

The role of the European Union in the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage in conflict and post-conflict contexts in the Middle East region

The example of Iraq



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Mehiyar Kathem, Giovanni Fontana Antonelli, Elke Selter and
Damien Helly, with Sophie Desmidt

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Acronyms

ALESCO	Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation
ALIPH	Alliance for International Cultural Heritage Protection
ARCH	Alliance for the Restoration of Cultural Heritage
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
BnF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France
CATF	Cultural Antiquities Task Force
CPF	Central Provident Fund
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DKPO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
EAMENA	Endangered Archaeology in North Africa and the Middle East
EC	European Commission
ECA	US Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EDUU	Education and Cultural Heritage Enhancement for Social Cohesion in Iraq
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
EUAM	European Union Advisory Mission
ICC	International Coordination Committee (UNESCO)
ICCROM	International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
IcSP	Instrument Contribution to Stability and Peace
IICAH	Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage
INLA	Iraqi National Library and Archives
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organisation
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
MERA	Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs
MoI	Ministry of Interior
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ONSA	Office of the National Security Advisor
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SBAH	State Board of Antiquities and Heritage
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TPC	Tutela Patrimonio Culturale
U4H	Global Coalition Unite 4 Heritage
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UCL	University College of London
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WALADU	Development and Structuring of BA Courses on Archaeology in Iraq
WMF	World Monuments Fund

Executive Summary

Building on the EU's experience in Iraq as a case-study, this report analyses the main components of a possible EU's strategic approach to cultural heritage protection and enhancement¹ as a tool for conflict prevention, peace building, dialogue and mediation, in the Middle East and beyond.

In comparison to other international powers active in the field of cultural heritage protection, the EU is well placed to assume a global leadership position in the protection, safeguarding and enhancement of cultural heritage in conflict and crisis situations. In the Middle East, crises and terrorism have led to unprecedented cultural loss with the lingering impact of devastating ruptures on the lives of millions of people. EU Member States and the Union have directly felt the impact of recent Middle Eastern crises with terror attacks, migration shocks, general instability and illicit trafficking of cultural goods.

In Iraq and the Middle East, several lessons for future EU action can be identified:

- The long-lasting impact of international interventions in the field of cultural heritage protection is maximised when donors pool their resources along a clearly defined multidimensional (human, cultural, economic and political) strategy involving local actors and communities.
- Since heritage protection policies are about the recognition of human dignity, they work when they are implemented with communities and as closely as possible to the people directly affected by destruction and damage.
- The EU and its Member States have an international added value in cultural heritage protection because they can bring together conflict prevention, peacebuilding and cultural heritage expertise in one toolbox to pursue their common external action objectives. Interventions on cultural heritage protection require thorough and adaptative conflict analyses; conflict-sensitive cultural heritage initiatives and assessments have a better impact.
- Cultural infrastructures remain the backbone of a well-designed and sustainable cultural heritage protection approach in conflict situations. Investing in their support (politically, financially or through capacity-building, expert networks or other ways) is essential to ensure concrete, coherent, and impactful results on people, peace and the economy.
- Equitable access to (tangible and intangible) cultural heritage for civilians and people suffering from conflicts and crises is a sine qua non component of successful peace and heritage initiatives. This is especially important as cultural heritage has the potential to strengthen existing interventions and transform aid modalities. Multi-sectoral and cutting across multiple themes, from society to politics, to individuals, markets and communities, cultural heritage is indispensable to the future of EU's international activities.

¹ It is important to note here that this study primarily focuses on cultural heritage (interchangeably used here with heritage) rather than the broader concept of culture. The emphasis is put mainly on tangible heritage and while intangible heritage is part of the research scope, it has not been covered exhaustively.

A future **EU strategic framework on cultural heritage protection** and enhancement in conflict and crisis situations should be informed by the lessons identified above.

- Key principles for a strategic framework should revolve around the recognition of cultural heritage as a strategic asset in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and mediation: it bears strong symbolic and therefore strategic significance; it is a multidimensional conflict and peace variable; it is a space for multi-stakeholder negotiations; it is people-centred; it offers multiple entry points for interventions along the conflict cycle.
- The main objectives of a strategic framework will have to be aligned with the existing EU toolbox for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and mediation, while injecting key elements, methods and tools specific to cultural heritage.

