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CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CONFLICT ZONES: PROTECTING ANTIQUITIES DURING WAR



6th Annual Symposium

February 22, 2025 10am–6pm

Cultural Heritage in Conflict Zones: Protecting Antiquities During War

10:00 TEA & COFFEE / WELCOME / OVERVIEW OF SYMPOSIUM THEMES

Heritage and Conflict in South Asia

10:30 **War, Displacement, and Cultural Erosion:
The Performance Culture in Sri Lanka's War Zone**
Chamila Gunamunige

10:50 **Heritage Under Siege: Cultural Erasure and
Warfare in South Asian Conflicts**
Nadeem Omar

11:10 **Intangible Cultural Heritage in Conflict Zones:
The Case of Pashto Cassette Culture in Pakistan**
Ashraf Kakar

11:30 Discussion

12:00 LUNCH BREAK

Heritage as Imperium: Authoritarian Uses of the Past

12:30 **Syria's Heritage After Assad: Destruction, Reconstruction,
and Representation**
Nour Munawar

12:50 **Erasing Heritage: The Impact of Reconstruction on the
Historical and Cultural Identity of Diyarbakır's Sur District**
Münevver Özdemir

1:10 **Ethics of Discovery: Chronicling the Neolithic Art of
Tassili n'Ajjer in the Twentieth Century**
Sheyda Aisha Khaymaz

1:30 **The Past as Propaganda: Russian Orthodoxy and
Imperialism at Crimean Chersonesos 2014–2024**
Adam Rabinowitz

1:50 Discussion

2:15 TEA & COFFEE BREAK

Community Strategies for Heritage Renewal

- 2:30 **Community Archaeology in Lebanon:
A Path for Heritage Protection**
Nelly Abboud
- 2:50 **Sudan's Stolen Past: The War in Sudan and the
Local and Global Responsibility to Combat Looting**
Anwar Mahagoub Ali Mohamed
- 3:10 **Al Mudhif A Confluence – Philadelphia 2021:
Communicating Through Cultural Heritage**
Yaroub Al Obaidi
- 3:30 Discussion

4:00 BREAK

Closing Session

- 4:15 – Introduction of Keynote Speaker
5:30
- Keynote
**Conquest Archaeology: Landscape as Archive
and The Vestiges of War**
Zainab Bahrani
Edith Porada Professor of Art History and Archaeology
Department of Art History and Archaeology
Columbia University
- Discussion
- Final Reflections on Cultural Heritage in Conflict Zones
and Vote of Thanks

6:00 END OF SYMPOSIUM

ABSTRACTS

War, Displacement, and Cultural Erosion: The Performance Culture in Sri Lanka's War Zone

Chamila Gunamunige

There is a broad and established performance culture in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka. While some of these performances remain deeply rooted in the rituals and ceremonies of Hinduism, many traditional performances have explicitly evolved for entertainment purposes. For example, "Vada modi koothu," "Then modi koothu," "Thenn pangu," "Vada pangu," and "Vasakappa" are some of the traditional performances which focuses on entertainment. Nevertheless, during the civil war that lasted for several decades (1980–2009), the survival of these traditional performances faced a great challenge. Since the war was mostly located in the northern and eastern regions, the Tamil people, who are the majority of these areas, were constantly in a state of uncertainty about their lives. In addition, the economy of these areas collapsed severely. Many people died. Most people lost their homes, and many others were left disabled. On the other hand, the repression and censorship that came with the war confronted the people's freedom of expression. Therefore, the war completely undermined the cultural existence in the North and the East. A significant event that symbolizes the cultural erosion during this period was the burning of the Jaffna Library in 1981, one of the largest libraries in Asia, which destroyed over 92,000 books. This paper explores the impact of the civil war on the decline of traditional performance culture in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka. This research moves beyond the conventional understanding of archives as physical sites, emphasizing the significance of body-based archives, such as traditional performance practices. Since the documented sources are very limited in this field of study, the primary methodology for this research is based on interviews with experts in Tamil theatre.

