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Nationalization of Antiquities: Threats to Human Heritage Posed by Equating Modern Nations with Ancient Counterparts

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DEFINITION OF ANTIQUITIES AND

INTRODUCTION

Antiquities may be defined as objects from the ancient world that have survived to the modern day. In practice, the term tends to refer to such artifacts as pieces of pottery, sculptures, paintings, jewelry, but also extends to the ruins of buildings constructed in ancient times according to certain definitions. This thesis will adopt this most general and most inclusive definition of antiquities. This decision comes after careful consideration of the advantages and shortcomings of other definitions that are more narrow and exclusive regarding an object's dating, place of origin, and perceived value. To adopt one such definition that certain institutions now reserve for classical antiquities would have been especially convenient, given that my thesis deals primarily with objects and sites from the ancient past that possess considerable historical value based on their connection with ancient cultures and civilizations of pivotal importance to the formation of Western civilization. Even so, examination of the complex nature of the debate over what items should be called antiquities has left me critical of this definition, so I will first lay out the perspectives of several institutions that deal with antiquities at a variety of levels and discuss this thesis' definition before the main body of the work.

Where the branding of an artifact as an antiquity is concerned, the more limiting definition from convenience that I mention above is most in line with that which internationally recognized museums and art dealerships tend to utilize when referring to their collections and merchandise. The collection of antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum, for instance, is limited to objects originating primarily from Greece, Italy, Egypt, and the Near East (Lapatin and Wight

2010: xi). Regarding its antiquities supply, Bonhams, one of the oldest and most renowned auction houses in the world, states that its artifacts "could originate anywhere from Egypt, the Near East and Europe" and date from "between 4000 B.C. to the 12th century A.D." (Bonhams). The antiquities offerings of Christie's, another known name in the realm of art auctioneering, include "works of art from across the ancient Mediterranean world, including ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt and the Near East, which range in date from the Neolithic period through to 1000 A.D." (Christie's). While these institutions are in slight disagreement with each other regarding the range of dates that apply to objects being designated antiquities, they are in relative agreement about where these objects come from: the civilizations of ancient Greece, Rome, and the Near East, whose cultures are widely acknowledged as the originators of Western society.

Though we see it used by many internationally recognized and respected institutions, it cannot be overlooked that this definition, largely due to its specificity and exclusivity, is often at odds with those which are posed by scholars and organizations representing the international community. Moreover, the fact that the definition for antiquities is not standardized in all contexts could even counteract the stated goals of the conservation efforts that are so closely tied to antiquities: to preserve, understand, and appreciate the objects. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) determined in 1970 at the famous convention on the prohibition and prevention of illicit cultural property trade that antiquities "more than one hundred years old, such as inscriptions, coins, and engraved seals" should be given their own category to keep them distinct from other objects that are more typically called cultural property (UNESCO 1970). Cultural property is a term used to describe any physical item that is part of the tangible cultural heritage of a group. Since this term is more general and

inclusive than that which most institutions and firms reserve for antiquities, all antiquities are necessarily cultural property, but not all items of cultural property are considered antiquities.

Based on the text of the UNESCO resolution from 1970, one might assume that the word "antiquities" is being used in reference to culturally significant artifacts, but its usage in the text does not reflect some of the typical elements of other common definitions. For instance, the resolution implies that ancientness is not necessarily a key attribute of all antiquities. If the only condition for items to be considered antiquities is that they must be at least one hundred years old, then this definition is almost certainly at odds with those adopted by most museums and auction houses, as the ancientness of an artifact is clearly as important to its value as the location of its origination in the eyes of those institutions.

James Cuno, author of the book *Who Owns Antiquity?* points out the inconsistency of commonly utilized definitions for antiquities in his book: "The general, political definition of an antiquity (as it is used in political agreements and national laws) is an object that is more than 150 years old. Often they are included among all manner of things more properly called 'cultural property'" (Cuno 2008: 5). Cuno goes on to illustrate how this vague definition is unhelpful and perhaps even harmful to conservation efforts by citing as an example efforts made by Italy to restrict the importation of cultural pieces into the United States originating from the ninth century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. Cuno points out that Italy's request defined its antiquities so broadly as to include every object that was produced in Italy over those 1,200 years. In this way, Italy insured that much of its mission to safeguard its antiquities would be impossible from the start by equating cultural property with antiquities and failing to elucidate which objects were most worthy of being protected.

Of course, not all of those objects can reasonably be called culturally significant artifacts, and many of them are likely of little archaeological importance beyond the fact that they existed during ancient times. Where the value of an artifact to the locals of a modern culture is derived from a perceived connection between their own culture and an ancient culture, the overly generalized definition that Italy chose to adopt in this situation not only cheapens the value of truly significant archaeological finds, but it could also serve to endanger those objects by obscuring the reasons why an organization would want to preserve antiquities in the first place by implying that all cultural property is equal in value.

Another author, Roger Atwood, places all artifacts from the ancient world considered culturally significant under the general category of antiquities in his book, *Stealing History: Tomb Raiders, Smugglers, and the Looting of the Ancient World*. In the narrative, which deals with antiquities issues ranging across the world from Europe to Iraq to Peru, Atwood points out the ubiquity of illicit trade in antiquities around the world. In referring to objects from, for instance, Sipán, Peru, as antiquities, Atwood suggests that the term can easily be applied to objects originating from places as far removed from ancient European civilization as South America without the need for further clarification.

