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Archaeology and Contemporary Warfare

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Abstract

In the contemporary world, archaeology has become drawn, sometimes in dramatic fashion, into the violence of war. Archaeologists have taken part in monitoring and attempting to protect sites, museums, and monuments. However, they have engaged to a lesser extent with the underlying connections between damage to and destruction of archaeological remains and the reasons why archaeology has become increasingly both a target and a weapon of war. To highlight the complex intertwining of archaeology and war, this review examines the relationships among archaeologists' conceptions of their profession, the spiraling commodification of remains of the past, understandings and practices of cultural heritage, and the willful destruction of archaeological sites and objects, with a focus on Western Asia.

INTRODUCTION

War occupies a paradoxical position in the archaeological imagination. On the one hand, its potential to damage, if not destroy, the objects of archaeological study—sites, monuments, artifacts—and to disturb archaeologists' practice of their profession by forcing changes in research plans is widely bemoaned. On the other hand, most archaeologists evince a marked reluctance to address—at least in writing—issues that underpin the relations between archaeology and modern warfare (Hamilakis 2003, 2009; Al Quntar 2013; but see Eiselt 2009). This paradox is perhaps nowhere more striking than in western Asia, where the connection between war and archaeology is everywhere in the news as I write. Yet, unlike foreign archaeologists who conduct research in and on western Asia, colleagues who live in the region cannot afford the luxury of deciding whether to engage with the relationship between archaeology and war.

My own first archaeological field experience ended in an international evacuation from a war zone. For me and many of my colleagues working in western Asia, research plans have been changed, field projects abruptly halted, and some of us have found ourselves in the limelight of journalistic attention as news organizations seek experts to speak about actual or potential destruction of monuments. War and its repercussions for archaeology in western Asia have been practically omnipresent for the past 25 years: Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the pilfering of objects in the Kuwait Museum, followed by the damage to and looting of Iraqi sites in the wake of the US-led ground invasion and postinvasion; the dynamiting of the Buddhas in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, by the Taliban in spring 2001 and the smashing of anthropomorphic imagery in the Kabul Museum; the damage during the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, most infamously in the Iraq Museum but also the ensuing looting of sites; the highly mediatized destructions of monuments and sites in Syria and northern Iraq by the Islamic State since 2014 as well as the longer involvement of warring parties in looting and sales of antiquities; the damage to the Old City of Sanaa in Yemen as a result of Saudi bombing; and the ongoing conflicts in the West Bank and Gaza that have resulted in the neglect of sites.

This review focuses on the intersection of war, archaeology, and archaeologists in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It is confined primarily to perspectives and writings of Anglophone scholars; a full-scale treatment of this topic, integrating archaeologies and archaeologists from around the world, is beyond the scope of this brief article. I use war to include classic international wartime situations and civil wars, but also “low-intensity” conflicts that continue to smolder in places such as Palestine. I draw attention to some of the ways in which archaeology itself has been mobilized as a weapon of war, a form of structural violence that ranges from the deployment of archaeology in media campaigns to its use as a justification for land grabs. I examine principally, albeit not exclusively, western Asia,¹ a region that extends from Turkey in the west to Afghanistan in the east and southward to the Arabian Peninsula. Neither the investigation of war in the ancient past (e.g., Keeley 1997) nor “conflict archaeology” (e.g., Moshenska 2015) plays a role in this review.

Querying the place of archaeology and archaeologists in wartime revolves around several intertwined sets of issues. First, to whom or to what do archaeologists owe allegiance, especially but not only in times of war? Should they be advocates for sites, monuments, museums, and objects? Or for living people? For both? Or neither? A second fundamental issue is the nature of archaeological expertise. Is archaeology a form of scholarship that engages mainly with the material remains of the (distant) past? Or is it deeply interwoven with the present? Third, how can the growing

¹I refer to this region as “western Asia” rather than using the colonially derived, albeit far more common designations of Middle or Near East.

commodification of the past, as most evident in the booming international antiquities trade and tourism, be understood against a backdrop of increasingly frequent and, in some cases spectacular, destructions of monuments, objects, and sites?

ARCHAEOLOGISTS CONFRONTED WITH WAR

How archaeologists working in western Asia confront modern warfare is closely connected with how they understand the profession of archaeology. I distinguish three positions: archaeology instrumentalized in support of other goals, such as military or nationalist ones; archaeology as a discipline concerned solely with the past, investigated through its material remains; and archaeology understood as a study of the past that is situated squarely in the present. These are analytical positions: Individuals may move back and forth among them.

