

### Europe and the Mediterranean: Talking, Learning, Working, and Living Together, Vol. 6; Heritage and Society in the Euro-Mediterranean Community; Conference Papers, Pt. 1

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Konferenzband / conference proceedings

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Steinbach, U. (Ed.). (2019). *Europe and the Mediterranean: Talking, Learning, Working, and Living Together, Vol. 6; Heritage and Society in the Euro-Mediterranean Community; Conference Papers, Pt. 1* (Europa Bottom-Up, 21). Berlin: Maecenata Institut für Philanthropie und Zivilgesellschaft. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-60980-6>

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# EUROPA BOTTOM-UP

ARBEITSPAPIERE ZUR EUROPÄISCHEN ZIVILGESELLSCHAFT / EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY WORKING PAPERS

UDO STEINBACH (ED.)

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## EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

TALKING, LEARNING, WORKING, AND LIVING TOGETHER

6

EUROPA BOTTOM-UP NR.21

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MÜNCHEN/BERLIN: MAECENATA STIFTUNG 2019

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**Imprint** Europa Bottom-Up. Berlin/Munich: Maecenata Foundation 2019

**Published by**

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**ISSN (Web):** 2197-6821

**URN:** urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-60980-6

Editorial supervision by Siri Hummel



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**NR. 21/2019**

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UDO STEINBACH (ED.)

**EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN**  
**TALKING, LEARNING, WORKING, AND LIVING TOGETHER**  
**6**

HERITAGE AND SOCIETY IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN COMMUNITY

A Conference in Berlin  
19<sup>th</sup> June, 2018

Conference Papers (Part 1)

Supported by



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Nationalkomitee für  
Denkmalschutz

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## **Editor's preface**

By Udo Steinbach

The papers published in the two volumes have been presented to the forum on „ONE Heritage – Heritage and Society in the Euro-Mediterranean Community“ as a side event to the European Cultural Heritage Summit, Berlin, 19 June, 2018.

The event has been coorganized as before with the MENA Governance Centre of the Humboldt Viadrina Governance Platform, and cochaired by Eleftherios Ikonomidou, Udo Steinbach, and Rupert Graf Strachwitz.

Cultural heritage in its numerous facets is the most basic foundation of the complex relationship between people in the Mediterranean since the Phoenicians and ancient Greeks. It has turned out to be stronger than diversities and even destructions throughout many eras in history. Its vitality makes one optimistic that the notion of *mare nostrum* may still provide orientation for shaping common future.

The forum has built on the experiences of three conferences on the topic of Europe and the Mediterranean: *Speaking, Learning, Working and Living Together*, held in 2013, 2015 and 2017. The purpose of the forum was to call attention to Europe's responsibility for the common cultural heritage around the Mediterranean Sea. Having this in mind the organizers of the Berlin forum wanted the discussion to focus on three dimensions:

### **Our Common Heritage**

Repeatedly in the past, attempts at destroying the testimonies of past cultures and civilisations have been undertaken to manifest political and/or ideological superiority. They failed: Mediterranean culture has survived as synthesis of numerous inputs from the East to the West and the North to the South. To think Mediterranean means remembering that the presence cannot be thought without the past; and one's own not without the other's culture.

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## **The West-Eastern Diwan**

At present, literature, film and music – our intangible heritage – are the best used forms of human encounter across the Mediterranean. In an era that risks creating barriers of dramatic political, economic, social and humanitarian divergencies and confrontations, our cultural heritage constitutes a refugium in which we keep in touch with each other. It makes us certain that, at the end of the day, being human implies strongest commitment to making every effort to overcome the obstacles to making us feel as members of a global family.

## **The Transmission of Images**

The revolution of communication has brought people closer to and in more immediate contact to each other. Beside tremendous advantages and progress, the risk of escalating crises and conflicts has grown, too, in a short period of time. It would seem that religion has come to play a most unfortunate and unbecoming role. Apart of the process of conflict resolution, respect for other people's beliefs is of tremendous importance in mediating between conflicting parties and individuals. Referring to elements of heritage that are felt to be common, and opening a space of common memory is therefor a strategic approach to constructing a new vision of living together in the future.

To draw attention to tangible cultural heritage issues was the subject of the first panel. Relating the destruction and revival of Aleppo in Syria (Mamoun Fansa) created awareness for our endangered common heritage, while 'Turks in the Palace' (Cem Alaçam) reminded the audience of the history of intercultural relations. Paolo Vitti highlighted the intertwined cultural heritage of the Eastern Mediterranean in particular.

The second session moved away from building heritage and focussed on language, literature and ideas (Daniel Gerlach). More than in the other sessions, some "hardcore" issues became apparent. Is not our heritage being misused for political ends? Is it not being destroyed for ideological reasons? Is there a neo-colonialist aspect that needs to be addressed? A lively and controversial discus-

sion ensued, but everyone seemed to agree on one important point: The preservation of our common heritage is not inherently and universally accepted; it requires some well-argued advocacy.

Finally, the third session sought to provide some guidelines how this might be achieved – not by just celebrating beauty, but by putting forward arguments that resonate with the pressing issues modern society is facing. Costa Carras, whose paper unfortunately had to be read, as he could not be present, made a strong case for the ‘Golden Rule’, while Thomas Würtz and Sonja Hegazy bridged the divide between past and present and East and West by linking our common heritage to modern day normative societal issues such as generating mutual respect, creating a level playing field, providing identity, improving the knowledge and experience base, and establishing cells of networks that may prepare now for the colossal challenges awaiting us in the future.

All this was very much in line with the Maecenata foundation’s goals and will encourage the organizers to pursue this further.



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## **A War Destroys World Heritage. The Reconstruction of the Ancient City of Aleppo**

By Mamoun Fansa

Aleppo is the second largest city in Syria and one of the oldest permanently populated cities in the world. Located at the end of the Silk Road, which led from China to the Mediterranean Sea, Aleppo was one of the largest trading centres in the Middle East. The city contains about 5000 years of settlement-historical development. The beginnings date back to the time of Mesopotamian civilisation in the 3rd millennium BC. In recent decades a temple of the weather god was excavated on the citadel. Particularly well preserved are the relics of the temple from the late Hittite period (late 2nd and early 1st millennium BC), including numerous reliefs.

