Cultural Property Protection in the 21st Century: Meeting Requirements across the Forces

Collected papers from the International Conference in Vienna, November 2024

Nicole Gruber, Anna Puhr (eds.)

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Preface

The destruction of cultural property inflicts serious harm upon individuals, society and the cultural heritage of the global community. It strikes at the heart of people and their communities, affecting them psychologically and emotionally. It undermines the trust, respect and tolerance, which are essential for life in a diverse society and world. It is divisive, claims superiority of one group over another and encourages dehumanisation. Such action can incite and increase hostility and hate, and possibly even escalate conflicts to extreme violence. The theft, looting and illicit trafficking of cultural property furthermore serve as additional drivers of conflict by fostering organised crime and being used as a lucrative source of income for armed groups.

In the 1954 Hague Convention, the contracting states and their armed forces commit themselves to the protection of cultural property. This includes taking appropriate measures in peacetime to be prepared against attacks on cultural heritage sites in armed conflicts. Yet, on the 70th anniversary of the Convention, cultural property is still at risk of being damaged or destroyed. Deliberate attacks on cultural property are increasingly considered a strategic element in wars and armed conflicts and are perceived as a threat to international security.

This publication serves as a contribution towards the UNESCO recommendations concerning the safeguarding of cultural heritage. Presented in The Hague in May 2024, they include the implementation of civil-military partnerships and awareness-raising activities as well as the strengthening of international cooperation on the military protection of cultural property. Furthermore, they indicate the need for an enhanced involvement of defence and security personnel in discussions on the 1954 Hague Convention.

In this respect, this publication invites us to share knowledge and exchange perspectives on our capabilities and processes regarding cultural property protection, because dialogue is indispensable in the development of mutual understanding and trust in order to find joint solutions to this global challenge.

It is our duty to reduce the number of people experiencing a loss of their history, identity and culture and to protect our heritage for future generations.

Arnold Kammel
Secretary General, Director General and Defence Policy Director,
Austrian Federal Ministry of Defence

Introductory Remarks

From 11 to 13 November 2024, the International Conference "Cultural Property Protection in the 21st Century: Meeting Requirements across the Forces" took place at the National Defence Academy in Vienna, Austria.

Around 100 people participated in the event, while further 250 attended online. This included delegates from Austrian ministries as well as official bodies in charge of cultural affairs and Cultural Property Protection (CPP). Furthermore, there were numerous international guests from the civilian and military sectors, including representatives of armed forces from Europe, the USA, Africa, the Near and Middle East, who shared their experiences and knowledge in the field.

Military and civilian experts exchanged views on current issues relating to the (military) protection of cultural property and discussed joint challenges and opportunities for the increased and sustainable implementation of CPP in the armed forces.

The conference covered a wide range of topics, including the importance of cultural heritage for societies and the destruction of cultural property as a strategy in warfare as well as the role of new technologies, their benefits, and the legal basis for their use. Particular attention was paid to the integration of CPP into the education and training of armed forces.

The International Conference was held to mark the 70th anniversary of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. It was hosted by the National Defence Academy of the Austrian Armed Forces, supported by UNESCO, and organised in cooperation with the University for Continuing Education Krems, the Austrian Society for the Protection of Cultural Property, and the Austrian National Committee of the Blue Shield.

The event was part of the official UNESCO anniversary activities and served to strengthen the UNESCO initiative for the creation of a "civil-military alliance for the protection of cultural property" that evolved from the launch conference to start the global celebrations in May 2024, in The Hague.

To this end, let us work together to promote the protection of cultural property and to encourage the further development of civil-military cooperation in this significant area by supporting our common goal that culture shall not become a target.

Nicole Gruber & Anna Puhr

Chapter I
Cultural Heritage, War, and Society

Embedding the Human Being in Cultural Heritage and Property as a Prerequisite for Social and Individual Existence

Paul Ertl

Introduction

Our own cultural property must be protected! This seems to be clear to all of us from the outset. But why is that so? Is it our culture and our socialisation, in particular, that bring us to such a fundamental conclusion? According to our humanistic Western worldview, it is evident that our identity is very special and lies in our distinctiveness and, therefore, in our way of life. But if we look at the bigger picture, we immediately see that every culture embraces a community's identity, history, and heritage. By doing so, it fosters social cohesion, promotes diversity, and provides educational and economic benefits. Preserving cultural property helps to maintain a sense of belonging and respect for shared values across generations and civilisations. The latter is so important, precisely because it is vital for every society, culture, and civilisation. The following universal rule applies to building and maintaining a prosperous community: *All cultural property must be protected!*

A vast amount of research on this topic has been conducted. Therefore, I would gladly share my own expertise and thoughts in this short article, since we human beings, particularly, can only make sense of our environment because of culture. To provide a better understanding of my approach, I will begin by briefly elaborating on narratives, myths, (intangible) cultural heritage, and (material) cultural property. In the following, I will discuss the interconnection between man, cultural heritage, and cultural property as embedded in general culture and illustrate this with an example.

Civilisation and culture, change and continuity

At first, I would like to briefly outline a frequently overlooked linguistic problem so as not to invite confusion, namely the difference between the German *Kultur* and the English *civilisation*. When the English, French and others proudly speak of their civilisation, in German there is a distinction between *Zivilisation* (the term accentuates what is common to all people, leaving national concerns somewhat behind) and *Kultur* (which emphasises

national particularities, the uniqueness of groups). Elias shows very impressively that *Zivilisation* is a process or the result of a process. It refers to something that is constantly in motion. *Kultur*, on the other hand, refers to the products of human beings, such as works of art, books, religious or philosophical systems etc. (cf. Elias 1997: 91 et seq.).

According to Geertz, culture is a system of symbols that people use to give meaning to their lives and make sense of the world around them. It provides frameworks for understanding experiences, forming relationships, and interpreting interactions. It influences perception, and guides our responses to environments and situations, ultimately enriching our lives and facilitating social connection. Therefore, we humans decode the world and work with this knowledge and through culture as it shapes our beliefs, norms, and communication (cf. Geertz 1973: 23 et seq.).

Elias sheds light on the civilisation process and the emergence of culture as an interplay of social forces in a specific area, while Geertz pursues an interpretative and symbolic approach, which can be extrapolated in general. Combined, the two provide a unique and distinctive approach to the concept of culture. In the following, I will be referring to culture in this context.

To explain this in greater detail I would like to emphasise two fundamental aspects. The first combines symbolism and interpretation. The products are narratives, myths, and intangible heritage, which arise from decoding and elaborating on the world. The latter is a social aspect considered when the interpretation of the world is put into practice. This is what our triangle or triad (as I would call it) consists of: (a) the cultural property that exists in practice, (b) its ideological-philosophical premise – the intangible cultural heritage –, and (c) the human being as a vessel holding them, in which both practice and theory flourish. Thus, the dialectical condition of material and immaterial culture is transformed, so to speak, through the human being as a conductor (cf. Ertl 2008, 86 et seq.).

Prerequisites for a prosperous culture

All three conditions (materiality, man, and ideality) must be in place at the same time and relate to one another. If this is not the case, i.e. if one of the three parts is missing, it cannot be assumed that there is a functioning culture in the sense of a holistically constructed and perceived reciprocity. Here is an example:

Imagine a goldsmith in the 15ᵗʰ century. He is to forge a crucifix for his church. What does he need? Material, tools, and his own knowledge, a forge, a working place, time, and space – all this is necessary as well as strength, will, and a culture of interaction with the client (probably a religious dignitary at the time). Those are his practical prerequisites. But he needs more than that: he needs an ideology, a religion, a form of art (be it contemporary, traditional, or future-oriented) and culture, and a very special society in which this symbolic item (with all its inherent meaning) is embedded.

This example shows all the prerequisites for a prosperous culture: both object and action; ideology and dedication. With one of them missing, nothing can emerge from the others: without material, nothing can be forged; without religious context, there is no need for a crucifix; without a trained goldsmith, nothing can be forged. Only if all three prerequisites are given, can culture begin to take form. The goldsmith's identity is also closely linked to the culture in which he is embedded. In this way, he identifies with the world on an ideological, economic, and social basis. The same applies to the society that surrounds him. In this way, culture reaches the highest levels within a civilisation, always requiring all three steps: the creation, establishment, and implementation of culture.

As demonstrated by the example of the goldsmith, this multilevel culture is a central element of human identity and finds its expression in different forms and traditions, which are passed on between generations. The practical outcome is concrete, tangible cultural property. Narratives, mythologies, cultural memory as well as the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and the individual/society plays an important role in this process and offers deeper insights into the way people understand and shape their world. Therefore, it is necessary to delve a little deeper into the theory of narration and its connections with culture.

Narratives, myths, and intangible heritage

Narration, myth, and intangible heritage are intricately linked through the shared functions of storytelling and cultural preservation. At the core of this relationship lies the concept of narrative, which serves as a vital medium for transmitting cultural values, beliefs, and practices across generations. Myths, as foundational narratives, encapsulate the collective consciousness of a culture, offering insights into its worldview, ethical paradigms, and societal

norms (cf. Eliade 1984, 23 et seq., 85; 89 et seq.).

Intangible heritage refers to the non-physical elements of culture, including traditions, rituals, and orally transmitted history, which often take the form of narratives. The latter function as vehicles to preserve intangible heritage, enabling communities to articulate their unique identities and foster social cohesion. Especially oral tradition plays a crucial role, allowing myths and stories to evolve over time while maintaining core cultural tenets. (cf. Barthes 1972, 135 et seq.)

Additionally, narratives are essential for facilitating intergenerational dialogue, allowing younger members of a community to actively devote themselves to their heritage and understand their place within a historic continuum (cf. Merril & Fivush 2016, 73 et seq.). Thus, the interplay of narration, myth, and intangible heritage sustains cultural continuity, ensuring the transmission of knowledge and values that shape and define a community (cf. Peace & Oye & Frank, 2 et seq.). This permeates all areas of human existence, from play and sport through rules of engagement and codes of conduct to hallowed and sacred action (cf. Girard 1999, 402 et seq.). But it is not only socialisation that connects individuals and societies via culture. There is also a close connection between *ethos* and *ethnos*. For both are neither purely theoretical nor biological terms, but they are mutually related. This is apparent because of the structural embedding of *ethnos*, which is based on a shared social tradition and on the loyalty to a particular ethos (cf. Levasseur: 72). Both are mutually dependent and play a decisive role in shaping culture. If one of them is missing, this will inevitably lead to the respective culture being damaged or even becoming extinct. This interdependence forms the basis for the creation of culture by narratives.

Stories

Narratives (deriving from the myths that create the link between ethos and ethnos) are a central aspect of any human culture. They are constructed by means of stories. Humans use stories to convey and preserve experiences, knowledge, and norms. This clearly shows that narratives are more than mere recounts of events, as they create meaning and allow the processing of personal and collective experiences via an understandable structure. Storytelling is an intrinsically human ability (cf. Bruner 1991). This ability is closely linked to the transmission of traditions and knowledge, as it not only conveys

individual experiences but also collective values. By reinforcing social norms and values stories create shared identity.

This concept – albeit not brand new – has been widely accepted since the second half of the 20th century. The basic categories of such stories/ narratives can be found as early as in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1450b-1452b, 1456a). Mostly they are characterised by a teleological or teleonomic development, which is formed by the succession of its elements (events, actions). Such stories deal with the world as we know it from our daily lives. In a more scientific form, they also include all our academic disciplines, from the humanities and social sciences to the natural sciences, including mathematics and physics.

Hi-Story

Historiographers discuss whether stories are a suitable medium (or category) for capturing and describing historical events. Can history be described by stories? Is history itself only a story or even a hiccup story (*Hi-Story*)? I will not go into further detail here, as that would be a different discussion. Let me just mention the Husserl student W. Schapp, who established an independent "philosophy of stories" in 1959. According to his thesis, man is a being "enmeshed in stories" in all his actions and perceptions. Accordingly, he is not the subject of his own constructions of meaning but acquires his identity through the stories in which he is enmeshed and which are also the fundamental medium through which meaning is accessible to him, at all.

Myths

Mythology may be considered one of the oldest forms of storytelling. Myths are profound and symbolic narratives addressing fundamental questions of human existence: questions about origin, sense, and the relationship between humans and nature. Myths exist in all cultures and play a central role in the people's worldview of a people. They help to make the unknown under-standable and shape collective consciousness. Like other scholars, Claude Lévi-Strauss emphasised that myths exhibit universal structures and themes that have significance across cultures (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1971: 132 et seq.)

Mythology thus connects the individual with the community and nature. It creates cultural identity and helps to preserve traditions and values.

The telling of myths is a dynamic process in which cultural content is continuously renewed and adapted to changing conditions. In this way, mythology remains a living element of culture, linking the past and the present and influencing social and ethical behaviour. Myths help preserve a society's memory.

Cultural memory

Alongside each person's individual memory, there is a collective and/or cultural memory, which contributes significantly to the creation and preservation of cultural identity. According to J. Assmann, cultural memory forms a kind of *memory reservoir* for society and is stable over generations. Memory, in general, makes us aware of ourselves and gives us identity: cultural memory refers to traditions and their transmission, while social memory is based on everyday interaction and communication (cf. Assmann 109 et seq.).

Cultural memory is always preserved through symbols, rituals, monuments, and artefacts that commemorate significant events or myths. In this context, narratives and myths are essential components that are stored in a structured way and communicated via media and rituals. However, the process of collective remembrance and oblivion is dynamic: certain events or figures may be focused on or suppressed, depending on the current needs of society.

Individual, society, and culture

When speaking of cultural memory – including the stories derived from myths – on the one hand, and tangible property as its physical expression, on the other hand, it becomes clear that the interaction between intangible cultural heritage, material cultural property, and the individual as a representative of culture is like a complexly woven tapestry that defines human society. It is like looking through a threefold lens, showing the individual (man), intangible cultural heritage (such as beliefs, traditions, and practices), and material cultural property (including artifacts, architecture, and other tangible outputs) at the same time.

Humans possess a unique capacity for reflection and abstraction, allowing them to form ideas about the world around them. This cognitive faculty leads to the development of myths, symbols, and narratives. Myths serve as foundational stories shaping a community's worldview and representing a form of 'proto-culture'. Intangible cultural heritage encompasses the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities, groups, and individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. In this context, human beings are the carriers of these traditions, which they express and hand down to the following generations. The fuzzy nature of intangible heritage allows for adaptation and resilience, reflecting the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments. By contrast, material cultural property consists of physical objects created by people (artifacts, monuments, architecture, and art in general). These tangible objects are often manifestations of intangible cultural heritage. For example, a temple built for religious practice reflects (intangible) beliefs and rituals, just like the crucifix in my earlier example. These physical manifestations do not only serve as cultural symbols, but also as economic and social markers, anchoring intangible beliefs in the material world.

The interaction between the individual and those two forms of culture creates a continuous cycle:

Individual interpretation: a person interprets the world based on their understanding, shaped by myths ('proto-culture') and cultural heritage.

Creation of heritage: the individual participates in or creates expressions of intangible cultural heritage (such as stories, music, or dance), which are influenced by their life experience and the cultural narratives passed down through generations.

Materialisation: these expressions often inspire the creation of material cultural property (e.g. art, architecture), which embodies the values and beliefs of the community.

Reinforcement: the existence of material property can, in turn, validate and inspire further intangible cultural expression, thereby enriching the cultural narrative.

Conclusion: *M-I-M Dependency* and a call to action

The interconnectedness of intangible cultural heritage, material cultural property, and the individual is essential for the establishment and continuity of culture. Without the myths and narratives constituting intangible cultural heritage, material cultural property would lack in meaning. Conversely, without tangible expressions, intangible heritage risks being ephemeral. Ultimately, the individual plays a crucial role as both the carrier and creator of culture, transforming it into a dynamic and evolving phenomenon. The absence of any one component, be it the intangible or the tangible one or the individual human-being, would equal a breakdown of culture as we understand it. Therefore, each component is vital for a vibrant cultural eco-system. This can be expressed in a formula that reads as follows:

1. Man (M) is influenced by
2. Intangible Cultural Heritage (I) and produces
3. Material Cultural Property (M)

All three elements depend on one another within the *M-I-M Dependency*.

Regarding my earlier remarks on stories, myths, intangible cultural heritage/ tangible cultural property, and the human being, I now come to the following conclusion:

Culture is not only expressed through narratives and myths but also takes other immaterial and material forms. Intangible cultural heritage includes knowledge, traditions, customs, and skills passed down from one generation to the next. This includes, for example, music, dances, festivals, and oral narrative traditions. These intangible forms of expression are often closely linked to the identity of a community and play a crucial role in the transmission of cultural values.

By contrast, tangible cultural heritage (material cultural property) refers to physical objects, such as buildings, works of art, books, and technical tools. These material objects are the tangible evidence of human cultural history, often symbolising a particular time or culture. In addition, tangible cultural property not only constitutes a source of knowledge about past civilisations but is also a carrier of values and aesthetic ideas that provide deep insights into society.

The relationship between intangible heritage and tangible property is close and reciprocal. Human beings may be regarded as 'vessels' inside of which this reciprocity is acted out (cf. the stories of the goldsmith and the crucifix). This reciprocal relationship is called *M-I-M Dependency*, M-I-M standing for the relationship between <u>m</u>an, <u>i</u>mmaterial (cultural) heritage and <u>m</u>aterial (cultural) property (cf. Ertl 2008, 87) A flourishing *M-I-M Dependency* is as important for mankind as the air that we breathe: without air we die, without culture a society perishes.

In summary, the protection of both tangible cultural property and intangible cultural heritage is one of our most important tasks and challenges. Therefore, the call '*Protect cultural property!*' should go out to all of us.

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Intentional Destruction of Cultural Property as Illegitimate Psychological Warfare

Günther Fleck

I. Outline of the problem

The destruction of an enemy's cultural property goes back a long way in the history of war. While many kings, tribal chiefs, and dictators were satisfied with conquering a foreign country, some did everything in their power to strip the subdued people of their identity or even destroy it completely. In addition to the widespread practice of enslavement, this included, above all, the destruction of cultural symbols, today referred to as cultural assets. According to the rulers' doctrine, everything that reflected the identity of the subjugated people was to be eradicated.

Identity-creating symbols may be either material or immaterial. From a historical perspective, material symbols include capitals, castles, sacred places, royal residences, monasteries, and centres of education (prestigious schools and universities). Immaterial symbols include languages, dances, religious rituals, music, and literature. The deliberate destruction of these identity-forming symbols is intended to make the subjected people forget who they are by wiping out their culture. For this and other reasons, international law has placed identity-forming symbols under protection, which is now widely known as the protection of cultural property. This law is still being violated massively worldwide.

This paper will show the psychological and physical effects that the intentional destruction of tangible and intangible cultural property has on the people affected. It will be argued that this is a form of deeply inhumane, psychological warfare to be strongly disapproved of. According to international law, it even constitutes a form of illegitimate psychological warfare.

II. Process of psychological traumatisation

The objective of the present article is to provide an explanation of psychological trauma resulting from the intentional destruction of tangible and intangible cultural property: what is going on in the minds of people who

have been severely traumatised? How do psychological traumas manifest themselves? For this purpose, the main causes of disaster will be presented, human responses to disaster described, and the main features of psychological warfare outlined.

Main causes of disasters

International literature lists three event categories with the potential to traumatise people: natural disasters (e.g. floods, earthquakes, fires, storms), accidental disasters (e.g. car, aircraft, train or ship accidents), and deliberately caused disasters (e.g. bombing, torture, death camps).

The *intentional destruction of cultural property* holds a special position among man-made disasters, as it is prohibited under international law but has not yet been explicitly discussed as an instrument of psychological warfare. The loss of a cultural object may no doubt cause a very strong shock reaction in many people. Whether the perceived loss leads to psychological trauma depends on certain conditions, which will now be elaborated on in greater detail.

Human responses to disasters

The dramatic events described above may – but do not necessarily – lead to psychological trauma. Certain conditions (criteria) make psychological trauma likely: experiences of helplessness/powerlessness, feelings of guilt, strong personal affection, high degree of identification, dimensions/intensity of the event, and threat to body and life. In most cases, traumatisation is caused by a combination of all or some of the above criteria. However, if strong enough, even a single criterion can lead to this condition. Such a stressful event commonly triggers strong emotions, which have a severe impact on subjective well-being (cf. Figure 1):

Figure 1

Emotions that are commonly experienced after a
stressful life event (Horowitz et al. 1984:47):

Sadness over loss
Fear of repetition
Fear of merging with the victims
Shame and rage over vulnerability
Rage at the source of the event
Rage over those exempted
Fear of loss of control of aggressive impulses
Guilt or shame over surviving
Guilt stemming from an exaggerated sense of responsibility

The phenomenon of psychological traumatisation follows a temporal course, crucial to the understanding the workings of traumatisation. The dynamic model of Mardi Horowitz et al. (1984) illustrates in detail the possible development of post-traumatic stress disorder (cf. Figure 2): the left part of Figure 2 shows the course of acute stress reactions and associated symptoms, as experienced and overcome by most people; the right part shows the severe form, in which people develop a post-traumatic stress disorder that does not go away by itself.

Figure 2

Stress Response States and Pathological Intensification
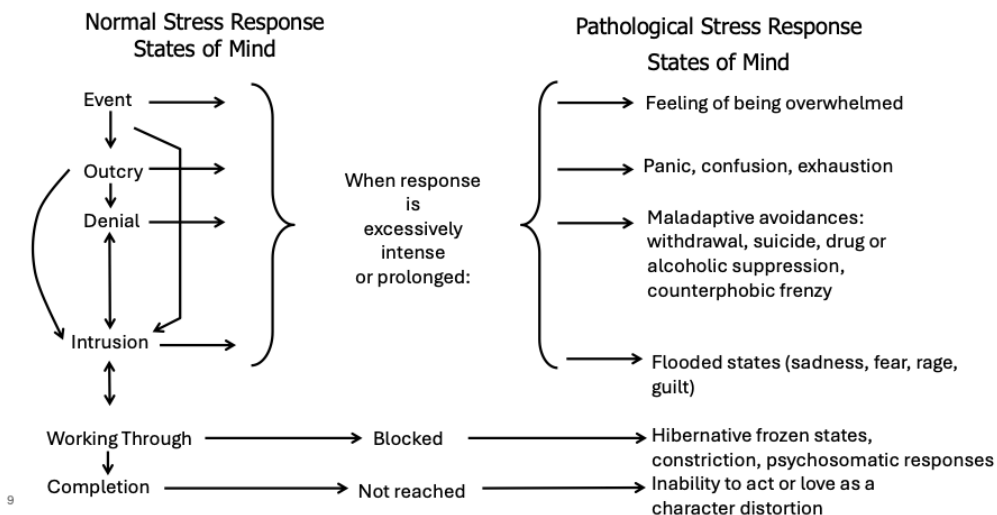
(Horowitz et al. 1984:36)

People exposed to very dramatic events initially react with both an outcry and with denial of what has happened. This denial can be accompanied by very calm outward behaviour. In such cases, individuals sometimes give the impression of keeping their composure, but this is misleading as emotions are running high under the surface. Subjectively, these persons often feel numb and paralysed. This initial shock phase is usually short-lived (lasting from a few minutes to a few hours) and then gives way to the reaction phase. The latter is characterised by an alternation of deliberate denial of what has happened and intrusive memories (referred to as 'intrusion'): persons try, with all conceivable means, to remove the terrible experiences from their consciousness, as they experience them as very painful and distressing.

However, the denial cannot be maintained for very long, being interrupted by intrusive memories, to which the affected person is helplessly exposed. After some time and various efforts, the individual succeeds again in repressing the unpleasant contents. The oscillation between the two phases can last for weeks or months.