Since my own argument will be focused on political interactions related to ancient objects and sites from areas traditionally connected to the foundations of Western civilization, my own usage of the term should be taken to mean those entities specifically. Still, while I will be referring to case studies primarily concerning artifacts and locations relevant to Europe and the Near East, I do not wish to propose a definition for antiquities that would dismiss the artistic and architectural achievements of the ancient civilizations of Asia, the Americas, or sub-Saharan

Africa. Rather, the definition is meant to aid me terminologically as I classify and refer to those objects which have been the particular subjects of contention and abuse in the West.

To further clarify exactly to which antiquities I am referring in the body of this thesis, the term "antiquities" will be prefaced by the epithet "classical" where appropriate. The definition for antiquities utilized in the body departs from the definitions set forth by some of the parties mentioned above where they grant certain rights of exclusivity of the term "antiquities". I would posit that in using the term to refer specifically to items only from Europe, Egypt, and the Near East, certain institutions and companies are attempting to romanticize artifacts from the West for the purpose of traditionalizing and monetizing the history that underlies those objects—a history with which many Westerners feel some connection. Consequently, the brand of antiquities known as classical antiquities has become synonymous with antiquities generally in many Western contexts.

Another result of this exclusion is that western antiquities (and classical antiquities in particular) are implied to hold certain value above those from other parts of the world due to their connection with the foundations of Western society. These judgments warrant further examination, for while many facets of Western culture have become globalized, one would be remiss to make the assumption that the West has the monopoly on ancient culture or, indeed, on ancient cultural artifacts. My intent in calling the objects with which my thesis is concerned classical antiquities is not only to refine my own definition for the sake of making a sound argument, but also to call attention to the ways that museums, auction houses, and even entire nations have controlled what items are considered antiquities in practical and business contexts by virtue of their commodification of the objects.

I also wish to address the question of how notions of cultural heritage factor into antiquities preservation issues. As Michael Hutter points out in *Economic Perspectives on Cultural Heritage*, "artifacts are certainly tangible — and yet they have qualities which are intangible" (Hutter 1997: 4). Hutter implies that the value of a culturally significant artifact is derived both from its physical form (the "tangible") and from the memories and truths for which it is a vessel (the "intangible"). Furthermore, his explanation suggests that in order to adequately preserve antiquities, one must also preserve the intangible qualities of cultural heritage that are the source of their value. One of Hutter's collaborators, Christian Koboldt, asserts that an object that is significant to cultural heritage is "an expression or representation of the cultural identity of a society in a particular period" (Hutter, Koboldt 1997: 68). Again, the artifact is described as inseparable from the sense of cultural heritage that underlies it. Another collaborator, David Throsby, proposes that people see antiquities originating from their relative localities as "cultural capital... which embodies the community's valuation of the asset[s] in terms of [their] social, historical, or cultural dimension" (Hutter, Throsby 1997: 15). I would acknowledge all of these statements as fundamental to our understanding not only of why we should value and respect antiquities in a cross-cultural, cosmopolitan sense, but also how their intangible worth contributes to their perceived value as political and economic assets and expressions of nationalism.

In the twenty-first century, antiquities have become especially relevant to issues of international politics due to our modern understanding of their function as physical embodiments of the histories and cultures of both local populations and of the entire human race. Because of the ties between artifacts, cultural heritage sites, and the political entities that control how they are studied, maintained, and exhibited—or, in some cases, intentionally destroyed or illegally

trafficked—matters of antiquities ownership and sharing have long been issues for modern countries and institutions wishing to claim for themselves some piece of the ancient past.

Since the year 2000, we have seen a shift in exactly how artifacts and heritage sites are being used by individuals, museums, radical political groups, and world governments to establish, alter, and assert power dynamics related to nationalism and national identity. As human society has become more globalized with the new century, so should our perception of identity change to accommodate our condition as both local citizens and citizens of the world. To that end, I will argue that equating modern nations with ancient civilizations that once existed within their currently held territories for the purpose of enforcing traditional conceptions of antiquities ownership is an obsolete and damaging practice because it promotes a sense of national identity based on harmful nationalistic attitudes of division and competition rather than cooperation and mutual appreciation for human heritage.

MUSEUMS, REPATRIATION, AND NATIONALISM

The relationship between ancient artifacts and the modern nations from which they come is at the center of many contemporary antiquities debates. While most scholars and institutions that deal with antiquities agree in a general sense that countries have some claim to artifacts originating from within their borders, the connections between modern states and the ancient peoples who once inhabited the lands upon which those states were established are often complex and sometimes tenuous. Equally as complicated are the implications of ownership of ancient civilizations' tangible remnants based on those perceived links.

Consider, for instance, a well-preserved piece of pottery dating from the Roman period and unearthed in Italy. Suppose that the piece comes to be valued as a major discovery and eventually finds its way into an Italian museum where it is prized due to its significance to Italian heritage. Is this claim to the object's history reserved only for Italians? And if the piece is thought to embody the culture of Rome, a civilization which contributed much in the way of customs, values, and systems to modern Western nations beyond Italy alone, should those states also be granted partial ownership of the artifact? These are the sorts of questions that are debated by antiquities scholars, museum officials, and government representatives with a range of motivations for making their arguments. The association of antiquities with modern nations is of especial interest to this paper, as the perceived connection informs how nations use antiquities as political assets to express and maintain a sense of national identity.