Chamila Priyanka (he/him) is a theatre artist and scholar from Sri Lanka. He is a PhD student with a specialization in performance as public practice at The University of Texas at Austin. His recent publication is "Ideological Crisis, Compliance, and Self-Censorship: Identifying the Symptoms of Sinhala-Speaking Theatre Through Its Responses to the Civil War" for the *Asian Theatre Journal*, 2024. He won the USA Fulbright Scholarship in 2016, and as a result of that, he obtained his MFA in Theatre Directing at Long Island University, New York. Chamila did his BA in Political Science at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Heritage Under Siege: Cultural Erasure and Warfare in South Asian Conflicts

Nadeem Omar

This paper investigates the deliberate destruction of heritage sites of religious significance in South Asia as acts of cultural erasure, focusing on the underlying motives and broader consequences of these actions. In instances of communal conflict—such as the destruction of the Babri Mosque in India, retaliatory attacks on Hindu temples in Pakistan, and the targeting of churches during Muslim-Christian tensions—these attacks emerge from deeply entrenched hostilities exacerbated by intra-state political rivalries among religious communities. The destruction of these heritage sites serves as a symbolic message aimed at eroding the presence, identity, and historical significance of the opposing community.

In contrast, the destruction of Buddhist temples by Tamil Tiger insurgents in Sri Lanka, the obliteration of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the vandalism of the Jehanabad Buddha by Taliban forces in Pakistan illustrate acts of strategic warfare. These incidents not only inflict cultural devastation but are also calculated measures designed to destabilize enemy morale, assert dominance, and further ideological objectives. Such actions often transcend the immediate conflict, embodying symbolic gestures intended to undermine the cultural and spiritual identity of the affected groups on a global stage.

The paper concludes that in both communal and military contexts, the destruction of heritage is a deliberate effort to erase cultural symbols and disrupt the historical continuity of affected communities. These acts have significant transnational implications, impacting not only the targeted groups but also the global community. Whether as a “cold war” between rival communities or a “hot war” between military forces, such attacks weaken the social fabric and collective identity of the affected groups. They also highlight the critical need for international solidarity among heritage experts, policymakers, and governments to protect cultural heritage as a vital expression of human dignity and shared history.

Dr. Nadeem Omar Tarar, a Visiting Senior Research Fellow in Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin, specializes in South Asian art history and cultural heritage. Previously an Associate Professor at the National College of Arts, Lahore, he holds a PhD in Art History (UNSW, Australia) and an MA in Critical Theory (Nottingham, UK). Author of two books on South Asian art and cultural history, his work has appeared in notable journals like *Third Text*, *Economic and Political Weekly* and *Journal of South Asian Studies*. His fellowships include the Aga Khan Program at MIT, the Charles Wallace Fellowship (SOAS, UK), and the Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship at the Harry Ransom Center, UT Austin.

Intangible Cultural Heritage in Conflict Zones: The Case of Pashto Cassette Culture in Pakistan

Ashraf Kakar

This study addresses the urgent need to protect and preserve intangible cultural heritage in conflict zones, centering on Pashto music cassette culture in Pakistan as a primary case. From the 1980s to the 2010s, cassette tapes served as the dominant medium for Pashto folk music, facilitating the decentralization of music production that allowed regional genres to flourish beyond institutional controls. These recordings capture the distinct soundscapes, performative nuances, and social customs of the Pashtun community, thus becoming valuable ethnographic records of an era characterized by traditional resilience. However, in conflict-affected areas, such as the Pashtun regions of Pakistan, these cultural assets are under severe threat from war, urbanization, and inadequate archiving support.

The absence of formal preservation efforts risks erasing historical expressions from collective memory. This paper argues for the digitization of Pashto cassette recordings to protect and sustain this cultural heritage, aligning with UNESCO’s mandate to safeguard intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in conflicts and emergencies. Recognizing cassettes as vital to both cultural identity and community, this study explores their role in ICH within the broader frameworks of international law and human rights instruments, which often overlook such forms of heritage during armed conflict. By securing these recordings, we not only preserve South Asia’s cultural diversity, but also promote equity in heritage representation, countering the often one-dimensional portrayal of Pashtun culture as solely defined by conflict. Ultimately, this work advocates digitization as a pathway to a more inclusive cultural landscape, where minority voices retain their rightful place in both regional and global heritage.

Ashraf Kakar is an anthropologist and filmmaker specializing in cultural heritage preservation and public engagement. Currently serving as a Research Specialist at Lok Virsa – National Institute of Folk and Traditional

Heritage in Islamabad, he focuses on documenting and promoting Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in Pakistan. Kakar led a comprehensive documentation study on “Narh Sur,” the distinctive throat singing tradition of Balochistan, and is working toward its inclusion in UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list for the 2024/25 cycle. His work advances heritage digitization and fosters broader access to Pakistan’s rich cultural traditions.