Archaeology Instrumentalized

When instrumentalized to serve other aims, archaeology becomes a kind of activist handmaiden to specific interests. A well-known example is the long history of involvement with military intelligence work, for example, the participation of archaeologists in dismantling the Ottoman Empire and carving out new states in the wake of World War I. C. Leonard Woolley, T. E. Lawrence, Max von Oppenheim, and Gertrude Bell were all directly engaged in military intelligence and/or other wartime activities, for which their archaeological work occasionally served as cover (Bernhardsson 2005, Richter 2008, Gossman 2013; see also Foster et al. 2005, Heine 2006), but the instrumentalization of archaeology to conceal spying activities continued long thereafter (e.g., Lawler 2010). Many of these figures loom large as popular culture heroes whose fame—mostly with barely a whiff of infamy—extends well beyond the boundaries of archaeology into film (“Lawrence of Arabia,” “Queen of the Desert”) and museum exhibits (“Abenteuer Orient. Max von Oppenheim und seine Entdeckung des Tell Halaf”²).

In a different kind of instrumentalization, archaeology has itself been deployed as a weapon of war and structural violence, sometimes by archaeologists but often by others seeking to use it for their own aims. Targeting of archaeological sites and monuments for destruction in the context of violent conflicts, or “eliminationism” (González-Ruibal & Hall 2015, pp. 156–57), is well attested from antiquity up to the present (Kohl 1998, Bevan 2006, Weizman 2007). Archaeological evidence has been used to justify the dispossession of people from their lands and homes, as in ongoing conflicts over the Silwan area of Jerusalem. In Silwan, excavations have revealed occupation since the Bronze Age, but the public presentation of the site by the private Israeli organization El-Ad highlights exclusively the portions of the past purportedly linked to the biblical David and other elements of Jewish history. This connection has been used to claim the area for Jewish settlement. Palestinian houses have been confiscated, and excavations have been conducted in the immediate vicinity and even underneath these properties (Abu el-Haj 2001, pp. 228–34, 258–62; Greenberg 2009; Pullan & Gwiazda 2009; de Cesari & Herzfeld 2015, pp. 181–83).

Archaeology has also been mobilized in national and international media to support wartime aims, as seen during the build-up to and aftermaths of wars in Iraq and in the hostility toward Afghanistan following the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas. By highlighting the purportedly direct connections between the Mesopotamian past and “us,” news media paved the way for claims that “we” need to rescue the treasures of past civilizations for the sake of our grandchildren, if

²See <http://www.bundeskunsthalle.de/ausstellungen/abenteuer-orient.html> (last accessed on 18 December 2015).

need be through military intervention. These metaphorical sleights-of-hand excluded present-day populations in the region from any claims to be inheritors of these pasts or, alternatively, emphasized their endangerment by despotic regimes (Pollock & Lutz 1994, Seymour 2004, Pollock 2005). Silliman (2008) has examined the metaphor of “Indian country” as used in news reporting, blogs, and soldiers’ accounts of recent wartime contexts in western Asia. The appellation draws on past US military exploits and stereotypes to impart specific meanings to recent ones, creating “a narrative of conquest and nation-building” (Silliman 2008, p. 241) that pits (Western) civilization against the savagery of the Other.

A Focus on the Past

For many archaeologists, the discipline they practice is concerned with material remains of the past as a means to learn about people who lived in earlier times. Archaeologists are thereby tasked with “the responsibility . . . to work for the long-term conservation and protection of the archaeological record by practicing and promoting stewardship of the archaeological record” (SAA 1996; see also *Am. Sch. Orient. Res.* 2015). Although some scholars have argued that these appeals obscure the highly selective notion of what constitutes the “archaeological record” (Hamilakis 2003, 2007, 2012; Wylie 2005), many archaeologists regard this stewardship role as fundamental to their discipline, making it the gatekeeper to material remains of and knowledge about the past.

When archaeology is understood as the study of the past in and of itself, practitioners often restrict themselves to an exclusive focus on their “real” expertise—sites, monuments, artifacts—with the politics of the present hidden behind the screen of the past (Bahrani 2008, Hamilakis 2009; cf. Malin-Boyce & Trimble 2009). Interventions in wartime to try to protect sites, monuments, and museums or at least to monitor damage to them are seen as a way to exercise one’s responsibilities as a professional toward archaeological materials and cultural heritage. In practice, this has taken the form of appeals to the links between regional archaeological remains and global heritage that ostensibly belongs to humanity as a whole in order to protect this heritage for the sake of future generations (Rose 2008). By this logic, if the material remains of the Mesopotamian past are imperiled, a threat exists to our global heritage (Bahrani 1998). The issue becomes one of policing to protect what purportedly belongs to all people.

