Dealing with the Past in the Present: How and Why?

Alexa Bartelmus and Giulia Francesca Grassi

Dealing with the Past in the Present: How and Why?[1]

In recent years, there has been an enormous amount of publications on "cultural heritage." Typing only the English term—in quotation marks—in Google [4 Dec 2014] reveals allegedly 24,600,000 entries (of which of course not all will prove relevant or valid), and there are hundreds of books and even quite a number of journals that have "(cultural) heritage" in their title. Some of these lament the loss or destruction of cultural property, while others are concerned with matters of its protection, with its ideological or commercial aspects, or with legal issues, to mention only a few examples. So why add another one?

Unfortunately, in present days there is a tendency both at universities and in society as a whole to disregard subjects dealing with pre-modern history as being totally irrelevant to today's life. The Ancient Near East is rarely known to anyone,[2] and even disciplines investigating more recent past periods of Near and Middle Eastern history attract relatively few students. Instead, presumably due to the dramatic events since the beginning of the new millennium, there is a very strong interest in recent developments in (mostly) the Arab world. But the past is highly relevant for understanding what goes on in the modern Near and Middle East, since it is also relevant for the people who regard it as their legacy.

During the past decades there were quite a few rulers in the Near and Middle East that made their countries' ancient past a topical issue. One might think in this context of, for example, the Shah of Persia's (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi; r. 1941-1979) huge celebration of "2500 years of the Persian Empire" in 1971 that celebrated the founding of the "Persian Empire" by Cyrus the Great (r. 559–530 BC) in the ruins of the ancient Achaemenid capital Persepolis (Grigor; Wiesehöfer), to which he invited visitors from all over the world, including many state rulers. Similarly, Saddam Hussein (r. 1979-2003) loved to decorate himself by counting selected famous rulers of Iraq's past—the Old Babylonian king Hammurabi (r. 1792–1750 BC), the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 605–562 BC), and the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty and conqueror of Jerusalem (in 1187 AD), Salah al-Din ("Saladin"; r. 1174–1193 AD)—among his predecessors (Baram 58; al-Gailani Werr 20; Robson 116), a practice, by the way, that was very common among the Ancient Near Eastern rulers them-

selves (Grassi 128). Hussein annually held a celebration in Babylon (Baram 48-51; Robson 116) after having restored the archaeological site and even having built his own palace there, overlooking the previous palace of Nebuchadnezzar. Also the reconstruction of the past of Israel has been affected by an ideological use of history and archaeology: If in the period of the colonization of Palestine, archaeology was practiced by immigrants in search of their roots, after the creation of the State of Israel, archaeology—one of the most popular pastimes in the country during the 1950s to 1970s—was also used as a means of legitimizing territorial rights (Elon). For these people the past clearly mattered; they used it to bolster their claims of legitimacy by referring to their countries' resplendent past.

Searching—in accordance with META's aims of interdisciplinarity and debate-orientation—for a topic that could be suitable to bridge the gap between the historically-oriented and the modern disciplines concerned with the Near and Middle East, and to raise mutual interest because it is equally relevant for all of them, "cultural heritage" (understood in its widest sense; see below) thus seemed to be a reasonable choice. Fortunately enough, this topic not only allows for multiple perspectives

and approaches, but also leaves room for discussion, not only between scholars of different disciplines, but also between academics and practitioners, and between people from "Western" and Near and Middle Eastern countries. We certainly cannot answer all the questions posed in our volume, but maybe we can inspire discussion. And of this we are convinced: No matter in which way, the past matters. That is why we have prepared this issue.

A source of continuing discussion is the question of whether important cultural artifacts whose provenance is unknown and that are therefore likely to stem from illicit excavations should be dealt with and published by scholars and thereby be made even more valuable than they already are. Two different perspectives on this question are presented by **Jody Tabitha Neal** in her article "Provenience, Provenance and the UNESCO 1970 Convention: Two Schools of Thought on the Publication of Indeterminate Artifacts."[3]
She argues that, on the one hand, the publication of an artifact with unknown provenance (or history of ownership, as opposed to "provenience," the location where an object was found) and the resulting scholarly discussion on its nature and cultural association can be important tools to rectify its archaeological record. This

again—in combination with the information provided by the object itself—adds to the knowledge of lost civilizations, and the respective artifact, which would otherwise remain lost to the world, thus becomes another puzzle piece in the reconstruction of world history.
On the other hand, however, publishing an artifact with unknown provenance indirectly fuels the mechanisms that have brought it into the antiquities market. This is not only morally dubious because the scholar thus ideologically supports a process of theft in which the respective countries—at least materially[4]—lose part of their cultural heritage, and increasing demand makes looting even more attractive, but it also has even more sinister ramifications: Recent studies have discovered that there is also a strong connection between the illegal antiquities trade and other, more serious crimes, such as corruption, smuggling of drugs and arms, prostitution, and perhaps even the funding of terrorism. So, whereas the damage to the historical information related to an artifact caused by the loss of its archaeological record might be counterbalanced—at least in part—by its publication and scholarly discussion (Neal also points to the fact that archaeology itself is "ultimately destructive"; 22), there are other kinds of damage related to the publication of indetermi-

nate artifacts that cannot easily be compensated for.