In the time of the Seleucids the city was re-established. The road plan created during that time can still be traced in the cityscape. A decisive conversion and expansion took place under the emperor Justinian (518 - 565) in the Byzantine period. In 636 AD, the city was conquered by Muslim troops and from the 10th century onwards, a revival took place, which made Aleppo a cultural centre. In the following centuries, there were always times of cultural flourishing, reflected in the special architecture of the city. In 1986, the Ancient City of Aleppo was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. In 2006, Aleppo was the cultural capital of the Islamic world. Before the war, 110,000 people lived in the 360-hectare Ancient City Area of Aleppo. There were 30,000 workplaces and 16,000 housing units. In total, 2.5 million people lived in the city before the war.

Aleppo's Ancient City not only gained importance through its monuments and settlement continuity, but it was also a unique community that was kept from being a mere tourist destination due to its vivacity, its complex interdependencies and its ethnic diversity. It was a unique place where people of different religions and backgrounds lived and worked together. It is necessary to rebuild this neighborhood of people and, as far as possible, to reduce and heal the in-

tangible damage, caused by hatred and mistrust, through joint work. The Ancient City of Aleppo was never just an exhibit or just a tourist attraction like Palmyra. The special feature of the ancient city was its cultural power of identification and its liveliness. People lived, worked and traded.

Due to the initiative of many architects and city planners in Aleppo, first ideas were developed in the 1980s, of how the ancient city can be restored, rehabilitated and an economic force - also with regard to tourism - can be developed. Shortly before the war, the citadel and the Umayyad Mosque were restored at great expense, the infrastructure was renewed and parts of the traditional residential quarters in the ancient city were improved. Germany has invested more than 30 million euro in development cooperation in the rehabilitation of the Ancient City of Aleppo, the Agha Kahn Foundation has provided over 6 million dollars for the restoration of the citadel and its surroundings. Other institutions such as the World Monument Fund and the Arab Fund have also contributed to this process of conservation and renewal. The Syrian government was also involved in the restoration of the ancient city with considerable financial resources.

From 2011 until 2016 Aleppo was in the centre of the war between rebels and the army of the government. In East Aleppo serious disputes and destruction took place.

The damage to the buildings in the eastern part of the city, in particular those of the ancient city, is devastating. The reports from the ancient city are catastrophic. There are 70 % of the historic buildings that are on the monument list, which are heavily damaged and partially razed to the ground, furthermore numerous khans and other buildings are completely destroyed. 50 % of the traditional aleppine houses are no longer habitable. Of the approximately 100 mosques, 60 % are damaged, of which 30 % are totally destroyed. 70 % of the bazaars are partially destroyed. The land registry office was destroyed by a bomb attack, so the proof of ownership becomes considerably more difficult. Two remarks on the cultural identity of the Ancient City of Aleppo need to be mentioned here:

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## *Cultural Identity*

Each people has its human and cultural roots that bind these people to their land, their ancestors and their history. Their visible expression can be found in the cultural legacies, some of which are still not excavated or are located at archaeological and historical sites or in buildings and museums.

These places and objects, which are creating identity, are very numerous in Syria and have a great importance far beyond the borders of the country. The archaeologist René Dussaud from France described Syria as an open-air museum at the beginning of the 20th century.

The destruction of material culture such as buildings and immaterial everyday culture leads to the destruction of the cultural identity of a people. In the case of the Ancient City of Aleppo as a world cultural heritage, the loss is enormous. The Ancient City of Aleppo with its settlement continuity from the 3rd century BC to the present day, as well as with its liveliness and its special habits of life, is an example of an cultural monument creating identity for the inhabitants of Aleppo. With the Ancient City of Aleppo, an international cultural heritage has gone irretrievably lost.

The plundering and destruction of many archaeological and historical sites in the ancient city through uncontrolled and spontaneous reconstruction also leads to the destruction of scientific connections between cultural heritage. Settlement activities and objects lose their significance when they can no longer be assigned.

### *The Ancient City: A Place of Remembrance*

Each person has some places where he can remember certain events and perceptions with which he partially identifies. The Ancient City of Aleppo is for many Aleppians a place of remembrance, which evokes images and experiences. A visit to the ancient city is a visit to its multifaceted history, which can be perceived with all the senses: to see, to smell, to hear, to touch and to enjoy. A visit to the ancient city is also a call for communication and exchange of knowledge and goods, for buying and selling, for talking about anything and

everything with locals, people surrounding, with tourists, with young and old, with Muslims and with Christians. All these experiences remain and shape our memory of the ancient city. Although the Aleppians do not know exactly which stories and histories are hidden in the ancient city, the connections to them remain preserved over many generations. Not only buildings, but also the immaterial cultural elements such as poetry, narration and music are only preserved if we cultivate and traditionalise them. While reconstructing Aleppo care must be taken to ensure that these cultural elements do not get excluded.

After my book 'Aleppo. A War Destroys World Heritage' was released, it was a logical consequence for me to think in time with experts about post-war reconstruction and ways to prepare and organise this project in the Ancient City of Aleppo.

### *Considerations for the Reconstruction of the Ancient City of Aleppo*

Developing ideas and plans for the reconstruction of the Ancient City of Aleppo depends to a great extent on the political situation and development in Syria, especially in the implementation phase. Therefore, it is important to analyse how the powers in Syria are developing and how far the influence of the various parties in the cultural sphere extends, especially if culture and historic preservation are exploited for political purposes. There are many questions to be answered in this context; two of the most important issues are the influence of changing demographics on the population of Syria, especially in Aleppo, and on the role of UNESCO in preserving its status as a World Heritage Site. The Ancient City of Aleppo has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1986, meaning that any change in the specified criteria of UNESCO must be coordinated with UNESCO. Monuments must be restored in such a way that they correspond to the status of a World Heritage Site. Non-compliance with the criteria threatens the withdrawal of World Cultural Heritage status. All rebuilding measures must therefore be requested and coordinated with UNESCO.

After the end of the current fighting and the recording of the damage, the question arises: What should be rebuilt to preserve the character of the ancient city and to meet the UNESCO rules?

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The following considerations should be taken as a basis:

- As far as possible, the entire historical city plan with the city walls and the streets with the small streets should be preserved or rebuilt.
- In order to preserve the old historical structures of the streets, it is advisable to maintain or rebuild the corner houses of historical value.
- Historical buildings such as mosques and other religious buildings, khans, schools, dwellings and the entire bazaar must be given priority at work. Decisions should be based on the Aleppine List of Monuments.
- Work with authentic materials and craft techniques.