Syria’s Heritage After Assad: Destruction, Reconstruction, and Representation

Nour Munawar

History is written by the victors. This holds true when a conflict reveals a symmetric tendency. In Syria, where a protracted armed conflict (2011–2024) has predominantly been viewed as asymmetric, history was being scripted by an authoritarian regime that claimed to have won the war. This research investigates cultural heritage practices, uses, and misappropriations in Syria since the colonial period. First, the discussion examines the intricate interplay between heritage and politics in Syria by scrutinizing heritage politics and uses in colonial and postcolonial contexts. In this paper, I analyze the al-Assad regime-orchestrated heritage reconstruction projects during Syria’s unfinished war. Then this research moves on and explores official regime attempts to create war narratives and the selective commemoration of Syria’s recent conflict by looking at the portrayal of disputed war memories in popular media production and the formation of oral history. I argue that, since the colonial period, cultural heritage as a discourse has produced a politicized unilateral (hi)story and narratives shaped and influenced by political agendas. This history encompasses highly politicized heritage reconstruction works, freighted with cultural meaning, and primarily intended to bolster the power and authority of the Arab Socialist Ba’ath regime.

Dr. Nour Munawar is an archaeologist and UNESCO heritage expert; he currently works as a research fellow at the University of Amsterdam (UvA). He is the Principal Investigator of the “Decolonial Futures: Heritage, Memory, and Narratives in the Making in MENA” research project funded by the Dutch Research Council (NOW). He also works as a UNESCO Researcher for the UNESCO Documentary Heritage Unit on the “Documentary Heritage for Intercultural dialogue—a case study of AIUla, Saudi Arabia”. Munawar has published extensively in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes on archaeology and heritage studies. His research focuses on the politics of the past, uses and abuses of heritage in post-conflict, archaeology of the contemporary past, colonialism and postcolonialism, and decolonization of heritage in the Arab region and the Global South. He held positions at Brown University (USA), UCL–Qatar (Qatar), the University of Amsterdam (the Netherlands), and the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (Qatar).

Erasing Heritage: The Impact of Reconstruction on the Historical and Cultural Identity of Diyarbakır’s Sur District

Münevver Özdemir

The historic Sur district of Diyarbakır, Turkey, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, suffered extensive destruction during the conflicts that erupted in late 2015. Following the cessation of hostilities, the government initiated a large-scale reconstruction process, marked by implementing emergency expropriation decisions and widespread demolitions. These measures profoundly transformed the district’s urban fabric. Reconstruction efforts prioritized modern infrastructure and high-end housing developments while neglecting the preservation of Sur’s unique historical and cultural identity. Many registered historical buildings were irreparably

damaged or altered, and the traditional streets, once characterized by modest homes and a strong sense of community, were replaced by luxury residences marketed at prices far beyond the reach of the former inhabitants. This shift has significantly altered Sur's demographic composition, eroding its social and cultural fabric. This paper argues that the state-led reconstruction of Sur disrupted the area's historical texture and facilitated a demographic transformation that undermined its cultural identity. By analyzing the policies and practices behind the expropriation and rebuilding process, this study demonstrates how the reconstruction trend, rather than preserving Sur's heritage, has contributed to its erasure. The case of Sur serves as a critical example of the broader tensions between urban renewal initiatives and the preservation of cultural and historical heritage.

Münever Özdemir holds a BA in History and an MA in the History of Art, Architecture, and Visual Studies, both from Boğaziçi University. Her MA thesis, titled "Maritime Fortifications of Arwad and Alanya from the Eleventh to the Fourteenth Centuries: Liminal Shores," explores medieval maritime architecture. Her research interests include the art and architecture of the medieval Eastern Mediterranean and Anatolia, coastal cities, cross-cultural and maritime architecture, rulers' imagery in the Mediterranean, and perceptions of Byzantium. She is currently a PhD student at the University of Texas at Austin.

Ethics of Discovery: Chronicling the Neolithic Art of Tassili n'Ajjer in the Twentieth Century

Sheyda Aisha Khaymaz

Dotted across the Saharan massifs and plateaus are millennia-old rock engravings and paintings that act as a critical temporal bridge, connecting contemporary observers to the region's ancient past. Particularly, the plateaus of Tassili n'Ajjer in southern Algeria harbor an extraordinary concentration of images depicting animals and humans in the midst of mundane, everyday activities. Dating back an impressive 12,000 years, Tassilian rock art provides what is possibly the earliest record of life in the prehistoric central Sahara.