There are, of course, also "chance finds" that fall into a legal grey zone: The Dead Sea Scrolls, of which the first were discovered and kept by Bedouin shepherds, are perhaps the most prominent example.[5] Such artifacts are neither the product of official excavations nor of looting.

As a kind of compromise, Neal suggests to distinguish between publications that are made for the sake of profit (like auction catalogues) and those whose aim is to "emphasize the loss of the archaeological context, and/or to highlight the situation of cultural heritage looting at present" and that are prepared "for the overall rationale to be the return of the piece to where it was stolen" (25).

In theory, there are today clear rules to determine whether an artifact is "legitimate" or "illegitimate": All artifacts that were acquired after the year 1970, when the UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* was put into force, and that are not accompanied by an official export license cease to be legitimate. However, not all states have subscribed to the UNESCO convention, and its impact is always "bound by the national laws that govern each country" (20). Furthermore, even a

seemingly sound provenance record is not necessarily trustworthy: in recent years there have been some prominent cases where dealers managed to fake the necessary documents in order to sell illegally-acquired objects to museums. It is thus the responsibility of the institutions concerned with trading and purchasing cultural artifacts (like auction houses and museums) to carefully investigate their provenance—and to impose the necessary consequences if it should turn out to be dubious, even if this contradicts their own interests (some positive examples are given on p. 23).

Responsibility, and even a thought-leading role of museums and other academic collections with regard to the protection of cultural artifacts, as well as to the "mediation and translation of cultural differences" and the "improvement of bilateral and multilateral relationships" (37) are also key issues in the article of **Markus Hilgert**,[6] the current Director of the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin, who, however, approaches the topic from a very different, both theoretical and programmatic, perspective.

The protection of cultural artifacts constitutes for him an "ideal example of transdisciplinary research" (37), to which he ascribes—following Schneidewind and Singer-Brodowski (69)—the potential to

catalyze "processes of transformation in society" and thus to become a "transformative scholarship" (36): The different steps that were necessary to ensure effective cultural property protection (such as, for example, conservation, documentation, provenance research, research on the creation of suitable legal frameworks, and the establishment of training programs for all those concerned with cultural artifacts protection) required the collaboration of both academic and non-academic actors. Because of their "prominent position at the interface between research, culture, society and politics" (37), and because of their specific competences that lay "particularly in the multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary field of cultural property research" (32), institutions that curate—and do academic research on—substantial collections of cultural artifacts (e.g., archives, libraries, museums, and academic collections)[7] were best-suited to guide such transdisciplinary research processes and thus had a "special responsibility" (32), not only in the field of cultural assets protection, but also with regard to the "multi-perspective mediation and translation of objects in transcultural spaces of reception" (36).

As for the latter, Hilgert highlights the "multiperspectivity of objects" and "variability of 'object identities'" (34) and postulates that those should be taken into

account, not only in research and documentation but also in the presentation of objects: modern object repositories should provide barrier-free access to their collections, not only physically, but also linguistically and culturally.

This could be supported—at least in part—by a recent technical development, namely the process of "virtualizing material culture" by means of digital media like "individualized mobile applications" or "three-dimensional (3D) digital documentation" (34). The latter especially offered an "enormous potential" (34) for doing research and conveying history since it allows for digital—and even (3D-)printed—replications of cultural artifacts all over the world.

Of course, having a *representation* of something is not the same as owning the *original object*, and digital reproduction will neither keep smugglers and collectors from selling or purchasing looted objects, nor state representatives from requesting the repatriation of prestigious objects of high ideological value to the countries of their origin. But at least for scholarly work, 3D-digitalization offers a bulk of new possibilities that are only in their infancy at present.

Modern archaeological techniques are extensively employed in the Rania Plain Proj-ect conducted by the University of Copenhagen and described in our journal by its directors **Tim Skuldbøl** and **Carlo Colantoni** ("A Damage Assessment of Iraq's Past: Archaeological Heritage Management on the Rania Plain in Iraqi Kurdistan").

The project's aims are, on the one hand, to investigate the development of the Late Chalcolithic (4000-3300 BC) settlement of Bab-w-Kur in the Rania Plain (Iraqi Kurdistan) and to catalogue and protect its extant archaeological heritage; on the other hand, to understand the cultural landscape and the history of the human occupation of the Rania Plain, and to evaluate the damage that occurred to its archaeological heritage from the 1950s up to now. Thanks to advances in remote sensing with the use of satellite imagery and aerial photography (for example, by using small radio-controlled helicopters, known as 'drones'), modern archaeology has developed effective means to document—and thus protect—Iraqi heritage.

