Reporting Heritage Destruction

Reporting Heritage Destruction

Edited by

Bijan Rouhani, Bill Finlayson and Timothy Clack

Archaeopress Archaeology

Archaeopress Publishing Ltd
13-14 Market Square
Bicester
Oxfordshire OX26 6AD
United Kingdom

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-80583-038-2
ISBN 978-1-80583-039-9 (e-Pdf)

Cover art: 'Destruction of heritage' by Doug Farthing MBE; oil on canvas

This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com

Contents

List of Contributors

Authors

Alula Tesfay Asfha is an architect, academician, and cultural heritage expert with a PhD in World Cultural Heritage Studies from the University of Tsukuba, Japan. He is currently a Gerda Henkel Fellow at the Frobenius Institute, Goethe University Frankfurt, and an assistant professor at Mekelle University. Asfha has led a variety of conservation projects, including the restoration of Gundagundo Monastery and post-conflict heritage recovery in Northern Ethiopia. He advocates for co-creation approaches to preserving Africa's heritage, emphasising the dynamic relationship between architecture, culture, and community. Alula also heads the Tigray Heritagescapes Restoration Initiative Project.

Mona Azarnoush is an architect and researcher who obtained her PhD in Architectural and Urban Heritage Conservation. Her in-depth research focused on identifying the historic context of a small city, utilising Grounded Theory to explore the relationships between the historic fabric and local communities. Acknowledged for its distinctive contributions to the field, her dissertation received support from the Ministry of Interior of Iran. With a strong passion for Iranian indigenous architecture and heritage pathology, she studies the factors disrupting the relationship between people and their heritage. Her experiences and publications are predominantly dedicated to this important research area. ORCID: 0000-0002-7382-5279

Ammar Azzouz is a British Academy Research Fellow at the University of Oxford. Azzouz is the author of *Domicide: Architecture, War and the Destruction of Home in Syria*, published by Bloomsbury in 2023, with a foreword by Lyse Doucet, the BBC's Chief International Correspondent. He is currently conducting research on art and culture in exile with a focus on the Syrian diaspora. Azzouz has written for a wide range of platforms, including *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*. He has been invited to speak at over 150 events globally, from Mexico and the US to Germany, the Netherlands and Qatar.

Kristen Barrett-Casey is a DPhil candidate in Archaeology at Hertford College, University of Oxford. Her research focuses on post-conflict reconstruction of heritage sites and the politics of its funding by international actors. Geographically, she has written on Iraq, Afghanistan, Mali and Bosnia, and is currently researching China's influence on Uzbekistan's heritage-production and management. More broadly, she is interested in the mechanics of soft power, and its relationship with heritage management and security.

Karima Bennoune is the Lewis M. Simes Professor at the University of Michigan Law School, where she teaches courses in international law and human rights. She served as UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights from 2015-2021. Her 2016 report for the General Assembly developed a human rights approach to the intentional destruction of cultural heritage. She carried out related missions to Cyprus, Serbia and Kosovo. Bennoune was also appointed an expert by the International Criminal Court during the reparations phase of The Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi, concerning destruction of cultural heritage in Mali.

Eleanor Childs is a third-year doctoral candidate at the Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University, Australia. Childs has a background in International Relations, focusing on the Middle East, with research and professional experience in the areas of (post-)conflict society, refugee and diaspora politics, decolonisation, and systemic violence against marginalised communities. Her thesis examines the absence of gender dimensions in multilateral responses to the mass destruction of heritage sites in Syria and Iraq by the Islamic State, and applies feminist International Relations theory to securitised and human rights-based heritage discourses.

Timothy Clack is the Chingiz Gutseriev Associate Professor in Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Oxford, UK. He is also an Associate Fellow of the Centre for Historical and Armed Conflict Research (CHACR). Tim's research concerns the drivers and aftermaths of conflict, with current focus on areas such as identities, cultural destruction, information/ propaganda, and climate change. His recent co-edited books have included: *Climate Change and (In)Security* (Routledge 2024); *Archaeologies of Cultural Contact* (OUP 2022); *Cultural Heritage in Modern Conflict* (Routledge 2022); and *The World Information War* (Routledge 2021). He is Co-Founder of Oxford University's Endangered Cultural Heritage of the Global South Hub.

Mark Dunkley is a Visiting Fellow at Cranfield University, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and an Associate of the Security Institute. He is a Field Officer in the British Army Reserve where his interests encompass understanding the exploitation of cultural heritage across the spectrum of conflict. He has worked at the NATO CIMIC Centre of Excellence in the Hague and the US Army War College. He has published widely on the relationship between culture and warfare and is co-editor of *Cultural Heritage in Modern Conflict* (2023) and *Heritage at War* (2024).

Mohamed W. Fareed is an architect and researcher with professional and academic experience centered on reinterpreting built heritage in the Middle East. He is an active member of various working groups and scientific committees in ICOMOS. He holds a Master's degree in world heritage studies from Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus-Senftenberg. He also has a postgraduate diploma in urban heritage strategies from the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands. He obtained his bachelor's degree in architecture from Helwan University in Egypt. His primary focus in both research and professional practice revolves around the digital reinterpretation of architectural heritage in the Middle East.

Bill Finlayson is the Director of the Endangered Archaeology of the MENA region (EAMENA) project at the University of Oxford, documenting archaeological sites and providing training to national heritage staff throughout the region. He was Director of the Council for British Research in the Levant, based in Amman, from 1999 to 2018. His research at Beidha within the Petra World Heritage Site, has included site conservation, the public presentation of the site for the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Petra Development and Tourism Regional Authority, and a socio-economic study of the local communities and their relationship to cultural heritage. He is Co-Founder of the Endangered Cultural Heritage of the Global South Hub at Oxford. ORCID: 0000-0002-0330-8006

Elly Harrowell is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for Peace and Security at Coventry University (UK). Her research explores the relationship between peace, conflict and cultural heritage, and asks how interventions to safeguard cultural heritage can be harnessed to support peace in communities affected by conflict. To this end, Harrowell has carried out research in a range of contexts (including the occupied Palestinian territory, Mauritania, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan), provided consultancy support to organisations such as ICCROM and UNESCO, and has published widely on this and other topics related to post-crisis reconstruction.

Afifa Khan is a Research Assistant working in GIS and survey for the Mapping Archaeological Heritage in South Asia (MAHSA) project. A major part of her job has been working with collaborators in Pakistan, organising and editing legacy data and ground-truthing sites. She has previously worked on documenting sites in Kyrgyzstan for the CAAL project and, before that, as a field archaeologist in the commercial sector in the UK. Her interests mainly lie in reassessing legacy data in Pakistan and how systematic surveys can impact the depth of data across the landscape.

