

ARCHAEOLOGY IN CONFLICT: SETTING THE AGENDA

The protection of cultural heritage is not merely about monuments and artifacts but about people and identity. Consequently, preserving cultural heritage is not about the past but concerns the present and future of humankind.

The history of the past 25 years demonstrates that, despite international conventions and public awareness, archaeological heritage and cultural property are increasingly becoming targets of high priority in armed conflicts and the "cultural cleansing" of whole regions one of the prime goals of warfare. Around the whole world, such armed conflicts often form the context and the incentive for the looting and destruction of archaeological sites as well as religious buildings and cultural institutions, such as libraries, archives, and museums. The targeting, looting and destruction of cultural property connected to armed conflicts threatens scientific investigation on, conservation of, and general access to cultural heritage.

An additional factor is the illicit trade in antiquities which constitutes up to 90% of international trade in archaeological assets. Along with the trade in arms, drugs, menial labor and sex slavery, as well as in rare and endangered animals, the trade in illicit artifacts forms one of the most profitable branches of international organized crime and also adds to the war chests of international terror organizations. This makes the targeting, looting and destruction of archaeological sites and cultural property in the context of armed conflicts and the illicit trade of antiquities also a matter of international security.

The [Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property](#) in the Event of Armed Conflict and its 1st Protocol, both done at The Hague in 1954, were drafted against the backdrop of the experiences of World War II when combat damage to cultural property had occurred mostly as "collateral damage" (e.g. in the event of bombardments of a city or artillery battles in urban contexts). This 1954 Hague Convention largely assumes conventional warfare and traditional wartime scenarios with regular armed forces of national states. Since then, warfare and conflict scenarios have changed dramatically. However, the regular armed forces of many

national states have applied elements of the principles and standards of the 1954 Hague Convention to the military rules of engagement (e.g. within the so-called Civil Military Cooperation model, originally developed within NATO) and the [2nd Protocol](#) (1999) to the 1954 Hague Convention intends to cope with these changes.

Today, most conflicts have become unconventional. In the future it is very likely that most armed conflicts will not conform to the "classical" conflict scenarios of war. More and more we face inter-ethnic and inter-religious armed conflicts fought by irregular forces that are that are not necessarily constrained by the conventions of international law (such as the 1954 Hague Convention). Furthermore, recent wars have also created complicated post-conflict scenarios of political instability as well as long-term military occupation that often provoke violent insurgency and guerrilla resistance. Even when conflicts are carried out by national entities that are constrained by the conventions of international law, many governments tend to deploy private military and security companies in addition to regular armed forces that are not subject to international law. All these developments have added largely to the dramatic loss of cultural property since the end of World War II, which, according to UN estimates, is almost 50 % of all cultural property.

Scholars need to rethink their positions and react to these dramatic changes in the modes of warfare and the incredible loss of cultural property. This demands a multidisciplinary approach within a multinational network of partners. It will engage a broad range of questions, including philosophical, ethical, juridical, humanitarian, social, sociological, psychological, humanistic, historical, religious, cultural, economic, political, and military aspects. Such a multidisciplinary approach will enhance the understanding of mechanisms involved in the targeting, looting and destruction of cultural property in the diversity of current armed conflict scenarios. A general goal of research must be to deliver new information to serve as a solid basis for the development of chapters of international law, effective procedures and tools for the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflicts for governmental bodies, law enforcement, public institutions and NGOs, and applicable principles for military rules of engagement that consequently avoid the targeting and destruction of cultural heritage.

Scholars - archaeologists as well as cultural heritage professionals - must consider their role and involvement in the protection of cultural property, facing the challenge of the new conflict scenarios. Today's connections between academia, civil society,

government, and the military have to be critically assessed at the beginning of the 21st century. Against the backdrop of recent experiences in former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places in the world, archaeology faces pressing ethical, epistemological and even existential questions that demand serious attention in a constructive, systematic manner.

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