The 1970 UNESCO Convention against Illicit Exports determined not only that the international community should be sensitive to the importance of antiquities to modern nations, but also that they should take steps to prevent the pillaging and exportation of a country's

cultural property. These determinations acknowledge that illicit trade in antiquities is harmful not only to those nations which are at greater risk of cultural robbery due to the richness and quantity of their heritage material, but to the entirety of human society, as the pillaging of ancient artifacts often leads to the loss of information about the objects and their significance to culture in addition to the objects themselves. The convention has been adopted by 132 United Nations member states since 1970, with most countries choosing to ratify articles of the convention by writing them into their own law codes. The convention of 1970 paved the way for further action concerning the guarding of antiquities in the form of the convention of 1978, which established the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation, which has largely provided the basis for the repatriation of certain artifacts back to the modern countries from which they are thought to come.

While the convention of 1970 has been largely successful in promoting international attention to the issues of antiquities theft and destruction, it has seen a mixture of success and failure with regard to repatriation. Consider, for instance, the convention's inability to mitigate the longstanding issue of what should become of such pieces as the Elgin Marbles, on which both Greece and Britain make claims of legitimate ownership. Both nations recognize the authority of UNESCO conventions on repatriation of cultural property, but the particularities of the case are such that Britain does not support the claims of Greece, the country that contains the site of the marbles' origin. Both sides have made strong arguments as to why they should have proper custody over the marbles. Greece cites the connection between its modern society and those of the Ancient Greeks and argues that the esthetic quality of both the Parthenon and the marbles is devalued by the separation of the pieces. Britain insists that the marbles would be at a

greater risk if they were not housed in the British Museum and that fewer people would have access to them for viewing and appreciation.

The marbles remain in the British Museum, where they have sat since the early nineteenth century. But whose claim to them is more legitimate? When Elgin removed the marbles from the Parthenon from 1801-1812, he did so not with the permission of the Greek government, but under the auspices of Selim III, whose Ottoman Empire was occupying Greece at the time. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the occupying Ottomans were melting down other classical works of sculpture in Athens for their materials, and supporters of Elgin's actions have pointed out that the marbles from the Parthenon might have shared the same fate if not for their removal from the country (Sanchez 2017: 4). Critics of Elgin's actions have argued that, since Greece was under occupation during the time of the marbles' extraction, the permission for their removal was not given to him legally, overshadowing claims that he was conserving the marbles with accusations that he was participating in something more like vandalism and looting.

In 2014, UNESCO offered to act as a mediating party between Greece and England to resolve the issue of the Parthenon marbles, but Britain refused on the grounds that UNESCO is meant to mediate issues between nations, not between a nation and a museum (BBC: Elgin Marbles). Greece, on the other hand, insists that the scale of the issue is such that it is a matter between nations and that the removal of the marbles was an affront not only to the esthetic wholeness and of the Parthenon, but also to Greek national identity.

Ultimately, the issue at the heart of the case of the Parthenon marbles is a clash between differing conceptions of cultural ownership. Supporters of repatriating the marbles to Greece tend to believe that the artifacts are the property of Greece because they are representative of the ancient history of the modern nation. Conversely, many supporters of the British Museum's

argument believe that the Parthenon marbles are of such great importance to all of Western civilization that to return them to Greece would be to fundamentally misunderstand their significance in a larger context than just Greek culture in particular.

I do not intend to prove which of these points of view is more justified. Scholars and diplomats have posed persuasive arguments for both sides over the course of the last two centuries, and the issue has yet to come to any point of resolution. Rather, I would point out how one element of the debate, namely whether antiquities are the explicit property of twenty-first century nations whose modern territories happened to house artifacts from ancient societies, is worth further examination. To conflate two cultures as removed from each other as ancient and modern Greece into one idea of a nation for the sole purpose of retrieving artifacts is to misguidedly simplify the problem of heritage ownership. Moreover, treating modern nations as the evolutions of ancient civilizations that once existed in the same locations is not always a reasonable or helpful way to approach issues of antiquities ownership, as ancient cultures have, in many cases, influenced the customs and philosophies of several modern peoples, not just those of their direct ethnological descendants.

Traditionally nationalistic conceptions of cultural ownership have become even more tenuous with the emergence of globalism. As Nayan Chanda, founder of the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization points out, "Economic integration, and with it cultural globalization, has far outpaced our global mindset, which is still rooted in nationalist terms. We benefit from all that the world has to offer, but we think only in narrow terms of protecting the land and people within our national borders—the borders that have been established only in the modern era" (Chanda 2007: 319). The nationalistic mindset that Chanda describes has led to the

commodification of certain culturally significant artifacts and relegated them to a position in which they are treated more like economic resources than treasures of human history.

This principle of self-identification based in nationalism applies even on a much smaller scale, as is evidenced in the case of the Sicilian village of Aidone, which has been the beneficiary of several recent instances of repatriation. One piece that was previously held in the Getty Museum, a cult statue of a certain goddess, was repatriated in 2011 to the small village, which has a population of around 6,000 residents. The statue was found to have been taken from the nearby ruins of Morgantina, an ancient Greek settlement, as the result of an illegal excavation. There were holes in the record of provenance for the statue even when the Getty obtained the piece for eighteen million dollars in 1988, but nevertheless the piece remained in Los Angeles until the museum determined after lengthy negotiations that the pieces should be returned to Sicily (Felch 2017).