The goal of protecting archaeological remains and cultural heritage has led some archaeologists to take a more activist stance by becoming involved in direct or indirect collaborations with the military. Proponents of an interventionist position appeal to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the most widely cited international legal instrument designed to prevent damage to archaeological materials during war (UNESCO 1954; Gerstenblith 2008, 2009). The Convention defines cultural property as “movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people” (UNESCO 1954, Artic. 1), including objects, the buildings that house them, and places with a substantial density of cultural property. It obliges the military of warring states to respect cultural property “by refraining from directing any act of hostility against such property” except in the case of military necessity (Gerstenblith 2009, p. 21). The military must act to prevent theft or vandalism during war or occupations. In order for them to meet these responsibilities, some archaeologists and cultural heritage professionals claim that the profession must cooperate with, if not directly train, military personnel (Gerstenblith 2008, p. 87; P. Stone 2009; Schipper & Eichberger 2010; La Piscopia 2013).

In accordance with this argument, archaeologists have taught soldiers about the value of archaeology (*Archaeol. Inst. Am.* 2005, Emberling 2008, Rose 2008) and have provided information about the locations and importance of sites. Some archaeologists have lobbied politicians in the attempt

to prevent direct damage to archaeological remains and museums, notably in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (George 2008, Gibson 2008). Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have been formed or mobilized to document and advocate for archaeological preservation.³ For advocates of an interventionist position, a refusal to engage with the military “is to abrogate our responsibility to our profession and more importantly to the world cultures that we cherish” (Malin-Boyce & Trimble 2009, p. 116; see also Rush 2015 and <http://www.aiamilitarypanel.org/>).

Scholars adopting this position often argue that the only way to avoid worse damage to archaeological remains is to work with the military in some capacity. The lessons of Iraq, in particular the plundering of the Iraq Museum but also the widespread looting of sites, are often heralded as a case in point (George 2008). Taking this line of argument a step further, some observers have suggested that the large scale of wartime damage demonstrates the need to train military personnel during peacetime, without the pressures of an imminent or ongoing war (Schipper & Eichberger 2010, La Piscopia 2013). Doing so, however, can be seen as paving the way for future military engagements.

The Past Situated in the Present

An alternative understanding of archaeology emphasizes its engagement with material remains, past but also present, and the mutual constitution of people and things. As part of this remit, archaeology examines the various meanings accorded to the past and its ruins by people in the present. An understanding of the past is possible only when its situatedness in the present, under specific local conditions, is given due consideration. Like their fellow cultural anthropologists, archaeologists connect with local communities, including but not limited to scholarly ones, as well as government officials and bureaucracies in the regions in which they conduct fieldwork. There is therefore every reason why archaeologists should engage with the intersection of contemporary politics, including war and militarism, and the study of the past (Meskell 1998, Albarella 2009, Hamilakis 2009, Boytner et al. 2010). An important issue is not simply whether archaeological sites and objects are damaged or destroyed during conflicts, but rather how and why archaeology becomes caught up in such battles and lends itself to use as a tool in hostilities. Why do sites and monuments become targets? What roles do archaeologists play in this outcome, wittingly or unwittingly?

In 2003, the World Archaeological Congress (WAC) established the Archaeology and War Task Force to address questions of whether the rescue of archaeological materials should take precedence over other concerns and whether archaeologists should collaborate with the military in situations of armed conflict. Whereas the report of the task force produced no direct outcome, WAC recently adopted the Dead Sea Accord, which acknowledges the “unquestionable priority of human life” while also recognizing “how impoverished . . . lives may be when stripped of their human rights to their culture” (WAC 2014a). Protection of cultural material may be “an expression of concern for human rights” or “an appropriation . . . that alienates people and attempts to rewrite and control the past” (WAC 2014b).

Some archaeologists have suggested that the foregrounding of archaeological objects and sites during wartime deflects concern from the humanitarian catastrophes of war (see discussion in

³These include, among others, the International Committee of the Blue Shield (<http://www.ancbs.org/cms/en/home>), Saving Antiquities for Everyone (<http://www.savingantiquities.org/>), Safeguarding the Heritage of Syria and Iraq (<http://global.si.edu/projects/safeguarding-heritage-syria-and-iraq-shosi>), and Heritage for Peace (<http://www.heritageforpeace.org/about-us/>). Not all of these organizations nor all of their members adhere to the same idea of archaeology and its role in present-day conflict, but all regard the protection of archaeological remains as a critically important task.

