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People First?
Reassessing Heritage Priorities in Post-Conflict Recovery

Abstract

This concluding chapter critically examines the need to conserve historic fabric in post-conflict situations. While this need will sometimes be appropriate and necessary, it may not always be the case. I argue instead for recognising the possibility of prioritising people and their immediate requirements, which may sometimes include architectural restoration. In a sense, I am suggesting that these remains may not always be that important in the greater scheme of things, and that other social and basic human needs maybe more pressing. Such views are grounded in an archaeological perspective that recognises the formation of the archaeological record and of our cultural heritage as a process, involving many factors and influences including deliberate destruction. It also recognises archaeology's interest in understanding people through the material remains left behind. This archaeological viewpoint makes it easier to understand the argument to sometimes leave war-damaged sites as ruins; to let them go.

Keywords: Archaeology, Post-conflict, Social value, Refugees, Identity.

There is significant concern about political instability around the world. This concern is nothing new, but it is growing as conflict comes closer to people's everyday lives through terror attacks and their online reporting in real time. Intentional cultural damage is a characteristic of recent warfare, the wanton destruction often for fundamental religious or strategic reasons (but for an overview of motivations, see Brosché et al. 2017). Many of the papers in this collection refer to examples of such motivations and the complex geopolitical factors behind each of them. But they also raise another important issue. It is very easy, as conservation and heritage professionals, to be saddened and outraged by such cultural vandalism and to be motivated to restore sites to their original state. It is our area of responsibility, and therefore, one might say, the 'duty of care' rests ultimately with us. Yet, as an archaeologist working within the heritage field, I take a rather different view. While I fully acknowledge the responsibility to act 'for the heritage', I do not accept that our responsibility is only, or even necessarily, towards its fabric. This view is shaped by an understanding that conflict has occurred over millennia, and on each occasion those affected have had to respond to it in the best way possible. Even thousands of years ago people might have buried their dead and mourned their losses, moved out of their territory to a safer place, or restored elements of their 'built environment', and perhaps even conducted investigations that resulted in perpetrators being brought to justice. Such early examples of human conflict will have left deep scars, just as they do today. But in each case there seems little doubt that, in society's response to the traumas of conflict, people come first.

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The deeper history of conflict

Nataruk, at Lake Turkana in Kenya, East Africa, is an excavation site from 2012 in which the remains of 27 individuals were found. Twenty-one of the remains were identified as adults, including at least eight male and eight female, and others were categorized as children. Ten of the twelve skeletons found in situ show evidence of "major traumatic lesions that would have been lethal in the immediate- to short-term" (Mirazon Lahr et al. 2016). This archaeological site is described by the excavators as providing evidence for inter-group violence from around 9.500 to 10.500 years BC. Some 12.000 years later, this place, and the events that unfolded here, is in the news; people are interested once more in Nataruk and how the events that occurred here contribute to the human story. Some reading the report in the leading scientific journal Nature may be disturbed by the images and the descriptions of fatal injuries that it contains. Some may find comfort in an assumption that these people were not like us, they were not so emotionally 'sophisticated' – they would not have felt the trauma in the way we do. Mourning and emotional investment, however, has deeper origins than we once thought. We know that some animal species mourn their dead (eg. Bekoff 2000), and we are quickly learning, through combinations of archaeological and psychological research, how people tens of thousands of years ago felt emotions such as compassion, arguably much as we do today (Spikins 2015). Archaeology tells us that contemporary events are part of a longer process. All that is different is that events at Nataruk happened many years beyond memory. The passage of time allows us to distance ourselves from the impact of those left behind (Uzzell 1989).