The identity of the depicted goddess is unknown, but the general consensus among scholars is that she is probably Persephone. During its time at the Getty, the statue was thought to have been an image of Venus, but Sicilian officials have taken to calling it "the goddess of Morgantina". Unfortunately, unless the original looters come forth with new information regarding where the statue was unearthed, it is unlikely that the identity of the goddess will ever be determined with certainty. In the case of the Morgantina goddess, the mishandling and abuse of illicitly obtained antiquities can lead to the loss of even the most basic information about an artifact. Even so, Flavia Zisa of the University of Kore in Sicily insists that "the statue didn't exist by herself, she was made for a specific place and a particular purpose" (Felch 2017), and the locals of Aidone are hopeful that the statue will attract tourism and increase the village's economic prosperity. All of this raises the question: should the Getty museum have returned this

artifact from its own encyclopedic collection which is visited by over one million patrons annually (Getty) so that it could exist in relative obscurity in a small Sicilian village? Based on established precedents regarding antiquities that have been found to have been stolen, this was the proper course of action from a legal standpoint, but those precedents are based on the belief that a country—or in this case, a small village—should be able to claim to own an artifact that was unearthed within or near their territories.

Consider also the case of Zahi Hawass, the former Minister of State for Antiquities Affairs for Egypt whose career as a politician was bolstered by a wave of repatriation of Egyptian artifacts during his time in office. From 2002 to 2011, Hawass was responsible for the return of thousands of artifacts to Egyptian museums which had previously been kept in museums around the world. His claim was that objects from ancient Egyptian collections throughout the West are ultimately the property of the Egyptian state, and that their displacement is indicative of Western theft and appropriation of Egyptian culture and history (Waxman).

Hawass' highly nationalized vision of why antiquities originally from Egypt should be returned has inspired great division in the community of international museums, as his calls for repatriation have tested the willingness of those institutions to capitulate to a system of cultural monopolization in which objects unearthed in a country are viewed as the property of only that state. What is particularly interesting, though, is the timing of his most vehement calls for repatriation, which came in 2011 at the height of civil unrest in Egypt. When Hawass was appointed to the new position of Minister of State for Antiquities affairs in the same year, he and other cabinet members from the administration of Hosni Mubarak, who was the president of Egypt during the 2011 protests, had every reason to attempt to create a strong sense of national unity among Egyptians in order to maintain order.

Hawass' mission to return antiquities to Egypt could be interpreted as an extension of the government's efforts to remind Egyptian citizens of their proud and storied heritage and to suppress the notion that the country was experiencing a period of intense political fragmentation. In his work, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, Anthony D.S. Smith details the ideology of nationalism that underlies this type of political strategy: "Nationalism becomes self-reproducing in a world of nation-states. For once the world has defined 'normality' as national solidarity and national statehood, every nation must be vigilant against signs of cultural assimilation and must produce nationalists whose self-appointed task is to strengthen national identity and uniqueness in order to increase social cohesion and solidarity" (Smith 1979: 23). Since the contributions of ancient Egyptian civilization to the whole of human society are evident, tangible reminders of the artistic achievements from Egypt's ancient past become especially valuable to the perception that the modern state of Egypt is strong and worthy of celebration because those objects recall the strong foundation of culture upon which the nation was built.

Utilizing antiquities as a means of nationalizing a population can lead to the abuse of the very memories that make them valuable to us. The greatest advantage of globalized society is that the inventions and discoveries of humanity can be shared more easily than at any point in the past, and yet the threat of difference and diversity continues to enforce the creation of arbitrary distinctions between modern societies that hinder our efforts to appreciate, study, and preserve such things as art and architecture from the civilizations of the past.

In addition, the victims of nationalist policies of antiquities retention are not limited only to the museum and the museum-goer; the antiquities themselves are often subjected to damages. As James Cuno points out in his book, *Who Owns Antiquity?* "We are losing ground against the destruction of the archaeological record through war, environmental damage, economic

development, looting, and acts of nature" (Cuno 2010: 28). Cuno emphasizes the urgency of shifting international consciousness away from the nationalist worldview not only as a means of safeguarding antiquities in the short term, but also as a means of creating circumstances in which the citizens of the world can more aptly understand others' cultures and appreciate our shared human heritage. The theft and destruction of antiquities due to such recent events as the Iraq War and the fight against the so-called Islamic State have proved Cuno's point that war can bring irreparable harm to archaeological treasures and heritage sites, but I would add to this that over-identification with one's own culture through the nationalization of such things as ancient artifacts and locations can contribute to political tensions that ultimately result in conflicts between peoples.

ISIL AND PALMYRA

As the author and cultural critic Edward Said once wrote, "successful nationalisms consign truth exclusively to themselves and relegate falsehood and inferiority to outsiders (as in the rhetoric of the capitalist versus communist, or the European versus the Asiatic)" (Said 2001: 176). Indeed, the process of nationalizing a state's citizens often involves the creation of an "us" and a "them", and objects that convey some element of a nation's heritage are especially susceptible to being used in this way. Antiquities can seem to reaffirm the greatness of "us" by pointing to the achievements of ancient civilizations whose creations and customs have informed the cultures of our modern nations while simultaneously constructing a "them" whenever the suggestion is made that the benefits of those achievements should be reserved only for the appreciation of the perceived descendants of those civilizations and not allowed to people from any other country. This same principle applies in the case of the so-called Islamic State, whose mode of establishing a clear sense of "us" and "them" to fit the rhetoric of its pseudo-nationalism is one of destruction. Nowhere are the damages of this ideology more evident than at the ruins of the ancient city of Palmyra.