### *Population Exchange and Expropriation*

Concern is justified because the evacuation of the inhabitants of Aleppo in 2016 from East Aleppo and the ancient city was not only an act of humanity, but possibly a plan to change the composition of the population in Aleppo. Exchanging the inhabitants of East Aleppo is probably also an intervention in the cultural identity of the Aleppians. The new population, which consists in part of mercenaries from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, has no ties to the history of Aleppo. If the inhabitants of the ancient city can not or will not return, it will be easier to refrain from building up the ancient city due to reduced resistance of the former inhabitants. As an example of how the Syrian regime deals with monuments after the destruction, the city of Hama should be considered.

The Damascus regime issued a decree on April 4, 2018: All land and properties will be auctioned or taken by the state after 30 days. During this period the owners must register and prove that they are the owners of the land or properties. The consequences of this decree are devastating for both social peace and heritage law and reconstruction. According to information from „Süddeutsche Zeitung“ of April 20, 2018, this project and other laws serve to change the demography in Syria. These measures have been agreed with Iran, aiming to break up the former social structure and create a new society in Syria. This will make it easier for Iran to govern Syria in a long term.

### *The Case of Hama*

The ideology of the Syrian government and the handling of the destroyed monuments is known from Hama in 1982, after the destruction of the ancient city and during the suppression of the rebellion. The Ancient City of Hama was not rebuilt, but instead destroyed by the removal of the remaining historical sources with the use of bulldozers. After that high-rise buildings were built. Thus, parts of the identity of the inhabitants were deleted and the new generation has no connection to the history of Hama.

### *The Question of Financing*

With this level of destruction in the very complicated political situation with all the different interests of the parties, financing will be difficult. Reconstruction in Syria is estimated by the World Bank in June 2017 at more than 226 billion US dollars, for Aleppo 100 billion are estimated. The work will take decades. This is an estimate of numbers that are caught up in reality when work starts on the ground and many problems with different actors who want to assert their own interests become visible. The local confrontation with the situation in Aleppo will result in different timescales and significantly higher costs.

The Syrian state is not in a position to finance these tasks, the economy is depressed. The war has consumed the reserves of the state. Syria is not in a position to reconstruct through the financing contracts of the war with Russia and Iran. The European Union, particularly Germany, and Arab states such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries would be eligible for funding, but as long as the current regime is in power, reconstruction activities will be unimaginable for these countries. Therefore, we must be prepared for a long breath and hope that no uncontrolled rebuilding can cause further destruction and damage.

### *The Role of the Investors*

In the post-war situation, investors usually set the pace: Experiences from other post-conflict developments show that immediately after a pacification the decision-makers and the companies associated with them become active in the highly lucrative construction business. These activities include the construction

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of housing for the population (which often consists of newly arrived refugees or supporters of the decision-makers), but also profitable investments - in the case of Aleppo, this could also be the ancient city with its potential for tourist exploitation (preservation of the façade, hotels, shopping centers, et cetera). This rapid change makes the ancient city a tourist attraction and a Disneyland. The following possible developments are to be considered:

### *Need for Action*

In the period of upheaval, post-war cities, despite their differences, have always recurring, comparable structural problems that are likely to occur in Aleppo. The expectation is a fast-growing urban population, which results on the one hand from the strong influx of rural migrants, who want to create immediate living space and see new prospects for the future in the cities, and on the other hand from the influx of refugees returning from abroad. This significant increase in the number of inhabitants leads to a lack of housing, which usually ends in an “unregulated“ construction boom. At the same time, the so-called “warlords“ invest a lot in the construction and real estate sector and benefit from the increased demand for housing. In order to avoid conflicts of interest, conflict-sensitive approaches must be developed that take into account the special conditions of a post-war situation and consider the needs of different population groups and actors.

Strategies and measures are now to be developed - before the end of the war - in order to be able to act in the middle of the chaotic circumstances prevailing after the war. The new political situation calls for fast action in order not to face accomplished facts.

### *Formation of Work Groups*

In October 2016, after several workshops and discussions, the work group of 'Friends of the Ancient City of Aleppo' decided to set up five groups to coordinate the preparation of reconstruction. These work groups have been largely incorporated by the GIZ (Society for International Cooperation) in the Aleppo Cultural Heritage Platform in December 2016 and are part of the work.

*Work Group 1: Law - Syrian Monument and Civil Law, Rights of Ownership and Ownership Structure, UNESCO Regulations, International Law and Cooperation*

Preliminary note

In 1986, the historic centre of Aleppo was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO with an area of 363 hectares. Due to the massive destruction of the city of Aleppo there will be a vacuum without legal regulations. The Syrian law on historic monuments is, as with other listed buildings or World Heritage sites in war zones such as Beirut or Afghanistan, not always effective and can therefore be undermined. Plots have already been sold to investors during the war, which will not take into account the original small parcel subdivision. Therefore, a pooling of plots for the construction of large buildings is to be feared. Whether the Red List set up by UNESCO can be used as an option for sanctions is questionable and, according to experience, politically ineffective.

The extent to which Syrian civil law and international law are applicable to the protection of monuments must be examined, in particular where the state unlawfully changes ownership, as it became clear from Law No. 10 of the Expropriation of April 4, 2018.

*Work Group 2: Archeology*

Preliminary note

In the Ancient City of Aleppo, no systematic excavations have been carried out so far. For this reason, in the first phase of the reconstruction, the older periods of the settlement are to be archaeologically researched. On the basis of a detailed archaeological and historical study it can be decided where archaeological excavations and further investigations must take place. Questions are formulated, and goals defined, excavation areas determined, and excavations carried out. In order to use the conditions after the destruction of the ancient city and to use the archaeological methods optimally, the work group archeology has to cooperate with several cooperation partners: investors and research institutions in the field



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of urban archeology. The experience of many interdisciplinary research institutes and companies should not only flow into the preparation of the archaeological measures - as in the field of historical research, excavation techniques, prospection methods, documentation and evaluation methods - but also in the implementation phase of the measures. When using modern prospecting methods, as little as possible should be intervened in the historical layers.

### *Work Group 3: Damage Mapping, the Role of the Aleppo Archive in Exile*

#### Preliminary note

The Aleppo Archive (now: Aleppo Archive in Exile) was created in Aleppo Documentation Center from 2008 until 2011. The GIZ-Aleppo project and the association 'Friends of the Ancient City of Aleppo' in cooperation with the Universities of Stuttgart and Cottbus were involved in the preparation of the documentation. The data collection includes so far information from the following sources available: administrations (infrastructure, planning), ministries, research projects and cooperation projects. The cadastral plans were also used as a basis, whereby the most detailed information was taken from the plans of the time of French Mandate. These were further developed, digitised and satellite images were added. For the possible cooperation with the GIZ, the data can serve as a supplement to the GIZ archives of the project of rehabilitation in Aleppo. All existing database information, such as the map commissioned by the Islamic Museum, the DAI and the UNESCO with the current war damage mapping, will be examined for their possible uses.