Conflict prevention through cultural heritage cooperation: In peaceful times, successful national cultural heritage policies have the power to address and manage conflictual memories so as to transform them as shared heritage. Investing in EU's partners' national cultural heritage policies contributes to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Mediation, dialogue and negotiating cultural agreements: Strengthened cooperation between EU conflict, security and cultural heritage experts has the potential to bear fruits in peace negotiations and mediation processes.

Crisis response and cultural heritage protection: EU coordinated crisis response on cultural heritage, when informed by sound heritage-related conflict analysis and following a clear political objective and do-no-harm principles can bring added value to peace enforcement and peacemaking interventions.

Strengthening national cultural infrastructures is essential to addressing priorities in conflict and war situations.

Civilians access and transmission of intangible heritage

Civilians in conflict, refugees and internally displaced persons all carry with them and survive thanks to parts of their communities' intangible heritage. With a strong record in humanitarian aid, refugee relief and civil society support, the EU can contribute further to the peace potential of cultural heritage as a binding resource between cultural groups and for wider society.

Counter terrorism and fight against organised crime and anti-trafficking: Robust EU partners' national cultural heritage policies contribute to counter-terrorism when they provide data and assets to trace, track and prosecute illicit cultural traders, in cooperation with EU and other security forces intervening in conflict zones.

Post conflict rehabilitation interventions: By recognising the significance of cultural heritage reconstruction and enhancement as a peacebuilding factor, the EU will maximise the use of its development cooperation and rehabilitation programmes.

1. Introduction

This section discusses the importance of cultural heritage for reconciliation and social cohesion. It explores conflict-sensitive approaches to cultural heritage in conflict affected and war-torn societies. Rather than viewing cultural heritage as a resource synonymous with peacemaking, this section underlines the ways in which heritage is increasingly integrated into competing systems of power and politics, an analysis of which is indispensable for the development of an EU Strategy on cultural heritage protection in conflict and crisis situations. Such a strategy on cultural heritage has to be cognizant of its potential to appreciate a rights-based approach as well as conflict-sensitive approach to cultural heritage protection and enhancement.

1.1. Cultural heritage and peacebuilding in the Middle East

Conflict weakens the cultural infrastructure of countries and the capacity of states, communities and people to address cultural collapse. It ruptures and disconnects people from the environment in which they live as well as fracturing society, causing instability, internal displacement, and deteriorated local economies and livelihoods. The concomitant loss of cultural heritage – viewed here as an embodiment of human development and manifested through tangible and intangible – can be permanent and the ensuing cultural erasure fundamentally change the character of states and societies.

The transformation of cultural heritage in the Middle East is an outcome of changed politics in the region. The cultural heritage of entire societies and communities have been severely undermined and the emergence of new systems of organising politics across the region have destabilised states and reconfigured structures of power. The rapid change in states and societies, the effects of ensuing conflicts and social upheavals, and more broadly changing political orders in the Middle East are having a lasting impact on the region's tangible and intangible heritage. As a consequence, cultural heritage is being transformed even in countries that are not directly experiencing conflict and there is a gradual politicisation of cultural heritage across the Middle East.

Systems of organising state and society, and the rise of new, state, quasi-state and non-state actors for whom heritage is an integral resource are reshaping the future of the region. The transformation of culture – often instrumentalised and regularly destroyed – is rapidly altering heritage landscapes. The crafting of singular and non-pluralistic narratives is reflected in state policy and interventions in society, creating unprecedented cultural appropriation, neglect and transformation of cultural sites and intangible cultures, in ways that will shape the future of the Middle East and its relationship to the outside world. The results, unfolding as they are, have yet to reach their end, and the repercussions of what the Middle East is currently experiencing will play out for many years to come.

The transformation of cultural heritage, including historic buildings, monuments, archaeological heritage and intangible practices as well as relationships people have to each other, is an outcome of shifting politics and conflict. As cultural heritage is directly affected by changing political structures, it is important to view all forms of heritage as a relationship to evolving state systems and existing and emerging centres of power. Heritage is relational and therefore exposes the ways in which power and structures in society take shape.