Many people only enter the event-processing phase only after a long time. This is when they are internally ready to face the events, deliberately remember them, and realise what happened and how it happened. Arising painful memories are no longer repressed but deliberately and consciously reflected upon. In this phase, people are also increasingly able to talk about the events with friends or acquaintances. In the processing phase, it is necessary to come to terms with the events. It is certainly one of the most difficult tasks in a person's life to accept grievous losses, such as sudden blindness or the loss of one's family. If the affected persons manage to accept the terrible events, they become inwardly free to reorient themselves in life. However, there are people who cannot go through this process: they get stuck developing long-term post-traumatic stress disorder. Untreated, the latter may last a lifetime and, in some cases, end in suicide.

III. Psychological warfare

What is psychological warfare?

> "Psychological warfare involves the planned use of propaganda and other psychological operations to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes, and behaviour of opposition groups. RAND has studied military information support operations (MISO) in many countries and war zones and has provided objective and supportable recommendations to policymakers on methods and tactics to employ or defend against these operations." (The RAND Corporation)

The (national) interest of belligerent actors may be to demoralise the opponent (enemy), to persuade them to give up resistance and, ultimately, to subjugate them. Another goal may be the eradication of the opponent's identity by any means. The intentional and systematic destruction of tangible and intangible cultural property is used to wreck the enemy's identity, causing demoralisation, dehumanisation, and severe post-traumatic disorders. The destruction of cultural property equals irreversible material loss, symbolising a population's loss of national character, since cultural property is deeply ingrained in a society's systems of meaning and values, being essential to the personal, religious, or national identity of individuals.

IV. Conclusion

The destruction of cultural property represents an irretrievable material loss that symbolically targets the national character of a population. Such objects are deeply embedded in a society's systems of meaning and of inestimable value for individuals' personal, religious, or national identity. The systematic destruction of cultural property may have a strong impact on people's subjective well-being (demoralisation, traumatisation, dehumanisation, development of severe post-traumatic stress disorder etc.). From the perspective of military ethics, the destruction of cultural property equals a form of psychological warfare. Since this type of warfare violates universal human rights, it must be condemned and rejected.

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Lebanon's Heritage Destruction: A New War on History

Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly

The Israeli war on Lebanon, which lasted 66 days from October to November 2024, introduced new parameters of heritage destruction and protection. Targeting or threatening heritage sites emerged as a strategic tool to instill fear and weaken the opponent, with clear distinctions in the treatment of different types of heritage sites.[1]

While World Heritage Sites were primarily threatened but not attacked, national emblematic sites suffered damage without total destruction. In contrast, local heritage sites and memory places in villages were erased entirely, to illustrate one can take the example of the Nabatieh Souq.[2]

The post-war assessment of heritage destruction revealed two primary dimensions: the tangible damage inflicted on monuments, houses, and shrines, as well as the profound intangible loss experienced by society, due to the erasure of shared memory spaces.

During the conflict, the Israeli Army released maps identifying areas targeted for bombing and issued evacuation orders for the local population. These maps, widely disseminated via social media, included two World Heritage Sites located in the war zone. On 30 and 31 October, the majestic Roman Temples of Baalbek stood at the centre of a zone designated for attack entailing the evacuation of 80,000 residents to evacuate. Seeking refuge, some civilians were running to the temples, hoping to find shelter in the 2,000-year-old site. However, the gates remained sealed, and they were instructed to leave. In a social media post, the governor of Baalbek urged residents "not to head towards the temples, citing safety concerns." His statement indirectly referenced Lebanon's adherence to the 1954 Hague Convention, which prioritises the protection of cultural heritage. Allowing civilians to

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1   Cornish, Chloe & Tapper Malaika K. (2024): The priceless Lebanon heritage sites destroyed by Israeli bombing, Financial Times, 30 December 2024 (accessed 29.09.2025) https://www.ft.com/content/2715cb60-25e4-49eb-8707-38f70ddaee40

2   Israeli attacks destroy Ottoman-era market in Lebanon (accessed 29.09.2025) https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/10/13/israeli-attacks-destroy-ottoman-era-market-in-lebanon

shelter at the site could have jeopardised its status, leading to both human and historical loss.[3]

As the evacuation unfolded, horror scenarios played out in real-time. The Roman Temples of Baalbek, symbols of Lebanese identity, became the focal point of thousands of social media posts, pleading for their preservation. Lebanon initiated urgent political and diplomatic appeals to safeguard these historical treasures.

Ultimately, the bombing occurred. Lives were lost, homes were destroyed, and the sites trembled under the impact but remained intact. In response, the Israeli military claimed that special considerations were taken to minimise the damage to archaeological sites[4] by altering the type of weaponry used to reduce ground and surface vibrations. Nevertheless, this direct threat to a UNESCO World Heritage Site undermined the entire heritage protection system established under the 1954 Hague Convention.

This attack catalysed an unprecedented international response. Lebanon's request to grant Enhanced Protection status to 34 archaeological sites was met with overwhelming support. In a historic decision of 14 November 2024, UNESCO approved the entire list in a special meeting held in Paris.[5] The importance of this protection status was demonstrated in the battle at Shamaa Castle, home to the shrine of the prophet Simeon the Pure. Israeli soldiers displayed a clear interest in the site, bringing in far-right Israeli archaeologist Zeev Erlich (71) to assess its potential links to Judaic tradition. However, Erlich was killed in the conflict, and shortly thereafter, the soldiers left the site heavily damaged but not demolished, despite earlier threats.[6]

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3 Mao, Frances (2024): Baalbek's ancient ruins at risk by Israeli bombing, archaeologists warn, BBC News, 8 November 2024 (accessed 29.09.2025) https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c86qp55q3vyo
4 Ibid.
5 Lebanon: 34 cultural properties placed under enhanced protection, UNESCO, 18 November 2024 (accessed 29.09.2025) https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/lebanon-34-cultural-properties-placed-under-enhanced-protection
6 Goursaud, Lisa (2024): What we know about Zeev Erlich, the Israeli "researcher" killed in southern Lebanon, L'Orient Today, 21 November 2024 (accessed 29.09.2025) https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1436522/what-we-know-about-zeev-erlich-the-israeli-researcher-killed-in-southern-lebanon.html

In contrast, many other sites did not escape destruction. The Israeli Army razed border villages and eradicating their historical monuments. The devastation extended beyond architecture, as natural landscapes suffered immense losses; bombs set forests and wheat fields ablaze, wiping out the cultural and natural heritage of southern Lebanon. Medieval castles such as Toron and Beaufort, the shrine of Benjamin in Mhaibib, the Ottoman mosques of Blida, the Greek Catholic church in the village of Derdghaya and the rural village of Houla were either obliterated or heavily damaged. These sites, once the living heritage of the people, have crumbled into dust. The prospect of their reconstruction remaining an open debate with no clear resolution.[7]

This policy extends beyond physical destruction – it seeks to erase history, memory, and identity. The deliberate targeting of heritage sites was not merely an attack on Lebanon but an assault on global conventions designed to protect cultural heritage during wartime.

However, in this war, a strategy seemed to be employed to circumvent those conventions, specifically by distinguishing between different types of heritage sites. While World Heritage Sites were spared, smaller sites and places of deep personal and communal significance were erased.

The long-term intangible effects of this war might lead to shifts in collective memory and a rupture in the intergenerational connection to historic places. This was achieved through the systematic destruction of the rural and social fabric of southern villages by targeting privately owned historical houses, demolishing mosques, and churches, desecrating tombs, and destroying traditional water fountains.

This is a call for action. The world must stand with Lebanon in defending the local heritage of the South, which was left unprotected. This war extends beyond Lebanon; it challenges the fundamental policies and conventions that dictate the rules of warfare. Heritage destruction has become a tool of warfare, whose repercussions will be felt far beyond the borders of Lebanon. If we allow for history to be erased, the consequences will be shaping the global order in ways we have yet to comprehend.

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[7] Davis, Hanna (2025): The Devastation of Lebanon's Southern Border Towns, New Lines Magazine, 23 May 2025 (accessed 29.09.2025) https://newlinesmag.com/spotlight/the-devastation-of-lebanons-southern-border-towns/

The West African Cultural Heritage in the Effect of Political-Ideological Issues: A Heritage on Borrowed Time? Lessons from the Past

Hamady Gaye

A cultural syncretism

The Negro-African cultural identity has always been influenced and enriched by external cultural dynamics in a civilizational harmony that gives it its uniqueness.

The expansion of Islam in West Africa began between the 10th and 12th centuries with the boom in trans-Saharan trade. Its spread had a major impact on the lives of the local population. The strong influence of Islam stemmed from a long history, "more than ten centuries of the spread of an Islam which, while remaining rooted in the most orthodox Sunni traditions, borrowed its characteristic features from local cultures" (Dumont and Kanté 2012, p. 10). This intermingling of cultures has given rise to stone cities such as Chinguetti or the city of libraries, Wadane, Tichit and Walata with their "sand universities and desert libraries", or university halls of residence (Sankoré), mosques and Islamic libraries (Sidi Yahya) with Adjami or Arabic manuscripts and famous Sudano-Sahelian architecture of black-Arab inspiration.

In the recent past, West Africa also experienced European domination and colonization (between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries), which also had an impact on its civilizations through cultural assimilation and acculturation, with the introduction of Christianity and Western values.

A cultural war: Salafism vs. Sufi Islam, Christianism and traditional African religions

It is a tolerant Sunni Islam of Sufi inspiration that is traditional in most of the Sahel countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Mauritania, Senegal, and northeast Cameroon) with a model of religious tolerance and living together.

Virtually non-existent twenty years ago, Salafist groups now occupy whole areas of the Sahel. They are extending their areas of influence as far as the Gulf of Guinea, and are keeping the military forces that were supposed to neutralize them at bay (cf. Martinez 2023, p. 238).

As a result, since 2012, a large part of the geopolitical Sahel (approximately three million square kilometres, or 36 times the size of Austria) has seen a struggle for influence by foreign politico-religious powers. These are groups affiliated to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State represented by the "reformism" of a more radical, rigorist, traditional Islam, inspired by Wahhabism, which claims a return to the original Islam, based on the Koran and the Sunna: Salafism (cf. El Difraoui 2021, p. 6-10). This new religious doctrine, hitherto unknown in West Africa, is based on a strategy of implantation, focusing particularly on armed violence and terrorism, taking advantage of the weakness of the Sahelian states in the midst of a political and security crisis following the break-up of the Libyan state (cf. Martinez, 2023). The religious fundamentalism, based on a rigorist Islam that denies any other form of cultural practice contrary to their dogmas and doctrines promoted by these Salafist groups, calls into question the characteristics, dynamics and cultural practices based on the religious doctrines of local communities associated with idolatry.

These armed movements are waging a veritable "cultural war" by banning and destroying all heritage linked to Sunni Islam, Christianism, and traditional West African religions: mausoleums, monuments, places of worship, sanctuaries and sacred art objects, museums, libraries and manuscripts. Destroying them is tantamount to a "ritual crime".

By way of illustration, in the name of rigorist Islam and for geopolitical and ideological reasons, in Timbuktu[1] in January 2013, fighters from Ansar Dine (a Salafist jihadist armed group affiliated to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) burnt and ransacked manuscripts. These archival documents

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[1] Timbuktu (in Mali), nicknamed the "city of 333 saints", with its monuments (mausoleums) and archives (manuscripts) was listed as a World Heritage Site in 1988 because of its "outstanding universal value" and its essential role in the spread of Islam in Africa. They bear witness to the golden age of Timbuktu, which was the intellectual and spiritual metropolis of West Africa in the 16th century (cf. Djian 2004, p. 16).

(most in Adjami[2]) of exceptional universal value, some of which date back to the 13th century AD, constitute a rare documentary collection that bears witness to the history of Africa and of humanity as a whole. They also destroyed and desecrated several mausoleums of Sufi scholars that they equated with idolatry. Ansar Dine's Police chief Ahmad Al-Mahdi has been particularly prominent in this endeavor to destroy the cultural fundamentals of Sufi Islam.

The jihadist occupation also caused trauma and affected intangible cultural heritage, such as traditional festivals, ceremonies and periodic rituals of local communities.

Inter-community violence: cultural territories at risk

The invasion of the Sudano-Sahelian strip by jihadist groups has led to a cycle of violence and insecurity. A large part of the territory is beyond the control of the state authorities, with the emergence of embryonic Salafist administrations and the application of Sharia (Islamic law). This security crisis has led to an identity-based move withdrawal, with community antagonisms accentuating inter-community violence. This is one of the endogenous factors contributing to the destabilisation of tangible cultural heritage and the erasure of intangible cultural heritage. This subversion has its roots and origins in:

- Tensions linked to demographic growth and control of natural resources, resulting in conflicts between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders. These territorial tensions and conflicts have their origins in the devastating effects of climate change on the one hand, the move and withdrawal of populations towards the south of the Sahel following jihadist attacks on the other;
- Feelings of discrimination and abandonment;
- The failure of economic policies;
- The socio-political crisis, with the central powers being strongly contested by the peripheral elements of society, or by the questioning of traditional authority;
- The rejection of Western values and secularism;
- Separatism leading to rebellions;
- Ancestral ethnic crises.

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[2] Transcription system for local African languages using the Arabic alphabet.

All these latent inter-community crises are fertile ground for the jihadist project, which finds a favourable echo among the local population and strengthens the networks trafficking in cultural property. This deleterious situation disrupts or destroys the social equilibrium, so essential to cultural development. Traditional or religious heritage is ransacked, desecrated and destroyed, causing trauma and impact, and thus causing dysfunction to the entire social system. This pose threats and obstacles to social, religious and cultural practices, given that in Africa communities have a very close relationship with their environment, their territories and spaces of cultural expression, expressed through sacred rituals, giving rise to "cultural refugees".

In addition to the tangible cultural heritage that has been ransacked or destroyed, the greatest danger for local communities in the Sahel is the chaotic disruption of their intangible cultural heritage. Far from being a mere object of art or folklore, African cultural property reflects the identity, values, and mystical beliefs of a community.

Advent of a new phenomenon – the "civil looting": perception of cultural heritage as a symbol of foreign domination and a "denial of the system"

The weakness of states leads to situations of endemic political crisis and systemic bad governance, which have their roots in the birth and constitution of these young states (most of which became independent around the 1960s), calling into question their legitimacy and affecting social and national cohesion. This creates the seeds of recurrent instability and conflict, affecting democracy and civil peace.

In Africa, most modern institutions of memory such as archives, libraries, museums, sites and monuments are administered by the state, and most are inherited from recent colonisation. Their architecture and the cultural assets they contain are, in many ways, reminiscent of colonisation. As a result, heritage perceived as a "symbol of the public administration or of the colonial past" is particularly vulnerable to deliberate attacks by demonstrators in the form of looting, ransacking and arson. The recurrence of this scourge is beginning to establish itself dangerously as a tradition around electoral yokes and other social demands. These predatory practices concern

works of art, historic sites and monuments, documents in archives or libraries, museums, archaeological digs, etc. What are the causes?

- Written documents are the main target because they symbolise the power of the contested state authority, of foreign and cultural domination for oral societies par excellence. Destroying it therefore amounts to a "denial of the system";
- The economic interest in the illicit trafficking of cultural property;
- The use of premises for military purposes during periods of civil war (as was the case in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, etc.);
- Cultural heritage as a "conflict issue" and destroying it is tantamount to the "symbolic murder" of a historical memory.

Without this act, the defeat would not be total for certain actors in the conflict. This relentlessness can sometimes be a sign of ignorance. The loss of these "memories of peoples and administrations" leads to collective amnesia".

Prevention and resilience strategies: "planning for the day after"

In the face of these recurring situations of chaos in West Africa, which threaten the existence of cultural heritage, it is advisable to draw a number of life-saving lessons from the experiences observed and the particularities of Africa:

Local communities as "guardians of the temple": the X-factor in sustainable conservation and the first line of defence

The first level of intervention is to be found in the community itself, which is a guarantee of legitimacy and popular support. They need to be involved in sustainable conservation strategies.

In Africa, in practice, local communities, whether man-made or natural, generally provide the first aid to heritage in the event of a disaster. Memory institutions, which are veritable social institutions, are the pivots of collective life, with a strong social vocation and a strong spiritual basis. They act as a "3rd place[3]". They therefore need to be equipped to maintain cultural buildings, reduce risks and manage disaster situations.

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[3] The *third place*, a concept developed in the early 1980s by Ray Oldenburg, Professor Emeritus of urban sociology at the University of Pensacola in Florida, is distinct from the first place, the sphere of the home, and the second place, the domain of the workplace. It

By way of illustration, the annual plastering of the Great Mosque of Djenné[4] (the site of the ancient cities of Djenné inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1988) in Mali is a symbol of the community's social cohesion. During the plastering, the people of Djenné, using collaborative practices, work together to repair and rebuild the Great Mosque, which is the centrepiece of life in the town that has been inhabited since 250 BC, making it one of the oldest towns in sub-Saharan Africa. It is the largest mud-brick structure in the world and the finest example of Sudano-Sahelian architecture, a regional style characterised by adobe rendering and wooden scaffolding.

Among other examples:
- During the destruction of the Timbuktu manuscripts in January 2013 by jihadists, local communities, from the start of the jihadist insurgency in the North, had already been able to save more than 300,000 manuscripts from subversive hysteria by secretly transferring them to Bamako.
- In Ivory Coast during the politico-military crisis (2002-2011), local people were able to save the archives of the University of Bouaké by burying them to shield them from the destructive fury of the belligerents.

The various UNESCO conventions:
levers for protecting cultural heritage

UNESCO has adopted a number of cultural conventions (seven in total). They include the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict (1954), its First and Second Protocol (1999); the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage (1972); the fight against illicit trafficking in cultural property (1970); the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (2003); and the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions (2005).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has also classified places or properties as world heritage, giving

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is understood as a complementary component, dedicated to the social life of the community, and refers to spaces where individuals can meet, get together and exchange ideas informally.

[4] Djenné flourished between the 13th and 18th centuries as a center for the transport of goods such as salt and gold. Trade caravans also brought scholars and scribes, who introduced Islam to the region.

them special status for protection in terms of their universal value, with the "world heritage" label.

This label qualifies a site, a collection or even an object, giving it a particular, unique value. It confers prestige; provides technical assistance in managing routine preservation measures and offers insurance in the event of threats or damage resulting from disasters. In terms of promotion, the label can be used to increase attractiveness. With 12 % of UNESCO's World Heritage sites, Africa is underrepresented. Yet Africa accounts for a significant proportion of properties in danger. The List of World Heritage in Danger includes 52 properties, 16 of which are African (over 30 %).[5]

Faced with a variety of threats, including conflict, political instability and climate change, many of the wonders of Africa's heritage are at risk of losing their outstanding universal value. Therefore, evoking the continent's riches and warning of the dangers that threaten them is already protecting them.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding preventive and proactive strategies, given the context of conflict in West Africa, the first response is a political one: to work towards good, inclusive governance and equity to reduce the inequalities and discrimination that are sources of internal conflict. In practice, all these conflicts are linked to assertions of community or religious identity or to challenges to discriminatory public policies. In addition, the cultural heritage is paying a heavy price! Institutions, practices and rituals that maintained a certain social stability and ensured the peaceful resolution of conflicts guaranteed the stability of traditional African societies. This is the primary source of resilience. Traditional African societies have traditional mechanisms of a political, social, religious, magical or magical-religious nature for the prevention, conciliation, reconciliation, mediation and resolution of conflicts, whether intra- or inter-community, land-related, religious or political. These traditional instruments can serve as an effective complement to international conflict management methods (cf. Bagayoko and Koné 2017, p. 39). Safeguarding this heritage of universal value has become a geopolitical challenge that also falls to the international community.

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[5]   cf. https://www.cairn.info/revue-l-ouest-saharien-2021-2-page-15.htm&wt.src=pdf

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Chapter II
Safeguarding Cultural Property on an International Level

The 1954 Hague Convention and its two Protocols in the 21st Century: Mechanism and Evolution

Anna Sidorenko

The 1954 Hague Convention and its two Protocols (1954 and 1999)

The urging necessity for the universal ratification and effective implementation of these instruments

The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, adopted simultaneously with its First Protocol, is the first international treaty that is entirely devoted to the protection of movable and immovable cultural properties in all its forms, and the first Convention in the field of culture to have been adopted under the auspices of UNESCO. Designed in the aftermath of the Second World War, it is intimately linked with UNESCO's mandate for the construction of peace in the minds of men and women.

Following the development of modern warfare, the international community again gathered to reflect on the shortcomings of the 1954 Hague Convention and adopted the 1999 Second Protocol to strengthen this instrument.

The 1954 Hague Convention and its two Protocols (1954 and 1999) play a critical role in the safeguarding and protection of cultural heritage for promoting peace and international security, as emphasized by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347. These instruments are the only ones that grant UNESCO the full mandate to collaborate with and train armed forces in peace time and during armed conflicts. This reality highlights the urging necessity for the universal ratification of these instruments, and for their effective implementation at a national level through the adoption of comprehensive safeguarding preparedness measures.

UNESCO, as the Secretariat of these international normative instruments, is leading and at the forefront of initiatives accompanying States Parties in their implementation and the other Member States in their ratification processes. In recognition of the contemporary importance of these instruments, the ratification pace is steadily increasing. In 2024 we welcomed the ratification

of the 1954 Hague Convention by Malta, and the ratification of the 1999 Second Protocol by the Democratic Republic of Congo and San Marino.

Measures for the implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention and its two Protocols (1954 and 1999)

States Parties must adopt a comprehensive array of preparedness measures for the protection of cultural property against all foreseeable effects of an armed conflict, for which UNESCO may provide technical assistance.

The development of capacity-building tools for the training of civil and military stakeholders

International organizations such as UNESCO have a major role to play in assisting States Parties in the awareness raising and training of their armed forces, and therefore in abiding by their international obligations, in full respect of Article 7 of the Convention. Article 7 of the Convention requires the Parties to this treaty 'to plan or establish in peace-time, within their armed forces, services or specialist personnel whose purpose will be to secure respect for cultural property and to co-operate with the civilian authorities responsible for safeguarding it.' This unit should be deployable in the different fields of operation to advise commanding levels on relevant matters.

It is essential to stress the importance of the term 'in peace-time', which is fundamental to the application of the 1954 Hague Convention. Indeed, preventive measures to protect property against the possible effects of armed conflict, or any other disaster for that matter, must be put in place in peace-time for them to be effective, as these instruments are above all peacetime instruments. If preventive measures are established in advance, and the personnel responsible are made aware and trained beforehand, we will have all the tools at hand to react effectively in a crisis situation.

In that respect, UNESCO has developed numerous online and multilingual tools, including a Military Manual and an online course for the military, police, and law enforcement designed together with the Peace Operations Training Institute of the United States of America. UNESCO is also organizing major civil-military regional capacity building activities for the protection of cultural property, in order not only to raise awareness but also to foster that mutual understanding and collaboration between civilians and

the military, which is crucial to ensure an effective and comprehensive protection of cultural property.

Identifying, marking, mapping, and listing

The preparedness safeguarding measures are multiple and complementary, but all starts with a proper identification and inventorying of protected cultural properties.

The proper identification of cultural property must be conducted by civilian cultural heritage authorities and armed forces already in times of peace and pursued during hostilities. In times of peace, cultural authorities must ensure that all national cultural properties are inscribed on national inventories, which should preferably be accessible on an online platform, and include all relevant information on the property, including its exact coordinates and boundaries. Afterward, national authorities may ensure the marking of these properties with the distinctive emblem of the Convention, the Blue Shield emblem.

National authorities should also seek to inscribe their properties on the relevant international lists, notably properties of the greatest importance for humanity on the UNESCO International Register of Cultural Property under Special Protection and on the UNESCO International List of Cultural Property under Enhanced Protection. In that respect, all properties, including their exact coordinates and boundaries are internationally recognized and accessible on the UNESCO's webpage for civil and military consultation. This International List of Cultural Property under Enhanced Protection, established by the 1999 Second Protocol, is extremely inclusive and can welcome not only World Heritage properties or elements inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme, but also sites of national or local significance, and buildings housing movable goods.

