Convention, The International Safeguarding Campaigns, and the interventions in conflict and post-conflict areas are testimony to a long and consistent engagement in support of conservation.

Important measures for safeguarding cultural property to be undertaken in peacetime are: the preparation of inventories, the planning of emergency measures for protection against fire or structural collapse, the preparation for the removal of movable cultural property or the provision for adequate *in situ* protection of such property, and the designation of competent authorities responsible for the safeguarding of cultural property (cf. The 1999 Second Protocol to the Hague Convention: www.unesco.org/culture/laws/hague/html_eng/protocol2.shtml).

Important measures for safeguarding cultural property to be undertaken during armed conflicts are: a) Risk preparedness: some institutions saw the violent conflict in their country coming and prepared themselves to the best of their abilities, considering the local circumstances. The institutions that managed to save their collection, or part of it, had prepared themselves before the conflict broke out (Teijgeler 2006); b) **Closedown**: a normal practice listed in every disaster preparedness plan is to close down the institution as soon as possible in case of emergency (as in Egypt, during the August, 2013 events). This is to prevent casualties rather than to safeguard the collection, as the iron rule in risk management is to put the interests of human beings before those

of the collections. Once the doors are shut, the staff can pay full attention to securing the holdings. Three weeks before the American invasion in March 2003, the staff of the Iraq Museum closed the galleries to the public and began the task of protecting the museum and its content. They were able to save important parts of the collections but they could not prevent the looting of 15,000 art objects at the unprotected museum. During the Gulf War (1990-91) the Iraq Museum was closed down only after the Ministry of Communications - located across the road from the museum - was bombed, and the resulting tremors shattered a number of the museum's showcases. Unfortunately, the National Library and Archives of Iraq did not take any precautions before the American troops entered Baghdad; c) **Safe haven**: once the institution is closed there are several options to secure the holdings, depending how much time is left. One option is to move (part of) the collections to safer premises outside the institution (as the transfer of artifacts from the Mallawi Museum, Al Minya, by Museum staff, police, conservators, volunteers, and Egyptologists, as Dr. Monica Hanna, to al-Ashmounein, Egypt, on August, 2013) or even outside the country (as the transfer of artifacts from Beirut to Verdun, during the first years of the Civil War, 1975-90) (Gestoso Singer 2013). Of course, such an operation takes time. Again this stresses the importance of a solid contingency plan in which an evacuation is anticipated. Usually the library, archive or museum has sufficient space in a building that is not too far away. An institution in a conflict-prone area should seriously consider relocating the collection outside the region: a project that can be realized with the help of international organizations. However, often the mistake is made of transferring materials to surroundings that do not meet the minimum preservation standards. During the Soviet-backed Najibullah Government (1986-1992) the Kabul Museum ordered all objects on exhibit, numbering around 600, to be brought down to the storerooms and prepared to be moved. To minimize the risk of concentrating the objects in one place, some trunks were moved to the Central Bank Treasury vault in the Presidential Palace, others to the Ministry of Information and Culture, while the rest remained in the various depots of the Kabul Museum itself (Grissmann 2003: 71-76); and d) Safekeeping within the walls: partly owing to a lack of time, the big objects will have to be protected *in situ*, while the small ones can be wrapped up, packed and transported to the storage rooms. The wartime story of the National Museum has become part of Lebanese legend. The museum in Beirut was totally unprepared when the Civil War (1975-1990) broke out. As the fighting became more violent, the director, assisted by his wife and several employees, took the opportunity during a ceasefire to empty the display cases, took photographs of the artifacts and put

them in boxes after having made lists of them. They moved them to underground storage areas, and covered them with earth for camouflage. Only four people in Lebanon knew the location of the ancient artworks (Pharès 2003: 38-43).

The safety and protection of people is the first and foremost priority in any disaster, as is the resilience of their communities in times of disasters. Nevertheless, at armed conflicts our heritage is at serious risk as well. A free nation cannot be built without respect for its own heritage, culture, roots, and ancestors' legacy.

Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property

Since the beginning of the armed conflict in Syria, experts had long suspected that the country's archaeological sites and museums were being looted. The reports based on satellite images of the American Association for the Advancement of Science confirmed the fears that the scale of plunder was unprecedented since the Second World War. At the same time, it was discovered that the illicit trade with antiquities was a major source of income of the Islamic State, the wealthiest jihadist militant group in the world despite its recent creation (Lostal 2015).

The current terrorist art and antiquities market is dictated by two factors: (1) can an item be transported to a location where a buyer exists for it, and (2) can the artwork be passed off as legitimate once it arrives. To be sold an item must be exported from ISIS-occupied territories into nations such as Lebanon or Turkey, which have access to the first world antiquity and art markets. These objects are then smuggled into first world nations and legitimized through art galleries and dealers operating in the art business (Raggi 2015).

According to The Times of London, despite the high number of artifacts being removed from ISIS occupied territories the artworks being unloaded by the group are not limited to the heritage of Iraq and Syria. Some of the highest grossing ISIS artworks reported in London include Roman pottery and glass, as well as gold and silver Byzantine coins.