The menaces to the archaeological heritage of the Rania Plain are constituted mainly of the seasonal fluctuations of an artificial lake and recent urban expansion. Differently from other regions in Iraq, Kurdistan has not been severely damaged by the ongoing war and the presence of the Islamic State (IS), which—as stressed, among others, by the participants in the conference held in the headquarters of UNESCO on 29 September 2014 (Fuganti)—in general promotes a policy of destruction of the archaeological heritage of Syria and Iraq. On the one hand, the IS tries to cancel the cultural identity and the cultural heritage—even the Islamic one—of the regions under its control, sometimes meeting with opposition from the local population;[8] on the other hand, jihadists use the illicit trade of antiquities to finance war expenses.[9] Though Kurdistan escaped this pillage, the IS has affected the Kurds' situation by causing an impressive exodus of Iraqis escaping from advancing IS fighters. In the province of Dohuk, 900,000 refugees joined in the past few months a population of 1,000,000 local inhabitants.[10] In spite of the fact that several archaeologists operating in Iraqi Kurdistan were called back by their foreign ministries in August, and only a few of them have kept on working there in recent months,[11] the situation seems to be improving, and some scholars have already expressed their intention of going back to Kurdistan.[12] Before 1991, Iraq hosted the greatest number of international archaeological missions. After the wars, the first archaeological missions in Iraq in 2009-2010—Satu Qala (Universities of Leiden, Leipzig and Erbil/German Archaeological Institute); Qasr Shemamoq (Universities

Lyon 2 and Sorbonne); Bakr Awa (University of Heidelberg)—were all active in Kurdistan, which is today the only Iraqi region in which archaeologists can operate. As a result, the number of missions in the region increased in recent years.[13] As stressed by Skuldbøl and Colantoni, "in comparison to a rather bleak damage assessment for the cultural heritage of the rest of Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan holds the possibility of a highly positive outcome for the preservation of a fragile and irreplaceable cultural patrimony" (51). Let us hope that water and urban expansion will not cause the damage that war was fortunately so far unable to cause in this region.

Urban expansion is a major problem for cultural heritage, not only in Iraqi Kurdistan, but also in the region of the Gulf, which has seen in the last decades of the 20th century an extremely rapid urban growth, a phenomenon investigated in the article by **Djamel Boussaa** ("Cultural Heritage in the Gulf: Blight or Blessing? A Discussion of Evidence from Dubai, Jeddah and Doha"). The urban centers of several cities of the area "were often demolished and replaced by alien, imported, high-rise buildings" (55). When not demolished, the historic centers suffered from overcrowding, neglect and a lack of city planning, which sometimes trans-

formed them into slums. However, the importance of the preservation of historic centers—both for the maintenance of cultural identities and for economic reasons—is starting to be perceived, and beginning to produce sustainable development policies. Three cases are taken into consideration in the article: Dubai (UAE), Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), and Doha (Qatar).

According to the analysis of Boussaa, the case of Doha is the most successful one, since the central area of Souq Waqif, after a period of decay, has been properly restored and promoted, becoming "a major hub" for the inhabitants and their activities, as well as a tourist attraction.

A ray of hope for the historic center of Jeddah, Al-Balad, seemed to come from the session of UNESCO in May 2014, where Al-Balad was added to the World Heritage List. The application was promoted by Jeddah municipality in order to stop the deterioration of the area, mainly occupied by private buildings outside the jurisdiction of the municipality. The dispute between private parties and the municipality has already caused the loss of the majority of the historical buildings, but the inclusion of Al-Balad in the UNESCO List may possibly help the municipality in preserving and promoting the area.

The survival of the historic area of Dubai was seriously threatened in the 1970s, and

only around 12% of the old buildings survive. The revitalization of the historical area of Shindagha dates back to the middle of the 1990s and has led to the creation of two heritage villages, which attract many tourists and, at least according to Boussaa, are "a blessing to the inhabitants of Dubai and the UAE" (60).

A more critical view on the heritage villages that were created in the United Arab Emirates in recent decades (Abu Dhabi; Dubai; Hatta; Sharjah) is expressed by **Marxiano Melotti** in his article "Heritage and Tourism. Globalization and Shifting Values in the United Arab Emirates" that deals with different aspects of tourism in the Emirates. According to him, in the heritage villages the past is "frozen in order to create a better and easier product for the market" (78). They tend to be physically separated from the cities, thus perpetuating a distinction between Dubai's present, built upon hyper-modernity, globalization and a mix of cultures, in which the collections of Western museums may help to create its own heritage, and Dubai's past: everything dated before the discovery of the oil.

The heritage involved is of course both tangible and intangible: on the one hand, some historic buildings are restored and preserved, but on the other hand, the ma-

jor attraction in the villages is given by reconstructed uses and traditions.

Even archaeological evidence seems to be used more in its intangible than in its tangible implications. On the one hand, the evidence of an early trade is used to present modern shopping malls as the result of an historic process, or rather as a stable constituent aspect of the country; on the other hand, actual archaeological artifacts and sites—particularly pre-Islamic ones—are left unprotected, and the UAE has become a hub for the illicit antiquities market. At the same time, the archaeological interests (and investments) of the Emirates seem to be directed toward European sites, thus evidencing once again that the Emirates' policy towards tangible and intangible heritage is indissolubly and lucidly linked with tourism and marketing, and it even "becomes an instrument of international political and economic negotiation" (86).