Although UNESCO can develop tools and assist States Parties in adapting them to their own national contexts within the reach of its mandate, no real success can be achieved without a national political desire to implement these measures.

Developing adequate national legislative frameworks

All High Contracting Parties to the 1954 Hague Convention and Parties to the 1999 Second Protocol, must develop adequate national legislative frameworks, and criminal jurisdiction for the conviction of individuals responsible for crimes against cultural property. Furthermore, all Parties to the 1999 Second Protocol are mandated to arrest and prosecute any individual suspected of the destruction or damage to a property under Enhanced Protection. Therefore, these instruments build a strong national and international framework to reduce individual impunity for attacks directed against cultural properties.

Supporting funding mechanism

The 1954 Hague Convention and its 1999 Second Protocol respectively have their own funding mechanisms to accompany States Parties in the implementation of these normative instruments. A Special Account for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was established by the 77th meeting of the UNESCO's Executive Board (1967), which purpose was extended in 2024 to cover not only UNESCO's technical assistance to the Member States under Article 23 of the 1954 Hague Convention, but also, the effective conduct of monitoring or supervisory mechanism under Article 27(1)(c) of the 1999 Second Protocol, newly adopted by the 10th Meeting of Parties to this Protocol in 2023.

Furthermore, the 1999 Second Protocol established the Fund for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict which purpose is to assist States Parties to this Protocol to adopt preparatory, emergency and recovery measures.

The evolution of the Convention and its two Protocols

Cutting-edge technologies

The 1954 Hague Convention and its two Protocols are not static instruments, but are steadfastly adapting to the modern challenges and opportunities brought about in the 21st century. Cutting-edge technologies play indeed a pivotal role in fortifying the safeguarding of cultural heritage, highlighting

the relevance of mobilizing advanced technologies to assist us in our common mission to safeguard heritage.

For example, in 2023, the mandate of the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, established by the Second Protocol, was strengthened through the adoption of the above-mentioned monitoring and supervision mechanisms, accompanied by *Principles relating to the use of remote sensing data for the monitoring of cultural property*.

Notably since 2003, UNESCO has already acquired a rich experience in the use of remote sensing technologies for the monitoring of heritage, especially during emergencies and in crisis-hit areas, and the establishment of an official cooperation between UNESCO and space agencies. Satellite imagery and drones allow for rapid and effective damage assessment in threatened areas, and especially those that cannot be accessed by civilians.

Since 2015, UNESCO has partnered with the United Nations Satellite Centre (UNITAR/UNOSAT) to monitor and assess damage to cultural properties in emergencies. Several assessments were previously conducted in Iraq, Libya, Mali, Nepal, Syria, Yemen and today UNESCO continues to assess damage in conflict zones, including in Ukraine, the State of Palestine, and Lebanon.

**70 years of protecting culture in emergencies:
three new anniversary initiatives**

It is with this understanding of the contemporary needs and opportunities for the implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention, that UNESCO launched three new initiatives during its international conference "Cultural heritage and peace: building on 70 years of the UNESCO Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict" held in The Hague from 14 to15 May 2024.

One of the initiatives announced in The Hague is the reinforcement of managers and military personnel with capacities in cutting-edge technologies that can contribute to heritage protection. UNESCO will support States Parties in their efforts to make greater use of remote sensing by satellite imagery, artificial intelligence, and the preventive digitization of cultural property. In peacetime, in times of crisis and in post-conflict situations, new

technologies make it possible to inventory, model, scan, monitor, compare, and access the most threatened sites in emergency situations, and facilitate the resilience process.

The development of these new tools, notably using artificial intelligence and virtual reality, embodies new perspectives for the training of military personnel in the protection of cultural property, through a simulated environment.

Customizing these tools, using state-of-the-art technologies, and adapting them to the needs and reality of the military world will be one the outcomes of the UNESCO Civil-Military Alliance for the Protection of Cultural Property, another flagship initiative announced in The Hague. The purpose of this Alliance will be to accelerate the creation of units specialized in heritage protection in line with Article 7 of the 1954 Hague Convention to encourage peer-learning, sharing of experience and best practices. In parallel to the development of capacities for civil and military stakeholders, UNESCO launched a third initiative for the training of judiciary personnel in the handling of the juridical complexities of these normative instruments.

UNESCO already went forward with these initiatives by organizing a civil-military-judiciary training regarding the protection of cultural property in Ukraine, in August 2024. One of the aims of this training was to strengthen cooperation between these three bodies in adopting and implementing measures to safeguard cultural property and provide 'first aid' after damage. In particular, participants practised using the UNESCO-ICCROM method-ology and the newly developed form for assessing damage to cultural property and passing them on to the judiciary.

In the framework of its Alliance, UNESCO will also organise two additional civil-military trainings in 2025; one in the Sahel region and one for Latin American countries; thanks to the financial support of the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

From the 70th anniversary to the future of cultural property protection

The protection of cultural property is more than a duty; it is a testament to our commitment to preserve the very fabric of our shared heritage. From

innovative technologies to collaborative strategies, it is clear that our path forward is one of unity and shared purpose.

It is recognized that the pathway to an inclusive and comprehensive protection of cultural property by all stakeholders can be split into three strands: the adoption of preparedness measures in times of peace, the embracement of a community-based approach for all our actions and the establishment of strong international and interagency partnerships. Through these measures, we may have the potential to achieve the full commitment of all stakeholders, both civilian and military, to the protection of cultural property and the fulfilment of their duties under International Humanitarian Law, including the 1954 Hague Convention and its two Protocols.

This also emphasizes the need to consider heritage in a very broad understanding, embracing the diversity of culture. In that respect, we must consider cultural property beyond the distinction made between movable and immovable, tangible and intangible cultural properties, and understand heritage as a comprehensive whole. In that respect, the UNESCO Programme on Heritage for Peace, which is specifically designed for cultural property protection projects in times of peace, emergency and recovery, and in synergy between all UNESCO Conventions in the field of Culture, allows for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to the protection of our shared heritage.

Cultural Property Protection in Armed Conflicts in EU-, NATO-, and UN-led Operations and Missions: A Necessity?

Dominik Horn

Introduction

Cultural Property Protection (CPP) in armed national and international conflicts has become increasingly important in recent decades. Historical and cultural sites are not only witnesses of the past but also anchors of identity for societies. Despite international agreements, such as The Hague Convention of 1954 and its additional protocols, cultural assets often remain endangered in conflicts. Rather recent historical examples are the destruction of Palmyra in Syria or the looting in Iraq, but also the destruction of religious institutions during the Balkan wars of the 1990s, and, of course, the destruction of centuries-old cultural assets in the war between Russia and Ukraine. All these occurrences have shown and continue to show that armed conflicts are often accompanied by considerable losses of cultural assets and a loss of identity in the respective societies.

It is understood that the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United Nations (UN) play a central role in international military operations and missions when it comes to CPP. The question does not even arise as to what extent CPP is a required task in these operations and missions. CPP in armed conflicts is a central concern of the international community.

This article is meant to outline the existing legal framework, the challenges and deficits but also the prerequisites of its implementation in EU, NATO and UN-led operations.

The necessity of CPP

Cultural assets are not only material artefacts, but also carriers of identity for nations, regions and communities. Their loss can have a long-term impact on social cohesion and the collective memory of a culture. Cultural assets represent the heritage of past generations and are an integral part of a society's cultural identity. Their destruction can lead to the eradication of

knowledge, traditions and identity. In many conflicts, cultural assets have been and continue to be deliberately destroyed in order to exacerbate hostilities and erase identities. This underlines the need to consider CPP as an integral part of international operations and missions.

For CPP to be properly applied in the respective operations and missions, it is regulated by various international agreements.

The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict is the most important instrument of international law in this field. It stipulates that cultural property must be protected and must not be misused as military target. The Second Protocol of 1999, in turn, strengthens protection and imposes explicit sanctions in case of violations, in particular to prevent looting. UN Resolutions 2199 (2015) and 2347 (2017) deal with combating the illicit trafficking in cultural property, combating the financing of terrorist groups through the trade in stolen cultural property, and the responsibility of international actors. The UNESCO Convention of 1970 regulates the illicit trade in cultural property. In all of these regulations, the military plays a role that should not be underestimated.

The EU[1], NATO[2] and the UN[3] have each developed their own guidelines/manuals on CPP/Cultural Heritage (CH) in military operations and missions. The "protection of cultural property in crisis situations" is taken into account in strategic documents such as the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). In NATO, the implementation of CPP can be seen as part of civil-military cooperation (CIMIC). In the UN, on the other hand, the protection of CH is to be seen as part of peace missions (e.g. UNIFIL). These examples demonstrate that not every operation or mission has the same approach and has different mandates to implement.

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[1]   *Military Advice on the issues paper on the Preservation and Protection of Cultural Heritage in CSDP Missions and Operations*, in Council of the European Union, 14560/17, 20. November 2017. See reference documents: *Concept on Cultural heritage in conflicts and crises. A component for peace and security in European Union's external action*, in Council of the European Union, 9962/21, 18. June 2021 and *Council Conclusions on EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in conflicts and crises*, in Council of the European Union, 9837/21, 21 June 2021.

[2]   *Bi-Strategic Command Directive on CPP – Implementing Cultural Property Protection in NATO Operations and Missions*, SH/PD/J9/CL/SG/19-001345/1, 0173/TSC PFX 0110/TT-0502/Ser: NU0040, 1. April 2019.

[3]   *Protection of Cultural Property, Military Manual*, in United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2016.

Despite existing requirements under international law, there are numerous challenges regarding the implementation of CPP. First, there is a lack of prioritization. In military planning and operations, CPP is often treated as a secondary priority, the focus being primarily on strategic and humanitarian objectives. The lack of expertise also makes it difficult to deal with this topic professionally during operations and missions. Second, there is a lack of specialists who could implement CPP on the ground. The integration of archaeologists, historians and CH experts into military structures would be necessary. It is no coincidence that the Austrian Armed Forces have trained CPP officers for decades.

Sanctioning crimes against cultural property in the areas of operation and missions is difficult, as it is often unclear who should be held responsible. Nevertheless, sanctioning is not a primary task of the deployed military forces, but of the International Criminal Court (ICC) or the international organizations responsible for dealing with CPP. However, the military can identify crimes and report them immediately. The criminal prosecution of the destruction of cultural property must be significantly tightened and consistently punished to deal with such cases, but implementation remains a challenge.

The integration of CPP into international operations and missions in EU, NATO and UN is not only a moral obligation, but a strategic necessity. Protecting cultural identities contributes to reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction and should be seen as a long-term peace-building measure. The preservation of cultural assets can help to strengthen the trust of the local population in international actors, including the deployed international armed forces, who increasingly recognize CPP as part of force protection.

CPP is repeatedly linked to sources of funding for terrorism. Illegal antiquities dealers use the black market to finance terrorism and organized crime. These sources of income can dry up through consistent protection measures, in a holistic civil and military approach, depending on the mandate.

Compliance with and enforcement of CPP regulations from the perspective of international law strengthens the credibility of international organizations and underlines their commitment to peace and human rights.

In order to integrate CPP effectively and sensibly into international military operations and missions, clear guidelines, planning specifications and standards must be established in EU, NATO and UN operations and missions. CPP must be seen as an integral part of military operations and missions planning. Training in CPP must be mandatory in military training centres (at least in the higher ones) and civilian forces should be adequately trained in CPP.

Cooperation with civil society actors/experts/specialists (UNESCO, Blue Shield, etc.) is paramount in the context of civil-military interaction. The integration of historians, archaeologists and CH protection organizations (NGOs) is pivotal. Furthermore, CPP must deal with the latest technological processes both in military training and in operations. These include artificial intelligence, blockchain (tracking and documentation of cultural assets), digital catalogues, state-of-the-art satellite monitoring systems, etc.

Conclusion

Experience from past conflicts shows that CPP and CH must become an integral part of stabilization missions and, if the security situation in Europe does not improve, of territorial defence! Stronger institutional anchoring and consistent implementation of protective measures are key in order to preserve cultural heritage for future generations. CPP in armed conflicts remains a crucial task for EU, NATO and UN-led operations and missions. In addition to moral, ethical and legal obligations, there are strategic benefits, particularly for peacekeeping and the combat of the illicit trafficking as well as for the destruction of cultural property. Despite existing challenges, there are numerous opportunities to improve protective measures. The consistent implementation of CPP in international operations and missions is therefore not only significant, but indispensable for a sustainable security and peace policy. It is vital that CPP awareness is created within the military, but also in other areas of civil society.

Cultural Heritage Crime in Wartimes and Beyond – EUAM Ukraine Mission, May 2023

Manfred Pinnegger

Cultural heritage shapes the collective identities of communities and nations. It is complex, symbolically significant, emotionally charged, and vulnerable to political manipulation. It can be both a source of conflict and a force for peace, reconciliation, and development. Attacks on cultural heritage in conflicts often serve as symbolic violence to foster division and hatred. However, cultural heritage can also contribute to resilience, sustainable recovery, and lasting peace by helping to heal the scars of war.

The EU's strategic approach to cultural heritage in conflicts extends beyond protecting historical artifacts; it is vital for peace, security, resilience, and development. The EU Concept on Cultural Heritage in Conflicts and Crises and the 2021 Council Conclusions provide a political and operational framework, recognizing the role of cultural heritage in promoting peace, democracy, and sustainable development. The EU considers cultural heritage across all conflict phases, from prevention to crisis response, stabilization, peacebuilding, and recovery. It supports international legal frameworks and cooperates with international and regional organizations as well as civil society.

International Humanitarian Law, Cultural Heritage Protection Law treaties, and human rights laws affirm that destruction and looting of cultural heritage in armed conflicts constitute severe violations. The multiplicity of legal sources may lead to differing interpretations, but they serve as a foundation for seeking justice for war crimes, including "crimes against cultural heritage." The International Criminal Court's 2016 conviction of Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi for attacks against religious and historical buildings in Timbuktu, Mali, under Article 8 (2)(e)(IV) of the Rome Statute, set an important precedent. Given the central role of cultural heritage in social and political life, international law protects it holistically as part of world heritage. Investigating such crimes during conflicts is crucial for gathering evidence necessary for prosecution, restitution, and broader compensation for irretrievably lost heritage.

The fight against cultural heritage trafficking requires global law enforcement cooperation, integrating border security, museums, and anti-organized crime efforts. The OSCE's Heritage Crime Task Force, which includes police, border guards, financial and forensic investigators, museums, academia, and cultural ministries, coordinates efforts in Europe and North America. It assists countries in investigating heritage crimes and, since 2022, has actively helped Ukraine combat looting and trafficking of its cultural heritage. Protecting Ukraine's cultural heritage and prosecuting crimes against it is integral to Ukraine's civil security sector reform and EUAM Ukraine's mandate.

In March 2022, one month after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, EUAM Ukraine's National State Security Unit (NSSU) received reports from Ukrainian partners about war crimes against cultural heritage committed by Russian forces in occupied Ukrainian territories. Increasing media coverage and reports of deliberate attacks on Ukrainian cultural property led EUAM Ukraine to address the issue. NSSU launched a project to organize an international conference on war crimes against Ukraine's cultural heritage.

With support from the European External Action Service (EEAS), EUAM Ukraine organized the two-day conference "Cultural Heritage Crime in Wartime and Beyond" in Lviv on May 18-19, 2023. The conference convened international and Ukrainian experts from security and judicial authorities, cultural property protection institutions, and cultural institutions to develop strategies for effective cultural property protection. It aimed to provide recommendations to Ukrainian policymakers and authorities responsible for security, justice, and culture.

The event brought together international experts of cultural heritage protection, Ukrainian and EU authorities, law enforcement, judicial agencies, museums, and cultural institutions. Discussions focused on cooperation models for mitigating the damage to Ukrainian cultural heritage caused by Russian aggression and investigating related crimes. EUAM Ukraine's NSSU used this opportunity to emphasize the importance of combatting cultural heritage crimes to senior Ukrainian law enforcement and judicial officials. The conference also served as a starting point for future joint projects by EUAM to enhance Ukraine's cultural heritage protection through advisory support, inter-agency coordination, and information exchange. Based on the

conference outcomes, EUAM Ukraine will draft recommendations to facilitate collaboration between Ukrainian and European experts and agencies.

Effective international cooperation is crucial for investigating and prosecuting cultural heritage crimes. Eurojust, the EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, plays a significant role in addressing cross-border crimes, including cultural property crimes. Eurojust's experience includes assisting in recovering seventeen stolen masterpieces from the Museum of Castelvecchio in Verona, Italy, in 2015. These artworks, worth an estimated €17 million, included pieces by Rubens, Tintoretto, Mantegna, and Pisanello. Eurojust facilitated international legal cooperation, coordinated contacts within and beyond the EU, and supported the execution of mutual legal assistance requests.

Mag. Anita Gach, head of Austria's Art Crime Unit in the Criminal Intelligence Service, highlighted frequent cases of art theft and the importance of monitoring auction houses, art markets, flea markets, and online platforms to recover stolen artworks. National databases and the Interpol's works of art database are essential tools. As many art crime cases have international dimensions, international cooperation is crucial for combating cultural property crimes.

Since Russia's invasion in February 2022, ICOM (International Council of Museums) and its National Committees have been supporting Ukrainian museum professionals by providing material aid, financial assistance, and employment opportunities. ICOM has facilitated coordination between stakeholders and partners to assess needs and provide targeted support. Museums and professionals worldwide have donated funds, equipment, and provided employment opportunities for Ukrainian colleagues displaced by the war. Additionally, ICOM has supported the NEMO initiative to monitor support activities for Ukrainian museums.

Given the vulnerability of cultural heritage during armed conflict, ICOM published the Emergency Red List of Objects at Risk for Ukraine, developed in collaboration with Ukrainian experts. This list identifies cultural objects most at risk of illicit trafficking and serves as a long-term tool against illegal trade in Ukrainian cultural artifacts.

At the Lviv Conference, Michael Delacruz, a keynote speaker from Blue Shield International (BSI), presented findings from BSI's assessment missions across Ukraine from November 2022 to January 2023. BSI's field-work, including consultations with Ukrainian cultural heritage stakeholders and military personnel, identified challenges in enforcing the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in Armed Conflict.

To address difficulties in identifying violations of the 1954 Hague Convention amid active conflicts, BSI collaborated with the Smithsonian Cultural Research Initiative (SCRI) and the Cultural Heritage Monitoring Laboratory (CHML) to conduct satellite imagery analysis. Their report of 30 June 2022 on the Conflict Observatory portal identified five cultural sites damaged or destroyed with no military targets nearby. Four of these cases showed clear signs of deliberate targeting.

BSI also conducted field visits in Kyiv, Odesa, Chernihiv, Kherson, Kharkiv, and Donetsk regions to evaluate Ukrainian efforts in documenting cultural heritage crimes. This included consultations with museums, NGOs, military personnel, and cultural institutions.

The Lviv Conference produced three key recommendations for the future protection of Ukraine's cultural heritage:

1. Establishing a national interdepartmental expert group with representatives from security, judicial, and cultural heritage protection authorities as a priority.

2. Implementing specialized security and judicial units to combat organized cultural property crime and related war crimes against Ukraine's cultural identity.

3. Integrating organized international cultural property crime into police academy training programs in Ukraine.

For further details see:

https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/news/lviv-hosts-international-conference-on-crimes-against-cultural-heritage/

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/24/crimes-against-history-mapping-the-destruction-of-ukraines-culture

Is the 1954 Hague Convention outdated in the 21st Century? Recent Developments in Cultural Property Protection

Summary of the panel discussion of 11 November 2024

Despite numerous initiatives in the field of Cultural Property Protection, culturally meaningful goods continue to be deliberately destroyed or looted during armed conflicts. Targeted attacks on cultural assets serve as a strategy in wars and beyond. Due to reasons such as the complexity of current armed conflicts, the increasing range of military tasks, a lack of awareness, resources or capabilities, the 1954 Hague Convention is often not fully implemented by states and their armed forces.

In this context, the panellists discussed what measures, guidelines and policies are to be taken on a strategic/policy level to enhance Cultural Property Protection.

Panellists

- *Anna Sidorenko*, Head of Cultural Heritage Protection Treaties Unit, UNESCO Secretariat of the 1954 Hague Convention

- *Cameron Walter*, Head of Heritage Crime Task Force and Customs Adviser, OSCE

- *Lieutenant Colonel Alfio Gullotta*, Policy Officer for Cultural Heritage at the European External Action Service (EEAS)

- *Dominik Horn,* Former Member of NATO Human Security

- *Astrid Reisinger Coracini*, International Law Expert, Lecturer at the Department of International Law and International Relations at the University of Vienna

Moderator

- *Brigadier General Peter Harold*, President of the Austrian Society for Cultural Property Protection and Advisor to the Chief of Defence Staff of the Austrian Armed Forces

Main statements

Anna Sidorenko outlined that, from a legal perspective, the implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention and its Protocols is crucial. There are clear procedures to conduct ad hoc monitoring, assessment of state of protection, including by satellite, and to evaluate requests for the inscription of cultural properties on the UNESCO International List of Cultural Property under Enhanced Protection, including provisional inscriptions on an emergency basis. UNESCO assists States Parties in the identification of the boundaries of the properties proposed for inscription, which is essential when a Ministry of Defence is signing a declaration for non-military use (this declaration confirms that within the inscribed boundaries there will be no military action or presence, except for clearly marked guardians). This daily cooperation between national civilian and military authorities under the 1954 Hague Convention ensures proper implementation and protection.

She mentioned that States Parties may also address requests for international assistance under the Fund of the 1999 Second Protocol, to support technical assistance and various activities in times of peace, conflict and post-conflict. In addition, UNESCO established its Heritage Emergency Fund for all forms of emergencies, which is well supported by donors and States Parties.

Sidorenko further referred to the outcomes of the UNESCO Conference in The Hague, held in May 2024, which launched the global celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the 1954 Hague Convention. She recalled the establishment of the UNESCO Civil-Military Alliance for the Protection of Cultural Property, which serves as a crucial point for cooperation between all involved stakeholders. Informal partnerships are already in place, involving policy exchanges and the operationalisation of treaties.

According to Sidorenko, the conference in May also highlighted the importance of developing and promoting tools, including new technologies to make better use of these resources. The conference also discussed the possible establishment of a working group, involving young professionals from military and civilian backgrounds to explore the principles of artificial intelligence. Together with partners, such as the United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT), a part of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), UNESCO is actively involved in the monitoring of cultural property during wartime, using remote sensing satellite technology.

In the context of strengthened implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention in missions and armed forces, Sidorenko mentioned that UNESCO is implementing military training programmes through its global network of field offices, in coordination with local governments and national authorities. This initiative aims to expand the implementation of the Convention through comprehensive military training.

Referring to the training of peacekeepers, she explained that this is a primary objective regarding the definition of training models. A large-scale project is being launched to develop a Massive Online Training Course (MOOC), which will provide access to basic and in-depth knowledge for peacekeepers, beyond an already existing online course developed with the Peace Operations Training Institute (USA). This training emphasises an under-standing of individual responsibility, as decisions made by commanders and soldiers can have significant consequences. The training models include descriptions of necessary processes for peacekeepers and military personnel during operations.

As to non-State actors, Sidorenko noted that efforts should be increased to involve local communities in the safeguarding of their own cultural heritage. The UNESCO Heritage for Peace Thematic Programme, implemented in synergy between all UNESCO Conventions in the field of Culture, creates a platform for cross-cutting linking the 1954 and 2003 Conventions[1]. This community-based approach is crucial for the future to prevent damage or destruction of cultural properties.

Sidorenko further stated that it is important to note that The Hague Convention does not only cover immovable heritage, but also movable, such as archives, libraries, and manuscripts - the world's memory. An example from Lebanon illustrates this, where a site already on UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme was also inscribed on the International List of Cultural Property under Enhanced Protection. This shows that, even with limited resources, much can be achieved with determination.