Kersel 2008). Collaborations with the military are seen as part and parcel of the militarization of US society (Lutz 2009b, González 2010). They are problematic because they are shaped by asymmetrical power relations, entrenched hierarchies within military structures, and the insistence, in at least some sectors, on secrecy (Albarella 2009, Eiselt 2009, González et al. 2009, Hamilakis 2009, Netw. Concerned Anthropol. Steer. Comm. 2009, Price 2011). The military's ultimate goals are to win wars and to gain advantage over others, and those civilians who choose to collaborate serve the military and not the other way around (McFate & Laurence 2015).

These problems come to the fore in reflections by archaeologists who have chosen to engage directly with military institutions (Teijgeler 2008). Accounts of teaching programs developed to train soldiers who are about to be deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan suggest that curricula are narrowly defined, emphasizing major “works of art,” the doings of kings and military conquests, and the development of writing, cities, and agriculture (Rose 2008). Contemporary archaeological themes that focus on everyday life and alternatives to a linear, evolutionary understanding of the past play little or no role. Programs are designed to be “completely apolitical” and to “generate positive publicity for everyone involved” (Rose 2008, p. 144). Reporting on his involvement in training soldiers, Emberling (2008, p. 453) notes, “The program’s organizers made it clear to all lecturers that there were limits on what we were to discuss . . . [T]here was no illusion that the talks themselves were conducted in an atmosphere of academic freedom.” The possibilities to evaluate the effectiveness of the training were also limited: Permission to interview soldiers after their return from overseas duty was not granted (Emberling 2008, p. 455). A tacit premise of these training programs is that soldiers require historical background in preparation for deployment (P. Stone 2013, Rush 2014) instead of taking the position that a knowledge about the past should be part of every person’s basic education.

The military tends to prescribe, formally or otherwise, what it does and does not want to hear from members of academic disciplines (Ferguson 2012). Anthropologists have pointed out the reliance in military circles on an outdated concept of culture and stereotypes of Others—best known through the widely publicized reliance on R. Patai’s highly normative *The Arab Mind* as a “cultural primer” for soldiers deploying to Iraq—and also the assumption that warfare is inevitable because it is said to be deeply rooted in our evolutionary past (González 2010, pp. 25–26, 95–109).

MILITARIZATION OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Scholars have demonstrated numerous ways in which US society and culture are permeated by military values (Gusterson 2007; Price 2007; Lutz 2009a,b; Robben 2009; González 2010, 2015; Stroeken 2012a). It is therefore hardly surprising to observe a similar trend in archaeology.

Dual-Use Technologies

One avenue through which archaeology is militarized is through dual-use technologies, those that can and have served both military and civilian purposes. Technologies of this kind are widely employed by archaeologists: satellite photos, global positioning system (GPS), and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs, or drones), to name a few (Ur 2013; Casana & Panahipour 2014; Casana 2015a,b).

Aerial photography and satellite imagery, both of which derive in whole or in part from military and intelligence activities (Dodge & Perkins 2009; Fraser 2010, p. 71; Ur 2013, p. 29), are central components of archaeological landscape studies. These kinds of imagery are supplemented by the use of total stations for precise on-the-ground mapping, UAVs, three-dimensional scanning, and more (Ur 2013, Levy 2014, Fernández-Hernandez et al. 2015). Combining technologies allows

archaeologists to collect data at exceptionally large scales and to observe things that are invisible to the naked eye (Casana 2014).

Many technologies for mapping and viewing are closely connected to the growth of surveillance in contemporary society and the power of defining who sees and who is seen (Parenti 2003, pp. 3, 9; Dodge & Perkins 2009). The use of surveillance technologies to examine the past does not exclude the present: When satellite imagery is used to search for archaeological sites and their spatial relationships to landforms, images of contemporary settlements and land use are also part of the picture. This intrusion into people's lives takes place without consent, informed or otherwise (for a recent warning, see <http://www.aaas.org/page/satellite-imaging-cultural-sites-conflict-cautionary-note>).

While many dual-use technologies have been adopted by archaeologists without direct acknowledgment of their origins and other uses, some scholars have engaged in critical reflections on the meaning of this “entanglement.” Wickstead (2009) has discussed the oft-unreflected acceptance of an omniscient gaze in the widespread use of GIS. In a demonstration of the potential to use Google Earth imagery to reverse the gaze of governments and the powerful, Myers (2010) tracked building activities at Guantánamo that transformed the naval base into an extralegal prison for hundreds of men from the Middle East, Central Asia, North Africa, and Europe as part of the Bush White House's self-declared War on Terror.