The goal of using numerous databases from different institutions is the creation of a complete map with all information about the damage of the war in detail.

### *Work Group 4: Urban Planning*

#### Preliminary note

In order to develop reconstruction plans, the situation before the war should be examined and some important results of the last decades should be put together. Before the 1990s, uneven urbanisation processes were typical: In East Aleppo there were 60 % informal settlements, in the west there were better structured

settlements. This always leads to social tensions in the entire city. The development in the ancient city was also influenced by lack of prospects and lack of administrative structures. There was no traffic planning for the ancient city. The rehabilitation project supported by GIZ in the years 1994 until 2011 improved the living conditions of the inhabitants of the ancient city. The city was upgraded, and the tourism developed (for example emerged restaurants and hotels).

The following aspects and considerations from an urban planning point of view should be taken into account in the reconstruction after the war. There is a lack of local municipal administration structures and planning instruments: Unfortunately, no definite plans can be worked out for the reconstruction strategy on the basis of missing detailed information about the state after the war.

#### *Work Group 5: Conflict-Sensitive Strategies – Post-Conflict Analysis and Planning*

##### Preliminary note

All reconstruction-specific problems will be discussed in this work group and possible solutions will be sought. This work group forms a link between all groups, especially in the planning and execution of the concept for urban development in post-conflict situations. The work group should mediate between the actors of the different work fields as well as the old and new population of the ancient city and reach a societal consensus. The group will also mediate between the ancient city dwellers and defuse conflicts.

Players must be identified and a political map made for internal use. Consideration must be given to the city's history (symbolic meaning of the ancient city and its buildings) and future development (economic perspective). The relationship between the ancient city and the new city must be defined.

Among the economic aspects that should be taken into account are the ownerships, the war-related claims and acquisitions as well as the economic interests of different “stakeholders“ and the future prospects for tourism. An elaborated proposal for a communication strategy on pacification must also be developed

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to communicate the cooperation of new and old residents through social media. Strategies will be developed to respond swiftly to the situation, such as problems of illegal construction boom, lack of housing, unsafe ownership, lack of legal certainty, territorial claims. One should try to learn from other post-conflict situations and concern the transfer to Aleppo, such as in Cyprus, Northern Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo et cetera. Another important aspect is the participation strategy, involving Aleppine and civil society initiatives.

### *Concluding Remark*

In this lecture, I tried to formulate the considerations and approaches required for strategies on the reconstruction. The reality in Aleppo will provide us with many more ideas and arguments.

I was told over and over again that rebuilding the Ancient City of Aleppo was a difficult task and that it was impossible to implement the work on site. However, I hope that parts of the many ideas and considerations can be implemented, and as a motto and guide to our work on the reconstruction of the Ancient City of Aleppo, I would like to cite two quotes: The Sheikh of Dubai, Muhammad bin Rashid Al Maktum, writes: 'The word "impossible" does not exist in our language'. And in German it says: 'Hope dies last'.

## Turks in the Palace. Captives, Trophies... Visitors!

By Cem Alaçam

With more than 60 historical sites or monuments, Staatliche Schlösser (state-castles) und Gärten (gardens) Baden-Württemberg is one of the biggest agents or stakeholders when it comes to the cultural heritage of southwestern Germany and its communication to the national and international public. In its portfolio there are world-famous heritage sites such as Heidelberg Palace, Maulbronn Monastery or Schwetzingen Gardens – to name just a few. With its widely ramified network of historical sites that is spread all over the state of Baden-Württemberg the institution is by now able – almost with ease – to attract round about four million visitors each year. One may therefore consider Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg or SSG to be a well-oiled machine that only needs regular maintenance and some minor tweaks every now and then to reach its audience. And it's true: Heidelberg Palace – as the most glaring example – has long been firmly established as a touristic crowd-puller. This status dates back to at least the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even in spite of global competition for touristic visitors this won't easily change in the near future. In other words, SSG can always count on the stability of the traditional tourist flows, the loyalty of its current customer base and last but not least the aura and beauty of its monuments.

Despite this seemingly favorable point of departure, however, a problem is looming on the horizon. It is a problem that cannot be seen nor understood when one looks just at the absolute numbers. In the case of Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg the absolute numbers are just fine. But what about the relative ones? Even though there still is a somewhat inexcusable lack of statistical data it is an open secret that one group in particular is underrepresented among the SSG-audience: so-called “Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund”, people with a migrant background. What makes cultural institutions' general lack of “reach” among migrant communities so problematic is the simple fact that this part of society is ever-expanding – not only in sheer numbers but in complexity as well. On top of that, this ongoing socio-cultural diversification process has further been accelerated in recent years by the hundreds of

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thousands of refugees and asylum seekers that have come to our country. To call a spade a spade: Although our visitor statistic is formidable today, it might not be so formidable in the near future. This is not only a challenge for the level of public participation the institution is aiming at. The foreseeable decrease of visitor interest might also bring about financial consequences: Since all of our activities are tax-funded – from restoration to marketing – knowledge of and acceptance for the cultural heritage we provide is of course existential. For who will be willing to pay all of our expenses in the future, when general knowledge of and overall acceptance for our monuments might be shrinking due to demographic change and a thus changed cultural memory?

To show you just how great of a challenge we are facing I will give you some basic statistical facts on the demographic reality of Baden-Württemberg we as an institution have to cope with. Today round about 30% of Baden-Württemberg's population have a migrational background. In urban areas this share is considerably higher: In Stuttgart and Mannheim it is 45%, in Heilbronn and Pforzheim – as you can see not only the major cities are concerned – it is hovering around 50%. Furthermore, this part of German society is significantly younger: With an average age of 36 years people with a migrant background are roughly 10 years younger than those without a migrant background. In other words, their influence will slowly but surely get stronger in the coming decades.

### **“Türkenlouis’ Neue Kleider” – a participative theatre project**

So what can be done to increase the rather limited reach of many cultural heritage institutions among people with a migrant background? In 2014, one year before the beginning of the migrant crisis, the so-called “Flüchtlingskrise”, SSG installed a small task force to tackle this question and to develop innovative mediation formats for said part of society. It was very much clear from the beginning that the new formats have to meet at least three criteria: Firstly, a topic or theme has to be found that is interesting and entertaining as well as relevant to the target group. Secondly, no matter what topic or theme a simple guided tour wouldn't do. Thirdly, the formats need to get people with a migrant background involved as equal partners.