"Museumification" (Weineck 99) and commercial use were certainly not among the main purposes of UNESCO when it enacted the *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2003. Rather, according to UNESCO's definition, intangible cultural heritage is "traditional, contemporary, and *living* at the same time" (UNESCO, "Heritage"; our emphasis) and "contributes to social cohesion, encouraging a sense of identity and responsibility which helps individuals to feel part of one or different communities and to feel part of society at large" (ibid.). Furthermore, "intangible cultural heritage can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it" (ibid.). The latter claim, however, is somewhat contradicted by the fact that it is actually only state parties who can make proposals for inscribing "cultural practices and expressions of intangible heritage" (UNESCO, "Lists") on the *Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*. This allows for another kind of 'misuse' of the concept, namely as a means to deal with socio-religious problems by domesticating cultural diversity and thus preventing independent cultural (and especially religious) identity.

An example of this practice is given by **Benjamin Weineck** in his contribution "Governmentalities of Alevi Cultural Heritage: On Recognition, Surveillance and 'Domesticated Diversity' in Contemporary Turkey." He argues that the recognition of part of an Alevi ritual—the *semah* dance—as "intangible cultural heritage" and its inscription in the Turkish National Inventory for Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2010 were part of "a form of political conduct, which on the one hand" met "the Alevi communities' aspirations for recognition" (93), but on the other hand kept control over its interpretation, by downplaying its religious character (Alevism is not officially recognized as a religion in Turkey) and instead presenting it as "a cultural facet of Turkishness" that "does not principally deviate from Sunni Islam" (98).[14] This notion was also supported by the naming of the ritual as "Alevi-Bektaşi," since this term was "used mostly by Turkish-speaking Alevis, which excludes Kurdish Alevis and with that the notion of the politically subversive character of Alevism" (98). In this way, the assumed purpose of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, namely to empower vernacular groups and to undermine "formerly state-oriented approaches to monumental heritage sites" (101; cf. also the literature quoted on p. 93), would only partly be reached since—despite the increased visibility of these groups and their cultural assets—the recognition of the Alevi-Bektaşi cultural heritage would fail "to translate into the legal-political realm" (101).

Leaving the authority of interpretation of their own "cultural heritage" to the people involved, on the other hand, carries the danger of subjectivity and distortion of facts, which can turn out to be a source of

inter-cultural conflict, especially when it comes to the interpretation of history. History is not explicitly contained in the official definition of "intangible cultural heritage" by UNESCO ("Heritage"), but it is—at least in our opinion—highly relevant in this context. On the one hand, it is mainly their interpretation in terms of history[15] that gives importance and value to (otherwise meaningless) material objects that have remained from the past. On the other hand, history shares many of the features that characterize "intangible cultural heritage" according to the UNESCO definition, if it is understood as a legacy that is received from past generations and as an important element in constituting a living community's cultural identity.

Of course, with regard to the question of "how it truly was," interpretation should not be left to the agents of history and their (real or ideological) heirs alone, because every community tends to interpret history in the way that best fits its ideological purposes and psychological or moral needs—and we, as modern Western scholars, are by far not above doing the same. In fact, there is not one absolute, objective truth (one might perhaps recall Hilgert's "multiperspectivity of objects"), but rather, history is always subject to interpretation (Rüsen, "Einleitung" 27). Therefore, every community should at least have the right

to do research on its own past, to interpret it, and to tell its own story as part of its own "cultural heritage."

An interesting approach to overcome the cultural differences in historical thinking in order to make different narratives comparable and thus to allow for global scholarly discourses on history in which "the Others"[16] (that is, non-Western cultures; Rüsen, "Einleitung" 33) can actively participate has been offered by Jörn Rüsen ("Zugänge"), who suggests that a basis for such a discourse could be reached by searching for universals in historical thinking.

An important constituent of this process is Assmann's theory of a "cultural memory" (Assmann, *Gedächtnis*) since there was "no human culture without the constitutive element of collective memory" (Rüsen, "Zugänge" 44) and "historiography as something culture-specific" would occur in the framework of such a theory as a "specification of a universal and fundamental cultural practice of human life" (ibid.).

Further, the theoretical frame of an intercultural comparison should "not only 'define' the area of what should be compared" and to "open a perspective within which 'historiography' or 'historical thinking' were taken into view as parameters of

comparison," but also "name a number of aspects by which the variety of differences" (45-46) could be taken into view. This variety was constituted by the "different circumstances under which historical consciousness works, the challenges that generate it, and the functions it has to fulfill" (ibid.). Also, "cultural practices" and "mental processes" (ibid.) affecting it should be taken into account. Particular attention is attributed in this context to the "criteria of meaning" that are relevant for the "reconstruction of the past as history" and for the "logic of historical interpretation, poetics and rhetoric of representation, and the possibilities to understand the past as something relevant and important for the cultural orientation of present life praxis" (45).