Astrid Reisinger Coracini emphasised that the legal framework of the 1954 Hague Convention clearly binds all parties, but the rules protecting cultural property equally apply to non-state actors. The challenge is to establish a structure ensuring that these rules are applied by all actors. This concerns formal legislative and administrative implementation as well as training and

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[1] Conventions for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

awareness building among stakeholders. While formal implementation on the national level has a mixed record among parties, actual implementation in day-to-day professional practice is even more limited and inconsistent. There is certainly room for improvement; however, efforts should also be made to broadly disseminate knowledge to the general public, even before conflicts arise. Such pre-existing knowledge would be an advantage in the event of an armed conflict, in particular concerning newly recruited soldiers or persons who otherwise take up arms. Various NGOs, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Geneva Call, engage directly with non-state actors to discuss rules applicable in non-international armed conflicts and to encourage declarations of compliance regarding certain standards.

International law relies on the willingness of states and non-state actors to comply. If they refuse, the enforcement mechanisms are limited, often leaving violations to be punished under international criminal law as a last resort. While the existing legal framework is sufficient, criminal law always comes after the fact in the face of violations and destruction. With a view to deterrence, active dissemination of individual obligations under international law and preparedness to prosecute crimes in national or international courts are therefore essential.

Reisinger Coracini further noted that the strength of some conventions lies in their rudimentary provisions, which can be adapted and updated more easily through guidelines and policies than new international agreements. The 1954 Convention and its Protocols are considered solid and operational frameworks. However, implementation remains the main challenge, since not all states have well-developed peacetime programmes. Coordination is also a major issue, as many organisations at the national, regional and international levels, including NGOs, are involved in activities on the ground. UNESCO and various secretariats are in the process of harmonising guidelines and practices. These reforms, as well as monitoring processes, often build upon the most advanced mechanisms and lead to a more comprehensive understanding and practice of international heritage protection across conventions.

In his role as EU representative **Alfio Gullotta** noted that the European Union's policy on cultural heritage protection extends beyond its borders, supporting national authorities in conflict and crisis situations, such as in Ukraine. Efforts are also being made within the EU to combat the trafficking

of cultural property. Since 2022, a specific action plan has been in place, along with dedicated research funds, including Horizon funds, which support projects aimed at protecting cultural heritage. Some of these projects use Artificial Intelligence to identify trafficked objects and potential threats.

He further mentioned that the European Union, through the Commission and the External Action Service, supports peer-to-peer cooperation with third countries through programmes, such as Twinning and Taiex, which can be used in the field of cultural property protection. Although the EU can only support local authorities, it provides expertise and funding if a request comes in from a country. Despite limited funds, the process is straight-forward in case local authorities request assistance from an EU member state.

Speaking from his personal experience, Gullotta stressed the significance of discussing challenges regarding the implementation of cultural property protection in armed forces. When he had started working on cultural heritage protection, there had been almost no awareness of the issues, but this had changed. Training is widely available, included in many training curricula and continuously developed; but we have to be aware that excessive regulation can be counterproductive, existing regulations should be adapted to realities on the ground and the necessary training continuously provided. On the ground, simple rules, incentives and consequences for non-compliance are required, and proper training and clear guidelines can lead to effective results. Significant progress has been made in implementing the 1954 Hague Convention over the past 50 years. There is now a higher level of awareness as to the importance of the issue. Consistency in the implementation of existing measures is essential for continued improvement.

Dominik Horn, formerly assigned to NATO, explained that NATO remains cautious about conducting projects outside the Alliance. The organisation has significantly shifted its focus towards deterrence and defence, including issues, such as cultural property protection, the protection of civilians, combating human trafficking, and addressing conflict-related sexual violence. Initially, cultural property protection projects have been earmarked for stabilisation missions, but this focus had now shifted. NATO also needs to keep pace with developments in artificial intelligence and hybrid warfare. Cooperation with other organisations such as the European Union and the United Nations are crucial. NATO has a mix of member states, some more progressive, others more reluctant, resulting in a balancing act. Developing and promoting the Action Plan from 2019 to the present

has been a sensitive issue, especially when compared to cultural property protection in conflict. It is essential to convince both member states and partners worldwide of the importance of these efforts.

Regarding new binding agreements, Horn stated that an overload of guidelines can be restrictive. The key is to be pragmatic and clearly define roles and responsibilities in each phase. This is particularly complex in the current situation in Ukraine, where NATO and the European Union are actively involved, and bilateral efforts are being made. The focus should be on the primary tasks of soldiers under the EU, NATO, UN, and probably OSCE umbrellas. Soldiers have to respect the protection of cultural property based on the 1954 Hague Convention and national legislation. On site, there should be a lead agency to guide actions, for instance, a civilian organisation in stabilisation missions. The military could provide expertise, material and support, but the main task should be clear.

Horn further explained that military cooperation often takes place bilaterally rather than through NATO itself. The current goal is to train soldiers within the Alliance in cultural property protection and other topics pertaining to human security. It depends on the mission/operation whether cultural property protection is indeed necessary. The challenges vary from one continent to the other.

Finally, he mentioned to consider one crucial aspect: in situations where wars are going on, like in Ukraine or the Middle East, we may have the priority to protect the people, and then, the cultural site comes next.

Representing the OSCE perspective, **Cameron Walter** explained that to understand all aspects of threat to human security, a variety of new and emerging threats need to be considered alongside traditional cross-border risks and threat vectors. This includes Artificial Intelligence, cyber threats, cultural property trafficking and protection and linkages to terrorism and organised crime. Under the auspices of UN Chapter VI, the OSCE (the world's largest regional security organisation) has 57 participating states, including Canada, the United States, all of Europe, Türkiye, former Soviet republics, and Mongolia. Given the complexity of cross-border threats in a changing world, the OSCE takes a comprehensive approach to combating trafficking of cultural property by involving various stakeholders, such as border management, customs, police, forensic and financial investigators, military, museums, academia, and state prosecutors. This cross-agency and cross-border collaboration, together with the use of technology, aims at

providing tangible solutions for forces on the frontlines, from scenario-based regional operations training, to technology deployment, to serving as a rapid response mechanism operating in near real-time. This comprehensive approach has proven effective in addressing both traditional and non-traditional threats and is expected to be the strategy for the future.

Walter further stated that from the perspective of law enforcement, the OSCE focuses on training police and border guards to deal with the threats of trafficking in cultural property and exercising the full extent of their investigative powers in concert with global stakeholders and tools. While they might easily recognise the immediate threat of weapons or drugs, they might not understand how trafficking in cultural property can contribute to conflicts, organised crime and the financing of terrorism. By highlighting the security implications, the OSCE helps these services to recognise the importance of the issue. Once awareness has been raised, further programmes can be developed in cooperation with academia, museums, and ministries of culture. This collaborative approach ensures that all relevant parties at the national level understand the importance of cultural property protection and work together to address it effectively and at a relatively low cost.

With reference to new guidelines, Walter mentioned that building trust at a global operational level – where communication can happen in real time – makes teams more agile. While legal agreements are necessary for law enforcement and border management agencies, even greater results can be realised by fostering frontline partnerships at the regional, national, and international levels. Customs and border officials should be able to act quickly and without excessive bureaucracy. Over the past seven years, awareness has increased exponentially, and the Task Force has been expanded significantly, highlighting the importance of real-time communication and the empowerment of forces on the frontlines.

Walter noted that the 1954 Hague Convention remains relevant, but that a strategic, cross-agency approach is required by States. Cooperation between law enforcement, the military, and prosecutors, who use networks established in peacetime, ensures effective responses when conflicts arise.

Final remarks, based on the concluding words of Peter Harold

- Raise awareness
- Define common goals
- Establish partnerships & networks
- Include a community-based approach
- Use modern tools to support the documentation of cultural property and its protection
- 'Keep it simple' and apply measures within the given framework(s)
- Take concrete and feasible measures to ensure implementation on the ground, accompanied by the promotion of the mindset required

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Chapter III
Cultural Property Protection and the Military

Cultural Property Protection: Benefits for Military Personnel

Laurie W. Rush

Introduction

Consideration of Cultural Property Protection (CPP) from the perspective of potential benefit to military personnel offers a new perspective for analysis of the topic. Traditional approaches focus on the relationship of CPP to potential mission success, but soldiers, sailors and airmen benefit at the individual level from more comprehensive preparation for deployment, information about local values and behaviors, traditional landscapes and infrastructure, more nuanced and detailed intelligence information, an ability to adjust operations for local celebrations ceremonies and holidays, and an improved ability to anticipate adversarial behavior. The latter offers options for potentially countering these behaviors prior to escalation of conflict into kinetic forms.[1] When we think of CPP and benefits for individual military personnel, perhaps the ultimate benefit would be avoidance of violent conflict altogether.

Anticipation of adversarial behavior

Current forms of information operations among western military organizations including NATO members and allies appear to be falling behind our adversaries when it comes to the use of monuments and historical narratives, often fictitious, to destabilize vulnerable communities and populations in regions of global interest. Beginning with the Bamiyan Buddhas, continuing with ISIS performance destruction across northern Iraq and Syria, and on through the Russian invasion of Ukraine, failed western efforts to understand the relationship between targeting monuments and adversarial information operations as a component of larger strategic goals creates serious cause for concern. Bamiyan was one of the first cases of a non-state actor purposefully destroying an iconic monument to gain global attention. Without a doubt, the tactic worked. However, the long-term strategic goal

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[1]   Laurie RUSH, "CPP in the 21st Century: The Privilege of Working with the Most Deployed Division". In Timothy CLACK and Mark DUNKLEY, *Cultural Heritage in Modern Conflict: Past, Propaganda, and Parade*, Oxford, 2022.

of destruction of the Buddhas was more nuanced. Evidence to this effect is found when details of the destructive methods emerge. If simple destruction had been the goal, the Taliban could easily have plied the sculptures with explosives and artillery until collapse was achieved. Simple observation fails to take into account the softness of the stone hillside that had enabled carving of the Buddhas in the first place. Simple destruction would have resulted in collapse of the entire hillside. That result would have undermined the long-term goal of leaving the empty niches in place as a reminder and a way to demoralize the Hazara people living in the Bamiyan Valley. Further research into the details of the destruction reveals that the Taliban had hired engineers to assist them with the calculations necessary to try to ensure that destruction would be limited to the Buddha sculptures, with the niches and hillside remaining intact.[2] Ironically, when UNESCO stabilized one of the collapsing niches, they completed the Taliban's goal.

Palmyra offers another example where a non-state actor, ISIS, attempted to use destruction of monuments to influence military decision making on the part of the coalition that was in the process of forming to liberate territory under the so-called caliphate's control. In the summer of 2015, the coalition was in the process of training militia and government soldiers to ensure they could handle their weapons and would be prepared to be victorious when the time was right for removing ISIS from northern Iraq and Syria.[3] It was in ISIS' best interest to try to induce the coalition to move up their timetable, encouraging invasion before coalition personnel were fully organized, trained, and ready. Beginning in August 2015, ISIS started holding Palmyra hostage, blowing up one monument at a time, with lots of suspense and publicity leading up to each demolition. The chronology of destruction included the Temple of Baalshamin on August 23rd, the Temple of Bel on August 30th, three tower tombs on September 4th, and the Monumental Arch one month later. The timing illustrates that the decision to destroy those monuments had nothing to do with ideology but rather was an attempt to sway European public opinion to send an expeditionary force to liberate the ancient city. At a meeting at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in late September, a series of high-ranking European officers expressed frustration at the pressure they were receiving from citizens who

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[2] Llewelyn MORGAN, *The Buddhas of Bamiyan*, Boston 2012.
[3] The author was a participant observer with 10th Mountain Division as those soldiers prepared for a coalition training deployment.

wanted them to take action immediately.[4] A complicating factor included European relationships with the site including French contributions to reconstruction and its role as an important grand tour destination.[5] It is possible that one reason the ISIS Palmyra information operation failed was apathy on the part of the American public, and it is important to note than when the coalition was ready two years later, they were victorious and reclaimed the territory in question.

After Palmyra

There were glimmers of hope after Palmyra. In the US, the Smithsonian partnered with the US Defense Intelligence Agency to plan the invasion of Raqqa, Syria, with an emphasis on minimizing damage to the ancient city wall and protection of the Baghdad Gate, both iconic features for the citizens and community.[6] In addition, LTG Erik Peterson and LTG Walter Piatt, both serving in senior positions at the Pentagon, were pro-active supporters for the meaningful implementation of cultural property protection across the US Army. LTG Peterson provided a keynote speech at a seminal cultural property conference hosted by the Cornell University Program in Historic Preservation entitled, Cultural Property Protection in the 21st Century, [7] and LTG Piatt made CPP education a priority for Division Leadership during his tenure as Commanding General of the 10th Mountain Division.[8]

From 2014 until the present, NATO has been addressing issues related to cultural property protection; including the topic as an element of NATO Human Security Policy[9]. NATO also funded a series of Advanced Research Workshops in 2014, which generated a detailed report with recommendations for the meaningful implementation of a cultural property protection

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4 The author was present at this meeting.
5 Robert OUSTERHOUT personal communication, Philadelphia 2016.
6 Katharyn HANSON 2022 "Raqqa, Syria in the Summer of 2017: a Cultural Site and US -Led Coalition Airstrikes," *Heritage and Society,* Volume 15, Issue 2, pp 199-224.
7 Erik PETERSON, 2022 "A Vision for Cultural Property Protection," Journal of Preservation Education and Research, Volume 14, Special Issue January 2022, pp 10-22.
8 Laurie RUSH 2017 MG Walter Piatt, Personal Communication at LeRay Mansion upon taking command of the Division.
9 Allied Command Transformation 2023
https://www.act.nato.int/article/human-security-in-nato/

program that could be applied during all phases of military operations[10] along with a best practices handbook.[11] NATO Headquarters hosted a meeting to discuss CPP in February of 2023, but unfortunately there were no meaningful outcomes of these efforts. The NATO Centre of Excellence for Stability Policing has also hosted meetings focusing on the topic, but substantive integration of CPP into NATO operations has yet to be achieved.

Currently the US Army and NATO has shifted focus to near peer conflict, and it is not unusual to hear the opinion that CPP plays an important role in stabilization and nation building missions but not in peer-to-peer conflict. However, Major Hannah Guarendi He, US Army, offers a historical analysis that illustrates how the critical decision to spare the Imperial Palace in Tokyo and the temples of Kyoto not only influenced the Emperor of Japan's decision to surrender but also contributed to stabilization during occupation and beyond.[12]

Russia in the 2020s

Ten years have passed since ISIS attempted to teach the West to pay close attention to adversarial use of monuments as a component of hybrid warfare. Unfortunately, this factor has largely been minimized and ignored leaving western militaries at a tremendous disadvantage during Phase 0. In the United States, US Army Reserve recruiting of "monuments officers" and the associated media attention served as a substitute for development of meaningful CPP initiatives associated with information operations and mission planning. In contrast, Russia has completely incorporated questions of history, monuments and cultural property into their approach to warfare at the very highest levels. For example, when Putin's war cabinet is analyzed[13],

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10   Frederik ROSEN 2017 *NATO and Cultural Property: Embracing New Challenges in an Era of Identity Wars*, The Nordic Center for Cultural Property Protection, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a8ece4b12abd9a4deae2dad/t/5ab427d61ae6cf2ed3768614/1521756135958/NATO+SPS+CPP+OutcomeReport.pdf

11   Laurie RUSH 2017 Cultural Property Protection as a Force Multiplier: Implementation for all Phases of a Military Operation, The Nordic Center for Cultural Property Protection, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a8ece4b12abd9a4deae2dad/t/5ab4aebf88251b2e6b0e5af7/1521790693382/NATOSPSCPP_Manual.pdf

12   Major Hannah Guarendi HE 2023 "In the Hope for Peace; How Protecting Cultural Property during War is Preparing for Peace, Army Lawyer, Issue 3, pp. 49-61.

13   Dan SHULTZ, PhD, Canadian Navy, CHX Briefing.

you find the Minister of Defence, Sergei Shoigu, who introduced legislation criminalizing "destruction, damage, or desecration" of Soviet military memorials in foreign states, and Sergei Naryshkin, the Director of Russian Intelligence who also serves as the President of the Russian Histori-cal Society. These leaders are implementing their ideas concerning emphasis on culture and history, not just in Ukraine, but in their attempts to destabilize their neighbors throughout the region and at very local levels. Analysis of Russian behavior in and around the Norwegian town of Kirkenes offers a case in point.[14]

The Russians use historical narratives to rationalize their presence in critical locations. In the case of Kirkenes, they turn to the story of St. Tryphan, a Russian bandit with a religious conversion experience who converted Sami people to Christianity and built chapels throughout the border region. The Russians are now claiming these places of worship as potential Russian territory. A component of this behavior also includes reconstruction of crosses left behind by the nomadic Pomor fishermen, who originated in Russia. After the crosses are revitalized, Russians claim the surrounding neighborhood as defensible Orthodox territory.

Another example of successful mobilization of historical narratives in Kirkenes is resurrection of memories of community members who worked with the Soviets as partisans against the Germans during World War II. As Norway joined NATO and pivoted toward the west, these heroes were discriminated against and denied jobs. The Russians have been reminding these individuals and their families of this treatment while erecting memorials, statues, and organizing commemorative events. In October 2023, a Russian delegation exacerbated the tension by usurping community recognition of these individuals with an oversized wreath and rhetoric. Recordings of the conflict at the memorial are now globally available on the High North News.[15] According to Taub[16] the Russians carefully evaluate their information successes and failures as they unfold in remote places for improved implementation in future locations like the Baltic States.

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[14] Ben TAUB 2024 "Russia's Espionage War in the Arctic," *The New Yorker,* Sept. 9.

[15] Arne HOLM 2023 "High North Tour: Norwegian Russian Battle of Wreaths During the Commemoration of Finnmark Liberation," *High North News*, https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/norwegian-russian-battle-wreaths-during-commemoration-finnmarks-liberation.

[16] TAUB 2024 "Russia's Espionage War in the Arctic," *The New Yorker,* Sept. 9.

Necessary action and response

Our Canadian allies have taken the initiative when it comes to this topic, with careful analysis and guidance provided by Archaeologist and Historian Dan Shultz. Dr. Shultz completed a fellowship at NATO Defense College Rome producing thoughtful guidance on future NATO counter measures in his publication "Who Controls the Past Controls the Future; How Russia Uses History for Cognitive Warfare."[17] When people like the citizens of Kirkenes understand the motives and long-term goals behind what on the surface appear to be relatively innocent monument recognition or awards ceremonies, they will be better prepared to resist or at least avoid becoming inadvertent participants in future adversarial actions. The term Cognitive Temporal Warfare, CTW refers to this form of Phase 0 warfare where the adversary rewrites historical narratives to rationalize multiple forms of multi-spectral information and cyber operations to disrupt communities, influence opinions, and interfere in democratic elections, with potential goals of occupying their neighbors and destruction of nations they view as enemies.

It is also critical to remember that Russia and China both view models of successful democracies as a threat to their authoritarian regimes which is why both nations are targeting democratic states nearby and abroad. In CTW, kinetic action is preceded by rhetoric, which when analyzed properly is of enormous intelligence value. For example, CTW uses anniversaries of momentous events and iconic locations to focus adversarial activity. Once these patterns are understood, they can serve as predictive elements for future adversarial action, offering opportunities to plan effective counter offensives. CTW is a nuanced and subtle approach requiring first, recognition. Once recognized, NATO and its allies need to protect themselves while developing effective information operations with levels of investment comparable to planning and preparation for more traditional forms of warfare.

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[17] Dan SHULTZ 2023 "Who Controls the Past Controls the Future," *NATO Outlook War Series No. 4* December. file:///Users/laurierush/Downloads/Outlook-04_23.pdf also note that Shultz recognizes that the title of his article is a quote from George Orwell.

In summary, benefits to the soldier

In the best-case scenario, careful analysis of adversarial behavior during Phase 0, a sophisticated understanding of CTW and informed counter operations could theoretically prevent the tension from escalating into violent conflict. Prevention of the need to deploy in the first place is of immeasurable benefit to the soldier.

This article is written in the personal capacity of the author and does not reflect the opinions of Fort Drum, the US Army or the US Department of Defense.

The Military Protection of Cultural Property in Conflict Zones – A Historical and Strategic Perspective in France

Tim Le Berre

The views expressed in this text are those of the author and do not represent any official position of the French Ministry of the Armed Forces, the French Army, or the French Foreign Legion.

The protection of cultural property during armed conflicts lies at the intersection of military ethics, international law, and civilizational identity. In France, where cultural property is deeply intertwined with national memory and public values, its safeguarding has evolved from an aesthetic concern into a strategic necessity. This paper explores the historical origins, institutional consolidation, and current challenges of France's military cultural property protection efforts. It traces the evolution of the French model from reactive wartime measures to proactive, doctrinally integrated strategies that influence both operational effectiveness and international credibility.

Part I – Historical foundations and the emergence of military cultural property protection

France's relationship with cultural property is deeply rooted in its political, legal, and philosophical history. As early as the French Revolution, the state defined cultural objects as public goods to be preserved for the benefit of the nation. The protection of cultural property was thus not only an aesthetic or scholarly concern but also a civic and moral duty. Revolutionary figures such as Abbé Grégoire condemned the destruction of religious and aristocratic monuments during the upheavals and coined the term "vandalism" to describe the cultural loss. This early awareness led to some of the first major legislative initiatives for the identification, preservation, and regulation of cultural property, laying the groundwork for a tradition of state-directed cultural stewardship that would evolve throughout the 19th and 20th century.

The establishment of the Commission for Historical Monuments (Commission des Monuments Historiques) in 1837 marked a pivotal institutional milestone. Tasked with inventorying and protecting France's architectural heritage, the Commission launched systematic state intervention in cultural preservation. Influential figures such as Prosper Mérimée and Viollet-le-Duc

played a central role in shaping a discourse that merged nationalism, Romanticism, and scientific rationalism. In the course of the 19th century, this institutional framework expanded, underpinned by legal developments that recognized cultural property not merely as a cultural asset but as a symbol of the French Republic. Monuments, manuscripts, and artifacts increasingly came to be viewed as national treasures that embodied the continuity of France's historical identity and civic values.

These achievements, developed in times of peace, were put to a severe test with the advent of industrialized warfare in the 20th century. The First World War (1914–1918) marked a traumatic rupture in Europe's relationship with its past. The widespread and often indiscriminate destruction caused by modern artillery and air strikes revealed the extreme vulnerability of cultural property. The shelling of Reims Cathedral in 1914 – a Gothic masterpiece and iconic symbol of French Christianity – provoked worldwide outrage and mobilized unprecedented efforts to protect endangered cultural assets. The symbolic power of such destruction made clear that cultural property was not merely collateral damage but a deliberate target of psychological warfare and cultural dominance.

France was one of the first nations to respond to this threat with an organized military-cultural initiative. In 1917, the Service for the Protection of Works of Art in War Zones (Service de Protection des Œuvres d'Art en Zone des Armées) was established. This unique institution mobilized artists, architects, archaeologists, and curators – many of whom were conscripted or volunteered for military service – and deployed them in operational zones. Their mission was twofold: to identify and safeguard threatened monuments and artworks and to evacuate movable cultural property to secure locations. While often improvised and dependent on the cooperation of local commanders, their very presence marked a significant innovation in incorporating cultural concerns into military operations.

The pioneering work of these units, though constrained by wartime conditions, set a precedent for future collaboration between the military and cultural institutions. Their reports, photographs, and field studies formed the foundation for post-war reconstruction and established cultural property protection as a legitimate and necessary component of military planning. Moreover, they instituted a model of interdisciplinary cooperation among soldiers, scholars, and civil servants – a feature that continues to characterize

French military cultural policy today.