One does not need to abandon these technologies, but there is a need to be aware of where they come from, with what goals they were developed, and the potential implications of their use for people both present and past. This is perhaps especially the case for those technologies with reaches that have only recently expanded beyond a primary military function.

Winning Hearts and Minds

Militarization is not predicated solely on the threat of force but also on attempts to “win hearts and minds” (Lutz 2009b, González 2010). In an explicit effort to do so, packs of playing cards containing information about archaeological sites and objects were created for soldiers deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Egypt (see <http://cchag.org/index.php/what-we-do/in-theater-training-aids/cpp-playing-cards/>). Their texts focus on the importance of archaeology as part of *our* heritage or sometimes global heritage—but never *their* heritage. In another instrumentalization for militarily defined goals, the UK Operation Nightingale uses excavations as a form of therapy for wounded soldiers and to help them develop “marketable skills” (Rush 2014, p. 4942).

Participation of serving members of the military, or those engaged in collaborations with the military, in academic conferences and publications is another element in the militarization of the discipline. Whereas academic labor is based on the freedom to question and critique any and all knowledge claims, the military structure is based on an unquestionable chain of command, requirements of secrecy, and limitations on critique (P. Stone 2005, McFate 2015). What may appear at first to be mutual participation on a level playing field is not, and the presence of serving military personnel in academic contexts may have a chilling effect on critical discourse.

CULTURAL MATERIALS AND WAR: FROM LOOTING TO COMMODIFICATION AND BACK

Some of the most widely discussed effects of war and violence on archaeology come from studies of looting. Although neither looting nor the antiquities trade that it sustains are solely war-related, war tends to facilitate and accelerate both.

Looting has been defined as the “removal of culturally significant material from archaeological sites for commercial gain” (Proulx 2013, p. 111, note 5). It encompasses at least two different kinds of activities: unauthorized excavations and theft. Unauthorized excavations were prevalent just before and in the immediate aftermath of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and are widespread in Syria today as well as in the context of ongoing conflicts over the Palestinian territories and Afghanistan (Löw 2003b; Adams 2005; Kersel 2007; al-Hamdani 2008; al-Hussainy & Matthews 2008; Emberling & Hanson 2008; E.C. Stone 2008; al-Houdalieh 2014a,b; Cunliffe 2014; Casana 2015b). Such excavations are doubly damaging because not only are objects shuttled into markets for sale, but digging is carried out without attention to archaeological context. Theft, the removal of cultural materials from monuments, museums, and other repositories, was most prominently in the news in 2003 with regard to the Iraq Museum (Löw 2003a, Pollock 2003, Bogdanos 2005, George 2008, Gibson 2008). Regrettable as thefts may be, they often affect objects that have been well documented and for which archaeological context is—in many cases—known.

Looting can also be differentiated on the basis of practitioners’ aims. Targeted searches for antiquities by quasi-professionals may involve very specific kinds of artifacts, including truly exceptional pieces. “Subsistence looting,” in contrast, is the attempt to make a modest living or to supplement inadequate wages by digging for saleable objects. Looting has also become a means to fund war (“blood antiquities”: Shabi 2015; Harmanşah 2015; Smith et al. 2015, pp. 16–17).

Looting of archaeological remains and cultural heritage has a long history, perhaps most iconically involving the plundering of artworks throughout Europe by Napoleon and later the Nazis (Nicholas 1994, Meyer 1996). Commodification of looting is already attested in nineteenth-century Palestine, where local inhabitants catered to tourist desires to possess a (material) piece of the Holy Land (Kersel 2007, p. 90). But over time there has been a significant shift in the intensity of the commodification of cultural remains, with a growing tendency to sell objects for maximum profit and to purchase them as investments.

The antiquities trade is a huge industry, which has been claimed to reach multiple billions of dollars per year (Dietzler 2013; see also Brodie et al. 2000), and it continues to grow despite outspoken condemnation and legal attempts to regulate it. The limited scope of legal regulations is, at least in part, a result of powerful collectors’ lobbies that have opposed attempts to tighten restrictions on imports of illicitly acquired artifacts (Renfrew 2000, Brodie & Renfrew 2005, Brodie 2008, Gibson 2008, Proulx 2013, Hardy 2015).