Finally, one should ask for the "forms, processes, and factors of change, and the development of historical consciousness" (46).

In her article "Historical Thinking in Intercultural Perspective: Iranian Narratives on the Mongol Era," **Anja Pistor-Hatam** applies this approach to modern Iranian historiography (from the 1930s until 2011) on the Mongol period.

By further taking into account the concept of "history of meaning" she investigates how "fictions of coherence" (104; Ass-

mann, *Mind of Egypt*) are constructed, and what meaning is thus "bestowed on the Mongol era by modern historical narratives written in Iran" (105)—that is, narratives that mostly "were written and published as textbooks to be taught at schools and universities", and thus "continue to imprint public historical consciousness" (105) in Iran.

According to her analysis,

> Iranian historiography until this day continues to be strongly determined by the placement of historical consciousness in a literary tradition of myths and legends, as well as the ideologically dominated narratives of various political currents (107)

Perhaps most influential is the idea "that 'Iran' had existed as a cultural entity since Achaemenid times" and was as such "a twenty-five-hundred-year old nation" (106). This idea was not only promoted by the creation of an according historiographical project during the Pahlavi era, but is still accepted—at least in part—in today's Islamic Republic. Especially in the latter, (Shiite) Islam and divine predestination have become further important elements of historical narratives. Thus, for example, Ghazan Khan's (r. 1295-1304) conversion to Islam was reinterpreted as "the beginning of a new era, equivalent to

the victory of the 'Iranian element,' the triumph of the Shia, and the reestablishment of an Iranian nation-state" (108). The indestructibility of a "nucleus of 'Iranianness'" is often explained in terms of the "mental superiority of 'Iranianness' based on cultural heritage" (ibid.). Whereas such narratives "often lack plausibility and do not comply with scholarly standards like verifiability, rationality, and reflection of the individual scholar's own viewpoint" they could be accepted—at least in part—"in the context of a relativistic history of meaning" (ibid.).

In her conclusion, Pistor-Hatam once more addresses Rüsen's "principle of mutual recognition of dissimilarities" that "would imply that scholars in Iran and abroad had been reciprocally aware of each other's publications" (109). This, however, seems not to be the case at present—at least not regarding the Mongol era. Whereas the "impact of 'Western' (and Russian) scholarly literature concerning the Mongol period on the construction of meaning by Iranian authors" had been considerable before 1979, Iranian authors writing about the Mongol period would nowadays "not give attention to the state of the art in international academic research" (110) any more. But also, Western scholars seemed hardly to take any note of what is being done in Iran.

Of course, with regard to Iran, one might be tempted to connect this with the current political situation: the Islamic Republic, its regime, and the values and ideas it promotes are often looked upon with distrust in the "West"; on the other hand, Iranian scholars (in Iran) can only act within the limits of their own socio-political context and have to meet certain societal expectations.

That it is not necessarily ignorance or differing ideologies that cause differences between the state of research on a country's history (and its interpretation) in a country itself and abroad, and that some Middle Eastern scholars are even "desperate for international collaboration" (121), is stated by **Eleanor Robson** in her article "Creating Futures for the Past in Southern Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities," which deals, however, with a different country and topic, namely the problematic situation of scholars working on ancient history in Iraq.

According to her observations (based on personal experiences) Iraqi scholars were absolutely not up-to-date regarding recent research on the ancient history of their own country. This situation could be explained by the historical developments during the last century that she divides into four distinct phases.

During World War I and the following British Mandate, Iraqi ancient history had been "solely for Europeans" (118)—with the result, by the way, that great numbers of important cultural artifacts of Iraq's past ended up in European and American museums where they have remained until today.

This situation changed significantly after Iraq's independence in 1932, when antiquities laws were changed in Iraq's favor, the first Iraqi PhD students were sent abroad to study archaeology, and the Iraqis started to carry out their first own excavations. Still, pre-Islamic history hardly played any role in school education, since the curriculum was strongly under the influence of pan-Arabism and conveyed mostly respective "nationalist and militaristic" (116) narratives.

Under the Baathist regime (1968-2003), and especially under Saddam Hussein, antiquity increasingly became attractive, since by exploring and promoting Iraq's glorious past, its leader could be presented "as the natural, inevitable successor of millennia of militarised dominance over the region" (ibid.).

Because of its association with Baathist propaganda, however, "public appetite for ancient history" today was underdeveloped amongst the older generation and faced "ignorance amongst the younger"

(118). Moreover, those scholars that still decided to deal with archaeology or ancient history suffered from the dramatic consequences that the international embargo enforced by the United Nations following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 had had for the Iraqi academic community—especially the isolation that the embargo had brought about and the resulting loss of "knowledge and expertise; of funding and prestige; of professionalism and control" (117). To keep up with the latest academic discoveries and developments was almost impossible for Iraqi scholars, except for those that had "particularly good knowledge of English, French or German and a particularly good internet connection" (118). But the technological infrastructure and library provision of the archaeological departments were "woeful" (120) and Iraqi students were "simply not trained in the search and analytical skills needed to locate and make sense of what is on the web" (ibid.).