The interwar period offered limited opportunities to institutionalize these lessons. However, with the outbreak of the Second World War, the threat to cultural property became even greater and ideologically charged. The Nazi regime plundered cultural property on an unprecedented scale, incorporating its destruction and appropriation into its strategy of domination. In response, the French state reactivated and expanded its protective measures. Mobile protection units were created within the military engineering corps, and regional initiatives were launched to safeguard collections and monuments. The preemptive evacuation of thousands of artworks – especially from the Louvre – was both a logistical and symbolic success, attesting to the value of cultural memory even in times of existential peril.

During the occupation, figures such as Rose Valland played heroic roles in documenting Nazi art looting and facilitating the post-war restitution of stolen works. Her meticulous records were vital to the recovery of many treasures and today symbolize cultural resistance. In parallel, the protection and repatriation of cultural property were coordinated by the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) program of the Allies, in which French officers also took part. These international collaborations underscored that cultural property protection had become a shared concern among democratic states – not merely a matter of national identity but a reflection of civilizational values.

After 1945, the widespread destruction of European cultural property prompted an international legal response. France played a leading role in drafting the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict – the first international treaty to explicitly define the military's responsibility for cultural property. This convention marked a turning point in global recognition that the protection of cultural property is inseparably linked to humanitarian and legal obligations during war.

From revolutionary ideals and improvised wartime initiatives to international leadership, France's historical development in the field of military cultural property protection demonstrates a continuous and evolving commitment. What began as a reactive response to wartime devastation has grown into a forward-looking doctrine that regards cultural property not only as a national

asset but also as a pillar of human dignity, resilience, and reconciliation.

Part II – Institutionalization and doctrinal integration

The aftermath of the Second World War left not only a devastated physical landscape but also a moral imperative to embed cultural property protection within national policies and international law. Although the 1954 Hague Convention provided an international legal framework, its effective implementation required the development of national institutions, structures, and doctrines. In France, the legacy of both World Wars fostered a heightened awareness of cultural property's vulnerability, giving rise to efforts to establish permanent military protection – not merely in reaction to past losses, but as a proactive duty of state responsibility.

The integration of this protective commitment into the French military system formed part of a broader trend toward the professionalization of the armed forces and their alignment with international norms. Cultural property protection increasingly came to be seen not only as a cultural task but as a strategic objective, especially in the context of international missions. During the 1970s and 1980s, French officers – particularly within the Ministry of Defence and Army Staff – began systematically analyzing the legal obligations and strategic potential of cultural property protection. These efforts led to the establishment of dedicated departments, the creation of operational manuals, and collaboration with civilian cultural institutions.

A key moment in this development was the growing involvement of French armed forces in overseas operations – in Lebanon, the Balkans, and Africa. These missions often took place in areas of high cultural significance, where historic sites and religious monuments were directly impacted by conflict. The encounter with cultural property as an operational factor compelled the French military to integrate standardized protection measures into its planning. These ranged from mapping significant sites and structures to deploying cultural property officers and developing procedures to avoid damage during troop movements.

This institutional anchoring was further reinforced by collaboration with international organizations such as UNESCO, the Blue Shield International, and the European Union. France actively positioned itself as a normative leader in the field of cultural property protection during armed conflicts. Its

efforts extended beyond legal commitments – such as ratifying the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention – to operational action, including the creation of expert teams and the training of commanders in cultural awareness. Notably, the development of military cultural property protection guidelines within the French Army has since become part of official operational doctrine.

Symbolically, these developments strengthened France's self-image as a guardian of universal values. The integration of cultural property protection into military doctrine drew on the long-standing tradition of the *mission civilisatrice* – now reinterpreted through the lenses of human rights, international law, and cultural diplomacy. This identity was cultivated through public communication, media coverage of military cultural property missions, and the visibility of cultural officers during ceremonies and educational initiatives.

By the end of the second decade of the 21st century, France had established one of the world's most comprehensive military systems for the protection of cultural property. This system combined trained personnel, specialized institutions, operational doctrines, legally compliant procedures, and international partnerships. It enabled the military to identify and mitigate cultural threats proactively, rather than merely reacting after the fact. At the same time, it laid the structural groundwork for sustainable cooperation between defense, cultural, and development actors in peace missions and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

The integration of cultural property protection into France's military doctrine thus represents not only an institutional achievement but also a conceptual shift. It reflects a broadened understanding of what constitutes ethically responsible military conduct in the 21st century – recognizing that legitimacy, narrative, and cultural identity are as vital as tactical superiority. The French model demonstrates that military professionalism and cultural sensitivity are not mutually exclusive – and that protecting the past can be a strategic asset for shaping peaceful futures.

Part III – Contemporary challenges and strategic relevance

In today's strategic landscape, the protection of cultural property by armed forces has acquired renewed urgency and complexity. The 21st century is defined by non-traditional conflicts: asymmetric warfare, hybrid operations, counterinsurgency, and the growing influence of non-state actors whose strategies often target symbolic elements of identity – including cultural and religious heritage. In this context, France's historically rooted and institutionally embedded efforts to safeguard cultural property must adapt to new threats such as ideologically motivated iconoclasm, the digital manipulation of cultural narratives, and the geopolitical instrumentalization of cultural memory.

One of the most pressing challenges lies in the deliberate destruction of cultural property as a weapon of war. Unlike the collateral damage of industrialized warfare in the 20th century, today's acts are often strategically planned demonstrations of symbolic violence aimed at erasing identity, history, and social cohesion. The destruction of the temples of Palmyra by the so-called Islamic State, the intentional demolition of mausoleums in Timbuktu, and the systematic looting of museums in Syria and Iraq are emblematic of this "war against memory." These attacks target heritage sites deliberately – they are not accidents, but strategic objectives. This reversal of conventional warfare logic demands a fundamental reorientation of military doctrines, training standards, and international cooperation. For France, this entails not only strengthening the presence of cultural property officers in operational theaters but also expanding the concept of security to include cultural dimensions.

France's experience during Operation Barkhane, launched in 2014 in the Sahel, illustrates this new paradigm. In Mali, French forces encountered a cultural landscape of immense historical value – particularly in Timbuktu, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The occupation of the city by Islamist groups in 2012 had already led to the destruction of mausoleums and the burning of precious manuscripts. Upon intervention, the French command deliberately incorporated cultural protection into its operational planning. Cultural property officers provided cultural situational assessments, briefed troops, identified vulnerable structures, and established reporting mechanisms for potential damage. Although secondary to combat priorities, these efforts significantly contributed to the legitimacy of the French presence and

helped build trust with local communities – a critical factor in any counter-insurgency strategy.

Considering cultural dimensions in operational planning has proven valuable not only for protecting cultural property but also for enhancing mission effectiveness. In contemporary conflicts, military success increasingly hinges on perceptions among affected populations: how do they assess the intentions, behavior, and credibility of intervening forces? In this regard, the respect or neglect of cultural property can exert a disproportionate influence on narratives and public opinion. Respect fosters trust and cooperation, while accidental damage can provoke rejection, protest, and reputational loss. Thus, cultural property protection serves as both a tactical and strategic multiplier with effects that extend far beyond physical preservation.

New challenges have also emerged in the digital domain. Cyberattacks on museum databases, the spread of falsified historical information, and the use of artificial intelligence to manipulate heritage imagery are now part of hybrid warfare. The battlefield today includes symbolic and informational arenas, where control over cultural narratives can be as decisive as control over territory. France is responding by enhancing military intelligence capabilities to detect such threats – for example, by monitoring digital disinformation campaigns aimed at delegitimizing international protection regimes.

Illicit trafficking in cultural objects poses another persistent problem, especially in fragile states and post-conflict societies. Looted artifacts are used not only for personal enrichment but also to finance terrorist networks. French forces – particularly in West Africa and the Middle East – have developed procedures for identifying, reporting, and securing cultural property during operations. Cultural property officers cooperate closely with customs authorities, Interpol, and international institutions. Improved training of soldiers in identifying such items and understanding their legal status is critical to closing the gap between discovery and protection.

The role of cultural property advisors within the French armed forces has expanded in recent years. Their presence in operational headquarters ensures that cultural considerations are integrated at every stage of a mission – from strategic planning and tactical implementation to post-conflict recovery. Their deployment to missions such as Operation LYNX in Estonia (2023), AIGLE in Romania (2023), and earlier in Lebanon and Mali, demonstrates

their dual function as advisors and operational actors. Their responsibilities include risk assessments, coordination with local authorities, and emergency intervention. Cultural property protection has thus become an integral part of military operational concepts.

Education also plays a central role in sustaining this commitment. Military academies such as Saint-Cyr have integrated modules on cultural property protection in armed conflict into their curricula. The 2022 course on legal frameworks and operational implementation exemplified an interdisciplinary approach, combining international law, art history, anthropology, and military practice to train culturally literate and tactically proficient officers. Simulations, field exercises, and cooperation with civilian institutions reinforce the practical orientation of this training.

At the diplomatic level, France continues to advocate for strengthening international mechanisms. It supports the implementation of the Hague Convention and its protocols, contributes to UNESCO's emergency heritage fund, and participates in EU strategies for cultural property protection in crisis situations. France's leadership is further underscored by its collaboration with the Blue Shield International and its support for international rapid response teams.

Nevertheless, difficult ethical questions remain: Can the protection of cultural property justify the reallocation of military resources? Should soldiers risk their lives to safeguard monuments when human lives are also at stake? These dilemmas are far from theoretical – they require clear policy guidelines and values-based training. The French armed forces have adopted the principle that protecting cultural property must not contradict the preservation of human life; rather, where possible, it should complement it. This balance is rooted in the humanist tradition of the French military and reflects General de Gaulle's conviction that a soldier is not only a fighter but also a guardian of civilization.

The symbolic power of cultural property – its capacity to shape identity, inspire resistance, and anchor collective memory – explains why it so often becomes a battlefield. It also explains why its protection is more than a cultural or legal obligation: it is a strategic act. France's military approach to cultural property protection demonstrates this link. By embedding cultural awareness into training, doctrine, and operations, France shows that modern

warfare must be conducted not only with arms, but also with foresight. Protecting what defines us – our history, our art, our monuments – may become one of the defining measures of civilized conduct in war.

In conclusion, France's experience in military cultural property protection reflects a paradigm shift: safeguarding cultural heritage is no longer a peripheral humanitarian concern but a core element of military strategy. It fulfills diplomatic, operational, and symbolic functions that reach far beyond the battlefield. In the face of evolving threats and the increasing complexity of armed conflict, this model offers a forward-looking perspective – one in which the preservation of beauty and meaning is not a luxury, but a prerequisite for lasting peace.

Protection of Cultural Property: Structure, Training, and Exercises in the Austrian Armed Forces

Josef Eitler

This article attempts to give a short overview of the situation in the Austrian Armed Forces, without going too much into detail.

Cultural Property Protection is relevant for various areas and functions, as for example, for advisors to military commanders, liaison personnel, and for the assessment of tactical situations.

In the Austrian Armed Forces, matters of deployment are separated from educational and training matters. Directorate 1 of the Operations Division is responsible for the operational organisation of CPP. In terms of training, CPP is part of many courses offered at educational institutions within the Austrian Armed Forces, such as the Theresian Military Academy. However, the main expertise regarding CPP education and training lies with the Centre for Leadership and Defence Awareness at the National Defence Academy in Vienna. Thus, there is a clear structural separation between deployment and education - with all its advantages and disadvantages.

The Austrian Armed Forces are organised into four brigades as combat units and nine territorial commands, each responsible for a federal province. When taking a closer look at the organisation, we find CPP personnel at different levels. There are experts and advisors at the higher commands. Trained soldiers, predominately officers and non-commissioned officers, work in various functions to strengthen CPP awareness across all echelons, while the core staff of Liaison Officers CPP is assigned to territorial commands. Since they are active reserve officers, the integration of CPP into a functional system depends on their personal interest and commitment. In general, they are trained staff officers and highly motivated. In addition, this group of officers has a strong association to civilian professions, as all of them come from academic backgrounds and have a general understanding of CPP. They work, for example, in the fields of history, art history, architecture, restauration or archaeology.

The training of Liaison Officers CPP is conducted at the National Defence Academy. There is a basic one-week course whose main topics are CPP in the Austrian Armed Forces, CPP within the national and international frameworks, International Humanitarian Law, psychological effects connected to cultural property and its destruction; it also includes a practical part, which consists of the assessment of cultural property in the context of a tactical planning process.

Further training takes place in the form of two-day seminars once a year. Here, the focus lies on current developments as well as on topics from different areas of CPP. In the last seminar, for example, the question how big museums deal with their collections in the case of an emergency was dealt with. For this purpose, it was key to get into contact with the museum staff responsible for security concepts to get acquainted with their preparations for all kinds of emergencies and the way they cooperate within their networks.

In this context, the dual function of Liaison Officers CPP within the Austrian Armed Forces becomes once again apparent, their task shifting between being important advisors, on the one hand, and communicating with national authorities as well as with the respective NGOs, on the other hand.

Currently, the focus lies on raising awareness for CPP. One way to become more visible is to participate in more complex exercises. This is ensured by a closer cooperation with the brigades' Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC) elements as well as with the Institute for Higher Military Command, Leadership and Management of the National Defence Academy. This has led to important synergies: for instance, Liaison Officers CPP were given the opportunity to take part in the planning exercise of the General Staff Course and the subsequent major exercise of the Austrian Armed Forces. The experiences and results of these exercises formed a valuable basis for the further training of new Liaison Officers CPP.

In summary, CPP awareness in the Austrian Armed Forces is increasing, even if this is still predominantly due to the personal commitment of individuals.

Cultural Property Protection Exercises as Interface between Heritage, Military, and Emergency Responders

Anna Kaiser

For the successful protection of cultural heritage in times of crisis, cooperation between heritage professionals and emergency responders is necessary. Emergency responders might include firefighters, civil protection, civil defence and the military. Both sides, however, need to be better versed in cooperating as there is typically minimal overlap in these professional fields. This contribution examines the use of table-top and live exercises in the education of cultural heritage professionals, empowering them to successfully collaborate with emergency responders that might be called upon for assistance in protecting cultural heritage in emergencies, highlighting the benefit of joint trainings and exercises as well as identified needs and takeaways of such exercises.

Threats to cultural heritage are manifold and range from general security management, climate, accidents and malfunctions to high kinetic events such as severe weather conditions, earthquakes, violence, terror or armed conflict.[1] It is the highly kinetic events that require cooperation between the heritage sector and emergency response to make heritage protection and recovery a success. The Center for Cultural Property Protection at the University for Continuing Education in Krems, Austria, has hosted a series of exercises since 2016, training heritage specialists to work together with emergency responders. The exercise scenarios ranged from fire, earthquake, heavy rainfall, flooding and storm to civil unrest combined with the wanton destruction of cultural heritage and military operations as well as evacuations in certain regions of Austria. The heritage specialists involved were enrolled in one of the study programmes of the centre, had different professional backgrounds and came from literally all over the world, which included different legal backgrounds and possible emergency responders for the time of need. The emergency responders supporting the exercises, local fire brigades and Austrian Armed Forces, did so based on challenges added to their training programmes and capacity building. All exercises had the

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1 Siegel, Almut and Dohrmann, Alke. SiLK – Sicherheitsleitfaden Kulturgut, https://silk-project.de/ (accessed 10.02.2025).

assumption in common that emergency responders were not going to change their trusted and well-trained decision-making and working processes in order to accommodate heritage practitioners, but that the heritage experts had to have a basic understanding of the way emergency response units work, which includes a strict process, high time pressure, and a very short time frame to transmit the necessary information to the right people at the right time.

Expanded training in military staff work is typically not available to civilian heritage professionals, who do not normally need this type of expertise in executing their day-to-day professional duties.[2] Therefore, the heritage specialists were given basic introductory lessons into decision-making processes and staff work, and one of the training outcomes was to learn how to operate under time constraint. Thus, all scenarios were conducted under time pressure: in the scenario the default settings applied and outside the scenario as the time allocated for pre-learning was also limited. Staff work and decision-making processes were aligned to the format used by the Austrian Armed Forces since they supported the exercises, but also as a means of benefitting their own (i.e. emergency response) personnel, as they were able to train for cooperation in cultural property protection. It is also important to note that, with only slight modifications, the same system is used in the Austrian national civilian disaster management, which proved a huge benefit for the set-up of the exercises.[3]

Three of the exercises were analyzed in detail for a master's thesis.[4] The research question of this thesis was whether table-top and live exercises were valid tools in effectively preparing civilian heritage professionals for the cooperation with emergency responders. The analysis focused on cooperation with the military and considered the impacts of time constraints on the validity of those training endeavours. The participants of the three exercises

[2] Schramm, Hannes. Integration von zivilen Akteuren des Kulturgüterschutzes in einen Einsatzstab. 2019. Master Thesis, University for Continuing Education Krems, 13.

[3] Bundesministerium für Inneres, ed. "Richtlinie für das Führen im Katastropheneinsatz." January 2007. https://www.bmi.gv.at/204/Download/files/Richtlinie_fuer_das_Fuehren_im_Kat-Eneinsatz_Letztfassung_BF_20200122.pdf (accessed 10.02.2025).

[4] Schramm, Hannes. Integration von zivilen Akteuren des Kulturgüterschutzes in einen Einsatzstab. 2019. Master Thesis, University for Continuing Education Krems.

listed three main takeaways:

1. Speaking the same language is of paramount importance. The participants stressed that they had only realized this during the exercise phase, not understanding the necessity and the implication in the lectures before participating in the exercises themselves.

2. Coordination between the heritage side and emergency responder side is vital. Having worked together before, i.e. during training exercises, is of immense help in ensuring successful coordination. The civilian heritage professionals stated that in light of the highly structured staff work and procedures that are firmly in place in emergency responder organizations, it would be the civilian heritage professionals who must learn how to best cooperate and communicate with emergency responders.

3. When working under time constraints and in emotionally stressful situations (which could not be fully simulated), it was crucial to have clearly stated responsibilities and work according to a fixed scheme. In the case of the exercises, the decision-making process and related procedures relied on military staff, who enabled the development of effective courses of action.[5]

One approach to fostering successful collaboration between heritage professionals and emergency responders was developed in the EU-funded project "ProteCHt2save" and takes the form of so-called Cultural Heritage Rescue Teams (CHRT). Ideally, these teams were to be composed of a mixture of heritage experts and personnel from emergency units or the military, but it is our belief that a team composed solely of heritage experts could do the job as well, provided they had an understanding of how the military and emergency units plan and operate. During the two exercises conducted in 2018, the core structure of such a team was included and the heritage professionals participating were sent into the scenarios as part of a CHRT. A CHRT could offer rapid response to protect cultural heritage facing natural disasters, man-made disturbances, and consequential effects. CHRTs could be developed, organized and trained as either national or international organizations, as both have distinctive pros and cons. National teams would

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5   Schramm, Hannes. Integration von zivilen Akteuren des Kulturgüterschutzes in einen Einsatzstab. 2019. Master Thesis, University for Continuing Education Krems, 52-53.

benefit from nationally defined and coherent standards and readily available team building and training possibilities, whereas international team compositions could draw on the best qualified and most experienced personnel from a number of countries. International teams, however, would also have to contend with different training standards that need to be harmonized, difficult or no options for team training, language barriers and different equipment standards, in addition to a challenging legal setting under which to compose such teams.[6] On the organizational level, the CHRT needs a team leader, logistical personnel, a liaison officer to communicate with the relevant governmental institutions and emergency responders, as well as different subject matter specialists – i.e., archaeologists, structural engineers, conservationists, and data and informatics specialists. Capabilities and knowledge regarding the documentation, handling, packing, moving, and storing of cultural property of all kinds should also be present on the team. At the very least, the team leader and liaison officer should be able to work in close coordination with the different emergency responders on site or with the military, hence underlining the importance of joint training and exercises and established interfaces. The CHRT structure proved successful within the cultural heritage protection exercises conducted by the Center for Cultural Property Protection Krems, and similar structures have since been developed, for instance, by the EU-funded project ProCultHer and the German project KulturGutRetter, a cooperation between the German Archaeological Institute, the Federal Agency for Technical Relief, and the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum.[7]

When the study programmes of the Center for Cultural Property Protection were evaluated and re-organized in 2024, a survey was conducted among all students and participants of short and long-term cultural property protection programmes since 2016, in order to identify the needs of especially heritage

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6   Kaiser, Anna. Guidelines for Cultural Heritage Rescue Team (CHRT). 2019. https://www.interregcentral.eu/Content.Node/D.T3.2.1-Guidelines-for-Cultural-Heritage-Rescue-Team.pdf (accessed 10.02.2025).

7   ProCultHer Project. Key Elements of a European Methodology to address the Protection of Cultural Heritage during Emergencies, https://www.proculther.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/PROCULTHER-Methodology.pdf (accessed 10.02.2025); KulturGutRetter | Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, https://www.kulturgutretter.org/en/home-2/ (accessed 10.02.2025).

professionals engaging in heritage protection. 60% considered the collaboration between the heritage and emergency response sector 'very important', while 40% deemed it as 'important'. 80% rated practical exercises as 'very important' and 20% as 'important'. Regarding training settings, 80% stressed the importance of a mixture of theoretical and practical lessons, whereas 20% would opt for live exercises only, with no theory and only practical sessions. These numbers strongly support the potential of joint and combined exercises in cultural property protection, which have the huge benefit of not only training the topic at hand but of creating solid interfaces between heritage professionals and emergency response.

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Safeguarding Heritage amidst Adversity: The Lebanese Army's Independent Works Regiment and its Journey in Cultural Property Protection

Youssef Haydar

- A tribute to the 70th anniversary of the 1954 Hague Convention -

Introduction

In view of the 70th anniversary of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, it is timely to evaluate how its principles have gained a foothold in conflict-affected regions and to consider the importance of its continuing implementation. Lebanon, a country of rich cultural diversity and storied resilience, saw a reinvigorated pledge to the Convention's aims after the devastating Beirut Port blast in 2020. Owing to its ethos, the Lebanese Army's Independent Works Regiment (IWR) has become an outstanding force, integrating the concept of Cultural Property Protection (CPP) into military operations, thus implementing the very spirit of the Convention.

This paper highlights the IWR's transformative journey from emergency responders to regional leaders in CPP. Their initiatives culminated in the establishment of the Cultural Property Protection and Emergency Response (CPPER) Training Center and extensive collaborations with national and international institutions. The IWR's experience offers a powerful case study of how armed forces can uphold the Hague Convention's legacy even amidst modern crises.

From tragedy to transformation: the Beirut blast as a catalyst

The explosion that rocked the Port of Beirut on 4 August 2020, inflicted massive human, infrastructural, and cultural losses. Entire heritage neighborhoods – Gemmayzeh, Mar Mikhael, and others – were left in ruins.

Among the first to respond was the Lebanese Army's IWR, whose mandate traditionally focused on opening roads for Civil Defense and Red Cross

intervention, removing debris, and delivering people's goods within the port area. Outside, citizens are assisted by removing debris from the streets and rehabilitating damaged military facilities around the port.

While assisting civilians and stabilizing damaged infrastructure, IWR personnel encountered severely affected cultural sites, such as ancient stone walls and historical buildings. This exposure revealed the necessity of equipping military responders with the skills and frameworks to protect heritage. The blast became a turning point, initiating a shift in the IWR's operational outlook toward one that incorporates Cultural Property Protection as a central pillar.

For IWR members, this was more than a professional shift – it was a personal mission. Many soldiers understood, viscerally, what the loss of heritage meant to people. Their engagement marked the start of a new identity: that of engineers who do not only build, but who preserve.

The significant number of historical walls and buildings in the streets required a unique approach. The regiment coordinated with the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) and the local NGO "Biladi" to address this challenge. This collaboration laid the foundation for the MOFA "Ministry of Foreign Affairs" (Heritage Bostrous Palace) consolidation project, which the LAF undertook in cooperation with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Blue Shield International, and "Biladi".