As this paper underlines, a new EU agenda based on the convergence of heritage and peacebuilding, conflict prevention and mediation and dialogue can underpin international support to help rebuild societies. Cultural heritage heralds a new opportunity for the revitalisation of peace work in the Middle East. Peace oriented heritage approaches should attempt to strengthen degraded cultural heritage infrastructures on the basis of diversity and human dignity. Anchoring international support on essential heritage priorities will support existing structures, people and institutions and reap visible benefits. A cultural heritage approach to peacebuilding should bring otherwise disparate themes, projects and tools within the ambit of a guiding framework to inform the EU's engagement in the region. Where the focus has been more on cultural heritage,

EU programmes have been implemented in the Middle East without a guiding strategy, resulting in piecemeal interventions, a lack of focus, and ineffective outcomes that have done little to address the desperate situation on the ground. Where it could have assumed a leading global position, weak interventions have, as a result, caused a growing frustration amongst host stakeholders and other beneficiaries.

Support to the cultural infrastructure of a country, as well as destroyed or damaged heritage sites in a country that has multiple cultural groups can act as important symbols of co-existence and continuity. Heritage that is functional and vernacular, used for everyday purposes, or has the potential for developing tourism and local economies, is just as equally significant to communities and national cultural rebuilding. Support to tangible and intangible heritage, particularly that which revolves around diversity, inter-community connections and shared histories, can bolster communal resolve, resilience and build on existing societal support mechanisms. If done with a view to community ownership and participation, reconstructing tangible heritage can assist in the preservation and protection of cultural practices and other forms of intangible heritage wealth. In war affected countries, reconstruction of destroyed or damaged tangible heritage, such as historic buildings, monuments and landmarks should be viewed as an essential feature of any heritage and peace approaches. Sites that are rebuilt for the celebration of national identities and intangible cultural heritage, can act as a counterforce to sectarianisation, cultural appropriation and the promotion of singular and corrosive narratives of division and identity-based politics.

Cultural heritage affects how we interact in the world, and has major implications for diplomacy, domestic and international security and how people and states at a global level operate. Cultural heritage shapes our ideas and actions. It defines who we are and how we interact with each other and the world around us. How it is used can shape the worldviews of populations and their political and cultural futures. How heritage is used affects the type of society that people and elites construct, its character and values, which affects community relations and how people view each other.

Cultural heritage is more than the sum of its parts. When its role in an affected society is well-understood, it can be an essential and integral feature of peace and stability. The promotion of national values and shared histories and connections that cut across sect, religion, tribe, ethnicity and other divisions contribute to peace. The promotion of inclusive citizenship and national identities, which prizes shared histories but a respect for difference, is central to social cohesion, cultural diversity and amicable relations between communities and cultural groups and the state.

1.2. Cultural heritage, reconciliation and conflict prevention

Cultural heritage and peace related frameworks and activities are complementary bodies of practice and knowledge that can potentially strengthen international activity and policy. Cultural heritage is hence inextricably interwoven in political action and is an integral component of peacemaking and political structures to manage the affairs of everyday life. Relationships between people and with centres of power are also cultural, formed around notions of the past, and as such cultural heritage can be a powerful lens with which to better understand politics and the ways in which institutions are constructed and resources mobilised.

Cultural heritage can act as a source of national pride and platform for championing dialogue in times of crisis. Protecting the cultural diversity of society, and its people and communities, should be a key goal of heritage related peace activity as it strengthens plurality and counters singular narratives. Cultural heritage destruction reduces the prospect of building peace in diverse societies through shared histories which are embodied in tangible and intangible cultures. Cultural diversity is not just about respecting the environments in which people live and the right to cultural expression but is an essential part of self-determination. Cultural diversity, as the EU recognises, is thus essential for the development of democratic, inclusive and resilient societies.

In contexts of crisis and conflict, where power structures are constantly in change, cultural heritage is commonly a way in which to govern over targeted populations and expand political presence. For such purposes, it is often instrumentalised by political elites. In countries with multiple religions and ethnicities, these processes regularly take the shape of social division and the construction of singular narratives. A sense of oppression of one group by another often characterises these attempts to control politics. The valorisation of cultural division and 'othering' - the notion that 'we are different from them' - for the purposes of political and economic gain harms society and can lead to societal tension and division. Where civil society has been weakened by war and countries marked by multiple inter-generational ruptures, the propagation of singular narratives can lead to cycles of war, disinformation and deafen calls for social and political rights.