This paper examines the contested historiography of the Neolithic rock art discoveries in mid-century Tassili n'Ajjer, with particular attention to the colonial context that shaped these archaeological encounters. Through analysis of competing claims of discovery, notably those of Lieutenant Brenans (1933) and Henri Lhote (1956), the study demonstrates how European archaeological expeditions were deeply embedded in colonial power structures and territorial control. My research situates these "discoveries" within the broader historical context of French colonial occupation and the Algerian War of Independence, revealing how archaeological practices were implicated in the widespread patterns of cultural dispossession and institutional power. By documenting the removal of prehistoric objects to European institutions and the destruction of others, this paper argues that the supposed preservation of Saharan Neolithic heritage often served to flourish European academic careers while simultaneously contributing to the region's cultural destabilization. This study then concerns itself with the ethical parameters of research methodologies through the critical case of Tassili n'Ajjer, reflecting on what passes as "research" in both conflict and peacetime contexts. Through reflexive positioning of my own fieldwork within Tassili's post-independence backdrop, I posit a fundamental question about the nature of knowledge and discovery itself: whether any cross-cultural research encounter can occur without some form of disruption or harm to Indigenous spaces and lifeways. Through an examination of researchers' ethical dilemmas and by looking at some telling cases of how not to do research, this analysis hopes to contribute to wider discussions about ethical research practices in geographies developmentally marginalized by the colonial enterprise.

Sheyda Aisha Khaymaz is an artist, curator, poet, and PhD candidate in Art History at The University of Texas at Austin, specializing in modern and contemporary art from the north of Africa. Their doctoral dissertation,

titled "Indigenous Presentness: Translocal Politics of Amazigh Art and Resistance," focuses on the manifold expressions of Indigenous philosophies in art and explores the nexus between Amazigh artistic output and sovereignty movements across the territories known as Tamazgha. Khaymaz is the 2023 recipient of the Rhonda A. Saad Prize for Best Paper in Modern and Contemporary Arab Art, awarded by the Association for Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey (AMCA), and the 2022 Mark Tessler Graduate Student Prize Award, awarded for the best paper by the American Institute for Maghrib Studies (AIMS). In 2023, they held a curatorial fellowship in the Modern and Contemporary Art Department at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and are currently the 2024 Brooks International Fellow at Tate Modern.

The Past as Propaganda: Russian Orthodoxy and Imperialism at Crimean Chersonesos 2014–2024

Adam Rabinowitz

Attention to cultural heritage in conflict situations often focuses on direct threats to the survival of objects and monuments, or on their illicit removal from their places of origin. Less attention is paid to heritage sites that are maintained and even celebrated by an occupying force. Yet this situation can create an even greater threat to the connection between monuments or objects and the communities whose heritage they express. Appropriation, reinterpretation, and a shift in the priority accorded to different time-periods and past groups can all sever cultural heritage resources from their legal caretakers and repurpose them for the ends of the occupier, even when the resources themselves are preserved intact. This paper will explore these complex issues through a case-study of the ancient city of Chersonesos in Crimea, where a concerted decade-long effort carried out by a close partnership between the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church, accelerated with the outbreak of war, have resulted in a reorientation of this UNESCO World Heritage site toward a vision of the past and future that serves the ideological needs of both Putin's government and the leaders of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. While the site itself has not yet been threatened by military action, a massive construction program has damaged parts of the archaeological zone, and portions of the associated museum collections have been moved to Russia for exhibits or safekeeping. Beyond this, however, the development of an enormous new museal complex focused on the Christian past of Russia, and Crimea's centrality in that past, has created new dangers for the interpretation and control of the archaeological remains. This paper will focus primarily on developments since 2022, but will also return to earlier events that are now easier to explain in light of later developments.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz is Associate Professor in the Department of Classics and Acting Director of the Institute of Classical Archaeology at UT Austin. He holds a PhD from the Interdepartmental Program in Classical Art and Archaeology at the University of Michigan and is an active field archaeologist specializing in the archaeology of Greek colonization and ancient food and drink. From 2002 to 2014 he carried out excavations at the Greek and Roman site of Chersonesos in Crimea. He is currently co-director of the Histria Multiscalar Archaeological Project at the Greek and Roman site of Histria on the Romanian Black Sea coast.