The first on-site workshop with Blue Shield International, led by Professor Peter Stone, marked another important milestone in the development of the LAF's CPP capabilities, by providing valuable insights and training for the regiment's personnel who participated in the MOFA consolidation project.

Bridging the gap: recognizing a capability not a unit within armed forces in heritage protection

The 1954 Hague Convention and its two Protocols serve as the primary legal framework for the protection of cultural property during armed conflicts. While the Convention calls for the establishment of specialized personnel and units, it also recognizes the challenges that nations may face when implementing these provisions.

The devastation underscored a critical gap in national emergency protocols: the absence of a structured military role in CPP. By integrating cultural property protection capabilities in existing regiment units, we have effectively mainstreamed this important function without the need for creating a separate specialized unit. This approach allows for the efficient allocation of resources while ensuring that personnel are trained and prepared to respond to cultural property protection needs.

The formation of a task force during emergencies is a strategic move, which allows a rapid deployment of trained personnel if the situation demands it. By drawing from the pool of trained individuals across various units within the regiment, we can assemble a dedicated force with the necessary expertise and capabilities to address cultural property protection requirements during conflicts or disasters.

This approach not only optimizes the use of resources but also fosters a culture of awareness and responsibility towards cultural property protection throughout the military. By integrating these capabilities into existing structures, we ensure that cultural property protection is not treated as an isolated or secondary concern but rather has become an integral part of military operations and emergency response.

Additionally, this approach facilitates coordination and collaboration between different units, enabling a more cohesive and effective response to cultural property protection challenges. The task force can leverage the collective knowledge and resources of trained personnel, enhancing situational awareness and enabling more informed decision-making. Together, the task force identified urgent needs: legal awareness, heritage-sensitive engineering, documentation practices, and emergency stabilization methods. The IWR committed to building a dedicated CPP capacity within the army, inspired by the Hague Convention and its two Protocols. This commitment laid the foundation for a systematic and sustainable approach to military engagement in heritage protection.

While the establishment of a specialized unit may be an ideal scenario, our solution demonstrates adaptability and a commitment to uphold the principles of the Hague Convention within the constraints of available resources. By integrating cultural property protection capabilities into existing structures and drawing on the expertise of trained personnel, we have created

a flexible and responsive system that can be mobilized when needed, ensuring the protection of cultural heritage during times of conflict or emergency.

Building knowledge: training, education, and new narrative development

The IWR's initial steps focused on training its personnel in CPP principles and international law. This was eventually codified into a formal training doctrine, aligned with the Hague Convention. In 2021, the LAF -IWR, in collaboration with the Biladi NGO, launched the "Jouhouzia" program, a comprehensive training initiative for its soldiers. The result was the development of three core training tracks:

1. **Basic CPP Course:** For officers and soldiers, offering a foundational understanding of heritage values, types of cultural property, and the obligations under the 1954 Hague Convention.
2. **Advanced (Operational) Course:** For planners and unit commanders, focusing on risk assessment, stakeholder coordination, and integration into operational planning.
3. **Train-the-Trainers Program:** To institutionalize knowledge within the military and ensure long-term capability transfer.

The training modules emphasize the recognition and classification of cultural property, the use of military mapping tools to protect heritage sites, cultural sensitivity in conflict zones, emergency response protocols to stabilize endangered sites, and legal frameworks, including the Hague Conventions and UNESCO Protocols. The Lebanese Army has recognized the importance of this training by awarding badges to soldiers who have completed the Advanced and TTT courses.

The "Jouhouzia" program is a multi-disciplinary course. Conducting joint training exercises and workshops allows military personnel and civilian actor's participants such as the Red Cross, Civil Defense, DGA, museums directors, libraries, Interpol, universities, university professors, and experts from NGOs, to familiarize themselves with each other's roles, responsibilities, and operational procedures. This not only enhances mutual understanding, consistent communication, and information exchange, but also facilitates the development of common strategies, tactics, and cooperative decision-making for protecting cultural properties during times of conflict or crisis.

Incorporating cultural sensitivity training into military curricula can help build capabilities and raise awareness about the significance of cultural heritage and the importance of its preservation during military operations. This can promote respect for local customs and traditions and minimize the risk of inadvertent damage to cultural sites.

Collaborations were launched with UNESCO, providing access to global standards, with Blue Shield International, offering trainings in cultural rescue and risk preparedness, and with foreign armed forces (e.g. Italy's Carabinieri, France's DELPAT), facilitating field exchanges and joint exercises. National universities, including USEK, the Lebanese University and NDU, contributed academic expertise, while NGOs like Biladi supported field-based learning.

A regional first: the CPPER Training Center

In 2023, LAF-IWR inaugurated the Cultural Property Protection and Emergency Response (CPPER) Training Center, a groundbreaking initiative for the Levant region. This facility is designed to deliver immersive, scenario-based training for military and civilian actors. The key features include a conference room as training facility, a simulation room replicating museums under threat as hands-on facility for artifact recovery, documentation, and temporary storage, as well as a simulation area enclosing real archaeological and architectural elements for simulating Lebanese heritage sites in exercises; a mobile training team equipped with full documentation capacity (360 degrees) with almost all tools, equipment, and machineries needed to intervene and deploy across all areas of Lebanon; and the cultural heritage restoration workshop training facility, used to restore objects and small monuments.

The CPPER Center also serves as a hub for inter-agency coordination, policy development, and academic research. It is the physical embodiment of the Hague Convention's goals within the military structure of Lebanon.

The IWR CPP model: an integrated approach for national and international collaboration

The IWR has developed a unique and replicable CPP Model, based on five key pillars: operational readiness, heritage mapping and intelligence, multi-

disciplinary collaboration, crisis response integration, as well as education and advocacy. This model represents an evolution in military doctrine – placing cultural stewardship at the center of operational responsibility. Incorporating cultural property protection course materials into the curricula of programs in institutions like the military academies, and NCO schools, and university students can be an effective way to raise awareness and promote the preservation of cultural heritage.

The IWR has strengthened its partnerships through national and international collaboration. On the national level, the IWR has signed Memoranda of Understanding with the Biladi NGO and USEK University. LAF-IWR has been supporting the Ministry of Culture and conducting joint programs with the DGA, the National Museum, and other museums from the private sector. Moreover, the IWR has been collaborating with universities, NGOs, and institutes working in the domain of CPP.

In 2022, the LAF presented its CPP capabilities on an international level by participating in the AMOT Course in Washington, D.C. This experience allowed the regiment to align its efforts with the army's vision and led to the establishment of the CPPER training center. The LAF's collaboration with international partners has continued to strengthen its CPP capabilities. In 2022 and 2023, the regiment hosted four-week training courses on-site at the CPPER, with the involvement of the Carabinieri and the DELPAT. Collaborative efforts with UNESCO, the United Nations, and other relevant international organizations to assess technically, document, and protect cultural sites from the threats of conflict and natural disasters.

From training to action: real-world applications

The IWR's CPP-trained units have already made tangible contributions. In 2023, the Regiment participated in a practical course with the Deutsh Institute in renovating 749-Modawar historical house in Beirut, where our officers and soldiers learned how to deal with lime, old fashioned blacksmith techniques, and wooden windows; moreover, it cooperated with the Italian Trading Agency (ITA) and the Assorestauro, Italian Association, in renovating the Ardea Purpurea Sculpture, art of Marco Bravoura from Italy, a fountain in Verdun Street in Beirut along with other partners.

The regiment's expertise and commitment to cultural property protection was further demonstrated during the recent conflicts in Gaza and South Lebanon. In response to requests from the Ministry of Culture and one of the most popular private museums in Beirut, the LAF undertook the critical task of proactively evacuating the museums in two of DGA museums. Collaborating closely with Biladi, the regiment implemented a joint strategy to preserve the immovable objects in the National Museum and a private museum. This involved the use of specially manufactured stones from the regiment, sand provided by the army, as well as plywood and geotextile supplied by Biladi.

Institutional support: embedding CPP in military culture

The transformation achieved by the IWR would not have been possible without high-level backing from the Lebanese Army Headquarters and relevant directorates. CPP is now embedded in army curricula, trainings, and missions. Lebanon benefits from the LAF's expertise, resources, and support from its international partners to safeguard its rich cultural heritage for future generations. The LAF contribute to the sustainable safeguarding of our cultural heritage and promotes its significance for national identity and global heritage. By leveraging its resources and expertise together with international institutions and armies, Lebanon can enhance its capacity to protect and preserve its rich cultural heritage amidst various challenges and threats.

Conclusion: a living legacy of The Hague Convention

Seventy years after being signed, the 1954 Hague Convention remains a living instrument. The Lebanese Army's IWR, through the CPPER initiative and a pioneering training model, honors this legacy in word and deed. As the world marks this milestone anniversary, Lebanon stands ready – not just as a witness to cultural loss, but as a beacon of cultural resilience.

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The Italian Blue Helmets of Culture and Experiences of the Carabinieri TPC in Iraq, 2003

Giuseppe Marseglia

In this article I will be drawing on my experience as the Commander of the Carabinieri Group for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (Carabinieri TPC) for central-northern Italy.

My contribution will focus on two topics: first, the creation of the *Blue Helmets of Culture* task force in Italy; second, I'll give a brief account of our first activities in Iraq in 2003 regarding the protection of the country's cultural heritage.

Italy was, in fact, the first country worldwide to create a specialised police force in 1969, dedicated to the protection of cultural heritage and the combat of crime against cultural heritage, by implementing the 1970 UNESCO directive one year in advance. Over the past 55 years of their existence, the Carabinieri TPC have accumulated extraordinary operational and technical experience. Aiming at a fruitful cooperation, we intend to make and keep it available to all countries requesting it.

On the national level, we are currently the most advanced and complex organisation regarding a specific area of competence. In coordination with the Ministry of Culture, our seventeen units cover all Italian regions, having both regional and interregional competence. We have an operational department in Rome with both national and international competences, organised into different thematic sections: archaeology, antiques, fakes, contemporary art, and data processing, the latter managing the largest database of stolen cultural assets worldwide.

This database, called "Leonardo", represents the key operational tool for the activities of the Carabinieri TPC. Constituting our 'physical memory', it has been operational for over half a century. The numbers are impressive: Leonardo contains about 1.3 million files relating to stolen objects, and almost 900,000 images. These numbers are even more impressive considering that the O.C.B.C., the second database of this type managed by our French partners, contains only 94,000 images. Furthermore, we are currently

testing S.W.O.A.D.S. (Stolen Works of Art Detection System), a new and innovative computer analysis system. Using artificial intelligence, the system includes the automatic search of the internet and social networks (big data), automatic image recognition, and the automatic comparison of images also with other police databases – in short – a brand-new computer system with excellent interoperability potential, which we will be able to share with all European and non-European countries. This great technological innovation will significantly enhance our operational capabilities, massively improving our investigative work.

The Carabinieri are both a law enforcement and a military force. They are the fourth service of the Italian Armed Forces (besides Army, Navy and Air Force). Its General HQ is in Rome and one of its branches are the Mobile and Specialised Units, to which the Carabinieri TPC are subordinated.

Despite this organisational structure, the Carabinieri TPC function in coordination with the Ministry of Culture, its Command being part of the latter.

The Carabinieri TPC act as a military force in coordination with the Ministry of Defence, and as a police force under the control of the Ministry of the Interior. Its commander is also an advisor to the Minister of Culture, the latter providing the force with general objectives to pursue. The Carabinieri TPC's officers also occupy different positions at international organisations, like UNESCO, INTERPOL, EUAM IRAQ, or the European Union External Action Service and have also seconded an officer at EUROPOL but this position has not yet been filled.

As a police service, the primary task of the Carabinieri TPC is to protect works of art against criminal actions. This protection includes checks and investigations on the art market to prevent illicit trafficking.

Finally, the Carabinieri TPC support our national Task Force Caschi blu della cultura (Blue Helmets of Culture) in emergency situations (mostly in the case of earthquakes or floods) to secure cultural heritage at severe risk of damage. These interventions take place both nationally and internationally, upon request or due to bilateral agreements.
The Carabinieri TPC carry out tasks relating to the safety and protection of cultural heritage, cultural property, and protected landscapes, as for instance: theft of cultural property, trade in illegally excavated archaeological finds,

illegal export, counterfeiting of works of art, illicit trade in rare books and archival documents as well as illegal construction in protected areas.

Thanks to the experience and skills acquired over 55 years of activity, the Carabinieri TPC are at the forefront internationally in the field of cultural heritage protection. Over the years, it has been promoting and taking part in training activities, in collaboration with other nations and with a view to continuously sharing updated and consolidated knowledge with professionals, civilian experts and other police forces.

The Carabinieri TPC also provide the Ministry of Culture with the basis for recovering illegally exported artifacts by way of cultural diplomacy.

Raising public awareness has always been considered essential by the Carabinieri TPC, since effective preservation of cultural heritage can only be achieved via the support and input from communities.

By signing the historic Memorandum of Understanding in Rome in 2016, Italy became the first country worldwide to set up the Task Force "*Caschi blu della Cultura*" (Blue Helmets of Culture) and make it available to UNESCO. The latter consists of qualified members of the Carabinieri TPC, and intervenes in the aftermath of armed conflicts, riots or unpredictable events that affect cultural heritage in Italy and abroad.

This new Task Force has also been employed in countries such as Mexico, Albania, Lebanon and Croatia and has conducted training courses for other police forces and local ministries in Kosovo, Iraq, Ecuador, Mexico, Albania, Bolivia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cuba, El-Salvador, Iran, Libya, Palestine, Peru, and Qatar. It is made up of military personnel from the Carabinieri TPC and experts from the Ministry of Culture.

Main tasks of the Blue Helmets of Culture:
- preventive tasks: whenever the Task Force intervenes to support the local authority responsible for preparing measures to limit potential risks to national cultural heritage caused by crisis or emergencies;
- operational tasks: in times and areas of crisis, whenever the Task Force intervenes within a security operation to support (or replace, if necessary) the local authority responsible for protection, due to crises or emergencies compromising national cultural heritage.

Tasks in detail:
- surveying of archaeological sites and monuments attacked or at risk of being attacked;

- identifying and securing of areas of archaeological interest, monuments and shelters for movable cultural assets considered of national interest;
- cataloguing of national cultural heritage;
- defining and activating of procedures to get movable cultural assets to shelters;
- entering immovable properties and shelters in the UNESCO International List of Cultural Property under Enhanced Protection, provided for by the II Additional Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954;
- training Police Forces and other organisations responsible for the protection of cultural heritage, providing technical-operational support to combat clandestine excavations and illicit trade in cultural goods; and
- identifying of stolen national heritage assets and inclusion in the Carabinieri TPC's database of stolen cultural assets as well as in the "WOA" Interpol database.

With the Decree of 31 March 2022, the Ministry of Culture, upon indication of the country owner and upon request of the UNESCO Secretary General, proceeded to amend the decree establishing the Unite4Heritage task force, with the aim to

- establish an operational structure within the Dicastery with its own budget to manage activities related to the protection of cultural heritage nationally and internationally, integrating the model referred to in the Directive of 23 April 2015 of the Minister of Culture (attached);
- abandon the name *Unite4Heritage*, used in the awareness campaign launched in 2015 by the then Director General of UNESCO;
- name the new task force into *Blue Helmets of Culture* (*CBC*), which shall permanently replace *Unite4Heritage*;
- guarantee the coordination of the General Directorate for Cultural Heritage Security with national Civil Protection;
- provide for the intervention on foreign territory at the request of individual states or UNESCO; to establish the wording 'upon UNESCO invitation' and agree on methods and timing, according to the requesting countries' specifications;

- regulate that UNESCO's letter of invitation contains the general objectives, nature, and foreseeable duration of the mission, which shall be shared in advance with the Ministry, specifying the professional skills and numbers of personnel required to achieve the goals;
- lay down that, if the action takes place within the framework of an international mission and under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence, the task force's intervention must be agreed on in advance by both the General Command and the Inter-Forces Summit Operations Command;
- regulate that this task force does not only consist of Carabinieri TPC soldiers but also includes civilian experts from the Ministry of Culture, thus representing an emergency force for securing cultural assets and combating illicit trafficking; to specify that the task force is capable of operating both in Italy and abroad, in peacekeeping missions as well as in the case of natural disasters; to ensure that, if activated in such contexts, this specialised force closely cooperates with the other Carabinieri TPC units, immediately deploying to the localities affected in order to establish the damage caused to the territory's historical cultural heritage and – after receiving the necessary information and liaising with the other components required by the regulations – carry out immediate operations to secure the works of art;
- ensure that, once the conditions of stability, security and employment have been assessed and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation consulted, the intervention abroad can take place upon express request of one or more foreign states; that on the basis of a specific agreement with UNESCO, the task force may use the term "Italian Task Force upon invitation of UNESCO/ Italian Task Force upon invitation by UNESCO"; and
- decree that participation of the Component MiC Task Force in missions take place in conjunction with the Carabinieri TPC, which in the case of crisis management missions abroad, assumes command and control of the respective mission.

Regarding the Carabinieri TPC's experience in crisis management operations, it seems relevant to mention one of our first experiences during an on-the-ground training event, which enormously influenced the development of our operational standards. I am referring to the cultural heritage protection mission in Iraq in 2003, which, in view of the final stages of the

so-called Second Gulf War, saw its integrity constantly threatened. The alert came when, at the end of the fighting, the international press reported that the Baghdad Museum, which is considered one of the most important museums worldwide, had been looted and that some 150,000 artefacts had been stolen. As these 150,000 pieces represented almost the entire collection of the museum, the news was more than disturbing. A mission was, therefore, organised by our special department, which was deployed within the framework of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) - a provisional government in which the Culture Department was headed by the Italian Ambassador Pietro Cordone, senior advisor to the coalition government. A Carabinieri TPC officer was sent as an advisor to collaborate with the Ambassador to assess the situation, which seemed to be dramatic from the start.

The rooms of the museum looked demolished as if after an attack. However, it is safe to say that it had been more an act of vandalism committed by an uncontrolled crowd of rioters, who, unimpeded by any public authorities, had broken in and damaged and plundered the museum.

Among other things, the rioters had destroyed a Roman nude sculpture. According to several hypotheses and interpretations, this had been a gesture of Muslim iconoclasm, according to which symbols of nudity contradict the doctrine of Islam and are rejected. We noticed, from the beginning, that one important fragment – the statue's head – was missing. From our boots-on-the ground experience, we were certain that the head was the easiest piece to place on the clandestine market. It seemed obvious that the motive for attacking and looting the museum had not only been religious or iconoclastic, but also a criminal and economic one.

The museum's exhibition halls and restoration laboratories had been ransacked, too, and our investigations pointed to the fact that most of the archaeological finds had been stolen. Moreover, ivory panels had been destroyed irreparably, and famous cultural artefacts, like the Sumerian Harp and the Lady of Warka (one of the oldest sculptural representations of a female face from around 3000 B.C.), had been damaged.

In modern warfare, the primary objective preceding military occupation is to isolate a city. Thus, the first thing the Americans did was to bomb the power plants of Baghdad, leaving the whole city in complete darkness. As the looting of the museum took place in the evening hours, the rioters needed a

light source and used a large part of the catalogue of the central museum's archive as a lantern. The loss of the archive was a major setback, which we dealt with later by looking for copies of the catalogue.

About one month later, we fortunately found out that most of the collection of the Baghdad Museum had not been looted. This was owed to Dr. Nawala, the museum director and an extraordinary woman. She should be considered the true hero in the rescue of the Baghdad Museum's collection. Dr. Nawala had given the order to store the collection in the museum's underground storage rooms and to wall up the entrance, so the rioters did not understand that there was a treasure beyond that wall. Thanks to this deception, almost the whole collection of the Baghdad Museum was saved.

Only what had been stored in the restoration laboratories was lost, particularly, quite many small but valuable objects, such as cylinder seals. The cylinder seals together with the coins safeguarded in the laboratories represented the main target – not necessarily of rebels, but of people who knew what to look for and where to find it.

Cylinder seals, for which there is an excellent market, especially in the United States, were widespread in the Mesopotamian civilisation. They were made of various materials and were sometimes decorated with precious stones.

Unfortunately, Dr. Nawala was dismissed by the Anglo-American Coalition Government because she was a member of the Baat Party. On the same puritan principle, many managers of the Iraqi public administration, the police force, the Mukhabarat, and the armed forces were ousted.

During the entire mission, two officers from the Carabinieri TPC rotated as expert advisors between June 2003 and January 2004. In addition to collaborating with local authorities, the expert advisors were tasked to create a catalogue, as complete as possible, of what had been stolen from the Baghdad Museum and facilitate the availability of this information internationally to fight the trade in stolen cultural heritage on the clandestine market. Owing to those efforts, we managed to recover 1,200 archaeological artefacts stolen from the Baghdad Museum.

To proceed with the cataloguing of stolen artefacts, we designed a document that we could adopt to the crisis area and that served as a suitable tool to convey information about stolen archaeological artefacts in Iraq. For the indexing of archaeological artefacts, the Italian Ministry of Culture uses a format that contains 242 entries. It goes without saying that such a system could not be reproduced to create a database in the crisis area at hand.

Consequently, we tried to devise an expeditious system, based on which we could create a database. In the latter featured the photographs of the objects searched for as centrepieces. We decided to concentrate our efforts only on artefacts of which suitable photographs existed and complemented them with a brief description. The forms were e-mailed daily to our data processing section in Rome and, after being entered into our Leonardo Database (the largest existing database of stolen works of art worldwide), they were forwarded to the Interpol General Secretariat, where the first database worldwide of archaeological artefacts stolen in Iraq was created. At the end of our mission, we had established a database with roughly 3,000 objects. Unfortunately, for a series of reasons, including the lack of cooperation from Iraqi governments, it still is the largest database of archaeological objects stolen in Iraq.

Apart from the unit in Baghdad, another unit operated in the province of Dicar. It was based in Nasiriya and was part of the Ancient Babylon peace mission for the protection of cultural heritage. It was basically responsible for the inspection of archaeological sites, the creation of protection systems, such as observation towers, trenches, radio links, and, very importantly, the training of archaeological guards. Our unit also completed a crucial archaeological map during their stay. While carrying out their duties, our Carabinieri often happened to come across clandestine excavation activities, which sometimes represented a threat, as the illegal diggers would often be armed.

Finally, the special training of personnel, playing a key role in the mission, should be mentioned. With the help of Jordan, required due to the lack of safety standards in Iraq, we had trained 75 Iraqi archaeological guards by the end of 2004. These guards represent a landmark in the creation of an organised system for the protection of archaeological heritage.

The Role of the Army in Protecting Cultural Heritage in Times of Armed Conflict

Saliou Ngom

The protection of cultural property is more than a legal imperative. It is a moral imperative.[1]

Armed conflicts have always had a negative impact on World Cultural Heritage. From the destruction of sites of historical, artistic, or archaeological importance to the looting and illicit trafficking in cultural property, the horrors of armed violence contribute to the annihilation of peoples' cultural identities, depriving younger generations of their heritage. It is not just precious cultural property that disappears, but crucial sources of information about the history and culture of humanity.

The destruction of 14 World Heritage mausoleums in Timbuktu, Mali, the forced entry into the Sidi Yahia Mosque, the demolition of the Al-Farouk monument Patron Saint of the Poor, and the burning of 4,203 manuscripts at the Ahmed Baba Centre are perfect examples of the devastating effects of armed conflicts on the world's cultural heritage.

The notion of heritage takes us on an imaginary journey through time. As a collective asset, it is a factor for bringing people together, for freedom and tolerance, but also for respect, a legacy handed down from generation to generation. It is what our ancestors carefully preserved and bequeathed to their descendants, so they would remember them and their lives. In short, it is a vector for the survival of our cultural identities.