Paul J. Lane is the Jennifer Ward Oppenheimer Professor of the Deep History and Archaeology of Africa at the University of Cambridge. A former President of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists (2008-10) and Director of the British Institute in Eastern Africa (1998-2006), he has over forty years' research experience in Africa. His interests include landscape historical ecology, the origins of farming and herding in eastern Africa, the archaeology of ivory in Africa, and post-colonial and Indigenous archaeology. He currently directs the Mapping Africa's Endangered Sites and Monuments project aimed at developing digital sites and monuments registers for sub-Saharan African countries.

Ashish Makanadar is a civil engineer, designer, and urbanist specialising in urban planning, experimental design, technology, and policy innovation. His research spans cultural heritage, urbicide, sensuality/aesthetics and the politics of spatial representation, with notable contributions, including *Poverty Porn or Poverty Planning?* and *Digital Surveillance Capitalism and Cities: Data, Democracy, and Activism.* Currently a Project Research Associate at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Makanadar employs an interdisciplinary approach, integrating computational tools with urban and regional planning, environmental design, and urban sociology. His work bridges technology and design, advancing new paradigms in sustainable urban development and the city-society nexus.

Stefania Merlo is a Senior Research Associate at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological research, University of Cambridge, which she joined in 2020 to manage the Mapping Africa's Endangered Sites and Monuments project, aimed at developing a shared online repository of sites and monuments for sub-Saharan African countries. Prior to this she was a Senior lecturer in GIS at the University of the Witwatersrand and a Lecturer in Computing Archaeology at the University of Botswana. Her research integrates GIS, remote sensing, and participatory approaches to explore African landscape histories and make them available to different publics.

Carolyn Morris recently completed her Master's at the University of Oxford in Migration Studies within the Department of International Development. After graduating from university, she moved to Malaysia to work with a community centre, where her role involved co-launching a livelihood programme with Rohingya women. Afterwards, she worked with the IRC in a refugee community in the US, also engaging with the Rohingya community there. Morris's experiences revealed a gap in anthropological research on Rohingya heritage. This has inspired her involvement in grassroots organisations, story-telling projects, and academic initiatives focused on preserving and revitalising Rohingya cultural and religious identity post-genocide.

Elena Perez-Alvaro, PhD in cultural heritage and a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Fellow in underwater cultural heritage, is affiliated with the University of Guam, the University of Hawaii, and Universitat Pompeu Fabra. She has lectured on Cultural and Natural Heritage at UNIR University in Spain and served as a Research Associate at Nelson Mandela University in South Africa. Perez-Alvaro plays a significant role in international heritage organisations. She is an Expert Member of both ICOMOS International Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage and the ICOMOS International Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage. Her leadership extends further as she chairs the Underwater Heritage Working Group of the UK Blue Shield. Among her key works are *Underwater Cultural Heritage: Ethical Concepts* and *Practical Challenges and The Hidden Hand of Underwater Cultural Heritage*, exploring the ethical, practical, and geopolitical dimensions of submerged heritage. ORCID: 0000-0003-1594-6563

Cameron A. Petrie is Professor of South Asian and Iranian Archaeology and Principal Investigator of the MAHSA Project at the University of Cambridge. His research primarily focuses on the rise of social complexity, the social and economic aspects of state formation, and the impact that the growth of states and empires has on subjugated regions. Much of his work considers the relationships between humans and the environment, and makes use of landscape archaeology and GIS-based approaches. He has extensive field and research experience at archaeological sites dating from the Neolithic up to the medieval period in India, Pakistan and Iran, and either has co-directed or is co-directing projects in each of these countries.

Thomas Richard holds his PhD from the University Clermont-Auvergne. His work focuses on identities and cultural problematics in the Middle East, particularly in times of conflict. His dissertation was awarded the Michel de L'Hospital Prize, and has been published by LGDJ-Lextenso and the Presses de l'Université Clermont-Auvergne under the title *Du musée au cinéma, narrations de guerre au Moyen-Orient*. He has presented his research both in France and abroad, through conferences and articles about war memories, cultural representations of the borders, and identities as seen through films. His most recent work deals with filmic images and terrorism, militant cinema in the Middle East, cinema circulation, postcolonial memories, and museums in the Middle East. Associate Researcher at the Centre Michel de l'Hospital at University Clermont-Auvergne, he teaches political science and cinema studies at universities Paris-8, Paris-I, Lille and ESPOL.

Rebecca Roberts is an archaeologist with a longstanding interest in communicating information about archaeological heritage to audiences outside of academia. Her research interests include human-environment interactions in prehistoric Kazakhstan through archaeobotanical analysis. She has previously been a Curator and Research Associate at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, for an exhibition of Iron Age Saka-Scythian goldwork from East Kazakhstan. While at Birmingham Archaeology, she worked on building databases to manage archaeological data in both the UK and Qatar. She is currently Project Coordinator for the Arcadia-funded Mapping Archaeological Heritage in South Asia project, based at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge.

Bijan Rouhani is Senior Researcher at the School of Archaeology, University of Oxford, and the Deputy Director of the Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa (EAMENA) project. He holds a PhD in the History and Conservation of Architectural Heritage from the University of Rome, La Sapienza. His research focuses on the conservation and protection of built heritage, risk management for heritage sites, post-conflict reconstruction, and the application of new technologies for heritage documentation and preservation. Rouhani is Chair of the Cultural Emergency Response (CER) Board, Vice-President of the International Scientific Committee on Risk Preparedness (ICORP) of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), a member of UK Blue Shield, and Co-Founder of the Endangered Cultural Heritage of the Global South Hub at Oxford. He is an editor of *Managing Disaster Risks to Cultural Heritage: From Risk Preparedness to Recovery for Immovable Heritage* (Routledge 2024). ORCID: 0000-0003-0773-2469

Mou Sarmah is currently a Research Assistant with the Mapping Archaeological Heritage in South Asia (MAHSA) project, focusing on the discovery, documentation, and conservation of endangered archaeological sites. Her research interests include using geospatial analytical methods to study South Asia's cultural landscapes through

landscape archaeology. Previously, Mou collaborated with the Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa (EAMENA) project, gaining expertise in mapping and assessing at-risk heritage. Her Master's dissertation investigated Post-Harappan archaeological sites in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. Additionally, she acquired practical skills in geophysical surveying and field excavation during her time in commercial archaeology.

Saqib Sheikh's work centres on advocacy, social inclusion and educational access for refugees and stateless people. He serves as Project Director for the Rohingya Project, a grassroots initiative for the empowerment of the Rohingya diaspora using blockchain technology. He is also a co–founder and adviser for the Refugee Coalition of Malaysia, where he focuses on creating formal pathways for refugee placement in higher education institutes in Malaysia. Sheikh is currently a doctoral researcher at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, researching Rohingya identity, statelessness, and assimilation strategies.