Community Archaeology in Lebanon: A Path for Heritage Protection

Nelly Abboud

In Lebanon, community archaeology is a rather uncommon practice, where the general public is frequently excluded from archaeological research. Lebanese archaeology and history public museums remain largely

elitist, occasionally engaging the wider population in their programs. Many Lebanese archaeologists and heritage professionals argue that involving local communities in preserving and protecting cultural heritage is still worthless. This viewpoint, which downplays archaeology's social significance, is the result of decades of colonialism, elitism, and a history of gatekeeping and knowledge monopolization.

Over the years, Lebanon's heritage has faced numerous challenges, including incompetence, vandalism, looting, and the impact of wars. The recent Israel–Hezbollah conflict not only inflicted destruction but also revealed the vulnerabilities of both the state and the private sector. The 2024 war exposed the absence of preventive measures to protect sites and museums. Yet, it highlighted the significant role of local communities, who acted as first responders to document damage and advocate for the protection of heritage sites.

This paper explores the importance of community involvement in the preservation of Lebanon's cultural heritage. Through case studies, it examines how community engagement can bridge the gap between local people and heritage knowledge, strengthening the sense of belonging and enhancing heritage protection efforts.

Nelly P. Abboud is a Lebanese archaeologist and museum educator. She has worked in the cultural heritage field for more than fifteen years. She served as the education and visitor's service officer at the Lebanese Museum of Prehistory at the University of Saint Joseph in Beirut and later on as acting curator at the University of Balamand's Ethnography Museum. She co-founded Museolab in 2017, a non-governmental organization aiming to promote cultural heritage through experiential learning approaches. Her research interests include community archaeology, museum education, heritage destruction, and illicit traffic.

She was an active member of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) for twelve years and served as the MENA regional coordinator of the ICOM Committee of Education and Cultural Action (CECA). Additionally, she collaborated with the Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA) to investigate and record the illegal antiquity trade between Syria and Lebanon. She is also a member of the extensive team of specialists that collaborate with the Museum of Looted Antiquities (MOLA).

Abboud has contributed to the academic discussion on the function of museums and communities in cultural preservation and heritage education by publishing several articles and chapters in peer-reviewed books and journals.

Sudan's Stolen Past: The War in Sudan and the Local and Global Responsibility to Combat Looting

Anwar Mahagoub Ali Mohamed

The ongoing war in Sudan has placed both the population and the country's rich archaeological heritage in immediate danger. Looting, illicit sales, and site destruction have intensified, exacerbating historical patterns of heritage exploitation. This paper examines how heritage in Sudan can be protected by actively engaging and raising awareness within local communities, recognizing their crucial role in safeguarding cultural sites before and during war.

It explores the potential for collaboration between these communities and institutions investigating looted antiquities, emphasizing how their knowledge and vigilance can help identify and recover stolen artifacts. Additionally, it considers the responsibilities of universities and museums in addressing the influx of looted objects. While Sudan's war is often mischaracterized as a civil conflict, its broader geopolitical and economic dimensions shape how heritage is commodified and trafficked, underscoring the urgent need for community-driven and institutional responses.

It will also assess the legal and ethical frameworks governing cultural property acquisition, including international conventions such as the 1970 UNESCO Convention and the Hague Convention. Finally, it will

consider the potential consequences for institutions that acquire looted materials, from reputational damage to legal penalties. By centering Sudanese perspectives and community-driven archaeological initiatives, this paper argues for a more accountable and decolonial approach to protecting Sudan's heritage in times of crisis.

Anwar Mahagoub Ali Mohamed specializes in decolonial archaeology, focusing on Sudanese heritage archaeological sites and material culture. Anwar is completing a Master's in Interdisciplinary International and Regional Studies (MIRS) at the University of Michigan and has worked on archeological projects in Sudan Kurru and Jebel Barkal. With a background in community archaeology, Anwar's work critically examines the intersections of heritage preservation, colonial legacies, and local knowledge in shaping archaeological narratives.

Anwar's research extends to the contemporary risks facing Sudan's archaeological heritage, particularly in light of the current war. Their work engages with the ethical responsibilities of museums and universities in addressing the looting and illicit trade of artifacts. Through a decolonial framework, Anwar advocates for community-driven solutions that prioritize Sudanese voices in heritage management.

Anwar has presented at academic conferences on decolonizing archaeology and indigenous knowledge's role in heritage preservation. They are committed to fostering ethical archaeological practices that resist extractive research models and meaningfully engage with local communities. Anwar's research contributes to ongoing debates about restitution, provenance research, and the role of institutions in protecting cultural heritage in times of conflict.