Archaeologists have moved beyond blanket condemnations to engage in ethnographic studies of looting and the circulation of objects in the antiquities trade, exploring the actors involved and their networks. In Israel and Palestine, researchers have identified as central motivations unemployment, limited law enforcement, and, in the case of the Palestinian territories, resistance against a hated occupation that turns into deliberate attempts to damage archaeological remains considered Jewish/Israeli. Studies have been conducted on Israel’s semilegal antiquities market (Kersel 2007) and on looted objects from Early Bronze Age cemeteries in Jordan’s Dead Sea Plain from the time of their acquisition until they reach antiquities dealers and major auction houses (Kersel & Chesson 2013). Other scholars have interviewed self-identified looters and surveyed and (re)excavated looted tombs to determine what remains (al-Houdalieh 2014a,b).

In the context of wars in Iraq and Syria, local archaeologists have tried to monitor looting and to understand and address some of the motivations of those who participate in it. Al-Hamdani (2008) has documented the drive of local people to engage in unauthorized digging due to desperate financial need, especially during the international economic sanctions in the 1990s, but also out of anger at the ideologically constructed connections between the government of Saddam Hussein and the Mesopotamian past. From 1999 until 2002, in an attempt to stem looting, the Iraqi Department of Antiquities conducted all-year excavations so as to establish a permanent presence

at major sites and employ local villagers. This productive approach also had a negative side: When the impending 2003 invasion forced archaeologists to stop their work, some of the workmen used their newly honed skills to continue digging in order to obtain saleable objects. In another study, the authors have argued that villagers in southern Iraq regard archaeological sites as connected with evil spirits rather than seeing them as a source for personal financial gain (al-Hussainy & Matthews 2008, p. 95; for Palestine, see al-Houdalieh 2013).

Other scholars have examined patterns of looting and their connections to war-related activities from remote locations. E.C. Stone (2008) has used satellite imagery to monitor the timing and extent of looting in Iraq as well as preferences for particular kinds of sites. Casana (2015a,b) has argued that high-resolution satellite imagery is a better medium for assessing looting than are on-the-ground observations, but this contention has been disputed by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (see <http://www.aaas.org/page/satellite-imaging-cultural-sites-conflict-cautionary-note>).

In 2015, the spotlight of international and archaeological attention turned to Syria and northern Iraq where the Islamic State engaged in a series of spectacular, mediatized performances involving the partial destruction of famous monuments at Nineveh, Nimrud, and Palmyra (Bohrer 2015, de Cesari 2015, Harmanşah 2015, Shaw 2015). Much less notice has been paid to the dynamiting of shrines and tombs of significance to various local religious groups. And outside the circles of archaeologists and cultural heritage experts, little is said about the numerous other sites in Syria that have been impacted by collateral damage over the course of more than four years of fighting or those that have been looted to acquire artifacts for sale in support of one or the other side in the war. Comparison of peacetime damage to sites in Syria and damage caused by war demonstrates a dramatic increase in intensity as well as purposefulness during wartime (Cunliffe 2014).

These studies make clear that looting of whichever kind very often has financial motives and is closely connected to the antiquities market. As an outcome of chronic violence and war, many members of local communities find themselves in desperate economic circumstances, which combine with the alienation produced by cynical manipulations of the past by local governments and global actors to unleash massive waves of looting. Commodified objects move into the hands of small private collectors (“low-end collecting”: Holtorf & Kristensen 2015, p. 315) as well as wealthy ones. How demand for these objects and thus looting itself are stoked, producing new markets and accelerating the circulation of illicitly recovered artifacts through global channels, are important subjects for further research.

FROM COMMODIFICATION TO DESTRUCTION, ERASURE, AND TRANSFORMATION

Despite the crucial financial motive for looting, museums, sites, buildings, and even whole neighborhoods have been targeted for pillaging and destruction by invading and occupying armies that have another motive in mind: to deprive local populations of their cultural heritage and humiliate enemies (Bevan 2006; Gusterson 2007; Gerstenblith 2009, p. 27). Such acts are meant to demonstrate brutally and concretely the dominance of the conqueror, as Bevan (2006) has shown for Bosnia, the West Bank, and numerous other regions.

Although they have a long history, these kinds of willfully destructive events seem to take place with heightened intensity and frequency at present. This perception may be partly a function of the wide scope and near instantaneous dissemination of news. Thanks to the Internet, actions are increasingly conducted on a global stage; what is local becomes a global matter. Not only is knowledge of events immediate, but reactions can and do follow just as quickly and voluminously

(Flood 2002). In his analysis of the Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and other anthropomorphic statuary in the Kabul Museum, Colwell-Chanthaphonh (2003) argues that the crisis purportedly initiated by threats to and subsequent destruction of the statues was more a function of the reactions precipitated by the rapid dissemination of news stories than of the events themselves.