This distinctly archaeological perspective causes me to take a rather different view of recent and contemporary conflict and how we, as archaeologists and cultural heritage professionals, should respond to it. This alternative and time-centred perspective revolves around two key points that each concern heritage priorities. First is the **desire to restore**, or the 'conservation obsession' as one might describe it. I am not suggesting that we should never restore war-damaged monuments as there are clearly instances where this is a desirable, if not a necessary, outcome. My point is that it should not be the default position. Perhaps conservation is simply not the priority for local people, for a site whose restoration or repair would not bring benefit to the local economy through tourism, or to the community through any 'pride of place' or social identity considerations. On the other hand restoration might be considered appropriate for creating or maintaining some tangible reminders of the conflict, for commemoration or memorialisation. It might equally be central to community rebuilding and the re-construction of identity. The point is that we should neither presume this to be the case, nor should we impose our professional agenda over grieving and often fragmented local communities. Second is the need to prioritise people – that **people come first**. As archaeologists, we might think that we should leave dealing with people and social concerns to others better qualified than ourselves. But we should not forget that, as Sir Mortimer Wheeler (1954) famously stated, archaeology is all about people – of the past (through the ruins and the past communities they represent), of the present (those who may or may not have a degree of 'place-attachment' to those now war-damaged or threatened ruins), and of the future (those who will recall these contemporary events and the heritage decisions to conserve or manage their legacy in a variety of ways). Much of the heritage work I have been involved with (and arguably I would say the most socially meaningful work) combined understanding recent past behaviours with social anthropological working practices. From these experiences I am persuaded that archaeologists can do meaningful and distinctive work in these contemporary situations through a variety of motives and methodologies that are not always closely aligned with conventional archaeological practice.

In this short concluding chapter I will briefly explore these aspects of post-conflict heritage (the desire to restore, and putting people first), arguing that as archaeologists and heritage practitioners, we should always consider placing local people at the heart of heritage decision making, especially in situations that involve personal suffering and cultural hardship. One thing archaeologists understand better than most is the passage of time and its many influences and impacts on people and things. As archaeologists we also know that, except in extreme cases, ruins or archaeological layers will survive and that we can return to them later and decide how to act, with their local-interest or 'heritage' communities (after The Faro Convention, Council of Europe 2009). People may not be so resilient.

The desire to restore

Cornelius Holtorf (2016), in a recent essay on this subject, concluded:

"As far as the devastating war in Syria is concerned, for all the destruction taking place, its heritage as such is not 'at risk'. To perceive heritage as irreplaceable remains of the past, at risk of falling victim to present-day events, does not help in recognising the potential of a changing heritage to contribute to future-making as a legacy to be."

As stated earlier, there will be particular instances where there is consensus that war-damaged sites should be restored to their pre-war state. The re-

cently published 'Toolkit' (ArcHerNet), also known as the Cottbus Initiative (Schmidt n.d), states, correctly, that,

"[h]*eritage in all its diversity possesses unique restorative potential and can be instrumental in humanitarian relief, conflict resolution, peace-building and reaffirming cultural pluralities. […] Urban revitalisation can only successfully promote social reconciliation if it is inclusive, people-centred, and acknowledges the central role of heritage as a catalyst in the healing process.*"

Thus candidates for restoration might include iconic national or regional monuments that are symbols of pride and identity. They may have economic merit as sites of tourism (although I would follow Holtorf here in suggesting that the recent damage becomes part of the story, and the ruins are arguably more interesting and multi-layered as a result). There may be cultural arguments around public benefit, such as restoring the historic souk of Aleppo or a war-torn library or similar cultural institution. A similar argument can perhaps be made for churches, mosques and other religious buildings, although I am reminded of churches bombed in the Second World War in England and Germany which have become national, if not international, symbols of peace and reconciliation, and catalysts of urban renewal.

Restoration will often be an appropriate response, even on some occasions a clear priority. But as archaeologists we are closely aware of an archaeological record that has been shaped by events and processes (natural and cultural) over millennia. This is what the archaeological record is – an ac-cumulation of traces and evidence acted upon by various destructive (and in some cases constructive) processes to create the resource we have today. The archaeological record is not stuck in the present. It is constantly evolving, with things added and things taken away. One might add that, from the perspective of contemporary archaeology (see Harrison & Schofield 2010), far more is being added than removed – the archae-ological record, in other words, is growing. To regard it as a diminishing resource is incorrect and misleading. That said, all ancient sites are precious and have cultural value, for the evidence they provide, their aesthetic qualities, their history and place in the present, and their social and communal significance. That does not, however, mean everything from the past must be preserved and kept in a pristine state, or restored to an 'original' state (whatever 'original' might mean). Restoration or conservation should not always be the default position. This will be the correct response on occasion, but not always and perhaps not even often. So if not here, where should the priorities lie; what is the default position?