Aparna Tandon is a leading expert in disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and post-crisis recovery for cultural heritage. With over 25 years of experience in heritage conservation, she designs capacity development activities for heritage based disaster risk reduction, climate action and peacebuilding. At ICCROM, she leads the First Aid and Resilience for Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis (FAR) programme, an international flagship initiative focused on protecting heritage from conflicts, disasters and the climate crisis. Under her leadership, the FAR programme has provided critical training for heritage professionals, disaster risk managers, emergency responders, and local communities, empowering them to protect and recover heritage in the aftermath of complex emergencies.

Favour Chukwuemeka Uroko is a doctor of religion and cultural studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and also a research associate at the Department of Religion Studies, University of Pretoria, South Africa. He has published in the areas of religion, culture, and development. Currently, he is a lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, contributing to scholarly discourse and mentoring the next generation of leaders. He is a passionate advocate for community development; he collaborates with faith-based organisations to address societal challenges.

Sebastian Usher has been reporting from across the Middle East for more than thirty years - on its political, social and cultural shifts. His interest in the region was sparked by holidays in Lebanon with his grandparents when he was a child. That led him to take a job at the American University of Beirut straight after university where he was witness to the kidnapping of colleagues and friends. For the past twenty years, he's worked for the BBC as a reporter, editor and analyst focusing on the Middle East. Most recently, he's been reporting from Israel, Lebanon and Syria on the tumultuous events that have occurred since the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.

Vaneshree Vidyarthi is a Research Assistant for the Mapping Archaeological Heritage in South Asia (MAHSA) project and a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge. Previously, she worked as a field archaeologist for the Cambridge Archaeological Unit. She holds an MSc in Archaeology from the University of Oxford and a BA (Hons) from Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. Her main research focus is on the archaeology of South Asia, with a special interest in the Palaeolithic of the region. The aims of her work include bringing South Asia more firmly into the fold of global archaeological debates.

Jessica L. Wagner is a Captain, Heritage and Preservation Officer, with the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne) 38G Program. The 38G/6V is a revitalisation of the WWII Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Unit, focusing on fulfilling the requirements of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. She completed her Master of Arts at the University of Manchester, Centre for Museology: Institute for Cultural Practices, focusing on heritage spoliation and restitution. Her research explores the interplay of cultural property protection and humanitarian crimes. Wagner serves as the Preservation Subcommittee Lead for the International Collaborative Committee for Sudan Heritage Preservation & Advocacy.

Working Group Members

Several working group members contributed as authors to this publication; their biographies are included in the list of authors above. These members of the working group are: **Ammar Azzouz**, **Timothy Clack**, **Bill Finlayson**, **Bijan Rouhani** and **Sebastian Usher**.

Sussan Babaie is Professor in the Arts of Iran and Islam at the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London. She has published widely on the arts, architecture, and urbanism of the early modern Safavid period, including *Isfahan and Its Palaces* (2008), and the co-edited *Persian Kingship and Architecture* (2015). Most recently, she has turned to the

study of Food and Art and the link between sensory experiences of taste, smell, and seeing. Sussan is currently the lead scholar on Mongol Connections, a Getty Connecting Art Histories Project (2024-2027), and is co-curating with Shane McCausland (SOAS) an exhibition on the art of The Great Mongol State for the Royal Academy of Art, London (2027).

Robert Bevan is an independent journalist, academic, and heritage consultant who has written extensively on material culture and conflict including *The Destruction of Memory* (2006/2015) and *Monumental Lies* (2022). He is a member of ICOMOS and Blue Shield UK.

Jacob Davey is Director of Policy and Research at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, working to counter hate, disinformation and extremism. His work focuses on analysing and responding to online hate speech, hate crime, and the extremist movements which drive hate globally. He has published widely on these issue areas and regularly provides media and advice to senior policymakers on these phenomena.

Faisal Devji is Professor of Indian History and Fellow of St. Antony's College, Oxford. He is an intellectual historian who works on political thought in South Asia and the Muslim world. Devji's publications include books on Al-Qaeda's global militancy, Gandhi's non-violence, Pakistan as a political idea, and the rise and fall of global Islam.

Stephanie Grant is the Director of the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund, which was set up in 2016 to protect heritage at risk due to conflict in the Middle East and North Africa. Since she joined in 2019, Stephanie has expanded the fund's geographical reach into East Africa and South Asia and increased the remit to protect heritage at risk due to climate change. Stephanie has an extensive background in funding across culture, heritage and arts, including roles at the EU's Creative Europe programme, Arts Council England and as a freelance development consultant for cultural organisations.

Cécile Fabre is Senior Research Fellow in Politics at All Souls College, Oxford. She holds degrees from La Sorbonne, the University of York, and the University of Oxford. Her research interests include theories of distributive justice, the rights we have over our own body, and the ethics of foreign policy. Her books include *Cosmopolitan War* (OUP 2012), *Cosmopolitan Peace* (OUP 2016), *Economic Statecraft* (Harvard UP 2018), and *Spying Through a Glass Darkly* (OUP 2022). Her current project is on the ethics of preserving cultural heritage. She is a Fellow of the British Academy.

Charlotte Hanson is the Head of International Cultural Heritage Protection at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, UK Government. Charlotte manages partnerships and grants which support the protection of cultural heritage at risk from conflict and climate change. These include the Cultural Protection Fund in partnership with the British Council and with UNESCO, the AHRC, UNODC and the OSCE. Charlotte has worked in DCMS since 2020 and, prior to this, was a Conservator, with roles at UK museums, including the Imperial War Museum and Royal Air Force Museum.

Richard Hughes is a past President of ICOMOS-UK and presently is internationally engaged with the application of culture and cultural heritage as 'engines' and 'accelerators' driving sustainable development, while retaining societal values and resilience, also supporting responses to global climatic change and degradation of the historic cultural landscape. He works on preparedness and management for cultural heritage assets where there are increasing water, fire and man-made hazards, thus addressing vulnerability, societal and economic losses, and practically effective mitigation options. He has provided conservation and management plans for integrating heritage remains within large scale commercial development projects and on World Heritage Sites. He provides expert heritage support to Arup and international organisations regarding 'access to all' for adapted and new cultural venues. Part of his remit is in assessing social, scientific and economic value of cultural heritage assets to determine the financial and commercial viability of development and conservation impact mitigation undertakings and more broadly promoting cultural sustainability and celebration of the historic environment.

Maev Kennedy is a journalist who has written for *The Irish Times* and served as a special writer and arts and heritage correspondent for *The Guardian*. She is a regular contributor to *The Art Newspaper* and a former columnist for *Museums Journal*.

Eliya Lucks is Communications Officer, Policy Engagement Team, University of Oxford.