At least in some cases, destructions seem to be orchestrated specifically for a global forum. The recent theatrical, live-broadcast destructions in Palmyra, Nimrud, Nineveh, and the Mosul Museum led to a flurry of media attention. Some scholars have argued that these destructive acts were spectacles carefully designed for consumption by global audiences and disseminated through the Internet to provoke calculated responses. In this respect, they stand in contrast to the much less widely reported (in Western news media) destructions of shrines and other religious structures in northern Iraq and Syria, which are aimed more specifically at local populations. In the public hand-wringing that accompanied news of the destruction of ancient sites, occasional voices began to question whether the terms of the debate, especially the assumption of universally agreed-upon values of archaeological objects, might themselves be a problem (Bohrer 2015, de Cesari 2015, Harmanşah 2015, Shaw 2015).

Along with the possibilities of immediate global dissemination, the frequency of deliberate destruction of archaeological sites and monuments is also connected to changes in warfare; aims are often less about territorial gain and more about cultural and economic dominance. Destruction of cultural heritage is not just a collateral damage of war; rather, it has become one of the major goals. By destroying or damaging material remains, memory and identities are deemed to be injured or, in extreme situations, erased. More disturbingly, people turn against each other, and some are singled out because they have been associated with the practices of archaeology. A case in point is the murder on August 18, 2015, of Khaled Asa'ad, the long-term head of antiquities at Palmyra, who had steadfastly insisted on preserving the site (Hassan 2015).

Discourses about cultural heritage play a major role in these debates. Prevailing understandings of cultural heritage envision it as positively connoted (González-Ruibal & Hall 2015) and derived from a universalistic model that was originally formulated by UNESCO in response to the looting and destruction of cultural objects and monuments during World War II. This hegemonic notion of heritage has been widely used to materialize narratives of nationhood by selecting specific elements of the past—monuments, sites—to conserve and present (de Cesari 2010, de Cesari & Herzfeld 2015). In this understanding, cultural heritage consists of materials and intangible elements that are purportedly of high value to all people. In the language of the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, “World Heritage sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located” (UNESCO 2016).

Global hegemonic notions of heritage are closely allied to ideas of ownership and possession, and, like other commodities, heritage is seen as a scarce resource. It serves as a major attractor of tourism, which has become one of the more lucrative means of commodifying the past. Itself a product of modernism and capitalism, heritage is situated within the “experience economy” (González-Ruibal & Hall 2015, p. 151). One of the more insidious effects of the marketing of heritage has been “spatial cleansing” (Herzfeld 2006; de Cesari & Herzfeld 2015, p. 172), the separation of all traces of contemporary life—other than souvenir shops, ticket booths, and refreshments stands—from archaeological (heritage) sites. Examples are legion, including Petra (Hazbun 2008), Qurna (Hanna 2013, Tully & Hanna 2013), and Palmyra (Shaw 2015). Under such circumstances, it should come as no surprise that local residents become alienated from the archaeological past and stand by or act as willing accessories when ruins are threatened.

Whereas hegemonic notions of heritage work to uphold particular values associated with a capitalist world of nation-states and global claims of dominance, disenfranchised groups have striven to take heritage into their own hands in efforts to create alternative narratives. This attempt has been well documented in the case of the Palestinian territories, where local NGOs play a major part in instilling in the local Palestinian population a sense of connection and pride with respect to archaeological remains and creating a counternarrative to the dominant Israeli one (de Cesari 2010; Yahya 2005, 2010a). An ambitious attempt to bring together Israeli and Palestinian archaeologists to try to envision a place for archaeology in a future two-state solution resulted in “The Palestinian–Israeli Draft Agreement on Archaeological Heritage” based on the notion of “a unified archaeological landscape divided by political borders” (Yahya 2010b, p. 72).

Increasing attention has been paid to heritage resulting from legacies of violence, what has been referred to as negative, painful, or dark heritage (Meskell 2002; Bernbeck 2010, 2013; González-Ruibal & Hall 2015). Attempts may be made to erase negative heritage, as the Taliban endeavored to do by blowing up the Bamiyan Buddhas (Flood 2002). Looting may be motivated by a wish to destroy or remove things associated with a hated government or occupation (Sayej 2010, Varisco 2015).

