

CONFERENCE REPORT

Archaeology in conflict: cultural heritage, site management and sustainable development in conflict and post-conflict states in the Middle East

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Trinidad Rico

A conference on the theme 'Archaeology in conflict' was held from 10th to 12th November 2006 at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London and was organized by the Centre for Applied Archaeology (CAA). The aims were to increase our understanding of the underlying ethics in archaeological site management, and to define key aspects of archaeological theory, heritage management, funding schemes and policy approaches in conflict and post-conflict states in the Middle East, and specifically in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon.

Concerned with engagement with the world outside academia, the CAA brought together not only specialists, organizations and institutions involved in the cultural heritage of the region, but also contributions from the fields of journalism, political sciences and law enforcement. This provided an opportunity for scholars and experts from the region to contribute to the debate, and give conference participants an overview of the challenges and the formulae for success based on shared experience. Attending officials from antiquities organizations of the four countries concerned included Donny George and Abbas Al-Hussainy (respectively, former and current Director-General of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, Republic of Iraq), Ahmed Rjoob (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Palestine) and Assaad Seif (Ministry of Culture, Lebanon). This was complemented by contributions from UNESCO, the World Monuments Fund–Getty Conservation Institute, the Global Heritage Fund and the Art and

Antiquities Unit of the Metropolitan Police in London, as well as experts from numerous academic institutions.

Speakers addressed the relationships between conservation management models, sustainable development, conflict resolution, post-war recovery and the economic needs of contemporary society. Hot topics included looting, the Separation Wall between the West Bank and Israel, the efficacy and implementation of the provisions for cultural heritage within the Oslo Accords, and the role and potential applications of the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) as the 'Red Cross for cultural heritage'. A few sessions included presentations regarding the role of the media in representing conflict. Abed Aljubeih (TV producer/journalist) presented the Palestinian–Israeli situation as a 'conflict over the narrative': the media as a tool of reflection of society is an integral part of the creation of public opinion, which is key to the legitimization of territorial claims by Palestinians. Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly (journalist/archaeologist, Lebanon) suggested a need for archaeologists and journalists to work together. But the most visited issue in this conference was the planning and implementation of capacity-building in the agenda for policy-makers and funding bodies. Two presentations stood out on this topic.

In 'Power and politics in capacity building', Tim Williams (UCL, London) discussed the roles of different players involved in training and education projects. He dissected the *modus operandi* of funding

organizations in order to question reactive interventions and the tendency to fund spectacular projects, maintaining that there is a lack of understanding by many of these organizations about the nature of resources. He argued that sustainability, relevance to contemporary society and the fate of small-scale heritage need to be considered. Unless this is tackled, agendas will always be driven by economic engines. The questions that resonated were: are foreign experts always needed? and are management plans useful as planning tools? Williams concluded that we need to develop a culture that is not reflective of an international community patronizing other countries.

The problem of establishing a clear post-war scenario was discussed by Sultan Barakat (University of York) in 'Post-conflict reconstruction and the recovery of cultural heritage'. He argued that the timeframes for the process of recovery and reconstruction are underestimated. Offers and access to funding are available at the early stages of the project, but have a tendency to decrease rapidly over time. On the other hand, the understanding of the complexity of the problem is poor immediately following a crisis, requiring a longer timescale to unravel. Part of the problem is that initial investment yields no visible results, but the expectations of funding organizations can lead to premature intervention with monuments. Barakat also pointed out that creating legislation in these scenarios is not productive.

The organizers hoped to set the practice of cultural resource management within the context of social theory. Accepting that post-conflict and post-disaster situations are still transitional social and economic environments is a step forward. Conclusions that can be drawn from the conference include solutions for a better practice of conservation management, such as the need for risk planning, holistic approaches and understanding the different scenarios during and following conflict. Overall, the need for a central body to coordinate and provide funding was made clear in several discussions. Responding to attacks on this vacuum of power, Christian Manhart from the Cultural Heritage Division of UNESCO emphasized that the intergovernmental organization depends on member states to lobby and assist it in the deployment of successful projects.

In general, these discussions demonstrated that the field of archaeology and conservation can be grounded

in the reality of the socio-economic complexity of conflict. Speakers identified the wider context of conservation management, addressing issues of prioritization, humanitarian problems, poverty and development. The different focus of each standpoint provided a useful duality of perspectives. Professionals working and living in the affected countries painted thorough eyewitness pictures of the difficulties they face in understanding and tackling management and conservation issues. On the other hand, most of those who provide aid and support from abroad approached their work with a critical eye, identifying their own methodological gaps and limitations. Those organizations that did not take an evaluative position were questioned for it. Some presentations were weakened by relying heavily on a catalogue of images of destruction for effect. On the other hand, presentations that focused on critical evaluations of the implications of different types of interventions, the failures of methodologies and ideas of standards, provided participants with a substantive framework for further discussion.

It is clear that there is a need for capacity-building within our own professional domain, judging by the type of questions that remained unanswered. Funding bodies and agencies demonstrate varying methodologies for intervention. But what are the most effective means of proper reconstruction of infrastructure and how do they relate to a reconstruction of society? What is the ethically appropriate moment to conserve and excavate? When is training premature? What is the mechanism for mobilizing existing capacity within the conflicted country? How are projects to be evaluated? Can we build long-term partnerships in conflict and post-conflict states? There is consensus that cultural heritage management needs to be built from the bottom up, together with the local communities and within the local context. However, Gaetano Palumbo (World Monuments Fund) raised an interesting dilemma that sums up the complexity of the road ahead for conservation: do we aim for participatory planning to engage local communities in countries where democracy is not well seen?

The CAA aims to publish the edited proceedings from the conference. Information on all contributors and sessions can be found at the CAA website: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/caa/index.htm>. In addition, a working group is currently developing a series of voluntary

ethical guidelines for archaeologists and heritage managers that work in conflict and post-conflict contexts. It will report to the World Archaeological Congress (WAC) at the Inter-Congress meeting in Kingston, Jamaica, in May 2007.

► **Trinidad Rico** received her MA in Principles of Conservation at the Institute of Archaeology, UCL.

She is currently pursuing a PhD at Stanford University, where she studies the methodologies of conservation of cultural heritage in crisis management.

Contact address: Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology, 450 Serra Mall, Main Quadrangle Building 110, Stanford University, Stanford CA 94305-2145, USA. Email: trico@stanford.edu