Lynn Meskell is Penn Integrates Knowledge Professor at the University of Pennsylvania. She is Richard D. Green Professor of Anthropology, Professor in Historic Preservation at the Weitzman School of Design, and curator in the

Middle East and Asia sections at Penn Museum and serves as AD White Professor-at-Large at Cornell University. She holds Honorary Doctorates in Rome and Bergen, and Honorary Professorships at Oxford and Liverpool universities, Shiv Nadar in India and the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. Since 2011 Lynn has conducted an institutional ethnography of UNESCO World Heritage, tracing the politics of governance and sovereignty and the subsequent implications for multilateral diplomacy, international conservation, and heritage rights culminating in her award-winning book *A Future in Ruins: UNESCO, World Heritage, and the Dream of Peace*. She is currently examining the entwined histories of colonialism, internationalism, espionage and archaeology in the Middle East. Other fieldwork explores monumental regimes of preservation in India.

Vernon Rapley is the Director and Principal Consultant at Vernon Rapley Ltd, a consultancy service for the heritage sector. He's the Chair of the ICOM International Committee for Museum Security. A Fellow of the Antiquarian Society and an active member of the OSCE Heritage Crime Task Force. Until October 2024, he was the Director of Cultural Heritage Protection and Security at the V&A Museum, where he created and directed the V&A's Culture in Crisis Programme and the Culture in Crisis Portal. Before joining the V&A he served as the head of the Art and Antiques Unit at New Scotland Yard.

Introduction:
Can Reporting Heritage Destruction Be a Double-Edged-Sword?

Bijan Rouhani, Bill Finlayson and Timothy Clack

The idea of this volume began with fundamental questions about the reporting of heritage destruction: who is reporting, what is being reported and how, and what are the implications of such reporting? In an increasingly globalised world inundated with headlines from international news outlets, as well as the relentless flow of social media and user-generated content, how are threats to cultural heritage perceived, documented, and disseminated, and what are the broader consequences of this reporting? If cultural heritage can serve as both a trigger and a casualty of conflict, hinder stabilisation, and foster peace-building – with its role continuously shifting between exploitation and protection within different military strategies, threats, and interventions (Clack and Dunkley 2022) – how does the act of reporting influence this dynamic, and in what ways does it shape heritage's evolving function?

The necessity of putting this book together arises from the urgent need to critically examine the complexities of heritage destruction reporting. The destruction of cultural heritage in conflict zones has, in recent decades, gained considerable international attention. As stressed by the former United Nations' Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, access to, and enjoyment of, cultural heritage is a human rights issue (Shaheed 2011). Reporting such destruction raises public awareness, mobilises responses, and influences policy decisions. However, the way in which these events are reported and the heritage that receives the most attention can serve political and ideological agendas, at times exacerbating conflict dynamics rather than alleviating them. The emergence of digital media and the rapid proliferation of information channels have further complicated these issues, allowing for the simultaneous documentation of destruction, dissemination of misinformation, and even the weaponisation of cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage is integral to identity, history, and human dignity, making it a frequent target for political or ideological agendas. If not handled carefully, reporting on such acts can inadvertently amplify extremist ideologies or, conversely, be used to justify military interventions and potential neo-colonial initiatives. Western media has disproportionately focused on the destruction of ancient pre-Islamic heritage in the Middle East, despite it being only a fraction of the broader heritage devastation carried out by ISIS, which also targeted mosques, churches, and temples of various faiths (Stein 2022: 178).

Research on militant and terrorist organisations shows that deliberate destruction of cultural heritage has been an important means for spreading their propaganda, recruiting new members, and expanding their networks (Smith *et al.* 2016). In response to the deliberate destruction of heritage in Syria and Iraq by non-state actors, the UN Security Council and UNESCO redefined such acts as significant threats to international security and stability, but have been hesitant to apply similar measures against their Member States (Meskell and Isakhan 2024).

Although UN agencies and heritage organisations provide extensive documentation and monitoring frameworks, there is a lack of ethical guidelines specifically addressing media reporting on heritage destruction. While many international news media and international councils have ethical principles for reporting on war, terror, and emergencies (e.g. BBC Editorial Guidelines 2019; Council of Europe 2022), these guidelines do not adequately consider the cultural sensitivities surrounding heritage. This oversight neglects the crucial role heritage can play in conflicts, particularly when it is contested or used as a tool for political and ideological agendas and propaganda. There is also concern about the extent to which media reporting accurately represents local perspectives and narratives, particularly those of marginalised communities.

Understanding the patterns and media formats of reporting heritage destruction over time is crucial, as it reveals how narratives have been shaped, amplified, or manipulated in different historical contexts, providing insights into the evolving role of media in influencing public perception, policy decisions, and heritage protection efforts today.

The editors of this volume seek to address these issues by fostering an interdisciplinary dialogue that brings together archaeologists, heritage scholars, media professionals, policymakers, and human rights advocates. Their

goal is to provide a nuanced understanding of how heritage destruction is reported and the ethical considerations surrounding these reports. They also aim to develop a framework that can guide heritage professionals and media practitioners in more ethical and responsible reporting.

The project took shape through a series of carefully coordinated efforts. Initially, a working group was established to define the key themes and concerns related to heritage destruction reporting. This was followed by a scoping workshop, in Oxford, on 6 December 2022, where a select number of media professionals, government and policy officials and heritage scholars discussed critical issues, shared expertise, and outlined possible ethical guidelines. This workshop led to the planning of a large online conference, which took place on 15 November 2023, designed to expand the discussion to a wider audience, including global policymakers, non-government organisations, and academics.

The online conference was structured around three major themes: Who Owns and Values Cultural Heritage? Cultural Heritage as a Human Right; and Media Reporting and Heritage Destruction. Keynote speakers and selected scholars presented their research and case studies, leading to in-depth discussions on the impact of heritage reporting in various contexts. Panel discussions provided a platform for critical engagement with these issues, addressing not only how destruction is reported but also how these narratives shape international responses and funding for heritage protection and reconstruction.

The project was initiated by Oxford's Endangered Cultural Heritage in the Global South Hub (ECHGS), which engages scholars from various disciplines. The ECHGS[1] is an initiative led by the Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa (EAMENA) at the School of Archaeology, University of Oxford in collaboration with other Oxford-based scholars from Anthropology, Geography, and other disciplines. It undertakes interdisciplinary research on how cultural heritage is created, identified, valued and protected both by local populations and by international agencies, experts, and academics. The ECHGS also considers how heritage is currently threatened by conflict, climate change, and development. The longstanding relationships between the Global North and the Global South make cultural heritage both a critical focus for decolonisation debates and actions, and central to highly topical discussions regarding UK (and international) Official Development Assistance programmes.

The volume moved forward with a call for chapters, inviting contributions from a diverse range of experts and communities. Each submission underwent a rigorous peer-review process, with at least two reviewers evaluating each chapter to ensure academic integrity and coherence with the overarching theme of the volume. The chapters selected for inclusion offer a wide-ranging analysis, from historical case studies of heritage destruction and propaganda to contemporary challenges posed by social media and digital reporting.