Critical heritage studies have pointed to the irony that preservation and valuing of cultural heritage often grow hand-in-hand with threats to or actual destruction of monuments and objects. Destruction may itself be a process that creates heritage, rather than being opposed to it (Holtorf 2006), but once something has been declared to be heritage, its remains must be preserved. The tearing down of the Berlin Wall transformed it into cultural heritage and more or less simultaneously into something that could be bought and sold; the few remaining standing sections are protected. People imbue physical destruction with meaning: What constitutes destruction and which forms are considered legitimate and by whom are complex issues (Meskell 2002, Holtorf 2006, Bernbeck 2010, Holtorf & Kristensen 2015). As every archaeology student learns, excavation is itself destruction, albeit of an archaeologically and legally authorized form. It is through the practice of excavation and collection of materials in museums that they may become heritage for the first time (Holtorf 2006, p. 102; Fibiger 2015, pp. 393–94).

Put differently, destruction is very much in the eye of the beholder. A monument fits a UNESCO-derived definition of cultural heritage when it is intact but perhaps even more so when it is partially decayed or damaged but still visible. A look around Rome or Athens at the fallen columns and fragments of buildings that attract tens of thousands of tourists makes this abundantly clear. Ruins can even be romantic (Moshenska 2009, Dawdy 2010). It is principally the act of destruction, whether by looting or direct targeting, that is most often perceived as an offense. The Bamiyan Buddhas were little known in the West prior to being threatened and then dynamited by the Taliban, actions that catapulted them to instantaneous fame (Flood 2002, Bernbeck 2010).

These reflections in turn raise a crucial point that is too often elided in traditional discussions of heritage: For whom is something heritage, and who has the power to define what is, or is not, worthy of the label? The definition of Mesopotamian heritage as global—“our shared past” (Wegener 2010, p. 29)—is a political statement of positionality, not a self-evident or universal statement of fact (Pollock & Lutz 1994, Pollock 2005, Bahrani 2008; see also Scham & Yahya 2003). Who is the “we” who supposedly cherishes the material remains of world cultures (Malin-Boyce & Trimble 2009)? The power of definition can be seen in decisions about which monuments, structures, and sites land on lists to be protected from war damage and which are allowed to succumb to neglect or even demolition, from the statues of Saddam Hussein in Iraq to those of Lenin in post-1989 Berlin. It is striking that it is the notion that we need to protect and defend

our heritage that has been adopted by military institutions and, at least in part, conveyed to them by archaeologists.

THOUGHTS FOR THE FUTURE

Some scholars have argued that archaeology, rather than being deeply entwined with war and violence, has the potential to be a tool for dialogue and peace (Scham & Yahya 2003, Pollock 2008). A deliberate effort to reorient the practice of archaeology and its claims to knowledge production ultimately demands that scholars exercise their potential to act as public intellectuals (Hamilakis 1999) who help to educate themselves and others as self-critical individuals prepared to question established procedures and wisdoms (Giroux 2004). It means an acceptance of the deeply political nature of archaeological knowledge production that does not allow us to hide within narrowly defined professional interests when it comes to questions of war and violence. A self-critical scholarship must ask whether there is any room for collaboration with institutions such as the military, which work on the basis of command hierarchies and obedience rather than openness to critical questioning.

An archaeology that works against its instrumentalization in regimes of violence must confront the deleterious effects of the commodification of the past that too often accompany the discourses of cultural heritage and preservation. Must monuments, places, and objects be frozen in one (arbitrarily chosen) state in order to be preserved? Both scholars and local activists have increasingly shown that sites and objects can, and indeed must, continue to be used, allowed to decay, or deliberately transformed (Byrne 1991, 1995; Holtorf 2006; González-Ruibal & Hall 2015). NGOs in the West Bank have encouraged the integration of local communities in plans for site protection, the uses of archaeological sites as playgrounds and parks as a way of engaging local interest, and the creative restoration of vernacular architecture for community use (Yahya 2005, pp. 74–76, 2010a, pp. 149–53; de Cesari 2010). It may be appropriate to establish a neutral organization on the model of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as a means to negotiate major conflicts over the use or transformation of sites, rather than appealing to hegemonic institutions (Bernbeck 2008).

Whether it is about ownership of the past, ideas of preservation, or the dispossession of people who live on an archaeological site in order to make it suitable for tourism or the archaeologists' trowels (Shaw 2015), turning archaeological remains and knowledge into saleable commodities can be deeply alienating. The estrangement of living people from the past through its appropriation by archaeologists, political powerholders, or marketers has had no small hand in making archaeology one of the many casualties of war. Archaeologists can and should use their knowledge of people's ways of life, both past and present, to "articulate a political and ethical response" to current conditions (Hamilakis 2009, p. 41; Al Quntar et al. 2015, p. 159) rather than burying their heads in the proverbial sands of their excavation trenches.

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