One of the new cultural mediation formats I have developed on the basis of these preliminary decisions is a participative theatre project that looks into one of the most fascinating aspects of baroque residence culture: the historical phenomenon of the so-called *Kammertürken*. *Kammertürken* were exotically dressed Muslim valets or lackeys that could be found at almost all of the baroque courts and residences of the Holy Roman Empire and – in many cases – even beyond. Their legal status was generally that of serfs, which makes them a very chosen, a hand-picked few among the many Muslim war prisoners that were captured and enslaved during the long-lasting conflict between the House of Habsburg and the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, they were often held in high esteem by their masters and therefore sometimes given enormous privileges, which helped them to make careers even outside the palace. Just to give you two examples: There is – for instance – the adventurous biography of the famous Osman Ağa, who was allowed by his noble mistress to learn the craft of a confectioner or *Zuckerbäcker* in Vienna. Later in his life – after he had fled back to the Ottoman realm, I must add – he even became one of the official dragomans (translators) at the Sublime Porte in Istanbul. Another fascinating story is that of Christian Friedrich Aly in Berlin. Aly, a much beloved *Kammertürke* at Charlottenburg, did not only earn a considerable annual salary – 366 thaler, to be precise –, he was also given permission to build a house for himself in the immediate vicinity of the palace.

Although comparable biographies are yet missing for both the houses of Baden and of Württemberg as well as for the Palatine branch of the Wittelsbach dynasty at Mannheim and Heidelberg, many traces can be found that they all have had their own *Kammertürken*, *Kammermohren* or other exotic servants. The cultural and political context of the *Kammertürken* phenomenon is in fact very much present in the Baroque Palaces of Baden-Württemberg and simply cannot be overlooked. To be clear: the iconographies, the visual programmes of many of Baden-Württemberg's baroque residences partly remain incomprehensible without at least basic knowledge of the epoch-making conflict between Habsburg and the Ottoman Empire. That is particularly the case for the residential palace of Rastatt, but also true for those of Mannheim and Ludwigsburg. Just think, on the one hand, of the many oriental stucco trophies that give testimony

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to the battles that the sovereigns of Baden, of Württemberg or of the Electoral Palatinate fought against the Ottomans. On the other hand, and more importantly, even human trophies can be found: stucco sculptures of Muslim captives are visible in many of the major baroque palaces of southwestern Germany. In the so-called Ahnensaal of Rastatt Palace for instance twelve pairs of crying and handcuffed Turkish war prisoners right beneath the ceiling bear witness to the military success of Markgraf Ludwig Wilhelm von Baden – the so-called Türkenlouis – against the Ottomans.

Since we really wanted to reach people with our project and our topic and, as a consequence, achieve a broader public resonance, it was clear to us that a conventional guided tour just wasn't the right way. We needed other means and measures, especially as we aimed for a bigger stage, so to speak, and a bigger audience. Therefore, we developed the idea to write a theatre play on the Kammertürken phenomenon and the many Turkish-Ottoman influences that can be found in the histories and historical aesthetics of Baden-Württemberg's baroque monuments. The three SSG monuments we finally selected as stations for our theatre project are the residential palaces of Rastatt, Mannheim and Ludwigsburg since all of them, as I have already described, exhibit numerous testimonies of conflict and culture exchange between east and west. Mannheim, however, was to be the starting point of our project due to the city's size and diversity.

The choice to go for a theatrical format was, likewise, a well-considered one. Not only did it allow us to deal with the phenomenon in a less pedagogical way. It also gave us the chance to consequently get those involved in our project that at the same time are our newly targeted audience: people with a migrational background – or in our specific case the Turkish community in Mannheim, which by the way is one of the biggest ones in all of Germany, and the larger Metropolitan region Rhine-Neckar. The new partners we have found during our first project year are many. There is on the one hand the author of our play, Hasan Özdemir from Ludwigshafen, who was commissioned by SSG to write a (half fictional) play on the Kammertürken phenomenon. On the other hand, we were able to acquire the actors of the theatre club MAST e.V. from Mannheim whose members all have Turkish or Azerbaijanian migrational roots. MAST is

an acronym for “Mannheim Sanat Tiyatrosu”, which means “Mannheim art theatre”. Having many project partners was not always easy, but it got us a foot in the door and it further opened our institution with regards to some of the German-Turkish communities in Mannheim. Both the author and the theatre group in other words activated their own circles and immensely helped us in attracting their friends and family members to come to our play and thereby visit our first station Mannheim Palace. It will be our challenge to find similar partners and ambassadors when the play is performed in Rastatt and Ludwigsburg.

Now finally some words on the play itself: The name of the play we have developed together is “Türkenlouis’ neue Kleider”, a title apparently influenced by Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes”, “Des Kaisers neue Kleider”. The story or plot of the play is centered around the fictitious visit of the so-called Türkenlouis in Mannheim Palace, home of his old companion on the Ottoman battlefields in the Balkans, Carl Philipp. Seeing Carl Philipp however is not the real reason of his visit. He wants Carl Philipp’s Turkish servant, who is a very famous dress maker, to tailor him a gorgeous Ottoman costume. Carl Philipp’s Kammertürke however pursues his own objectives: he wants to ridicule Türkenlouis and thereby take revenge on him, as he and his companions captured him and brought him to the place where he lives today. Although the plot is – as I have said before – fictitious, it still has a historically accurate and authentic footing. Like Augustus the Strong, the famous Elector of Saxony, the so-called Türkenlouis was fascinated by everything Oriental or Ottoman. Not only did he collect myriads of different Ottoman weapons that today can be seen in the Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe. He and his wife Sybilla Augusta, the Margravine of Baden-Baden, also commissioned a large number of small costume portraits, some of which show them in various oriental or rather orientalist dresses. Today a large part of this miniature painting series is exhibited in the pleasure palace Schloss Favorite in Rastatt. And, again, like Augustus the Strong, the Türkenlouis allegedly had his own share of Kammertürken – and their female counterpart: Kammertürkinnen.