A key outcome of the project is the development of a set of ethical recommendations for reporting on heritage destruction, presented at the end of this volume. These recommendations, informed by discussions within the working group and inputs from conference participants, aim to provide practical recommendations for journalists, researchers, and heritage professionals. They emphasise the importance of context, the need for accurate and responsible reporting, and the potential consequences of misrepresentation. These recommendations highlight the need for greater collaboration between media outlets and heritage experts, establishment of clearer ethical standards for reporting, and the role of international organisations in supporting responsible heritage documentation. By engaging with these issues, the book seeks to provide a critical resource for understanding and improving the ways in which heritage destruction is reported and addressed on the global stage.

Our own experience of working in the cultural heritage sector, as academics, practitioners, policymakers, or journalists reporting on heritage has made it very clear to us that not only is a local perspective vital, but it is not singular – and that in conflict situations we have to tread very carefully, not least to ensure we do not increase the risk to people or their heritage. We have inevitably been dealing with many journalist enquiries since the start of the current Israeli/Palestinian conflict, but are being very cautious about what we say, and who we say it to. As **Sebastien Usher** said in our workshop, we are not always sure how what we say will be used or abused. Our priority is with the agencies who have stewardship over heritage.

We start from the perspective that cultural heritage requires people – the people who create, curate, and identify themselves through what we describe as cultural heritage. Cultural heritage goes beyond the inanimate objects.

[1] https://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/echgs-hub-15-nov-2023-online [Accessed 03 March 2025]

The chapters collected here may appear quite eclectic, providing many different examples and contexts, often, as with **Lane and Merlo**, reminding us that the reporting can be selective. They make it very clear that reporting cultural heritage destruction is not a neutral act, perhaps most visibly in **Richard**'s insightful analysis of sophisticated Russian media reporting and **Dunkley**'s account of the use of cultural heritage as a force multiplier, but this theme recurs throughout the book. **Saqib and Morris**, as well as **Makander,** discuss the misuse of heritage itself, but within a context where it may be seen as minor compared to loss of human life, but where the cultural context is fundamental. However, what comes through constantly is the importance of cultural heritage, notably as a human right as discussed by **Bennoune** and **Barrett-Casey** and in **Wagner**'s stark analysis of how cultural heritage destruction can be an advance warning of genocide. **Usher** recognises the importance of reporting, although he sees hazards in the process and argued that journalists need to get better at telling the story. The same applies to all of us, but it is clear from all the chapters and especially **Wagner**'s that cultural heritage destruction must be reported.

A topic that comes up with increasing frequency in cultural heritage, especially regarding the Global South, is the issue of ownership and value. Initially expressed as a concern with universal value being dominated by Western ideals, readily visible in the remains of the Roman empire and other former conquerors. More recently, approaches have begun to emphasise a bottom-up construction of cultural heritage and its dynamic nature – a theme picked up by many of our contributors.

Ammar Azzouz in his keynote for the theme *Who Owns and Values Cultural Heritage?* made this immediately relevant to our discussion with his concerns about the reporting of heritage as stones in ruins creating faceless wars. This abstraction of heritage from real people makes heritage of considerably lesser importance than human lives. The political nature of what is reported – as seen in the current Israel/Palestine situation – leads to apparent biases in coverage – with some identities being written out of history. A more bottom-up narrative, or many narratives, provides multi-vocal stories, and our contributors discuss many local stakeholders. That of course does not remove heritage from the political, and no one at our conference argued it could be.

Elly Harrowell and Aparna Tandon expand the identification of voiceless actors. Using the evocative term "heritage bearers" they note that people-led approaches have the potential to not only be more ethical, but more effective. Despite many critiques of a top-down, Western-dominated approach, this has not yet fed very well through on the ground. One recommendation they make is that heritage institutions need to listen to local voices and learn more to move away from their current expert-led paternalistic mode of working, echoed by **Karima Bennoune** in the need for learning, saying lessons had been learned on the risks of inflaming context and providing weapons through recognising partisan cultural heritages, and the need to maintain some universality to see the totality. **Harrowel and Tandon** described the need to amplify local voices through the much more complex process of co-creating projects. One of the great things they report is the development of practical tools to help achieve this bottom-up approach.

Paul Lane and **Stefanio Merlo** bring in further dimensions, one being that destruction is only reported from high-profile conflicts. There are conflicts that fall below the threshold of international news (a point raised again by **Mark Dunkley**, or as **Azzouz** said – conflicts can become forgotten). They explore the challenges of defining and addressing heritage endangerment in Africa. Their chapter critiques the global focus on monumental heritage destruction during conflicts while neglecting the incremental loss of archaeological sites due to urban expansion, mining, climate change, and poor heritage management. Through their case study on Mapping Africa's Endangered Archaeological Sites and Monuments (MAEASaM) project, they analyse these gaps by using remote sensing, archival research, and local partnerships to document and monitor heritage sites. The authors highlight issues such as the "tyranny of monumentality," data mismanagement, and legal shortcomings that contribute to Africa's heritage vulnerabilities. The chapter advocates for a more holistic, landscape-based approach that prioritises local perspectives and sustainable heritage protection strategies. Again, we are back to who owns and values the heritage – where it fits onto national and international priorities and policies.

Eleanor Childs focusses still more on the under-represented, here in particular the place of women in cultural heritage. She critiques the exclusion of gender in international heritage protection mechanisms, arguing that heritage destruction disproportionately affects women but is rarely analysed through a feminist lens. She highlights how UNESCO and global governance structures fail to integrate gender-sensitive approaches, treating heritage destruction as a security issue rather than recognising its cultural and human rights implications. Drawing on feminist International Relations theories, she examines ISIS' (*Da'esh*) systematic destruction of cultural heritage and its gendered impacts, including erasure of minority identities and exacerbation of women's insecurity. Childs

calls for integrating feminist perspectives into heritage protection to address these gaps and ensure inclusive policymaking.

Most of our discussion focussed on the terrestrial heritage that tends to spring to mind immediately. **Elena Perez-Alvaro** took us to the relatively neglected domain of underwater heritage, pointing out it has a similar history of use and abuse. Indeed, sometimes its impact can be very significant, as in the 2022 Ukrainian sinking and immediate registration as cultural heritage of the Russian warship Moskva. Perez-Alvaro observes that this is part of an ongoing campaign where both sides in the conflict are using maritime heritage as a political tool. The underwater record is full of direct evidence of past conflicts and networks of economic power, and maritime conflicts from the South China Sea, piracy in the Red Sea, and disputes about maritime boundaries in the Mediterranean are all ongoing. Maritime conflict is especially important in many of today's hybrid conflicts and underwater cultural remains are routinely used to argue ownership, frequently via social media. The media manipulation of maritime heritage to manipulate public opinion and provoke conflict leads **Perez-Alvaro** to argue that the international community must be vigilant in conserving maritime heritage and saving it from geopolitical exploitation.