Having composed her article with the explicit aim to "stimulate discussion, response and action" (113), Robson concludes her study with an appeal to scholars abroad not to leave Iraqi historians alone with their fate, and offers three suggestions for what viable support could look like: We should learn the Arabic language in order to enable face-to-face discussions

and push "our publishers to commission Arabic translations of our books" (121), we should scope the academic landscape in Iraq by identifying academics and cultural heritage organizations interested in collaboration in Iraq and discussing their needs with them, and we should advocate internationally in order to convince others "of the safety and value of working in-country" and "to get the message across that sustained engagement with Iraq's ancient history is not merely a western indulgence" (122), since the people of Iraq had a right "to learn about their region's past, both recent and ancient, should they choose to do so, to understand who they and their communities are, and how they came to be" (121).

Not only modern Iraqi historians face a lack of interest in their studies in their society, but "many governments worldwide are currently struggling to see the value in supporting academic humanities and social sciences" (Robson 118). This leads us to a final question to pose, that being the question of "belonging" of culture—in a more immaterial way than the one mentioned in the beginning.

While many would possibly agree that Ancient Near Eastern history and culture might indeed be of importance for the Iraqis, Iranians, and other Near and Middle

Alexa Bartelmus

is a research associate in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies at Marburg University. She has studied Assyriology, Semitic Studies and Ancient History at Munich University where she obtained her M.A. in 2006, and is currently preparing the publication of her dissertation (delivered in 2012) on the transmission, ways of use, and relevance of Sumerian in the Kassite Period (ca. 1600-1150 BC). Her research interests include (among many others) scribal education, royal ideology, and international relations in the Ancient Near East.
email:
alexa.bartelmus@staff.uni-marburg.de

Eastern peoples themselves, how many people are aware of the fact that Ancient Near Eastern ideas, notions, images and knowledge have influenced our own way of thinking and are deeply manifested in our own cultural tradition?

More than once in history, important impulses for what we regard today as important elements of modern Western culture have actually come from the Near and Middle East. Mathematics, astronomy, our calendar, and even the art of writing have been invented and developed in the Ancient Near East and were transported to Europe much later, via the Greek and Roman world—that we, influenced by a Eurocentric way of thinking, indeed regard as belonging to our own cultural realm.[17]

Later on, some important works of Greek philosophers and medical and technical writers have only survived because they were translated into Arabic or Syriac and/or adopted by Near and Middle Eastern scholars.[18]

On another, even less tangible level, even images that were created in the Ancient Near East have entered our "own" literary, artistic and musical tradition—especially via the Biblical tradition that, despite of its Near Eastern origins, has been totally absorbed by the "Western" world—so that they live on until the present day.

Of course, during the process of transmission, adoption, and selection, both the actual appearance and the interpretation of these ideas have changed, and what we see today is never identical with what it was once. (This is slightly different with material objects although those are also normally subject to transformation processes.) While some characteristic features stay, others become hardly recognizable any more, and in the course of time, even information on the nature of something might get blurred or even lost. But there might still remain a nucleus of information that reveals its true identity.

An illustrative example is the image of the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus (556-539 BC) that was created after his death.[19] His case is treated extensively by **Giulia Francesca Grassi** in her article "Nabonidus, king of Babylon."

Who would nowadays still recognize characteristic features of the last (Neo-)Babylonian king, Nabonidus, behind the well-known series of pictures by William Blake (1757-1827), that according to his own description show "Nebuchadnezzar"—Nabonidus' more famous predecessor who was still admired and imitated by Saddam Hussein at the end of the last century?

Who would even know that it was actually him who was the last Babylonian king, and not Belshazzar, as is suggested by the Biblical story of the fall of Babylon in the Book of Daniel—that is to some persons perhaps even better known from the famous poem "Belsazar" of Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) or its musical version by Robert Schumann (1810-1856)?

And who would have assumed that this king was very much interested in the history of his own country, and that he used (quasi-)archaeological methods—that were not much different from the methods still used in the nineteenth and early twentieth century AD—to search for traces and messages of his ancestors (among which he not only counted members of his own dynasty, but also—like Saddam Hussein and other modern Near and Middle Eastern rulers—important kings of other dynasties of Iraq's past)?

Past and present are not far away or very different from each other. They are just two sides of the same coin, and the past mattered in antiquity as—and for the same purposes as—it matters today: for the construction of identity, for ideological purposes and legitimation, and for power and prestige. Only the perspective on time was different for the people in the Ancient Near East: in their perception (reflected by the terminology used) the future lay behind their back (because it was still unknown to the people), while the

Giulia Francesca Grassi

holds an MA in Sciences of Cultural Heritage (Archaeology) from the University of Udine, and a PhD in Sciences of Antiquity from the same university. She is currently a research assistant in the Department of Semitic Studies at the University of Marburg. Her main research interests include Semitic epigraphy, Aramaic, the interactions between the Ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world, and anthroponomastics. She is the author of several articles on these topics, and authored the book *Semitic Onomastics from Dura Europos. The Names in Greek Script and from Latin Epigraphs* (Padua 2012).
email: giulia.grassi@staff.uni-marburg.de

past lay clearly visible in front of them (Wilcke).