Putting people first

Archaeology has always put people at the centre of its investigations. Until recently, archaeology has had a rather conventional (one might say narrow, and certainly literal) definition of being the study of the *ancient* past and thus only of *ancient* people. But more recently archaeological studies have extended into the contemporary world (eg. Harrison and Schofield 2010), and the people who inhabit it. Within the heritage sector a similar emphasis on people (ancient and contemporary) has recently emerged. In English Heritage's (2008) *Conservation Principles: Policies and Practice*, communal value is defined as, "deriving from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory" (p. 31). A subdivision of communal value is social value, defined as being, "associated with places people perceive as a source of identity, distinctiveness, social interaction and coherence" (p. 32). Similarly, the 2005 'Faro' European Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, "recognises the need to put people and human values at the heart of an enlarged and cross-disciplinary concept of cultural heritage", and is "convinced of the need to involve everyone in society in the ongoing process of defining and managing cultural heritage" (Council of Europe 2009).

Like archaeology, in my view, heritage is more about people (eg. in relation to identity) than it is about place (eg. monument protection, restoration etc), and certainly more about the present and the future than it is about the past. The problem with prioritising the restoration of war-damaged monuments in post-conflict situations is that it reverts us to a place- and past-centred version of cultural heritage. This is out of step with much current thinking.

So what would people-centred heritage practice look like in conflict or post-conflict situations? One example is work currently being undertaken by numerous archaeologists around the question of refugees. It is significant that archaeologists hold key roles in these projects, and while they are a small part of a wider range of projects and programmes that aim to benefit and support refugees, these archaeological/cultural heritage initiatives are distinctive for their focus on material culture, and their recognition often of refugees as research participants, not subjects. A recent issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* (Hamilakis 2016) is focused on archaeological responses to the current refugee situation. The 'Architectures of Displacement' project undertaken through Oxford University is documenting the places of displacement and seeking to inform policy, a project that began with an archaeological mapping of the Jungle Camp near Calais (https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/research/architectures-of-displacement). Working with another vul-

nerable and non-traditional community in the UK (and also now the United States), Operation Nightingale provides opportunities for war-wounded servicemen to use archaeological practice to help them towards recuperation and recovery post-conflict. The benefits of outdoor work with a clear structure and regimental discipline (recalling that many of the successful pioneers of archaeology had previously followed successful military careers) are clearly felt by the project participants. As for measurable impact, many examples exist of archaeological and heritage engagement projects that benefit their communities and participants. Analysis of the findings from the community-based DIG Manchester and DIG Greater Manchester projects has demonstrated clear success, even amongst the hardest to reach of non-traditional audiences (Coen at al. 2017). Work amongst homeless communities has had similar success (eg. Kiddey & Schofield 2011; Kiddey 2016). Archaeological and heritage work with vulnerable communities does work.

These and other similar projects were undertaken or led by archaeologists who understand archaeology to be a people-centred discipline. Extending the gaze from people of the deeper past to those of the present has not been a difficult transition for archaeologists to make (more so perhaps for non-archaeologists to comprehend).

Conclusions

There can be no universal panacea, no simple transferable methodology or blueprint for dealing with post-conflict situations. Every case is different. My argument here is that we must guard against knee-jerk reactions and the assumption that conservation is always the priority. In some situations (and these must always be closely argued and understood) this may indeed be the case. But in others there may be no justification for repair or restoration, beyond our own professional conscience. We should always begin by asking for whose benefit we seek to undertake this work? Is it to align with international or cultural expectations, reflected in guidelines and protocol? Is to satisfy our own consciences as professionals? Or is it, genuinely, to benefit the community most directly impacted by the 'loss' (if loss is what they see)? Instead, we could channel our expertise to involving those people directly in the decision-making process, from the initial discussions about priorities to the courses of action required for implementation. We can explain (from our archaeological perspective) the longer-term benefits of conservation, for rebuilding identity and promoting tourism, for instance. Understanding should always come first, but it is the community's understanding that should perhaps be prioritised, beyond that of professionals. Usually only then, and only where it is an agreed priority for the communities concerned, might restoration and other conservation actions become appropriate. This approach can also extend the responsibility to practitioners beyond the conflict zones, to the diaspora, to work with those displaced local residents living as refugees outside of their country. Liaising with diasporic communities has benefits, in helping people retain a sense of place, and of home. Furthermore, within the conflict zones and post-conflict, if restoration, excavation, survey or reconnaissance and monitoring is to be carried out, then this seems a good opportunity for training local people in relevant heritage skills, to help give them 'ownership' of the heritage, and the skills to manage it. This might mean pursuing a 'translational' agenda (Zimmerman et al. 2010).

Local people are a crucial ingredient to any situations where heritage (as broadly defined) has a role in post-conflict recovery. After all, these sites are their heritage, and they should have an important role in shaping its future.

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