Kristen Barrett-Casey's chapter examines Iraq's post-conflict legal system and its role in the conservation of cultural heritage, arguing that the legal framework both protects and endangers heritage. The 2005 Iraqi Constitution, influenced by the U.S. occupation, established a power-sharing system (*muhasasa*), which fragmented heritage management along sectarian lines. This legal structure commodifies heritage, treating it like oil and gas, prioritising revenue generation over preservation. Through case studies of religious sites such as the Al-Askari Mosque and the Shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel, Barrett-Casey illustrates how sectarian endowments undermine national heritage by privileging specific religious identities and enabling commercial exploitation. She discusses embattled humanity and the need to mainstream the advances made in the UN human rights support system. Like Lane and Merlo, she raised other issues of heritage destruction – why is some heritage reported more than others?

The interest in human rights is developed further by **Karima Bennoune,** who was the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights. In her keynote for the theme *Cultural Heritage as a Human Right,* Bennoune makes a powerful call for the importance of cultural heritage to all humanity, beyond the specific links between some heritage and groups of people. Cultural heritage is not important just for itself but for other rights, such as freedom of expression or religion, and economic development. Bennoune is in no doubt that protecting cultural heritage is protecting human rights. She critiques the UN Security Council's counterterrorism focus, calling for a more integrated human rights perspective across international policies. Additionally, she highlights the risks faced by cultural heritage defenders, urging stronger protections for those safeguarding heritage under threat.

Jessica Wagner makes a strong case for the importance of cultural heritage as a human right through direct association between cultural and biological genocide. Cultural property is viewed as mere materiality, negligible when compared to safeguarding human lives. Wagner makes a number of important points, firstly that attacks on cultural heritage can serve as advance warning of genocidal violence. Secondly, that culture shapes a group's collective identity. Culture is people, so when cultural heritage is destroyed, people are destroyed, the fabric of a culture is eroded, and the structure of a group becomes weak, making it far easier to eradicate in genocide. She argues that **c**ultural property protection (CPP) acts as a safeguard through forewarning, resistance, empowerment, and reconciliation, making it essential for preventing genocide and preserving human rights.

Sheikh Saqib and Carlyn Morris in their chapter on *Rohingya Narratives Beyond Victimhood* start from the point that the denial of a cultural life can appear minor in the face of genocide – but that of course such a genocidal campaign is often targeting and othering a specific (ethno)cultural group – the target is to some extent the cultural life and heritage. Victimhood can become an important part of identity, used externally, while the suffering felt is expressed more internally. Cultural heritage may be put aside in order to focus on the basic needs for survival, or cultural heritage may be subverted in the need to establish greater identity boundaries as part of the process of survival – what is Rohingya and what is not. Rohingya heritage faces existential threats not only due to destruction in Myanmar but also due to assimilation pressures in diaspora and refugee contexts. Heritage is both neglected in crisis situations and sometimes redefined as a survival strategy, reinforcing or reshaping Rohingya identity. They argue that reporting on cultural heritage destruction should be reflective and responsible, avoiding simplistic narratives that perpetuate passive victimhood.

Ashish Makander picks this up in a global approach, observing a politisation of the cultural landscape, deliberate destruction of plural histories, and in consequence a need to help build new dialogues that do not succumb to the negative use of heritage to support majority hegemonisation, the use of culture to provoke conflict. Rather, we need

to take the many cultural identities and learn to weave them into a resilient and inclusive form. He examines urbicide as a deliberate strategy to erase plural histories and consolidate majoritarian control. He critiques colonial and legal frameworks that enable this destruction and argues for reconstructing heritage narratives through inclusive and community-led approaches. The chapter also highlights the role of memory and architecture in countering erasure, making it vital that architects, civil engineers, and policymakers engage in heritage discussions.

In her case study on the historic city of Shiraz, Iran, **Mona Azarnoush** examines the role of media in safeguarding the city's historic fabric amid threats posed by urban development and religious tourism. She explores how a strategically coordinated news dissemination campaign mobilised public awareness, engaged experts, and pressured authorities into action. Through media-driven activism, the campaign temporarily halted destruction and ultimately secured the registration of Shiraz's historic context on Iran's National Heritage List, making its demolition a criminal offence. The study underscores the necessity of accurate, neutral, and legally supported heritage reporting, emphasising the importance of building trust with local communities. However, for such reporting to be effective, governments must separate heritage destruction coverage from political controversies and ensure comprehensive legal protections for journalists and reporters.

Timothy Clack explores the intricate relationship between media reporting and the destruction of cultural heritage in conflict zones. Using the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine as a focal point, the chapter highlights how cultural heritage is both a casualty and a weapon of war. The discussion extends to other global conflicts, demonstrating how media coverage varies, often shaped by geographical proximity, conflict complexity, and editorial agendas. The chapter underscores that media reporting can amplify or suppress awareness, influence public sentiment, and even shape the strategies of conflict actors. It draws lessons from counter-terrorism reporting, emphasising the need for ethical guidelines and media literacy to balance public interest with the risk of incentivising further destruction. This chapter serves as a bridge to the next theme on *Media Reporting and Heritage Destruction*, which delves deeper into how media narratives influence perceptions of heritage loss, international responses, and policy-making.

Under the theme *Media Reporting and Heritage Destruction*, **Sebastian Usher** brought us onto the core theme where the issue is one of superficiality and depth. The story of a single tree in the UK and its media impact gave people in the UK an insight into the importance of things. News editors and reporters must constantly judge the balance between conveying the human cost of conflict and the material destruction in a short, immediate response. While newsrooms have benefited from the democratisation of recording conflict through mobile phones, this has created new challenges over authenticity and propaganda against the flood of information – much of which is out before professional journalists can verify it. The destruction of cultural heritage by ISIS was as prominent a part in their propaganda as the beheading of their captives. The observations made in the preceding chapters indicate that the dichotomy between culture and life should not be over-stated – indeed following Wagner's point that cultural heritage destruction is often a forewarning of genocide, cultural heritage destruction should be reported at an early stage – but this still leaves the question of how to avoid providing propaganda points. Sebastian Usher explores how cultural destruction has historically been used as a weapon of war and how modern conflicts, particularly in Gaza and Ukraine, highlight its ongoing strategic use.