All in all, this first project of the newly-formed SSG task force was a huge success. It resonated well with the press of the Metropolitan region Rhine-Neckar



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as all of its important newspapers reported on the premiere of the play in Mannheim Palace. Even more important, however, is the long-term effect of the project: not only did it further open Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg to society as it really is. It also helped Mannheim's most important heritage site to gain a new group of visitors and thereby diversify its audience. Never before in its long history has Mannheim Palace welcomed so many Turkish (or rather Turkish-German) visitors as on May 27, the date of the premiere of "Türkenlouis' neue Kleider". But this is just the first step: we hope to achieve the same results in the residential palaces of Rastatt and Ludwigsburg.

## **Conservation of Cultural Heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean. A tool for building a better society.**

By Paolo Vitti

Cultural Heritage, by providing the most authentic and profound evidence of the past, is a crucial component of our lives. It is an integral part of our identity. It is thus not surprising that Cultural Heritage is becoming more and more relevant for our society and is a point of focus in the policies of many governing bodies. Across the world people are looking more and more for places with a clear and strong historic identity, which link them to a past, declaring *de facto* the failure of modern, anonymous urban no-places. A good example of the relevance of investing in heritage is the recovery of the historic centre of Bari, Southern Italy, once a somewhat disreputable place and now, after a much-needed restoration, a lively place full of vital activities. As a result of systematic advocacy, many development programs take into account the need to invest in heritage, because of its capacity to catalyse positive energies in society. I will thus draw your attention to a couple of examples of "best practice" in restoration projects in the Eastern Mediterranean, where the preservation and enhancement of heritage has been used as a tool for building better societies.

The Eastern Mediterranean, where East meets the West, offers a unique record of different cultures in its heritage. The osmotic process resulting from invasions and wars or from trade networks has enriched the exchange of ideas, social and cultural models as well as other cultural expressions, both tangible and intangible. Istanbul, Alexandria, Cairo, the Holy Land, to mention only a few of the places in the area, were, until recently, open cities that offered unique opportunities for cultural exchange. Buildings and historic landscapes remain as indisputable evidence of this past and can still be used to resist the present ideological and political process, which divides, separates and reduces identity to a few selected cultural components. In contrast to the pauperization of identities, Cultural Heritage can have a strong voice and built trust in a more balanced society. By knowing the *other*, we can better understand who *we* are.

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A recognition of the adhesive force of Culture and Cultural Heritage is emerging in this 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage. However, the spirit of Heritage as a driving force against cultural and social barriers was already manifest in many projects carried out in fragile contexts, where this past was and is being challenged by removing parts of the cultural records to build artificial identities which correspond to political projects. It is not by chance thus that Development Programs of the United Nations, namely UNDP, through generous support by donors, notably the European Commission, is now investing in Heritage through projects intended to be a catalyst and to bring people together around their common culture.

As a policy to reconcile the communities in Cyprus several projects have been undertaken on the island since early 2000. Cyprus is an impressive crossroads of Mediterranean cultures. Since its early history, in the Neolithic age, Cyprus has been populated and dominated by different populations and during the Bronze Age, the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic Periods and in Roman times remained a hub of civilizations. The history of 2nd millennium CE is enriched by the Byzantine presence, the Latin Kingdom, Venetian dominion and the Ottoman Empire. Working with architectural heritage thus involves understanding the traces left by the different cultures as well as dealing with the communities that have inherited this multi-layered past made up of tangible and intangible values.

The Armenian Church and Monastery Complex in northern Nicosia is a masterpiece of medieval architecture in Cyprus. It was built in early 1300 under the Latin dominion. The church was built as part of a Benedictine nunnery; its architecture is unique and displays an original interpretation of the styles and techniques imported from France to the East and married to local tradition in Cyprus. Since its construction, many transformations and additions have modified the layout, but the original gothic architecture was preserved and still catches the attention of every visitor.

Today it is part of a compound including the premises of the Armenian Church in Cyprus, three Armenian school buildings and the dwelling of a once-preeminent Armenian family. It is located within Arab Ahmet, one of the most historic

and culturally diverse neighbourhoods of the walled city of Nicosia. The Armenian Church, Maronite Church of Our Lady of Graces, the Holy Cross Catholic Church (Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem) and the Arab Ahmet mosque are all located along Victoria Street - once Arab Ahmet's main thoroughfare. Armenians were forced to leave the complex in 1963, when social unrest caused the northern part of the city of Nicosia to be cut off from the southern part. The area became an enclave of mainly Turkish speakers. Following the events of 1974, the site was occupied by the Turkish military forces, who eventually abandoned the complex in late 1990s. The church was later further damaged by seismic activity. The site then fell into disuse and disrepair—becoming a visual reminder of the corrosive effects of the conflict and the unresolved “Cyprus Problem”.

Restoring the island's cultural heritage has been part of peace-building projects in Cyprus since 1998. The aim was not only to conserve buildings and sites, but also to provide Cypriots with the opportunity to reconnect with their common heritage. The aim of these projects was to bring people together around a common and inclusive vision of a shared future. The restoration of the Armenian Church and Monastery complex is one example of this kind of initiative. It was funded by USAID (US Agency for International Development) and managed and directed by UNDP-ACT (United Nations Development Programme-Action for Trust). Today the Armenian Church is located in close proximity of the dividing Green Line, in the area administered by the Turkish Cypriots and inhabited currently by families with no cultural ties to the site. It is the property of the dislocated Armenian community, but managed by the EVKAF, the Pious Islamic Foundation. This project was begun at a crucial time in the process of finding a solution to the Cyprus issue, when the potential of cultural heritage initiatives to help heal the wounds of the past and to build trust among Cyprus' communities became a promising tool. The context was complicated on several levels—politically, socially and logistically. Cultural heritage projects on the divided island of Cyprus require consultation, if not approval, from multiple stakeholders. In some cases, especially when the project was undertaken in early 2000, the stakeholders were not open to each other's involvement. Any intervention at the site had to be evaluated by the antiquities authorities and approved

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by the Department of Antiquities of the Republic of Cyprus, the latter being the historical Department charged with the protection of the island's heritage. Within the walled city, the municipal authorities were involved in service provision and some maintenance. Coordinating between so many bodies would have been difficult even without the political division and the unresolved conflict in the background.

The project thus had a twofold objective. First, to recover a masterpiece of gothic architecture in Cyprus and preserve it for future generations. Second, to use a unique and shared piece of Cyprus' past to engage the multiple and unfamiliar stakeholders in the planning, design and implementation of a project that would respect memories of the past while building bridges for the future. Throughout, the intention was to guarantee the highest quality in the design and implementation and to introduce knowhow and restoration practises that were new to the island. For the first time since 1974, there was collaboration between the Armenian, Turkish and Greek communities in Cyprus who all care deeply for the island's culture and share a commitment to its preservation. Between 2006 and 2013, architects, engineers, planners and crafts people restored the site to international standards, ensuring that it is preserved for future generations.