A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1980, the Syrian city of Palmyra was once a cultural center for the ancient Mediterranean. The art and architecture found there combines Greco-Roman elements with those traditional to Persia, reflecting the history of the location as a cultural crossroads. Palmyra has been in the news recently due to the activities of the jihadist militant group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The group's campaign of iconoclasm against sites of religious and cultural significance led to the destruction of many of the artifacts housed in and around the site of Palmyra, including a Temple of Baalshamin, a

triumphal arch, and most of the contents of the Palmyra Museum (Denton 2016). Since the

liberation of the ancient site by Syrian forces in 2016, news of the defacement of statues and

ruins at Palmyra has come paired with reports that ISIL illegally unearthed and trafficked

antiquities to fund its future endeavors while the group was occupying the site. Further involving

the site with its own political statements, ISIL released a video of the execution of twenty-five

captives in a Roman amphitheater with the expressed intent of inviting Westerners to associate

those cruel deaths with the products and accomplishments of ancient civilizations to whom much

of Western society is traditionally attributed.

In March 2016, Syrian government forces recaptured the site of the ancient Palmyrene

ruins. The retaking of the site left international onlookers hopeful for the future of the ruins,

which were to be repaired as much as possible over the course of a long-term restoration project

backed by a multitude of states from around the world. But proponents of the project were met

with still more bad news in December 2016, when it became clear that ISIL had regained its

foothold in the region and launched another offensive aimed at seizing Palmyra from Syrian

government forces. At the time of writing, the occupation of Palmyra by ISIL militants is

ongoing, and press reports detailing further intentional damage to the heritage site continue to

circulate. Most recently, satellite images confirmed the destruction of elements of the Tetrapylon

and the Roman theater there.

The intentionality of ISIL's struggle for control of Palmyra raises questions about why

the self-proclaimed state would go through the trouble of attacking and occupying a site with

only minor strategic importance not once but twice. While the location offers little in the way of

tactical advantage, it is clear that ISIL officials in charge of offensive operations in the region

regard the world heritage site at Palmyra as an important target nonetheless. I credit the decision

of the militants to prioritize this symbolic target over more practical ones to the unique relationship that ISIL has with antiquities. Antiquities, especially those which are considered essential to the foundations of modern Western civilization, have in fact become targets of some significance to ISIL, as the organization aims to use the theft and destruction of antiquities to further several of their pursuits, from expanding the influence of their political and religious ideologies to asserting the legitimacy of the nationhood of the so-called "Islamic State".

Our earliest records of Palmyrene civilization come from around 2000 B.C. during the Bronze Age. The Mari tablets, Akkadian documents detailing ancient near-eastern civilizations, describe Palmyra as a trading center for travelers passing through the lower portion of what is now the modern country of Syria (Dirven 1999: 18). With the coming of the Roman era, Palmyra was able to foster thriving trade relationships with both its Parthian neighbors and the Roman Empire in the early first century AD while enjoying independence from both. In 14 A.D., however, Palmyra was annexed into the Roman province of Syria (Bryce 2014: 278). In the late third century AD, Queen Zenobia of Palmyra subverted Roman rule, annexing the province of Roman Arabia and invading Egypt. This Palmyrene revolt against the Romans, which resulted in the creation of a short-lived breakaway Palmyrene Empire, was put down by Emperor Aurelian in 272 AD (Bryce 2014: 308). The impact of Roman customs and art on Palmyrene civilization was important not only to the development of Palmyra as a multi-cultural city-state, but also to the modern Western assessment that the tradition of the site is an extension of Western history.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, Palmyra was maintained under Byzantine rule until it was taken as part of the Rashidun Caliphate in 634 (Le Strange 1890: 36). Successive administrations under the Umayyads, the Abbasids, the Mamluks, and the Al Fadl clan governed the region until its eventual absorption by the Ottoman Empire along with the rest of Syria in

1516 (Smitha 2001: 2). At times an autonomous city-state and at times a protectorate province of larger political entities, Palmyra has ever served as site for the confluence of ancient cultures. After World War I, Syria was partitioned, with Palmyra falling within the area of the French mandate. In 1929, the ruins of the ancient city of Palmyra became a site for archaeological research due to the efforts of the French general director of antiquities in Syria, Henri Arnold Seyrig. To accommodate excavations of the ruins, inhabitants of the settlement at Palmyra were relocated to the nearby village of Tadmur, which lies to the northeast of the ancient site (Darke 2010: 257).

The history of the militant terrorist group ISIL began in 1999, when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a career Salafi terrorist, met with Osama bin Laden to discuss Zarqawi's entry into the organization Al Qaeda. Zarqawi had been making a name for himself as a radical in Afghanistan since the 1980s, when he traveled to the country to fight against the Soviet occupation forces there (Kirdar). Zarqawi chose not to join Al Qaeda, but bin Laden nevertheless supplied the resources for Zarqawi to train Salafi militants as members of an organization called Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'al-jihad (JTJ) (BBC Profile).

The organization fought against American forces during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and in 2004 the JTJ was absorbed into bin Laden's organization, becoming a detachment of Al Qaeda operating primarily in Iraq. In June 2006, an American airstrike killed Zarqawi in Hibhib, Iraq, bringing about a period of decline for the group that lasted until 2011. Zarqawi's successor, Abu Ayub al-Masri, declared that his organization would spearhead the creation of an Islamic State of Iraq, which the group hopes will eventually lead to the creation of a new caliphate. In 2010, Abu Ayub al-Masri was killed in a raid by U.S. and Iraqi forces and was succeeded by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the current leader of the organization (Felter 2010).

In 2013, al-Baghdadi changed the name of the group to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria when it began operating in Syria, seeing the Syrian Civil War as an opportunity to recruit new radicals and expand its sphere of influence. Due to an internal dispute, ISIS split from Al Qaeda in February 2014. By June of the same year, the organization changed its name for the final time to the Islamic State, declaring the establishment of a new caliphate under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Mapping Militant Organizations). The group continues to operate in Iraq, Syria, and areas in the Middle East sometimes called the Levant. This has earned them the title, "Islamic State of Syria and the Levant" among the international community. Many still use the acronym ISIS to refer to the group as well. ISIL continues to operate primarily in Syria and Iraq, seizing territory and resources when able and committing acts of terror against the peoples of the region.