Bijan Rouhani examines the narrative patterns surrounding the destruction of cultural heritage from ancient times to the digital age, focusing on how such destruction has been reported, interpreted, and instrumentalised. In his chapter *Sowing Salt and Cultivating Fear*, he explores how these narratives have historically served propaganda purposes, reinforcing power structures, ideological dominance, and nationalist movements. This is evident in examples ranging from Mesopotamian inscriptions and Roman triumphal arches to revolutionary iconoclasm, wartime destruction, and digital-era media strategies. In modern conflicts, heritage destruction has become a strategic objective, with state and non-state actors leveraging digital media to shape public perception. The chapter argues that while new media democratise information and facilitate rapid dissemination, they also amplify propaganda, exacerbate the spread of misinformation, deepen ideological divisions, and transform heritage destruction into a consumable spectacle.

Mohamed Fareed reports a tendency in state media to emphasise government efforts in heritage preservation, portray cultural destruction as a threat to national identity, and downplay any potential involvement of state authorities in neglect or destruction. Fareed examines how state media in Egypt portrays heritage destruction, emphasising government-led preservation efforts while downplaying state involvement in demolition or neglect. He contrasts this with non-state media, which expose how modernisation projects, real estate interests, and selective heritage policies contribute to cultural loss. The state glorifies Pharaonic heritage for tourism and nationalism, while Islamic, modern, and politically sensitive heritage is often side-lined, despite a potentially greater connection

to ordinary Egyptians. Heritage destruction is framed as a trade-off for development, with independent voices challenging this narrative by documenting loss, gentrification, and erasure.

Bijan Rouhani and **Bill Finlayson** in their chapter on *Cultural Heritage in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)*, examine the extensive yet largely overlooked destruction of cultural heritage during this conflict. Despite its immense impact on historic cities, monuments, museums, and intangible heritage, the war received minimal international attention regarding cultural property protection. The authors compare this neglect to the heightened global concern in later conflicts in the region. They explore factors such as the absence of media coverage, limited archaeological engagement, strained ties following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the lack of international intervention, and the absence of "strategic value" from the perspective of superpowers, all of which contributed to this disparity. In addition to external factors, aside from the work of government specialist agencies, there were no vocal heritage activism movements dedicated to reporting and protecting cultural heritage during the war in either Iran or Iraq.

Returning to the issue of cultural heritage as state propaganda, **Mark Dunkley** discusses the propaganda uses of cultural heritage destruction reporting. Dunkley notes that the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) recognises that the protection of cultural property in conflict can preserve and enhance the UK's reputation locally and globally, maintain the ability to influence those amongst whom the UK operates, and even contribute to force protection and freedom of manoeuvre. Expanding on this, Dunkley explores how Cultural Heritage Intelligence (CHINT) is now formally recognised as a tool within military strategy, enabling armed forces to understand how adversaries might exploit heritage for political, economic, and military gain. The chapter highlights NATO's evolving approach to cultural heritage protection, linking it to broader human security objectives. Dunkley also presents the wargame Exercise HORIZON STRIKE, a training scenario designed to test how military forces engage with cultural heritage in conflict zones. The exercise demonstrates the complexity of balancing cultural property protection with operational demands and highlights the necessity of integrating CHINT into strategic planning to prevent heritage from being weaponised.

Afifa Khan and colleagues provide a review of how social media has developed its role within a wider media context, a fast-moving relationship again changed since the reelection of Donald Trump as president of the USA. Social media usage is not uniform in South Asia, with differences between countries, genders and urban/rural populations. Unsurprisingly, social media are being used actively by cultural heritage organisations and has proved successful in public engagement, including across borders. Unfortunately, its popularity has also led to its misuse. Khan and colleagues argue that although social media is not legally held to the same standards as traditional media, heritage professionals have a duty to report to these standards, bringing us firmly into the centre of the debate. They also recognise the political sensitivities that may arise while discussing the UK-based MAHSA project and the dominant use of English. Despite sensitivity to these issues, social media has been a substantial factor in amplifying friction between Muslim and Hindu communities and their cultural heritage. There have been other beneficial uses of social media, such as by the Kalash community, although the same information has been misused by tourists. The chapter highlights how social media both facilitates and threatens cultural heritage preservation, especially in politically fraught contexts. Heritage disputes, such as the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, have been amplified on digital platforms, spreading misinformation and increasing religious tensions. Meanwhile, grassroots initiatives have used social media to report endangered heritage, pressuring authorities into action, as seen in Pakistan's Buddhist heritage conservation efforts. The chapter calls for responsible engagement with digital platforms, urging heritage professionals to balance accessibility with ethical reporting while navigating the challenges of misinformation, political exploitation, and digital inequalities.

Alula Tesfay Ashfa examines the impact of the Tigray conflict (2020–2022) on Ethiopia's cultural heritage, detailing the widespread destruction, looting, and neglect of historic sites, churches, mosques, and manuscripts. This chapter explores how cultural heritage was weaponised – both as a target of violence and a tool of propaganda. Despite these challenges, grassroots efforts, remote sensing technologies, and international collaboration have played crucial roles in documenting and restoring damaged heritage. The chapter advocates for increased global attention, funding, and policy interventions to support Tigray's cultural recovery, emphasising heritage's role in resilience, community identity, and post-conflict reconciliation. The request for increased attention is a clear call for media reporting.

Favour Uruko describes the unusual Nigerian context, where traditional cultural festivals are vanishing in the face of terrorism. However, the terrorists are often sponsored by politicians to undermine their opponents, but then run out of control. Non-state actors often act with impunity, banning the cultural festivals. The chapter details how festivals like the Durbar Festival and Argungu Fishing Festival once united communities, boosted tourism,

and reinforced cultural identity. Their disappearance has eroded social cohesion and economic stability. Religious extremism, Fulani herdsmen conflicts, and the rise of insurgent groups have made public gatherings dangerous, leading to widespread fear and avoidance. The Nigerian government's inaction and occasional sympathy toward terrorist groups have further exacerbated the situation. Without intervention, these historic cultural traditions may be lost forever.

The engagement of Russian media on the recent Syrian conflict provides a very different context. **Thomas Richard** describes how Russian, especially private, media companies have managed an extremely successful narrative. In what has been explicitly described as an information war in the Russian media, Russian reporting has provided a counter to what they see as a biased Western viewpoint. Richard has analysed the Russian politicisation of reporting of Syrian heritage in a chapter that is at the heart of the discussions of this volume. The stories provided pick up directly from the former Syrian regime's use of heritage as symbolic of the nation's identity and confirming this value through interviews with ordinary citizens. This immediately identifies heritage destruction with the opposition and allows destruction by the regime or Russian forces to be side-lined and ignored, supporting the representation of the conflict as a battle between good and evil. It is suggested that the Russians were there to support the regime's protection of heritage, with the media focusing on Russian military police support for heritage protection, or Russian sappers undertaking mine clearance. This carefully curated media approach positioned Russia as the legitimate protector of Syrian heritage, further solidifying its geopolitical influence in the region.