The Defence and Security Forces are organised units whose capacity to intervene, protect, or destroy surpasses that of other units operating in the same field in times of peace or crisis, due to their degree of professionalism,

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[1] The Senegalese Defence Minister's speech during the opening ceremony of the CIMIC workshop on Cultural Property Protection, 28-30 Jan 2025.

the technology of their resources and the state-of-the art equipment at their disposal. In a crisis situation, particularly in armed conflict, they often operate alone on the ground. It is therefore easy to understand the issues raised by the notion of protecting cultural heritage in the event of armed conflict. The question of what role the Army can play in these challenges of protecting cultural property is an acute one.

Firstly, the concept of cultural heritage will be defined. Secondly, types of threat potentially affecting cultural heritage will be identified. Finally, an approach to the mission of armies will be introduced.

I. The concept of cultural heritage

For a better understanding of the concept of cultural heritage, we will borrow its definition from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics:

> "Cultural heritage refers to artefacts, monuments, groups of buildings and sites, and museums that are distinguished by their diverse values, including their symbolic, historical, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social meanings. It includes tangible heritage (movable, immovable and immersed), intangible cultural heritage (ICH) integrated into culture and natural heritage artefacts, sites or monuments. This definition excludes intangible heritage relating to other cultural domains such as festivals, celebrations, etc. It includes industrial heritage and cave paintings."[2]

II. Types of threats to cultural heritage

In recent decades, the issue of cultural property has come to the fore in the context of war, both as collateral damage and as a direct target for the belligerents, who destroy such property as a means of exacerbating violence, hatred, and revenge. This destruction has long-term effects on society, weakening the foundations of peace and hindering reconciliation when hostilities end. Recent conflicts in Mali, Libya, Ukraine, Yemen, Iraq and Syria have demonstrated the correlation between safeguarding heritage and protecting human lives. The destruction of heritage seems to be part of a global

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2   https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrimoine_culturel. Accessed on 8 February 2025.

strategy of cultural cleansing seeking to eliminate all expressions of diversity.

In peacetime

Natural and man-made disasters: earthquakes, terrorism, floods, fires, typhoons, theft, and other natural and man-made risks, among others;
- Poor conservation
- Illicit trafficking

In the event of conflict

- Destruction
- Theft
- Misuse
- Occupation
- Illicit trafficking
- Selling off
- Looting

III. The role of the armed forces in protecting cultural property

According to the 1954 Hague Convention, The High Contracting Parties undertake, in time of peace, to introduce into the regulations or instructions for the use of their troops such provisions as will ensure observance of the present Convention, and to inculcate in the personnel of their armed forces, in time of peace, a spirit of respect for the cultures and cultural property of all peoples. They undertake to prepare or establish, in peacetime, within their armed forces, services or specialised personnel whose mission will be to ensure respect for cultural property and to collaborate with the civilian authorities responsible for safeguarding such property.

The Senegalese Armed Forces have not departed from this rule insofar as, as part of their commitments in both internal and external operations, they use various legal instruments to raise the awareness of their personnel before, during, and after operations.

In addition to its regalian mission, which consists of ensuring the integrity of the territory and the protection of the population and its property, and contributing to the socio-economic development of the country, the Senegalese Army is active in the protection of the cultural heritage of peoples during armed conflicts, while ensuring that it is safeguarded and respected. It is with this in mind that Lieutenant General Mbaye CISSE, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, said in a preface to a book entitled «Le rôle des Forces armées au Sénégal: De la défense nationale au Développement»[3]:

> "In fact, the Armed Forces resemble a two-faced Janus, one side of which embodies a corporation that delegates the legitimate violence of the State and the other an entity that contributes tirelessly to the work of national construction and the country's influence."

In peacetime, the Army, on its own or in collaboration with international organisations (UNESCO, ICRC, UN etc.), organises workshops on the protection of cultural property. This includes training for trainers in International Humanitarian Law, civil-military cooperation in the protection of cultural property, rules of engagement and behaviour, codes of conduct, and manoeuvre conventions. Contingents leaving for overseas (peacebuilding or peace-making operations) benefit from pre-deployment training, aimed at familiarising troops with respect for the customs, habits, and cultural heritage of host countries.

The training takes into account the ability of soldiers to distinguish between cultural property, heritage sites, and military objectives. Regulatory insignia must be familiar to all. The principles of distinction and proportionality must be respected.

In the event of conflict, troops are committed to protecting cultural heritage. In the theatre of operations, induction training is carried out as soon as the troops arrive. The aim of this activity is to familiarise military units with the local culture and best practices of the United Nations and its partners (UNESCO, ICRC, UNHCR, UNMAS etc.). This induction training culminates in the production of brochures facilitating the understanding and

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[3] BA H. S, 2024, Le rôle des Forces armées au Sénégal : De la défense nationale au Développement, Editions L'Harmattan.

application of Rules of Engagement (ROE), rules of behaviour, and manoeuvre conventions. These brochures are illustrated with images of heritage sites and buildings likely to benefit from special, enhanced, or general protection. In this context, civil-military activities aimed at rebuilding damaged sites are carried out to win the hearts and minds of the people whose cultural heritage has been damaged.

Post-conflict operations focus on safeguarding and ensuring the respect for cultural heritage. In the event of collateral damage leading to the deterioration of cultural property, restoration operations are carried out by specialists. The armed forces are also involved in the restitution of stolen, looted, or exported cultural property. The original state of the cultural heritage must be restored, otherwise the rigours of the 1954 Convention and other legal instruments must be applied to armed forces responsible for the collateral damage resulting in the destruction of cultural property in their areas of operation.

All in all, armed forces should further strengthen and adapt their tools, practices, and skills to understand heritage protection as a decisive element in building peace and security. This would require a perfect symbiosis between military and civilian actors, in line with the standards imposed by the legal instructions of the 1954 Hague Convention and its two Protocols (1954 and 1999).

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Implementing Cultural Property Protection within Armed Forces – A Significant but Challenging Task

Nicole Gruber

Of significance

The targeted destruction and looting of cultural property has been increasingly attracting the attention of international media since, during wars and armed conflicts, cultural goods are misused and strategically destroyed. This serves to attack people on an emotional level, to undermine and reinterpret the identities and the past of societies. The trade in illegally acquired antiques may further constitute a lucrative source of income for armed groups.

The ongoing examination of the distinct meanings and functions of cultural heritage and property is a positive development, providing for alternative approaches to promoting peace and reconciliation processes.

In this regard, the importance of cultural heritage, including both tangible and intangible cultural goods, as well as the protection of cultural property is increasingly taking centre stage in international crisis and conflict management. This can be derived from new concepts and measures as well as an increased number of initiatives in this specialist area within the United Nations, NATO, and the European Union.

Today we know, and it can no longer be denied that the protection of cultural property must not be disregarded. Our cultural goods are of great importance to society. Embedded in cultural systems and processes, they fulfil different functions. For instance, they serve as mediators and carriers of knowledge, information, stories or tradition, be it in the form of movable goods, such as artworks, artefacts, books, archive documents, or immovable good and their architecture and cultural purpose. Depending on how much meaning and symbolism is assigned to them, they serve as identity-forming elements for individuals and groups. Furthermore, they are associated with the concept of memory, as they may act as anchors for memories and narratives across generations. Cultural goods are assigned specific values

based on different criteria. "In summary, CH [Cultural Heritage] items are designated as such according to their semantic strength as either social or ideological meaning-bearers or as evidence for ethno-historiographic science."[1] Moreover, a 'good' is likely to be considered valuable if it is rare or endangered and conveys a special message desirable at the time.[2] Being assigned different meanings and interpretations of the past, those objects can contribute to either the reconciliation or division of societies. As the interpretation of the attributions is often a top-down process and can be controversial, both tangible and intangible cultural goods also have a political dimension. They are "frequently manipulated, interpreted, and commodified as a propaganda tool to uphold official state narratives and to support the positions of parties in power."[3] Cultural property can also be of economic value for societies, as it may create jobs in the cultural sector.

Past and current armed conflicts show that comprehensive conflict analysis is crucial for assessing potential threats and taking appropriate preventive measures. Being part of this process, cultural heritage and property have been recognised as significant elements. Their role in military assessment is growing, considering the tangible and intangible dimensions. Information about local heritage and heritage sites beyond the listed cultural property is collected in areas of operation. This includes, among others, information regarding the location, vulnerability, and significance of such sites as well as associated sensitivities and norms or calendrical aspects. In this context, the focus is not only on potential attacks of heritage sites, but also on possible opportunities, such as strategic communication, interaction with the population, or promoting dialogue.[4] Cultural heritage and its material manifestations resonate in all phases of conflicts, which is why an in-depth investigation may indicate possible scenarios for future developments. If cultural assets and their underlying roles fail to be recognised, important aspects of a conflict may be ignored.[5] "A close examination of the uses of heritage can

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[1]   Muñoz-Viñaz 2023: A Theory of Cultural Heritage. Beyond The Intangible, S. 165
[2]   Cf. Muñoz-Viñaz 2023, p. 165.
[3]   Dallen 2023: Heritage Tourism in Africa. Where Do We Go from Here? p. 306.
[4]   Cf. Clack & Dunkley 2023: Introduction: Culture, heritage, conflict. p. 12.
[5]   Cf. Viejo-Rose 2023: Heritage and the (re)shaping of social identities in conflict cycles: anchor or quicksand? p. 40.

thus reveal the values, drivers, and friction lines of a society, and therefore, prove highly indicative of the patterns of conflicts […].”[6]

Given its significance, targeting cultural property in armed conflicts means attacking the heart of people and their communities. Therefore, the 1954 Hague Convention provides for consequences for the destruction of cultural property as far as prosecution by the International Criminal Court. But even below the threshold of court conviction, the targeting of cultural property can have far-reaching implications. This is especially true for armed forces. Effects may be increased mistrust among the population, protests, or riots. In addition, negative reports raise international attention. This may jeopardise the security situation in areas of operations and, thus, endanger the safety of soldiers. Moreover, the income armed groups generate through the illicit trafficking of culturally valuable objects may fuel or prolong conflicts.

Conversely, the protection of armed forces can be improved if cultural property is taken into consideration and respected. But what goods should be considered important? The fact that cultural property is often not officially listed poses a challenge for armed forces. At the same time, cultural property does not necessarily have to be listed to be valuable. This is why an assessment goes beyond the information given by cultural property protection lists.

Communication with the local population is essential to identify local heritage and to obtain a comprehensive picture of their social value. Experience has shown that a respectful approach to the heritage of local communities contributes to the successful implementation of projects.[7] This is also evident in crisis management and conflict resolution.

Moreover, heritage sites may be incorporated into peace and reconciliation processes to promote dialogue and create shared narratives. “In the aftermath of armed conflict, cultural heritage can be used to serve a number of functions, acting simultaneously as receptor, container, and reflector of meaning and emotions.”[8] Visiting cultural sites as well as important places

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[6]   Viejo-Rose 2023, p. 31.
[7]   Cf. Fleming 2021, Local and global communities as heritage stewards. p. 118-119.
[8]   Viejo-Rose 2023, p. 43.

and monuments can provide an impetus for remembrance and discussion. Tensions can arise through controversial interpretations, whereby "supervised" exchange is important, which can help to defuse conflicts and thus promote peace.[9]

A challenging task

Today, the importance of the 1954 Hague Convention and the significance of respecting and protecting our cultural heritage are highly recognised. Numerous developments have taken place in the field of cultural property protection (CPP) within armed forces. Yet, the implementation of CPP within armed forces and during military missions and operations still leaves room for improvement. This is partly because the range of tasks performed by armed forces has been increasing, as armed conflicts have become more complex. A wide variety of skills and knowledge needs to be applied in the training of soldiers and during military operations. But how can sustainable implementation of CPP in armed forces be achieved?

Based on the aspects presented at the conference and my personal experience from research, education, and training in the field of CPP, I have identified the following significant elements:

Firstly, sustainable implementation requires appropriate structural representation. This includes the definition of tasks in the specialist area and their representation in guidelines of armed forces. In addition, this must translate into CPP personnel responsible for further development and implementation of the issue. Moreover, CPP needs to be integrated into policies, strategies, and missions at the national and international level.

Secondly, it must be ensured that the protection of cultural property is integrated into the general training of soldiers at all levels of command. Hereby, solely focussing on theoretical content is insufficient, as the training of soldiers should aim at the practical application of knowledge. The protection of cultural property must, therefore, be integrated into military exercises.[10]

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[9]   Cf. Breen 2023: Conflict, Cultural Heritage and Peace. An Introductory Guide. p. 5.

[10] Cf. Speckner 2014: Kulturgüterschutz im Österreichischen Bundesheer. „Lessons learnt" und Ansätze zur Umsetzung, p. 98-99.

Furthermore, it is necessary to raise the soldiers' awareness regarding the importance of cultural heritage. In this context, the emphasis should be on explaining why cultural heritage is a valuable resource worth protecting, and on fostering understanding as to why certain actions are prohibited or required and have consequences. These measures are bound to lead to norm-based, practically automatic behaviour.

Thirdly, since heritage is a broad and complex area, there is a need for cooperation between different military and civilian agencies. In research, an interdisciplinary approach is required to obtain a holistic picture, with the disciplines ranging from art, through the humanities and social and cultural sciences to law and natural sciences. This is obvious, considering the wide array of national and international governmental and non-governmental bodies dealing with the topic. The various experts and institutions should seek frequent exchange. Joint projects, courses, and civil-military exercises facilitate mutual understanding and improve coordination, making quick reaction in emergencies possible.

Conclusion

Cultural goods are part of our history. Preserved over a long period of time, they become cornerstones of our past. Despite or precisely because of their importance, they are still deliberately targeted in the wars and armed conflicts of the 21st century. The 1954 Hague Convention regulates the protection of cultural property during wars as well as the measures to be taken in peacetime. Its implementation in a military context requires structured integration, which ideally results in the 'automatic' consideration of the issue at all levels of command. Cooperation and exchange between military, civilian, governmental, and non-governmental actors will further contribute to the effectiveness and quality of future cultural property protection.

CPP can preserve our heritage for future generations, prevent further escalation of conflicts, and contribute to peace and reconciliation processes. In this sense, a continuous and long-lasting promotion of CPP in armed forces, a wider civil-military exchange, and increased awareness regarding this specialist area should be encouraged.

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Cultural Property Protection in the Armed Forces and during Armed Conflict: Challenges & Opportunities

Summary of the panel discussion of 12 November 2024

Beyond being a legal obligation, the protection of cultural property can serve as a powerful force multiplier. Respecting and safeguarding heritage not only means fulfilling a duty but also enhances the effectiveness and impact of military measures and missions.

In this panel discussion, experts with different military backgrounds discussed the implementation of cultural property protection within armed forces, examining the various challenges and benefits of integrating this special area into the work of armed forces.

Panellists

- *Brigadier General Youssef Haydar*, Commander of the Independent Works Regiment of the Lebanese Armed Forces

- *Colonel Saliou Ngom*, Director of Archives and Historical Heritage, Senegalese Armed Forces

- *Lieutenant Colonel Giuseppe Marseglia*, Officer Group Commander of the Carabinieri for Cultural Heritage Protection North-Central Italy, Monza

- *Captain Timothy Le Berre*, Curator of the French Foreign Legion Museum and French Army Representative for Cultural Property Protection Development

- *Laurie Rush*, United States Army Archaeologist and Cultural Resources Manager, Fort Drum

Moderator

- *Anna Kaiser*, Head of Center for Cultural Property Protection, University for Continuing Education Krems

Main statements

Laurie Rush stated that we clearly need to develop leadership at the top. The Monuments Officer initiative, for instance, was successful because the military orders came from the top. Furthermore, a long-term view is required, and every effort should be made to include cultural heritage protection in the curricula of our military academies and the US Reserve Officer Training Corps.

She feels that working with young cadets is starting to pay off. She cited the example of a young Air Force captain, who had interned with her five or six years ago and was now advising a four-star Air Force general at a major combatant unit. This shows the benefits of taking a long-term view. Investing in interested officers and personnel at all levels will "pay the dividends" as they move up the ranks.

Rush also mentioned an experience in Honduras, where she had prepared to give a lecture on the protection of churches finding that the local authorities had already received advice from the Carabinieri, which illustrates the impact of cultural diplomacy. However, she insisted that it is crucial to listen to the needs of the community before starting well-intentioned training or reconstruction efforts. Misguided initiatives can lead to frustration, so it is better to first ask communities what exactly they need help with. She maintained that understanding community priorities is essential in post-conflict reconstruction. The mayor of Mosul, for example, made heritage restoration one of his top ten requirements, which was difficult for American commanders to understand. This highlights the importance of including heritage into overall reconstruction efforts. Sometimes, small actions, such as saving a garden, can provide immediate relief and help to rebuild the fabric of a community. Listening, thinking, and respecting local considerations are key to successful cultural diplomacy and heritage protection.

CPT Le Berre noted that he had both, good and bad experiences during deployments. One positive example was conveying the importance of cultural property protection to the troops. After weeks of discussion, a young Lieutenant asked him about cultural property in his future area of operation. This was a small victory, as it showed growing awareness.

However, he also faced challenges. For instance, a convoy unknowingly drove through an archaeological site, causing local villagers to react negatively. This incident highlighted the importance of proper inventories and communication. Another issue arose with a project to restore a mosque in Timbuktu, which has been halted because the local religious community has not been informed.

Le Berre also mentioned that many soldiers were unaware of the cultural heritage sites close to where they have been deployed. To address this issue, they created an exhibition on site, working with local museums and artists within the armed forces to educate the troops about local culture and heritage. This initiative helped soldiers to understand the significance of cultural heritage and the importance of protecting it.

He further explained that the first step is to identify the local or political authority responsible for cultural heritage and that it is crucial to liaise with local communities and religious groups, as they often manage cultural heritage. Collaborating with NGOs dedicated to heritage or culture is crucial too, even though it is not common for the military. It is also essential to liaise with schools, teachers, and anyone involved in cultural affairs as well as with other professionals. For example, he often liaised with curators in Mali. Using the same terminology has ensured effective communication between the two sides. This extensive network of connections is vital for the military when dealing with cultural heritage.

COL Ngom explained that Senegal has a long peacekeeping tradition since 1960, deploying troops under the banners of the United Nations, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the African Union. They train their soldiers in cultural property protection from the moment they join the army, ensuring they know how to behave and how to protect cultural heritage on the ground. Their rules of engagement are complemented by rules of behaviour to guide soldiers in situations not covered by ROE. They also collaborate with UNESCO and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to provide comprehensive training at all levels, from common soldiers to officers, ensuring everyone knows how to protect cultural property during missions.

LTC Marseglia talked about an important innovation regarding cultural heritage protection: in 2016, Italy signed an agreement with UNESCO to create a new task force, called Blue Helmets of Culture. This task force is a mix of military personnel from the Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (TPC) and civilian experts from the Ministry of Culture, including archaeologists, architects, curators, and restorers. This collaboration between military and civilian personnel is crucial for successful cultural property protection.

This task force operates both domestically and abroad, in countries such as Mexico, Albania, Lebanon or Croatia, and conducts trainings in several other countries. The main duties of this task force are preventive and operational tasks. Preventive tasks involve supporting local authorities in limiting risks to cultural heritage during crises. Operational duties involve intervening in crisis areas to support or replace local authorities if necessary.

The task force can be deployed upon UNESCO's invitation or through agreements between countries. It is deployed in emergencies, such as natural disasters and crises, both before and after conflicts. Their specific duties include surveying archaeological sites and monuments, ensuring the safety of movable cultural property, cataloguing items, registering immovable properties, and providing training to local police and administrations. They also collect information on stolen cultural items to update their own and Interpol's databases.

BG Haydar explained that, unlike others, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) are not an expeditionary force, but deployed in their own territory, which requires them to coordinate with everyone, including the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Their coordination extends beyond NGOs to universities, such as Notre Dame University, Holy Spirit University, and the Lebanese University. They are developing a Cultural Property Protection curriculum together with Notre Dame University, which will be implemented for the army. They are also cooperating with UNIFIL by visiting their sectors and hosting them in their regiment. Through their Headquarters they also work with teams from the French, US, and the Italian forces, training together and learning from each other. The LAF have attended several basic and advanced courses and are working on a joint

manual. Their activities involve extensive coordination to ensure effective protection of cultural heritage.

Haydar also mentioned that his regiment is cooperating closely with the Ministry of Culture, having signed an agreement aimed at the protection of cultural property. They discreetly evacuated priceless movable objects to Beirut on their own account in order not to cause panic. They also developed a strategy to protect immovable objects from collateral damage, using geotextiles, sandbags, and stones.

Regarding the current situation in Lebanon, Haydar noted that the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) recently submitted 34 sites to UNESCO for enhanced protection to ensure that these sites were not used for military purposes. Furthermore, they have drawn up a no-strike list, which has been shared with all relevant parties, including the Israelis through UNIFIL. This list is constantly being updated by the Ministry of Culture.

Lessons learned and the future of military Cultural Property Protection

CPT Le Berre stated that the military personnel should not fight the wrong battle. While cultural property protection is important, he advocates for the military protection of cultural property, which means adapting systems, procedures, and vocabulary for military use. This involves translating the 1954 Hague Convention into military actions, depending on the degree of violence and the commander's intent.

He further indicated that preparation during peacetime is crucial, as mentioned by Article 7 of the Convention and that there is no need for a large active-duty staff for cultural property protection during peacetime, but that even few specialised personnel can make a difference. For example, the Ukrainian colleagues failed to create a special cultural property protection unit in 2013, and now they are rushing to catch up.

Le Berre insisted that the key to success consists in confidence building and in convincing commanders that time and resources are devoted to preventing destruction. It is challenging to explain that, in this case, victory means the absence of destruction. This positive approach to the military protection of cultural property is something that needs to be promoted in the years to come.

BG Haydar further noted that, from his experience, multidisciplinary training is essential for the interoperability of ministries. One of the problems is that there is no effective communication. Training in his regiment is multidisciplinary, involving the Interpol, internal security forces, civil defence, the Red Cross, the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA), museum directors, and librarians. This facilitates mutual understanding.

He further drew the attention to the UNESCO Conference in The Hague in May 2024, which directly concerned the military.[1] This path should be continued and results achieved, as this was the first time that UNESCO was directly addressing the military, which was a good sign.

Laurie Rush noted that military leaders who argue that the protection of cultural property has no place in peer-to-peer conflicts should be encouraged to look at lessons of the past. For example, saving the Lipizzaner stallions at the end of the Second World War was a decision no American officer had ever regretted. Similarly, Secretary Stimson's advice to spare Kyoto's shrines and the Imperial Palace during the nuclear attack on Japan has probably made it easier for the emperor to surrender, saving thousands of lives. We should remind our leaders of those historical lessons and of the importance to protect cultural property.

Rush further explained that one challenge in modern conflicts are non-compliant key leaders and that coaching and role playing with soldiers regarding key leader engagement is essential. One method is to think of creative ways to reward key leaders during an engagement. For example, if they want information about a humanitarian aid route, soldiers could be trained at how to get something in return. Effective negotiation can lead to more concessions. It is about using a reward-based system.

COL Ngom mentioned that cultural property worth over $3.5 billion has been destroyed in the Ukraine conflict and that, despite the existence of the

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[1] Haydar was referring to the UNESCO's Cultural Heritage & Peace Conference from 13-15 May 2024 at the Peace Palace & World Forum, The Hague, Netherlands. Recommendations of the Conference: building a military cultural property protection capability, including the establishment of a UNESCO Civil-Military Alliance on Cultural Property Protection to enhance the military's capacity to safeguard and respect cultural property alongside their other duties.

1954 Hague Convention, it is difficult to implement its rules on the ground, once war has started. For this reason, it is important to raise awareness and train leaders, even before conflicts start, so we do not end up where we are today.

LTC Marseglia emphasised that the central term regarding cultural property protection in the 21st century was "dissemination", and that we need to spread awareness, reliable information, and training. The secret of effective cultural property protection is to support local communities, who are the true owners of their cultural heritage. Therefore, we should work with local authorities as well as heritage managers and provide soldiers with relevant information.