The survey and archival study revealed many important elements of the history and architecture of the church. Under the layers of modern cement and gypsum plaster covering the interior walls, the designers together with the conservators discovered that much of the original church was preserved. Painstakingly, step by step, the removal of the modern plaster revealed extraordinary evidence of the past. The restoration was governed by the principles of minimal intervention, reversibility, compatibility and use of traditional techniques. Main interventions included the consolidation of the pulverised stone. The intervention to save, restore and strengthen the nearly collapsed porch was of particular significance, for its innovative process, which made it possible to preserve its authenticity by literally "pushing" back in to their original position the stones of the vaults.

The project also included the restoration of the ancillary buildings. These constructions have invaluable social and religious significance for Armenians

worldwide. The complex was a social and educational centre not just for the Armenians of Cyprus, but also for many Armenians of the diaspora who visited Cyprus and had their children educated here. Besides flocking to the newly restored site for a casual visit, hundreds of Armenians participated in a Mass at the church on May 8, 2014, the first mass to be celebrated in 50 years. The momentous event, made possible in part through the restoration work and the relationships that the project had forged, was attended by representatives of all the island's religious groups.

The restoration of the Armenian church has been thus much more than a routine cultural heritage project. Restoring the monument was an example of, and an opportunity for, inter-communal collaboration and harmony. Furthermore, the transfer of skills and knowledge and the building of local capacity is having a substantial, long-term impact on cultural heritage in Cyprus. Many other restoration projects that have been carried out in the island since its completion making use the workmanship in which artisans were trained during the restoration and with quality standards in design, supervision and implementation that were unknown to the northern part of the island. The project expresses the European principles of cooperation and integration. Both the present and past of the island - and its multicultural character- were preserved and enhanced through this project. The Armenian Church and many other restored heritage buildings on the island are expressions of the hope that the multicultural community of Cyprus will fight to preserve its diversity in a common project of social and cultural growth.

Not far from Cyprus, in Palestine, the European Union through UNDP is equally investing in Cultural heritage restoration projects as a means to contribute to national growth. Though the main focus is tourism, the significance of these projects goes beyond the development of the Palestinian tourism sector, since they aim at raising awareness of the local communities about the importance of cultural heritage. Particularly relevant to that purpose is the restoration of Maqam En-Nabi Musa (Mausoleum of the Prophet Moses), a Muslim sanctuary located in the middle of El-Bariyah (the wilderness), a semi-arid region that extends East of Jerusalem, between the city and the Dead Sea. The landscape

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around the sanctuary has remained significantly untouched, making the relationship between the Maqam and the surrounding hills one of the elements that contribute to its uniqueness.

Maqam En-Nabi Musa was founded in the year 1290 CE by the Mamluk Sultan el-Malik ez-Zahir Baybars as the memorial for the Prophet Moses. Its religious significance derives from it having been identified as the tomb of Nabi Musa for the Muslim tradition. It evolved over the past seven centuries as an organic architectural construction, with several additions having been constructed around a central mosque. The architectural complex is a landmark in the region. Conceived to be along the routes that led caravans to Jerusalem from the Dead Sea, it consists of three floors and contains more than 150 living and service rooms used to host the visitors. These rooms with their domes above stand taller than the boundary wall and mark the skyline of the complex in symbiosis with the surrounding rolling hills. Only the minaret and the dome covering the tomb exceed the height of the other constructions.

The Maqam has a great significance in Palestine; its festival (*Mosam*) is most popular and played an important role in the Palestinian struggle during the British Mandate of Palestine as well during the *intifadas*. The celebration of *Mosam* at Nabi Musa gives the opportunity for people to gather from all over Palestine and come, under their political and religious leadership, to visit the tomb of the Prophet Moses. The festival, thus, is an opportunity for sharing cultural values and reinforcing the social cohesion and cultural diversity. The site holds also a very important significance for the Bedouin community living in the neighbouring territory, who consider the site as part of their culture and values.

After a period of misuse and abandon, the site was chosen for the establishment of a drug addicts' rehabilitation centre, losing both in terms of architectural values and original function. The intervention has thus a wider significance, going beyond the restoration itself and aiming at reactivating the social and religious function of the site in the region, as well as setting conservation standards and improving building capacity at a local level. The project, therefore, clearly interacts with a wider policy which provides opportunities to increase awareness of cultural aspects that are jeopardized by the corrosive effects of a consumerist

society. Moreover, the project, which will be completed in 2019, aims improve the potential for cultural, eco-tourism and creative industries for an inclusive economic growth, as well as to provide job opportunities mainly for young professionals and women (craftsmanship, tourism and cultural management), and improve engagement with the local private sector. Lastly, the project intends to increase the number of tourists and visitors to the Palestinian State in addition to adding new touristic routes with the new concept of connecting the landscape with the environment, archaeological sites and historical buildings.

The role of Cultural Heritage becomes thus a valuable tool for reconnecting with the most authentic aspects of our past. For this reason one of the objectives at Nabi Musa is going to be communication through digital media. Understanding the significance of the site and its surroundings, as well as exploring inter-religious aspects around the figure of Moses and developing *culture for all* values will become an equally important action as the restoration of the site itself. Contrasting with those processes which divide the community, the aim of the project will be to bring different people on site and offer a new opportunity for dialogue, so central in the past in most important capitals of the Mediterranean.

Within this context the intervention entails also taking concrete steps to raise awareness at a local level in understanding historical values at all levels, including the need to preserve traditional craftsmanship, which is jeopardized by the prevailing modernist culture. Deficient maintenance operation practice in countries lacking appropriate legislation is causing immense built heritage losses. Raising awareness among the local population and fostering traditional craftsmanship is thus crucial in sites where traditional heritage has not yet been destroyed by the use of contemporary techniques and modern building materials.

The arguments explored above are a tangible example of the strong potentials of Cultural Heritage in preserving and revitalizing human development and in reinforcing dialogue and social interaction. A policy making which is hopefully destined to become increasingly a cohesive agent for Europe.