The U.S. has also been a hot destination for plundered Syrian antiquities. In September 2014, John Kerry hosted a press conference at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York where he released a "red list of Syrian cultural objects at risk" which included a number of cultural objects which have been removed from Syria in the midst of ISIS' war. A "red list" was also announced for cultural objects from Iraq and is yet to be released. The goal of this project was to

raise international awareness of threats to Syrian and Iraqi cultural patrimony. However, the sale of ISIS-supplied artifacts reportedly continues in New York and London (Raggi 2015).

In 2013, the European Union had already barred all sorts of trade with Syrian antiquities. Under the Syrian Antiquities Law, the international trade with antiquities is absolutely prohibited and punished with 10 to 15 years of imprisonment.

In 2015, against this background, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2199 on 12 February according to which all Member States shall take appropriate steps to prevent the illicit trade in Iraqi and Syrian cultural property (Lostal 2015). Thus, unanimously adopting Resolution 2199 (Section "Cultural Heritage: ## 15-17"), Security Council: "15. *Condemns* the destruction of cultural heritage in Iraq and Syria particularly by ISIL (the "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant") and ANF (the "Al-Nusrah Front"), whether such destruction is incidental or deliberate, including targeted destruction of religious sites and objects; "16. *Notes with concern* that ISIL, ANF and other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida, are generating income from engaging directly or indirectly in the looting and smuggling of cultural heritage items from archaeological sites, museums, libraries, archives, and other sites in Iraq and Syria, which is being used to support their recruitment efforts and strengthen their operational capability to organize and carry out terrorist attacks; and "17. *Reaffirms* its decision in paragraph 7 of resolution 1483 (2003) and *decides* that all Member States shall take appropriate steps to prevent the trade in Iraqi and Syrian cultural property and other items of archaeological, historical, cultural, rare scientific, and religious importance illegally removed from Iraq since 6 August 1990 and from Syria since 15 March 2011, including by prohibiting cross-border trade in such items, thereby allowing for their eventual safe return to the Iraqi and Syrian people and *calls upon* the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, Interpol, and other international organizations, as appropriate, to assist in the implementation of this paragraph" (UN Security Council Resolution 2199). In short, the Resolution 2199 entrusts UNESCO and INTERPOL (and other organizations) with the responsibility of curbing the illicit trafficking of cultural objects.

In New York, on 27 April 2015, the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, and the Secretary General of INTERPOL, Jürgen Stock, addressed members of the UN Security Council on "Combating the Destruction, Smuggling and Theft of Cultural Heritage" in countries where destruction of heritage, looting and illicit trafficking are used to fuel hatred and finance terrorism. The Director-General highlighted the extent of the tragedy underway, especially the loss of

humanity's millennial history, and emphasized UNESCO's determination to combat the destruction, smuggling and theft of cultural heritage. Also, she stressed the need for the protection of heritage to be included in the mandate of peacekeeping forces, building on recent experience in Mali, where UNESCO is rebuilding mausoleums destroyed by extremists in close cooperation with UN peacekeepers. "Heritage must be at the frontline of peace building, as a way to build back dignity and confidence. It is imperative to curb radicalization and counter the narrative of hatred and division. The fight against illicit trafficking of cultural objects must be strengthened throughout the world," she concluded (cf. UNESCO Director General states to UN Security Council. April 27th, 2015).

Mr. Stock, Secretary General of INTERPOL, recalled "the key for effective police work is information and access to information at the right time, at the right place, for the right officer." He added that "the current situation in Syria and Iraq presents a significant challenge because sites vulnerable to destruction are often out of effective government control." Also, he shared lessons from the first Gulf war and the subsequent improvement of the Stolen Works of Art Database, with information on more than 1,300 items removed from museums and sites in Syria already added to the database. Finally, Member States also requested UNESCO to intensify efforts and cooperation with the International Criminal Court, in order to document destructions and war crimes so that perpetrators can be brought to justice (Cf. UNESCO Director General states to UN Security Council. 2015, April 27th, 2015).

Nevertheless, despite all diplomatic and legislative efforts to stymie the trade of ISIS antiquities there appears to be no end to illegal antiquities trafficking in sight. The responsibility to stop the art market's funding of the ISIS jihad does not rest only on the government's policing of antiquities import. Rather, it also remains the responsibility of galleries, dealers, and sales agents.

Conclusions

It is time to reflect on what the world should do next. First, there have been attempts to curb destroying and pillaging Iraq's archeological sites and written history. UNESCO launched a coalition against the illicit trafficking of Iraq's cultural artifacts, backed by a United Nations resolution. However, pre-emptive and punitive measures are inadequate in halting the systematic

destruction and looting of Iraq's heritage, given the mismatch between law enforcement abilities and ISIS' criminal network. Second to protection, Iraq needs to replace the destroyed pieces, by excavating and preserving archeological sites in a responsible fashion. To that end, the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), has been working since August to create an "Institute of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage," so that Iraqi students can take the first step towards becoming the next generation of cultural professionals. They welcome the ever-growing support from various American and French institutes, German universities, and the partnership with Arabs, Kurds, and international organizations. ISIS destruction of cultural heritage will only lead to further cycles of internal violence in Iraq. Now is the time for anyone who cares about culture to help create a group of Iraqi professionals that can monitor, protect, and promote its celebrated ancient past. After all, this is a better alternative to the mindless destruction going on in the present (Hartnell and Wahab 2015).

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