When ISIL took control of Palmyra in May 2015, the archaeological sites and artifacts there quickly fell victim to the group's campaign of cultural destruction. In his article on ISIL's war on heritage, Omur Harmansah, an associate professor of Art History at the University of Illinois at Chicago, gives a detailed analysis of the role of antiquities destruction in the operations of ISIL. Harmansah argues that instances of ISIL's "place-based violence" are ultimately acts of aggression against identity (whether local or international), but the publication of their destruction of artifacts and heritage sites serves to capture the attention of Western media and act as a form of self-representation to the world at large. In other words, their iconoclastic efforts at Palmyra and elsewhere add a new dimension to discussions around the world—and particularly in the West—of the group's capabilities: that they are able to damage and destroy not only lives and homes, but also the common history of mankind (Harmansah 2015: 170-177).

This point is especially important when considering ISIL's conceptions about the legitimacy of its claims to nationhood. Indeed, it is vital to one's understanding of the militants'

intentions and strategies to consider that the organization views itself not as a radical terrorist group but as a modern nation of people. While ISIL's religious doctrine holds that many of the antiquities housed at Palmyra are profane because they are an insult to their god, I would argue that ISIL leaders have targeted these images and structures because they wish to create a sort of historically even playing field on which to meet their enemies. After all, one pleasantly ironic capitulation that the organization's campaign of iconoclasm is forced to make is that history is important. This is the case not only in the sense that heritage is vital to human society, but also in the sense that modern nations are the products of millennia of historical events. Our antiquities are tangible reminders of those events and civilizations that have shaped our world's political geography. It is no coincidence that ISIL, an organization that calls itself a nation without any antiquities of this kind to justify its greatness from ages past, would concern itself with destroying artifacts that recall the extensive histories of other nations and peoples. It cannot be overlooked that with every antiquity destroyed, ISIL baselessly asserts not only that the shared heritage of, for instance, modern Syrians is meaningless, but also that its own identity as an emerging nation is legitimate, and that these acts of destruction are among the first great acts of their nascent "state".

Harmansah also points out other strategic roles that the highly-publicized destruction of antiquities plays for the organization, "from humiliating the local communities to broadcasting a radical ideology of religious fanaticism in order to recruit new transnational militants all the way to defying the common values attached to cultural heritage in the globalized world" (Harmansah 2015: 171). In these examples, we see ways that ISIL's efforts in the region of Palmyra led to tangible logistical advantages regarding recruitment and press attention for the group, as well as more intangible cultural effects that further their war against modern conceptions of a secular

and shared human identity. ISIL has now declared war on all of humanity, and the organization carries out its demolitions with such a flair for ostentatiousness as to invite the whole world to marvel at its acts of violence against cultures past and present.

An operation to retake Palmyra from ISIL was successfully carried out by Syrian government forces in April 2017. Observers from the international community were saddened to find that their worst fears about the state of the ancient site and its artifacts were realized, with most of the objects from the area either seriously defaced or destroyed utterly. During the ISIL occupation of Palmyra, the American Schools of Oriental Research's Cultural Heritage Initiatives group produced a multitude of reports detailing the damage done to specific structures, artifacts, and burial sites around Palmyra. The information contained in the reports is based on sources ranging from Russian drone videos to satellite imagery to videos released by ISIL themselves.

When ISIL was ousted from Palmyra in March, the Syrian Directorate General for Antiquities and Museums released its own reports after surveying the site on the ground. These reports confirmed that a combination of small-arms fighting, airstrikes, and intentional demolitions by ISIL amounted to the destruction of elements of the Triumphal Arch (AQI Weekly Report 49), multiple burial sites in the Valley of the Tombs (AQI Weekly Report 52), the Ayyubid-era castle, Qalaat Shirkuh (AQI Weekly Report 56), the Temple of Bel (AQI Weekly Report 59), the Temple of Baalshamin (AQI Weekly Report 119), and the Decumanus (AQI Weekly Report 71). Assessments of the destruction at the Museum of Palmyra indicate that mortars from ISIL's initial assault on Palmyra and airstrikes employed in efforts to retake the site caused substantial damage to the structure of the museum (AQI Weekly Report 41). Photographs of the museum's interior show iconoclastic defacement of statues, carvings, and dioramas, and

other images throughout the museum, especially those depicting humans and gods. Among these are the statue of Athena and the Lion of al-Lat (DGAM 2016). In the case of nearly every image of a human or humanoid, the head or face has been removed in accordance with ISIL's rules regarding the depiction of people and divinities in art.

While the very demolition of Palmyrene antiquities serves to make a political statement to the world about the ways in which it intends to eliminate modern conceptions of nationhood by destroying tangible representations of cultural heritage, ISIL's illicit utilization of the artifacts is not limited only to the destruction of the objects. Other artifacts unearthed illegally by ISIL during the occupation are believed to have been trafficked by the organization in order to fund its activities in the region. In a raid that killed ISIL official Abu Sayyaf in May 2015, documents were discovered containing details regarding the ISIL division known as Diwan al-Rikaz, or "Department of Precious Things That Come Out of the Ground" (Taub 2015). The documents indicate that at least $265,000 was collected by the Syrian branch of the division from local diggers and smugglers who were allowed to sell certain antiquities on the condition that a percentage of the sale money would be collected in the form of taxes for ISIL. An unknown number of private dealings conducted by the organization and its hired contractors likely amounts to an even greater figure. In his discussion with NBC reporters, one smuggler, who would be named only as Abu Mustafa, stated that he was personally responsible for the transportation and sale of at least ten artifacts unearthed illegally by ISIL. He further claimed that "the buyers were German, French and even Americans, and that the artifacts were sold for as much as $60,000 per piece" (Engel et al. 2016) If Mustafa's reports may be trusted, it is likely that ISIL employs other traffickers who also deal in the illegal sale of antiquities.