During our conference there was discussion of the post-conflict uses of cultural heritage in the first steps towards peace. A paradox was identified where heritage has specific meanings for different groups, risking its deployment for partisan or majority uses, including state building where it can be seen as benign, against the need to recognise the common heritage of humanity and to transcend narrow identity boundaries. More specifically, reporting cultural heritage destruction prevents denial and allows rebuilding. Unfortunately, as noted by Usher, there is a need to invest in on the ground reporting in the aftermath of conflict when proper investigations can be carried out, but also at the point when public interest is waning.

The Oxford Recommendations on Reporting Heritage Destruction provide a framework for ethical and accurate media coverage of cultural heritage destruction, particularly in conflict zones. Developed by the ECHGS Hub at Oxford University and the Working Group, the recommendations emphasise cultural heritage as both a human rights issue and a critical element of community identity.

The objectives of the recommendations include ensuring responsible reporting, preventing heritage destruction from being exploited for propaganda, and promoting ethical journalism that respects affected communities. The document highlights that heritage destruction is often linked to broader human rights violations, war crimes, and ideological conflicts, necessitating sensitive and informed reporting.

Journalists must prioritise personal safety and ethical reporting, ensuring their coverage does not cause harm to individuals or communities. Reporting should avoid amplifying extremist narratives, misinformation, or justifying military interventions. Coverage should include diverse perspectives, particularly from marginalised and indigenous communities, to reflect the full scope of heritage destruction.

Given that heritage destruction is considered a war crime, journalists should document incidents carefully to support potential legal proceedings. Media coverage should not be limited to immediate reports but should follow up on heritage and community recovery. Social media must be used responsibly, ensuring verification of sources and countering disinformation.

These recommendations aim to bridge the gap between journalism, heritage preservation, and human rights advocacy, ensuring informed, respectful, and impactful reporting. The preservation of cultural property is a vital step in safeguarding against humanitarian crimes – and reporting cultural heritage destruction becomes as important as reporting on loss of life. This feeds directly into how cultural heritage operates as a human right. Clearly an imposed heritage, or one appropriated for purposes such as state building, has less resonance.

In conclusion, the chapters in this volume underscore the complexities inherent in reporting on heritage destruction, which present both significant advantages and potential drawbacks. On the one hand, such reporting raises public awareness, mobilises responses, informs policy decisions, and enables researchers and organisations to assess risks to cultural assets. Accurate documentation can also counter political and conflict propaganda, provide legally robust evidence where crimes have been committed, and ensure that victims' voices are acknowledged. Moreover,

it plays a crucial role in gathering evidence for legal prosecution and facilitating post-conflict reconstruction and/or memorialisation through community engagement. The destruction of heritage frequently serves as an indicator of broader socio-political crises, including ethnic cleansing and systemic violence.

On the other hand, reporting, particularly when biased, may be instrumentalised in serving political or ideological agendas, thereby exacerbating tensions and perpetuating conflict. If mismanaged, it can inadvertently incentivise further destruction, as well as contribute to the recruitment and financing of extremist movements. Additionally, heightened reporting can lead to the securitisation of heritage, prompting increased state or military involvement in its protection, which may have both protective and restrictive consequences.

An excessive focus on iconoclasm and ideological dimensions risks obscuring the deeper political, historical, or colonial contexts that shape heritage discourses. Furthermore, media narratives often privilege certain interpretations of heritage, frequently presented as "universal values" while marginalising or disregarding the specific needs and perspectives of local communities.

Note on the Cover Art

As editors, we decided that, in light of the central themes of the proceedings, an image of destroyed cultural heritage on the front cover was inappropriate. This could lend itself to accusations of insensitivity on the one hand and promulgating propaganda and extending the impacts of the destructive act on the other. Instead, we decided to use an abstract artwork which speaks to issues of violence, identity, emotion, threat and aftermath. We were at once fortunate and delighted to get permission from the artist, Doug Farthing to use his oil on canvas work, "Destruction of Heritage" for the cover (see Figure 1).

The background to the artwork makes it even more apt. Doug Farthing, who was trained at the Royal Drawing School, has held many successful exhibitions, including at the National Army Museum, Imperial War Museum and University of Oxford in the UK as well as overseas, including in Ukraine and the Falkland Islands. Formerly a soldier, he has for many years worked in the humanitarian sector. In summer 2024, having returned to the UK after spending nearly 18 months overseas working for aid agencies in Ukraine, Sudan and Gaza and having seen the aftermaths of countless acts of heritage destruction, he produced this artwork and many others in an attempt to make sense of his experiences.

Acknowledgements

The editors of this volume extend their heartfelt gratitude to all contributing authors, members of the working group, and peer reviewers for their invaluable insights and dedication. Their contributions have been instrumental in shaping the themes, discussions, and overall academic coherence of this work. We are grateful to the Chingiz Gutseriev Trust at the University of Oxford for funding the Open Access publication, enabling broader accessibility and engagement. Our appreciation also goes to Oxford's School of Archaeology for its support in facilitating this initiative, along with the Endangered Cultural Heritage and Global South (ECHGS) Hub for its continued collaboration. A special thanks to Sarah Laporte, MPhil in Classical Archaeology at the University of Oxford, for generously volunteering her time to assist with proofreading.

Figure 1. Doug Farthing next to his artwork in summer 2024 (credit: T. Clack)

References

BBC Editorial Guidelines 2019. *Section 11: War, Terror and Emergencies*. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidelines/war-terror-emergencies/ (Accessed: 08 November 2023).

Clack, T. & Dunkley, M. 2022. *Cultural Heritage in Modern Conflict: Past, Propaganda, Parade,* London, Routledge, 10.4324/9781003262312

Council of Europe 2022. *Journalism in Situations of Conflict and Aggression: Principles Extracted from the Relevant Council of Europe and Other International Standards*. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/compilation-of-coe-standards-relating-to-journalism-in-situations-of-c/1680a5b775 (Accessed: 08 November 2023).

Meskell, L. & Isakhan, B. 2024. Heritage Conflict and the Council: The UNSC, UNESCO, and the View from Iraq and Syria. *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 1-20.10.1017/s0940739124000249

Shaheed, F. 2011. *Report of the Independent Expert in the Field of Cultural Rights*. UN Human Rights Council.

Smith, C., Burke, H., De Leiuen, C. & Jackson, G. 2016. The Islamic State's symbolic war: Da'esh's socially mediated terrorism as a threat to cultural heritage. *Journal of Social Archaeology,* 16(2), 164-188.10.1177/1469605315617048

Stein, G. J. 2022. Performative Destruction: Da'esh (ISIS) Ideology and the War on Heritage in Iraq. *In:* CUNO, J. & WEISS, T. G. (eds) *Cultural Heritage and Mass Atrocities.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum. https://www.getty.edu/publications/cultural-heritage-mass-atrocities/

SECTION I.
WHO OWNS AND VALUES CULTURAL HERITAGE?