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## A Colossal Enterprise

By Daniel Gerlach

*Why the so-called Islamic State ravaged cultural heritage. And how rebuilding and protecting it can contribute to countering extremist ideology*

When on 31 August 2015, the United Nations confirmed the destruction of Palmyra's ancient Temple of Bel based on satellite imagery, the shock had not yet subsided. However, it was no surprising news. The organisation, which called itself the "Islamic State", had provided just another sample of its cruelty, raging against peoples and cultures in the Middle East. Many in the world were frightened or at least saddened by this news, aficionados of travel and antiquities, but also people who heard about Palmyra that day for the first time ever. The moment when the - hitherto well-preserved - magnificent temple, crumbled to dust had been broadcasted on prime-time news across the globe. The jihadi organization had installed considerable quantities of explosives and staged the happening in slow motion, gruesomely reminiscent of those chief blasters who bring down old industrial towers in the centres of densely populated areas.

Did 'IS' simply intend to shock the world? Or was there more behind this rape of cultural heritage? Did the perpetrators act out of lust for destruction, or were there deeper ideological motives behind? A living character from the jihadi theatre could provide an answer to this question. The man was repeatedly declared dead until he eventually faced a magistrate in Turkey in 2017. Ever since, Abu Khaled al-Kambodi, an Australian national of Southeast Asian origin, has been subject of a legal haggling.

The young man also known as Neil Prakash was some sort 'IS' poster boy. His likeable face appeared in various recruitment videos that the jihadists, unlike in the aforementioned orgies of destruction, had produced to promote a 'constructive' image of themselves. Most of these videos never made into the broadcasts of Western mainstream media. Prakash was casted for some episodes of the promo series 'Stories from the Land of the Living'. Here, Prakash described his

jihadi journey of initiation and a formative experience before becoming a Muslim and abandoning the pre-Islamic stage of ignorance (jahiliyyah). Born a Buddhist, he claims to have travelled with his mother from Australia to the land of their ancestors, Cambodia, as a young man.

The sight of people worshipping ‘lifeless statues’ and making sacrifices in temples had sparked, so Prakash reveals, the impulse to embrace Islam. Since then, he had experienced what the ‘shirk’ of the ancient times, prior to the era of prophet Mohammed, must have looked like. Shirk, as a dogmatic concept, means to ascribe of deification of people and objects besides Allah. And only few sins are considered more refutable in the reading of Islam that Prakash had embraced before joining the ‘IS’. Prakash also gives a detailed account about his upbringing as a migrant child in the white Australian society and his struggling with identity.

As important as the testimony is the setting: Prakash talks while standing on top and in front of the rubble of an ancient statue, presumably the Assyrian lions of Arslan Tash. These colossal figures had decorated a place in the - otherwise rather unadorned - Syrian city of Rakkah, then the so-called ‘IS’ capital in Syria. In 2014, the jihadists smashed the lions with a wheel loader. Prakash poses self-confidently in this scenery, but shows neither hatred nor malice. He explains why destroying idols is a Muslim’s sacred duty. In his view, they stand for the immaturity of humans who are slaves to objects without souls. And only Islam could free them from this self-imposed oppression.

Prakash's personal account was apparently intended to explain why the self-declared Caliphate had authorized its followers to destroy such cultural heritage. It almost seemed as if the ‘IS’ feared that this could discredit it among the local population. Despite all possible reservations, Syrians felt pride in face of such ancient civilizations. Now they witnessed not temples and statues crumbling but possibly also income. Many locals in ‘IS’-occupied territories had made a living from excavations, maintenance, and the cultural tourism industry; economic factors that could be gone for good. So ‘IS’ encouraged people to loot cultural sites, in order to tax the tomb robbers and skim off gold for its own war treasury.

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The jihadist propaganda found a number of excuses for these deeds. It was said that archaeology was a pastime of the infidel. Western colonial powers had excavated the idols and temples of the Ancient Middle East and re-imposed a culture of idolatry that Muslims had long since overcome. This argument might have been a pretext. But one should nevertheless take a closer look at it, because it concerns the cultural identity of the entire region, from Turkey to Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, the Holy Land, Egypt and deep into the Arabian Peninsula.

First of all, it is not true that the Islamic caliphs after Mohammed had indiscriminately spurned the ancient heritage. Not all participated in the destruction of pre-Islamic cultural sites. There were acts of vandalism indeed, treasure digging and secondary exploitation of good building materials, one of the most famous episodes in this context being that of the 8th century caliph Al-Mamun who dug a tunnel shaft into the Great Pyramid of Giza. But Arab-Muslim geographers did care about antiquity before any Western intervention. They knew of ancient sites that had already partially submerged.

The ruins of the Ancient Orient and Classical Antiquity often bore popular, mythical and folkloric names before Western archaeologists unwrapped their shovels. How strongly populations of the Middle East identified themselves with this heritage also depended on how present and visible these were: Whoever has been standing in the shadows of the Great Pyramid would hardly wonder whether the Egyptians of past centuries had built a relationship with their antiquity. In Syrian Palmyra, remote from urban civilization, the situation is somewhat more complicated. The same accounts for Mesopotamia, where the cradle of civilization was once built in adobe and, therefore, after several thousand years of rather underwhelming countenance.

Mandaeans, Mazdakites, Assyrian Christians, Zoroastrians, and other non-Muslim communities in the Middle East are undisputed to have preceded Islam. Other historical references may be constructed and of more legendary nature. But against the backdrop of the 19<sup>th</sup> century revival of antiquity, it is not surprising that many religious minorities in the Middle East developed a strong attachment to the newly excavated, splendid pre-Islamic landmarks. They became an expression of the diverse identity of the Middle East and, not least, a

place of longing reminiscent of a glorious past. And that is what they stand for until today.

This does not mean that Muslims in the Arab world do not proudly look at the biblical, Phoenician, Assyrian or Sumerian civilizations as part of their own identity until today. Especially since many know that the Golden Age of Islam would hardly have been imaginable without them. And Muslim culture is sometimes interpreted -analogous to the religion of Islam- as the completion and refinement of its precursors. But extremists like the 'IS' jihadists deemed it necessary to erase and overwrite this history. The infidel, heretical minorities were to be annihilated, physically and in terms of a cultural genocide. No temple or statue was to remain as a reminder of a historical identity other than the jihadi version of Islam.

Today, the international community keeps reiterating that the totalitarian cult-like ideology of the 'IS' needs to be eradicated. This can be done by other means than weapons, too. Protecting, rebuilding and promoting the importance of the ancient Middle Eastern heritage where it has been destroyed must be considered a most noble duty. Since it is an act of recognition and self-commitment for a culturally and religiously diverse Middle East that survives extremism of any kind.

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URN: urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-60980-6

ISSN: 2197-6821