Al Mudhif A Confluence – Philadelphia 2021: Communicating Through Cultural Heritage

Yaroub Al Obaidi

Al Mudhif Project in Philadelphia, established in 2021, marked the construction of the first Sumerian-style reed guesthouse in the United States and the world. This project served as a platform for cross-cultural dialogue, bringing together people of different ages and backgrounds through the lens of cultural heritage. Three core messages defined the project: 1) The Message of Reed: The use of reed—a material historically integral to human life in ancient Mesopotamia (modern-day southern Iraq)—served as the centerpiece of this initiative. Through the construction of the Mudhif, the project showcased how reeds were traditionally used to build houses and boats. This was particularly significant in the U.S., where reed is often considered an invasive species. By highlighting its historical and practical significance, the project offered a new perspective on this misunderstood material. 2) The Artistic Message: The project also emphasized the power of art in fostering community and cultural exchange. Al Mudhif became a vibrant social space where people from diverse backgrounds shared meals, drinks, and conversations. This artistic endeavor underscored the role of social arts in bridging divides and building cohesive societies. And 3) The Social Message: Al Mudhif became a space for meaningful connections, serving as a meeting ground for Iraqis and U.S. veterans who had served in Iraq—two communities that rarely interact. Their collaboration in constructing Al Mudhif resulted in profound and lasting relationships, demonstrating the potential for cultural projects to heal and unite.

The project's location in the U.S., far from the conflict zones of the Middle East, underscored its significance as a symbol of peace and cultural appreciation. Coming to life in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project faced unique challenges. Alternative construction and communication plans were developed to address potential disruptions, but fortunately, none were required during the project's execution. However, Hurricane Ida, which struck Philadelphia after originating in Louisiana, did cause some damage to the structure. The day after the hurricane, the team communicated updates to stakeholders and invited the community to participate in repairs. The overwhelming response and collective effort to restore Al Mudhif highlighted the project's ability to inspire collaboration and resilience. Through its messages of heritage, art,

and social connection, the Al Mudhif Project not only revived ancient building tradition but also fostered understanding, community, and hope across cultural divides.

Yaroub Al Obaidi is an Iraqi American artist born in Diyala, Iraq. He has lived in Philadelphia since 2016 and in Pittsburgh since 2023. Al Obaidi is a designer, researcher, and author with a diverse background in both education and the arts. From 2004 to 2007, he served as a lecturer at the College of Fine Arts at the University of Baghdad.

He holds two master's degrees: one in design from the College of Fine Arts, University of Baghdad, and another in socially engaged art from Moore College of Art & Design in Philadelphia. His thesis focused on "Narrating the Personal at Museum Galleries."

Al Obaidi is the co-founder of *Friends, Peace Sanctuary Journal*, the Arabic-English journal in Philadelphia. He also served as the art leader of the Al Mudhif Project in Philadelphia, which is the first Mesopotamian guest house built outside of Iraq. He worked as an educator and global guide at the Penn Museum for over five years and has been involved with the American Society for Overseas Research (ASOR) as a member of its Cultural Heritage Committee.

Currently, Al Obaidi is pursuing a doctoral degree in Communication and Rhetorical Studies at Duquesne University.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Conquest Archaeology: Landscape as Archive and The Vestiges of War

Zainab Bahrani

In the spring of 2003, US troops invaded Iraq and began an eight-year military occupation resulting in extensive and long-term damage to tangible and intangible heritage, archives, museums, and archaeological sites. In one of the best-known cases, US forces seized Babylon, converting this ancient heritage site into a military base, and irreparably damaging it in various ways. Although twenty-two years on this case is familiar, it is not resolved. The occupation of heritage sites by the military was widespread, a fact that raises intellectual questions regarding the symbolic capital of antiquity or heritage deployed in war, as well as juridical questions regarding cultural destruction in international laws of war. Practices of targeting or otherwise militarizing cultural heritage sites and historical built environments in war can be analyzed within theoretical frames of urbicide and conflict archaeology, by examining tangible vestiges of warfare and occupation on site in the field, as well as the optics of conquest and the writing of history in disciplines such as archaeology and heritage studies.

Dr. Zainab Bahrani is the Edith Porada Professor of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University in New York. She is the award-winning author of numerous publications on the art, archaeology and history of ancient Mesopotamia/Iraq, and the director of two field projects in Iraqi Kurdistan. Her most recent book is *War Essays*, London: UCL Press, 2025.

ANTIQUITIES ACTION



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