Abu Mustafa's statement about the nationalities of the buyers is echoed by Markus Hilgert, the director of the Berlin Museum of the Ancient Near East, who commented that "Pre-Islamic objects go to Europe and North America, while Islamic art goes to countries of the gulf" (Myers and Kulish 2016). Based on satellite images taken during the site's first occupation, ISIL has focused its looting efforts in Palmyra primarily on unearthing artifacts from the Roman period and the early Islamic period. By targeting sites that hold antiquities specific to these eras, ISIL insures for itself a base of customers internationally, as the interest of the West in Palmyra was originally due to the intersection of Palmyra with Rome, a civilization more traditionally associated with the history of Europe and, by extension, North America. Indeed, it seems that ISIL has found in Palmyra a source of money and media attention whose historical significance resonates not only with classical scholars and archaeologists but also with aficionados of history who would purchase antiquities related to Western civilization illegally.

This point illustrates one of the main reasons why ISIL continues to devote its strategic efforts to holding this otherwise strategically unimportant area: Palmyra remains a foothold from which the organization can repeatedly abuse the way Syrians and Westerners value antiquities. When ISIL fighters destroy the antiquities of Palmyra, they attack not only the historical remains of a great civilization, but also the identities of countless peoples who trace some element of their heritage to the site. When they sell the undestroyed remnants, there is no shortage of Western buyers who will pay money to fund international terror in order to own a piece of that heritage. It is somewhat ironic that the very sentiments regarding heritage that might lead an antiquities buyer to make such an illegal purchase is one which ISIL looks to destroy. Moreover, as the artifacts are displaced and moved through the black market, they become more difficult to

locate, identify, and repatriate due to the lack of legitimate records concerning a given artifact's provenance.

One ISIL official, Mohammad Salem, was quoted as having said, "Our enemies are stupid. We captured a whole town and houses from them, and they recaptured sand and destruction" (Denton 2016). This statement emphasizes an attitude that pervades ISIL's iconoclastic efforts in the region: that the forces of international governments are hindered by their willingness to use resources in retaking locations valuable to cultural identity even if the livable infrastructure of the places are destroyed.

The significance of the threat brought on by this element of the radical group's ideology cannot be overstated, as the organization is an enemy of peoples local and international that openly expresses its indifference toward, and even its hatred of, traditions of humanism and cultural diversity in favor of the violent and the eschatological. While the organization's ultimate mission of establishing a global caliphate is doomed to fail, many lives and some of our dearest cultural treasures are under threat from a force that would destroy them and leave no trace of their existence to history. In ISIL, we see an entity attempting to assert itself as a nation on the world stage by embracing the most brutal form of destructive nationalism since the turn of the century: one which, in bypassing the traditional hurdles of providing tangible objects showing cultural heritage to support the legitimacy of its statehood, is satisfied merely with the destruction of artifacts that it equates with modern nations.

Adding to the complexity of the situation in Palmyra are the political and economic ramifications of the city's recapture for the Assad Regime. Retaking the city will likely prove a valuable political coup for Assad, whose administration will be able to claim a large portion of the responsibility for the operation, with the rest of the credit going to Russian forces, who

supported the endeavor with airstrikes. The government is expected to reap further benefits more closely tied to economics from retaking some of the areas around Palmyra, as the city is believed to have been the staging ground for ISIL fighters to harass two major natural gas fields to the west of the city and the country's primary phosphate mines to the southwest. In retaking Palmyra, the Assad Regime, the regime of a dictator who knowingly and regularly visits cruelties upon the population of his own state, hopes to distract from the violent shortcomings of its own administration by reminding his country and the world at large that Syria too is proud of her ancient heritage. In identifying Syria with Palmyra in his propaganda, Assad will attempt to stir up nationalist sentiment in support of his regime by tapping into Syrians' desires to believe that the greatness of the proud civilization of Palmyra is exhibited in the government of modern Syria.

THE PERSEPOLIS COLLECTION

AND CONCLUSION

Violence against antiquities and cultural property in general is often an unfortunate reality of brutal wars waged out of intolerance and hatred, but the intrinsic value of artifacts can also become threatened when they are made into the objects of economic transactions without due regard for how they will be preserved or contextualized. The ways in which a piece is kept, exhibited, and studied are matters of especial importance to museums, culture institutions, and national governments, but not necessarily to those who judge the merits of an artifact based solely on its projected monetary worth. As I have demonstrated, the illicit sale of antiquities can lead not only to the damaging of the artifacts themselves, but also to the corruption and loss of any information regarding their provenance. However, the sanctity of cultural artifacts also becomes endangered when they are weaponized against any cultures or political entities that identify with them. The proof of this notion is shown in the extreme case of ISIL's abuse of antiquities at Palmyra, but also in the case of an ongoing U.S. legal dispute involving the Persepolis collection at the University of Chicago. This dispute perfectly illustrates the issues of whether antiquities should ultimately be viewed as assets belonging to nations and whether antiquities can be seized on the condition that the nation who claims ownership of that cultural property has committed a crime against foreign nationals—however unrelated to antiquities that crime may be.