He further mentioned that, according to his experience as an investigator, neither investigation nor protection can be conducted without relevant information. The digitisation of museum collections is very useful, and they are improving their systems every day. For example, a new system applying Artificial Intelligence has been recently implemented in their database. The first step to an effective cultural property protection strategy is to train staff in cataloguing cultural property.

Laurie Rush considered it very rewarding to witness the rise in importance of cultural property from an almost non-existent level in the US in 2004 to a significant presence in NATO and major commands around the world.

BG Haydar noted that, after working in this field for five years, he is witnessing significant changes. In former times, they have not been able to work unimpededly with the civilian population, because of the military hierarchy. However, after the explosion in the harbour of Beirut in 2020, those barriers have been removed. The community now sees the army as a saviour and their cooperation has become smooth and fruitful.

CPT Le Berre related that, four years ago, he had a brief meeting with a general to discuss the protection of cultural property and to convince him of the importance of the topic. The general dismissed it by answering, "If you like to play, you can play with this topic." One week prior to the conference, he met the same general again. This time, however, the general told him to 'go ahead.'

LTC Marseglia shared a personal story, which highlighted the changes over time: twenty-one years ago, he has been deployed to the Baghdad Museum – one of the most important museums worldwide, due to its extensive collection – to investigate the looting of archaeological items. During the final attack of the US Army on Baghdad, a group of rioters attacked the museum. An American platoon was stationed outside but did not intervene. When asked why, they simply said it wasn't their job. This was before the integration of the concept of cultural property protection. Today, the situation is significantly different: soldiers now have a different awareness, and he is optimistic for the future.

COL Ngom explained that, during the war in Guinea-Bissau in 1998, indiscriminate bombing took place, and that he witnessed the destruction of mosques, schools, and churches. Nobody seemed to care about the devastation. However, today, there is a heightened awareness about international instruments like the 1954 Hague Convention and its Protocols, along with other conventions protecting cultural property. He feels the situation has changed significantly.

Final remarks, based on the concluding words of Anna Kaiser

Cultural property protection requires a multidisciplinary approach and the cooperation of different ministries and agencies dealing with cultural heritage. In this context, it is important not to forget the armed forces and to make sure that the military protection of cultural property is aligned with the needs and requirements of the armed forces, so as not to make them the losers in the preparation and protection of cultural heritage.

It is further important to get in contact with local communities, whose daily lives revolve around their cultural heritage, which they have protected for centuries and want to continue protecting.

Supporting the efforts regarding cultural heritage protection and communicating its benefits is key to an effective and sustainable implementation of cultural property protection.

Chapter IV
New Technologies for Cultural Property Protection

Artificial Intelligence & New Technologies for Cultural Property Protection: Perspectives of the United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT)

Michelle de Gruchy

Introduction

Geographic information technology (GIT) practitioners have long been working to develop machine learning tools (colloquially, 'AI') for geographic contexts and uses under the umbrella term GeoAI with varying degrees of success. One of the best known GeoAI models, Segment Anything (SAM), was released in 2023 and has been quickly adopted and adapted by a wide range of practitioners within the GIT community. However, use of these tools by the cultural heritage sector, including the experts working on heritage protection at the United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT), is still rare and mainly applied in academic research.

The United Nations is a centralised organisation with many separate funds, programmes and specialized agencies dedicated to carrying out its mission, such as UNESCO for Education, Science, and Culture; UNICEF – the United Nation's Children's Emergency supporting children's needs around the world; or UNHCR – the High Commissioner for Refugees. Within this UN landscape, UNOSAT is the United Nations Satellite Centre, part of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), with a mandate to provide United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies with satellite analysis, training, and capacity development, at their request, as well as to continue supporting Member States with satellite imagery analysis over their respective territories and to provide training and capacity development in the use of geospatial information technologies.

Member States and other UN entities use UNOSAT's satellite imagery analysis for monitoring, to inform ground operations during conflicts and after natural disasters, as well as decision-making across a wide range of contexts. It is critical that UNOSAT's work is both accurate and precise, as well as impartial, to ensure people and places in need receive the assistance

they require. For this reason, UNOSAT can only operationalise machine learning tools that perform with minimal error, such as FloodAI – a tool developed internally and operationalised that detects flood water in satellite imagery.[1]

The diversity of cultural heritage makes the development of machine learning/GeoAI tools for this sector more challenging than for other contexts. In line with UNESCO, UNOSAT's heritage experts consider cultural heritage to consist of archaeological sites, buildings of historic and/or artistic value, libraries and archives, monuments, museums, and religious sites. While some of these categories are more consistent in nature (e.g. libraries, archives, and museums tend to be rectilinear buildings), others are incredibly diverse on a global scale (e.g. archaeological and religious sites). Consider the difference between an 18th century European fortress and a landscape with preserved hominin footprints, further diverse examples include the numerous varieties and shapes of settlements, burial sites, encampments, resource extraction areas, production and manufacturing sites, which have existed around the world and through all time. Similarly, while the world's most dominant religions practice in buildings (churches, synagogues, mosques, temples), others make use of sacred landscapes of natural features that may be marked with rock art or carvings in trees. This brief insight into the state of art of machine learning within the context of satellite monitoring for cultural property protection will focus on the category of archaeological sites to illustrate the challenges.

The state of art

Monitoring of archaeological sites for cultural property protection is a type of change-detection exercise. An analyst compares one or more 'before images' with one or more 'after images' to determine if any changes have taken place. If change is observed, the analyst further assesses whether that change represents damage or normal activity. In the context of archaeology, normal activity could include excavation associated with a planned field season. There may also be seasonal environmental differences that reveal/

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1   Nemni et al., "Fully Convolutional Neural Network for Rapid Flood Segmentation in Synthetic Aperture Radar Imagery."

conceal different features on the site due to natural processes. Seasonal vegetation changes are a common example, but the changes may also relate to other seasonal differences like changes in soil moisture that annually reveal/conceal archaeological features.[2]

It is relatively simple to have a computer calculate if the pixels in one image are different value (colour/tone) from the pixels in another image, so on the surface, it may seem easy to develop a machine-learning algorithm that can detect changes on an archaeological site; but the reality is much more complex. Archaeological sites can be damaged in numerous ways, even when damage is limited to the specific categories that can be associated with conflict: looting that appears as small dark holes, bulldozing to intentionally destroy sites, impact from missiles or bombs that leave round craters and damage or flatten standing ruins, flooding that can lead to erosion, and fire, to name a few – each leaves a different signature.

Still, archaeologists have been working to develop machine-learning algorithms to automate or semi-automate change detection at archaeological sites for about a decade.[3] This development has plateaued, with the best tools reported to have about 80% and, very rarely, 90% accuracy.[4] The algorithms are invariably trained in a limited area, often in arid, open environments, where vegetation does not further complicate results. All would require additional training to be applied more generally, which is not always possible. Machine learning involves showing a computer numerous examples of something, until it can identify it reliably or replicate it in the desired manner.

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[2] Hammer, "Multi-Centric, Marsh-Based Urbanism at the Early Mesopotamian City of Lagash (Tell al-Hiba, Iraq)."

[3] Lasaponara, Elfadaly, and Attia, "Low Cost Space Technologies for Operational Change Detection Monitoring Around the Archaeological Area of Esna-Egypt"; Lauricella et al., "Semi-Automated Detection of Looting in Afghanistan Using Multispectral Imagery and Principal Component Analysis."

[4] Lasaponara and Masini, "Space-Based Identification of Archaeological Illegal Excavations and a New Automatic Method for Looting Feature Extraction in Desert Areas"; Agapiou, "Multi-Temporal Change Detection Analysis of Vertical Sprawl over Limassol City Centre and Amathus Archaeological Site in Cyprus during 2015–2020 Using the Sentinel-1 Sensor and the Google Earth Engine Platform"; Agapiou; Tang et al., "Elaborate Monitoring of Land-Cover Changes in Cultural Landscapes at Heritage Sites Using Very High-Resolution Remote-Sensing Images."

For a machine-learning tool, like FloodAI that focusses on a single, narrow task – identifying flood water – thousands of examples are required to train the tool.[5] For a more complicated machine learning tool like a large language model, the examples required number in the hundreds of billions or more.[6]

The archaeological record, viewed globally and in its entirety, is much more complex than flood water. It preserves the variety of construction, art, and behavioural traces (e.g. ancient routes eroded into the landscape) all around the world that *Homo sapiens sapiens* and other hominins have left over millions of years. These appear as physical ruins, carved or painted art on rock or wood/trees, excavated holes, both erosional features and depositional features that deviate from natural geological processes, soil colour differences, and/or concentrations of objects. For example, a Palaeolithic hunting site may consist of a concentration of stone flakes and a few fragments of animal bone.

Often, there are not thousands of real-world examples of either a single site type or specific type of damage to archaeology. One exception are the numerous looting pits at Southwest Asian sites, like Dura Europos and, indeed, detection of looting is one of the types of change that archaeologists have focussed on for machine learning with relatively successful results.[7] In Southwest Asia, looting appears as small dark circles against an open landscape that lacks vegetation. Could this tool be generalised to perform in an environment where shrubs cast shadows, which also appear as small dark circles? Even if the algorithm could be generalised, this is just one type of damage.

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[5] Nemni et al., "Fully Convolutional Neural Network for Rapid Flood Segmentation in Synthetic Aperture Radar Imagery."

[6] Minaee et al., "Large Language Models."

[7] Lauricella et al., "Semi-Automated Detection of Looting in Afghanistan Using Multi-spectral Imagery and Principal Component Analysis"; Lasaponara and Masini, "Space-Based Identification of Archaeological Illegal Excavations and a New Automatic Method for Looting Feature Extraction in Desert Areas"; Abate et al., "Aerial Image-Based Documentation and Monitoring of Illegal Archaeological Excavations."

Conclusions

Machine learning tools to automate or even semi-automate the process of detecting damage to archaeological sites are still in very early stages of development. Religious and sacred landscapes have not been discussed in this chapter and there is no existing literature about developing machine learning tools based on satellite imagery for this category of cultural property.

It is with detecting damage to built cultural heritage that machine learning is expected to be first adopted for cultural property protection. Globally, buildings, religious buildings, museums, and libraries are often rectilinear structures with walls and a roof, similar to the many other modern (or post-medieval) buildings that people use and inhabit – although there are regional variations. One ongoing research project developing a tool that detects damage to buildings, which UNOSAT is a part of, is DISHA Damage Assessment.[8] If successful, this algorithm could be applied to detect damage to built cultural heritage buildings.

Meanwhile, FloodAI can already be used in conjunction with datasets of cultural properties to assist in rapidly determining whether cultural property (including archaeology) is being affected by flood waters.

Nonetheless, based on the existing results of research projects in the area of machine learning and cultural property protection, it is clear that human analysts will still be required to manually inspect before and after imagery for changes for some time; particularly in organisations like UNOSAT, where precision, accuracy, and impartiality are paramount.

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[8] Bromley, Jauer, and Matias, "AI from Google Research and UN Boosts Humanitarian Disaster Response: Wider Coverage, Faster Damage Assessments."

Future Perspectives for Cultural Heritage Protection

Anna Puhr

The overlap between artificial intelligence (AI) and military technology is increasingly shaping the landscape of modern cultural property protection (CPP). Since AI-operated tools have become an integral part of security and defence strategies, their potential to improve cultural heritage protection – especially in conflict zones – deserves closer examination. This article explores how developments in AI and military technology can contribute to the protection of cultural heritage, addressing both opportunities and challenges.

Austria has recognized AI as a key area of development, as outlined in its Artificial Intelligence Mission Austria 2030 (AIM AT 2030) Strategy,[1] which was supplemented by the 2024 implementation plan. Notably, this strategy includes a chapter dedicated to security, emphasizing AI's role in strengthening national resilience. The Austrian Ministry of Defence has actively pursued the integration of AI in cyber defence and hybrid threat response, through initiatives, such as HYBRIS,[2] a research project in cooperation with the National Defence Academy. HYBRIS aims at establishing a national data intelligence platform to improve the decision-making capacity of Austrian security authorities.

The growing importance of AI in national security, particularly in countering cyber threats and disinformation, also includes CPP. AI offers transformation potential in several key areas.[3]

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[1] Bundesministerium für Klimaschutz, Umwelt, Energie, Mobilität, Innovation und Technologie (BMK), Strategie der Bundesregierung zur Künstlichen Intelligenz, retrieved on 5 March 2025, https://www.bmk.gv.at/themen/innovation/publikationen/ikt/ai/strategie-bundesregierung.html

[2] HYBRIS - Hybride Bedrohungs-Resilienz durch Interdisziplinäre Zusammenarbeit der Sicherheitsbehörden, accessed on 5 March, 2025, https://www.kiras.at/gefoerderte-projekte/detail/hybris

[3] European Commission, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, K. Izsak, A. Terrier, S. Kreutzer, et al., Opportunities and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence Technologies for the Cultural and Creative Sectors (Publications

It can, amongst others,

- assist in archaeological site analysis by identifying and mapping potential sites;
- support damage detection and monitoring with real-time assessment and early warning systems;
- enhance digital archiving and documentation by cataloguing and safeguarding cultural assets;
- assist in combatting illicit trafficking by tracking illegally traded cultural artifacts; or
- enable digitisation and virtual reconstruction to preserve historical sites and artifacts for research and public education.

However, these advancements do not come without challenges. AI also introduces risks to this sensitive field, including biases to data processing, ethical concerns, and security vulnerabilities – issues that must be carefully addressed, as AI is being increasingly integrated into the field of cultural heritage.[4]

Cultural heritage has long been acknowledged as a vital carrier of information for humanity, providing identity, continuity, and stability. When historical narratives are manipulated or distorted by disinformation, this can undermine social cohesion and increase the vulnerability of democratic structures.[5] Therefore, the destruction or misuse of cultural property poses a direct threat to social and cultural resilience as well as to national identity, making its protection crucial when countering hybrid threats.

Office of the European Union, 2022); Petros Patias and Charalampos Georgiadis, "Fighting Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Goods—The ENIGMA Project," Remote Sensing 15, no. 10 (2023): 2579.

[4] Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), "AI Meets Archives: The Future of Machine Learning in Cultural Heritage," October 2024, https://www.clir.org/2024/10/ai-meets-archives-the-future-of-machine-learning-in-cultural-heritage/

[5] European Parliament, *The Impact of Disinformation on Democratic Processes and Human Rights in the World*, Study, Directorate-General for External Policies, 2021, accessed on 5 March 2025, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/653635/EXPO_STU(2021)653635_EN.pdf.

Despite this, neither Austria's AI strategy nor its Security Strategy explicitly address cultural heritage or cultural property, highlighting a strategic gap when it comes to safeguarding these assets in the context of emerging technologies and security challenges.

In particular, the integration of military expertise and new technologies offers significant opportunities for CPP.

The military's proficiency in managing complex systems, surveillance technology, and threat response can be adapted to monitoring and protecting cultural heritage. Leveraging these capabilities could lead to the development of robust monitoring systems, advanced data analytics, and predictive tools to enhance the protection of cultural sites. This is particularly crucial in conflict zones, where timely intervention and technological support can mitigate damage and prevent loss. Strengthening cooperation between the cultural and security sectors may thus contribute to more effective and resilient safeguarding strategies.

On 13 November 2024, three leading experts shared their activities and insights in this field at the roundtable discussion titled "Future Perspectives in Cultural Property Protection – Artificial Intelligence & New Technologies":

- *Michelle de Gruchy*, Lead Analyst for cultural heritage and archaeology at the United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT)

- *Damian Koropeckyj*, Director of Operations for the CURIA Lab Conflict Observatory Project

- *Timo Schless*, Adviser and Developer to the Whiteflag Foundation and Signals Officer in the Royal Netherlands Air Force

This roundtable, as part of the International Cultural Property Protection Conference at the National Defence Academy, explored the potential of AI and emerging technologies in cultural heritage protection. The key outcomes will be outlined in the following chapters.

Intersection of cultural heritage and technology

Timo Schless commented on the connections between Whiteflag and cultural property protection, highlighting his career's focus on using information in conflicts, which encompasses both technological and human aspects. Whiteflag emerged from the need to address the complexities faced by those involved in conflicts, particularly within the armed forces, where situational awareness is vital. The organisation prioritises real-time situational awareness, not only for cultural property but also for hospitals, aid workers, and food distribution. This approach requires civil-military and civil-civilian cooperation to ensure critical information is shared quickly and effectively. Whiteflag's objective is to make existing systems interoperable, minimizing duplication and ensuring that the right information reaches the right people at the right time. Essentially, Whiteflag functiones as a dynamic no-strike list, being continually updated to safeguard vital assets.

Michelle de Gruchy reflected on her career, noting that while she taught and trained across multiple degrees, her focus is not on training new archaeologists or cultural heritage professionals. Instead, she emphasizes the importance of training individuals from other professions with varying expertise. According to Michelle, the key challenge is finding concise ways to impart a whole field of knowledge effectively, particularly to those who does not have background knowledge of cultural heritage.

Damian Koropeckyj discussed the broader topic of civil-military cooperation and the increasing focus on cultural property for disinformation campaigns, noting how this intersects with the SCOPE framework. He shared an example of his research on a monument erected in Russian-occupied Ukraine nearly a decade ago, which had been falsely alleged to have fallen victim to Ukrainian war crimes. This allegation was used by the Russian media to justify military intervention, and by 2022, social media had been amplified this story: people searching for information online were directed to a Wikipedia page that supported this misleading narrative. Koropeckyj pointed out that, by 2024, individuals might turn to chatbots built on large language models, which could provide differing answers about the monument, either serving as propaganda or as an opportunity for commemoration. He highlighted the operational implications of such narratives,

which could put military units at risk and impact civil-military cooperation and leadership engagement. The use of large language models by powerful militaries, sometimes rooted in disinformation, represents a significant challenge that needed to be addressed.

Opportunities and limitations

Timo Schless highlighted the rapid advancement of technology, particularly AI, and emphasised the continued importance of human decision making, especially in sensitive moments. Reflecting on Whiteflag's use of technology in conflict zones, he elaborated on the use of blockchain technology. Schless explained that blockchain ensures data integrity and neutrality, as it removes the middleman and enables trusted information sharing between systems, without relying on a central authority. This feature is critical as organisations tend to trust their own systems, making blockchain a suitable solution for secure, decentralized data management. While blockchain is not ideal for storing large volumes of information, it excels at verifying data accuracy. This is particularly valuable in the context of AI, where the quality of data input is essential for generating reliable results. According to Schless, Whiteflag's goal is to enhance situational awareness and provide a trustworthy basis for verifying AI-driven insights.

Michelle de Gruchy discussed the potential of AI in the near future, particularly, in the damage assessment of built heritage. While the technology is promising, she noted that challenges remain, due to the variety of built structures, requiring tailored approaches and specific training for each context. De Gruchy pointed out that the use of AI in responding to natural hazards is likely to increase more rapidly than its use in conflict situations. She cited UNOSAT's long-standing use of FloodAI, which utilizes Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) data to detect water and assist in damage assessment and early warning. Although not yet specifically designed for cultural heritage, this technology could have an immediate impact, such as providing warning of potential flooding, which would help protect museum collections.

Regarding the development of a method to collaborate across different sectors by using geospatial or mapping data for military purposes, **Timo Schless** explained that Whiteflag can be very useful, for instance, for flood detection. If a satellite notices a flood, Whiteflag can quickly relay this information to other systems. This is important because the system that detects the flood might not be the same as the one used by people on the ground. Whiteflag helps to distribute the information and can also link it to nearby cultural property or other points of interest.

Damian Koropeckyj highlighted the importance of efforts like those of UNOSAT in cultural heritage protection, especially during major natural disasters to the relief of which armed forces contributed. He pointed out that the military is already working on implementing AI to predict behaviours, indicators, and early warning. From a legal point of view, cultural property should be factored in from the very beginning of a military operation, and data could play a crucial role in this context. Koropeckyj also identified a significant opportunity to integrate potential threat to, or destruction of cultural heritage into early warning systems during conflicts. He referenced quantitative studies showing links between looting and socio-political unrest, suggesting that integrating this data into other environmental factors in conflict areas could be highly beneficial. The mapping of archaeological sites, particularly in lesser-known areas, could greatly support military operations and enhance their effectiveness in protecting cultural heritage.

Building effective collaborations

Michelle de Gruchy emphasized the importance of events like the CPP Conference in fostering more effective partnerships, particularly between defence organisations, cultural heritage experts, and technology developers. She noted that such events are crucial for building networks, where participants can get acquainted, understand each other's work, share available tools, and identify mutual needs.

According to de Gruchy, effective collaboration happens when people are physically present in the same room, as it facilitated the connections and discussions necessary for meaningful cooperation.

Timo Schless explained that Whiteflag focuses on practical cases rather than on formal collaborations involving large sums of money. Its goal is to work with interested parties and achieve tangible results. However, this approach can be challenging in view of new, low-level, and not widely employed technologies, whose added value people within organisations have yet to recognize. The aim is to demonstrate how technology can work for individuals, assist in early risk identification, and gradually develop through the contributions of different organisations with varied expertise. Schless also stressed the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors, noting that technology often operates out of view of the public sector. Engaging in dialogue and exploring collaborative opportunities would benefit both sides. Whiteflag works with a wide range of partners, including a large IT company, a Start-up, and NGOs – each of them having a distinct culture and approach to new technology and funding. Finding common ground can be challenging and progress slow. However, Schless emphasised that this slow pace is not necessarily negative, as it allows for learning about new technologies and mitigating risks in the process.

Damian Koropeckyj emphasized the importance of having a clear vision when communicating goals, especially when working with broad ideas or experimenting with new technologies. He stressed that both the military and civilian sectors need concrete goals, even if the path leading to them was not totally clear. Koropeckyj pointed out that it is also crucial to be transparent about objectives and to allow for their discussion and negotiation, especially if they do not harmonise from the beginning. He noted that a clear direction is important, because people in both sectors follow established doctrines. Breaking down these goals into components comprehensible for both sides is essential for building informed and collaborative relationships.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the expert discussion highlighted the potential of AI and new technologies in transforming cultural heritage protection, especially in conflict and disaster zones. As we move forward, it is crucial to recognize the opportunities those systems offer, but also the challenges they present. The integration of AI into humanitarian aid and military strategies promises to reduce the impacts of war, offering improved and more efficient support

to those in need. However, as emphasized in an article of Timo Schless and his colleagues:

> "AI offers an opportunity to help reduce the tragedy of war and better deliver humanitarian aid to those who need it. However, to be successful, these systems must be trusted by humans and their information systems, overcoming flawed information flows in conflict and disaster zones that continue to be marked by intermittent communications, poor situation awareness, mistrust, and human errors."[6]

Building trust, improving communication, and ensuring collaboration across sectors will be essential for the full potential of these technologies to be realized in cultural property protection and in the support of humanitarian efforts.

Transcription of Discussion:
Raffaela Woller & Michaela Kukula, Center for Cultural Property Protection, University for Continuing Education Krems

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[6] S. Kate Devitt, Jason Scholz, Timo Schless, and Larry Lewis, "Developing a Trusted Human-AI Network for Humanitarian Benefit," Digital War 4 (2023): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1057/s42984-023-00063-y

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Link to Conference Booklet
&
Authors' Biographies

70 years after the 1954 Hague Convention was adopted, the implementation of Cultural Property Protection (CPP) within armed forces and during armed conflict has made significant progress, but its full integration into military measures, education, and training still leaves room for improvement. Thus, the international conference of November 2024 brought together civil and military experts to expound current issues regarding cultural heritage and property protection and discuss common challenges and possibilities for an increased, sustainable implementation of CPP within armed forces. Another objective was to emphasise the significance of tangible and intangible heritage for societies and to elaborate on the added value of CPP for military missions and operations.

This collection of papers provides a comprehensive picture of the contents discussed and findings presented at the conference.

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