Marburg, December 2014

Alexa Bartelmus and Giulia Francesca Grassi

Notes

[1] We would like to thank the other members of the editorial board for their continuous moral and practical support, our issue advisor Walter Sommerfeld and the anonymous reviewers for their very detailed and enormously helpful comments, and our proofreaders and student assistants for their excellent work. Also, we would like to draw attention to the fact that this issue not only contains articles that deal with the focus topic "cultural heritage" but—for the first time in the history of META—also an "Off-Topic" section in which Renate Dieterich presents a study on "More Than Movies: Cinema Petra in Amman During the Mandatory Period."

[2] This was remarkably different about a century ago (Sommerfeld 139-140).

[3] Because of its provocative question and two-sided argumentation, this article is presented here in the section "Anti/Thesis" that was originally intended to be filled by rivaling opinions of two different authors.

[4] One could argue again, that by publishing at least they gain important knowledge about their own history [note by the editors].

[5] The accounts of the discovery of the scrolls have been contradictory and there are several discrepancies, possibly due, at least in part, to the desire to pursue illegal excavations (Fields 23-24). For a detailed and illustrated account of the discoveries, see Fields, and particularly pages 24-26 for the discovery of Cave 1 by Bedouin shepherds. For the discoveries of the scrolls and their vicissitudes, see also the report by their first photographer (1948), the scholar John C. Trever. – The Dead Sea Scrolls have raised enormous interest, not only in the scholarly community because of their historical and philological value, but also among people who recognized the potential they offered for ideological purposes. For example, the archaeologist Yigael Yadin wrote about the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and their purchasing by his father, Eleazar Sukenik, for the nascent state of Israel: "It is as if these manuscripts had been waiting in caves for two thousand years, ever since the destruction of Israel's independence until the people of Israel returned to their home and regained their freedom. This symbolism is heightened by the fact that the first three scrolls were brought to my father for Israel on 29 November 1947, the very day the United Nations voted for the re-creation of a Jewish state in Israel after two thousand years." (quoted in Elon 40). On the other side, after the Oslo agreement between Israel and the PLO, the PLO demanded the restitution of the Dead Sea Scrolls because their authors would have been members of an "ancient Palestinian set" (Elon 45-46).

[6] "Materializing Culture - Culturizing Material. On the Status, Responsibilities and Function of Cultural Artifact Repositories within the Framework of a 'Transformative Scholarship'."

[7] Those are subsumed by Hilgert under the neutral terms "object repositories" or "cultural property repositories"; for a detailed explanation see p. 30-32.

[8] For example, the inhabitants of the city have saved the minaret of the Great Mosque of Mosul by forming a human chain around it, in order to preserve it from the destruction planned by jihadists (Fuganti 6).

→

→ [9] See Fuganti and the interview with Daniele Morandi, director of the project "Terra di Ninive" (University of Udine), by Paolo Beltramin. The USB flash drive of a jihadist found by the Iraqi intelligence in August contained the report of the sums collected through the selling of the antiquities of the city of Nebek: $32,000,000 (Beltramin).

[10] See the interview with Daniele Morandi by Cinzia Dal Maso.

[11] Cinzia Pappi, current director of the Satu Qala Project (University of Leipzig), personal communication.

[12] Cinzia Pappi, personal communication; interview with Daniele Morandi by Beltramin. We would like to thank Cinzia Pappi and Daniele Morandi for their helpfulness.

[13] The great surveys are those of Erbil (Harvard); Dohuk (Udine); Zakho (Tübingen); Upper Zab (Poznań); Sulaymaniyah (IFPO); Shahrizor (London/München); see also the list in the article by Skuldbøl and Colantoni (note 4); "Mār Šiprim."

[14] However, Weineck neither wants "to deconstruct Alevi Cultural Heritage as a mere strategic tool" nor to "deny the emotional value of ICH and its potential for preserving threatened practices and objects for the purpose of safeguarding and constructing identities": "governmentality" would simply make "use of it in a creative form" (95).

[15] History is understood here in its widest sense, as a "universal cultural practice of remembering visualization of the past that aims to orientate one's own life praxis under the circumstances of the present and to provide it with a perspective for the future" (Rüsen, "Einleitung" 22; our translation).

[16] All translations in this paragraph are our own.

[17] Unfortunately, history of knowledge is not treated in this issue although it was our original intention to include it.

[18] On the translation movement from Greek into Arabic in Baghdad during the first two centuries of the ʿAbbāsid rule (8th-10th century AD), see Gutas and Endress (especially 416-31). High Greek literature was rarely translated into Arabic, but the interests of the translators were vast: from agriculture, astronomy, pharmacology and optics to music, military treaties and philosophy (see the list provided by Gutas 193-96). As regards Syriac, the majority of the Greek scientific texts were translated in the 9th century AD as part of the ʿAbbāsid translation movement (Gutas 22). For the works translated into Syriac, see Duval 263-87.