The dispute began in 2003 when Iran refused to respond to claims of damages brought forth by a group of United States citizens harmed in a 1997 suicide bombing in Jerusalem. The plaintiffs in the district court case, which was officially entitled *Jenny Rubin, et al. vs. the*

Islamic Republic of Iran, et al., charged that Iran had financed the Hamas militants who carried out the attack and should therefore be responsible for the settlement of the damages. When the court ruled against Iran, the country did not acknowledge its culpability in the bombing or the validity of the U.S. court's ruling. As a result, the plaintiffs were granted the right to demand an amount of 423.5 million dollars from Iran, but they were restricted by certain American legal precedents that prevent the outright taking of reparations from a foreign nation (Grossman 2006). Consequently, they attempted to exact those reparations in the form of artifacts from United States museums and institutes with extensive Persian collections that could be sold off to pay for the damages.

The artifacts on which the plaintiffs' legal representation determined to make a claim are currently being housed at the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. The collection, which is composed of thousands of clay tablets from sites associated with the ancient Persian city of Persepolis, was loaned to the university by Iran so that any inscriptions might be deciphered and studied. The tablets were discovered within the site of the ancient treasury ruins at Persepolis. The inscriptions on the tablets of Old Babylonian and Elamite cuneiform describe administrative concerns pertaining to daily life and culture in the Achaemenid Empire. The content of the records includes descriptions "of sales, of land deals, of taxes to be paid, or of the amount of money borrowed from the treasury" while also offering specific information about the trades and nationalities of skilled workers from various parts of the empire (Oriental Institute). Ironically, the manner of the treasury's destruction allowed for the tablets to be preserved beyond the lifespan of similar records from the Achaemenid period, as the fire that brought down the building also baked the tablets, thus hardening them to the point of survivability. The rarity of the tablets cannot be overstated; as Gil Stein, the director of the Oriental Institute at the

University of Chicago points out, "It's valuable because it's a group of tablets, thousands of them from the same archive. It's like the same filing cabinet" (Slevin 2006).

For over a decade, the plaintiffs' legal representation has fought to prevent elements of the Persepolis collection from being returned so that they could be taken and sold to pay Iran's debt. In 2016, however, the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit determined that artifacts from the Persepolis collection were not eligible for seizure on the basis that only property "used for a commercial activity in the United States" (U.S. Code Title 28) is able to be seized. The court cited specific wording in U.S. law code regarding judgment against a foreign state, stating "We read this exception to require commercial use by the foreign state itself, not a third party. Iran did not put the artifacts to any commercial use" (U.S. Court of Appeals 2015-2016). Nevertheless, the imprecise wording of the legal documentation meant to resolve issues regarding the execution of seizure upon foreign property has left the case open to further appeals, and the proceedings have extended into 2017, with the most recent action from the plaintiffs coming in the form of a petition to counteract the 2016 ruling (Supreme Court 2016).

The judgments of American courts in this matter are crucial in determining certain precedents for the seizure of antiquities that were legally obtained by U.S. institutions. If the plaintiffs are granted the right to secure reparations from the seizure and sale of items from the Persepolis collection for the perceived international crimes of Iran, then that country's political dealings would have indirectly placed antiquities held in American museums in the hands of a third party with no expressed interest in safeguarding the integrity of the artifacts. The result would almost certainly be the sale of the tablets to private collectors, inviting but not securing the continued safety of any of the artifacts. Moreover, it is likely that many of the pieces would no longer be available for public appreciation or study by scholars.

The willingness of U.S. courts, museum institutions, and established legal codes to capitulate the ownership of the antiquities to Iran creates an especially interesting dimension to the case. Regardless of whether the artifacts from the Persepolis collection have been used commercially in the U.S. by Iran, if the tablets are ultimately handed over to the plaintiffs, it will be due to an unfavorable decision by U.S. courts. While the current state of the court proceedings seems to indicate that the tablets will stay in Chicago, where their preservation and availability would be insured, the fact remains that the collection is being targeted because it is considered the property of the state of Iran. The philosophy that underlies traditionally nationalistic conceptions of what political entities may claim to own antiquities continues to create space for the potential abuse of artifacts like those of the Persepolis collection because it equates modern nations with their ancient counterparts with the effect that countries believe they have one more valid reason to reject the realities of globalism. In the case of the Persian collection, a victory for the plaintiffs would represent not only a loss for scholars of the ancient world, but also another step away from meaningful negotiations with Iran.

While it is disturbing to think that genuine pieces of human history may be lost or destroyed based on legal technicalities or culture wars, it is equally as troubling to think that misguided conceptions about who should have the power to control humanity's access to our shared heritage will continue to threaten relations between modern nations and cultures. When antiquities are perceived as items to be owned by nations, the immense complexity that underlies a culturally significant artifact's importance to all of humanity is vulnerable to obscuration by harmful nationalist sentiment. The artifacts become more like any other possessions: mere objects over which to fight—things that are stolen, guarded jealously like resources, or even destroyed in order to assert the notion that one's own country is superior. To treat our antiquities

in this way is to engender further political and cultural division and to misrepresent how we can and should use our antiquities to better understand and appreciate the connection between ourselves and the ancients. Indeed, it would be abusive to the truths about the human condition imparted by such treasures to allow the desire for the prestige of owning a piece of history to render us unable to take advantage of opportunities for human solidarity now.

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