[19] Of course, the image that entered the later literary and artistic tradition is certainly not the one that Nabonidus himself would have wanted to survive: instead he would have loved to be remembered by future generations under his true name (for the importance of the survival of one's name in Ancient Near Eastern thinking, see Radner) and for the deeds he was proud of (rather than his failures)—a wish that is at least partly fulfilled by modern excavations and the decipherment of his own inscriptions in which he presents his own version of "his-story."

Works cited

Assmann, Jan. *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. München: Beck, 1992. Print.

---. *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*. New York: Harvard University Press, 2002. Print.

Baram, Amatzia. *Culture, History, and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968-89*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991. Print.

Beltramin, Paolo. "Il predatori dell'antica Ninive: 'I jihadisti rivendono i tesori'." *Corriere della Sera*, 27 Sept. 2014: 13. Print.

Dal Maso, Cinzia. "L'italiano che scava nel Kurdistan per salvare I tesori dell'antica Assiria." *Il Venerdì di Repubblica* 7 Nov. 2014: 34-35. Print.

Duval, Rubens. *Anciennes littératures chrétiennes, II : La littérature syriaque*. Paris: Lecoffre, 1899. Print.

→

→ Elon, Amos. "Politics and Archaeology." *The Archæology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present.* Ed. Neil Asher Silberman, and David Small. Sheffield: Sheffield Academy Press, 1997. 34-47. Print.

Endress, Gerhard. "Die wissenschaftliche Literatur." *Grundriss der Arabischen Philologie. Band II: Literaturwissenschaft.* Ed. Helmut Gätje. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1987. 400-506. Print.

---. "Die wissenschaftliche Literatur." *Grundriss der Arabischen Philologie. Band III: Supplement.* Ed. Wolfdietrich Fischer. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1992. 3-152. Print.

Fields, Weston W. *The Dead Sea Scrolls. A Full History: Volume One, 1947-1960.* Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009. Print.

Fuganti, Daniela. "Irak. Terreur en Mésopotamie." *Archéologia* 527 (décembre 2014): 4-6. Print.

al-Gailani Werr, Lamia. "Archaeology and Politics in Iraq." *Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art.* Ed. Brian A. Brown and Marian H. Feldman. Boston, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014. 15–30. Print.

Grigor, Talinn. "Preserving the Antique Modern: Persepolis '71." *Future Anterior* 2.1 (2005): 22-29. Web. 15 Dec. 2014.

Gutas, Dimitri. *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Græco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbāsid Society (2nd-3rd/8th-10th centuries).* London: Routledge, 1998. Print.

Mār Šiprim. "Mār Šiprim. International Association for Assyriology. Archive. In the Field." *Mār Šiprim.* Web. 5 Dec. 2014.

Radner, Karen. *Die Macht des Namens. Altorientalische Strategien zur Selbsterhaltung.* Santag 8. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005. Print.

Rüsen, Jörn. "Einleitung: Für eine interkulturelle Kommunikation in der Geschichte." *Die Vielfalt der Kulturen. Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität.* Vol. 4. Ed. Jörn Rüsen et al. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1998. 12-36. Print.

---. "Theoretische Zugänge zum interkulturellen Vergleich historischen Denkens." *Die Vielfalt der Kulturen. Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität.* Vol. 4. Ed. Jörn Rüsen et al. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1998. 37-73. Print.

Schneidewind, Uwe, and Mandy Singer-Brodowski. *Transformative Wissenschaft. Klimawandel im deutschen Wissenschafts- und Hochschulsystem.* 2nd ed. Marburg: Metropolis, 2014. Print.

Sommerfeld, Walter. "Die Altorientalistik und die historische Dimension der gegenwartsbezogenen Orientforschung." *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin* 142 (2010): 137-54. Print.

Trever, John C. *The Untold Story of Qumran.* Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1965. Print.

UNESCO. *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.* Paris: UNESCO, 14 Nov. 1970. Web. 15 Dec. 2014.

---. Heritage. *What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?* UNESCO. Web. 15 Dec. 2014.

---. Lists. *Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Register of Best Safeguarding Practices.* UNESCO. Web. 15 Dec. 2014.

---. *Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.* Paris: UNESCO, 2003. Web. 15 Dec. 2014.

Wiesehöfer, Joseph. "Kyros, der Schah und 2500 Jahre Menschenrechte. Historische Mythenbildung zur Zeit der Pahlavi-Dynastie." *Mythen, Geschichte(n), Identitäten: Der Kampf um die Vergangenheit.* Ed. Stephan Conermann. Hamburg: EB-Verlag, 1999. Print.

Wilcke, Claus. "Zum Geschichtsbewußtsein im Alten Orient." *Archäologie und Geschichtsbewußtsein.* Ed. Hermann Müller-Karpe. Kolloquien zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Archäologie 3. München: Beck, 1982. 31-52. Print.