The development of an appropriate cultural heritage strategy should be cognisant that fragmented political and cultural geographies are an outcome of divisive and exclusivist politics rather than the norm. Where others focus on the rehabilitation of specific communities, as it has become the case in much of recent international interventions, the EU should focus on addressing ruptures that affect state and society.

Cultural heritage is a fundamental right and its destruction and degradation are violations of the constitution of human life. People's lives and ways of existence are embodied in their heritage including in historic buildings and archaeology, artefacts, archives, shrines and places of worship that they and their descendants have brought into being. The undermining of the cultural environment in which people live in war and conflict, as well as in more stable times, erodes human capacity to realise dignified and sustainable lives. Destroyed infrastructures undermine human dignity and the fabric of society. Respect and promotion of human dignity should thus be a central pillar of heritage for peace work and central to the preparation of a comprehensive approach to cultural heritage within the EU.

In conflict situations, local partners are much more likely to approve projects as funding and international support, particularly in the field of heritage and culture, is scarce and saying no, or asking for project proposal to be revised, may upset potential work being done or altogether dissuade donors from working with that particular partner. In such conflict situations, domestic systems of scrutiny and accountability are weakened, and international engagement should take note of the impact this could have on partnership formation. It is commonly thought by local institutions that some international engagement is better than nothing, and this rationality informs why projects are approved yet have weak ownership. In these contexts, there is a responsibility for donors and their international partners to be trained in how to engage local partners in war and conflict situations where decision-making is informed in large part by the surrounding environment characterised by upheaval and conflict.

Addressing power asymmetries in heritage related activities, between national and international actors, is necessary to build strong and genuine partnerships. Any major and strategic intervention must take into account the need for immersive and active participatory engagement, especially if heritage is to be a resource for peacemaking and social reconciliation. Existing ways of working, which required national institutions to rubber stamp projects, does little to support ownership and responsibility locally and has major repercussions on project outcomes and the potential effectiveness of an EU strategy on cultural heritage. Indeed, seeking approval for projects – which usually involves speaking to one or two officials - does not equate to participation and local project ownership. These concerns are often dismissed and not properly addressed. Project design and information gathering that goes into project preparations is just as important as the delivery, and what happens at these initial stages will dictate in large part how projects unfold on the ground. To address these issues, representatives of large, multi-year programmes that are designed to support heritage and conflict prevention need to spend sufficient time with local partners and engage, preferably for several days or more, in the institutions that are envisaged to be partners. This is not an issue of only conducting a desk-based or on-site needs-assessment but rather what is required is immersive engagement with the people with whom co-operation is sought.

2. European and International actions in the field of cultural heritage in Iraq

In this section, we will discuss the activities of the European Union, key EU member states and international actors in the field of cultural heritage and conflict prevention, including some references to Iraq.

2.1. European Union and Member States approaches to cultural heritage in Iraq

Increased political interest and a global call to action in the wake of the cultural destruction witnessed in Iraq and Syria by the Islamic State has resulted in a number of key EU documents produced to inform decision-making. The EU's investment in Iraq, being its largest portfolio in the Middle East, offers a good opportunity for it to lead on a heritage and peace agenda and transform its work into real change for the people it intends to support. The EU's relationship with Iraq is informed by an increasingly active engagement and co-operation, as set out in Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: Elements for an EU Strategy for Iraq (2018) agreement. Amongst several strategic objectives, including in the fields of security, economic co-operation and reform, education, human rights and the pursuit of accountable government, is a focus on community and national reconciliation, religious diversity and support to a common Iraqi identity (Council of the EU 2018).

The increasing focus of cultural relations and heritage, evidenced also by EU funded programmes in Iraq, builds on a growing and stronger EU-Iraq partnership built over the past few years. In forging a partnership with Iraq, the EU is also working with EU Member States, the International Monetary Fund, the Global Coalition Against Da'esh, the World Bank and many other regional and international partners to shape the ways in which the international community is working in Iraq. Indeed, the EU's focus on cultural heritage in Iraq is an outcome of the post-Islamic State context about cultural heritage destruction and is therefore a relatively new addition to its portfolio in Iraq. At fault however, throughout the EU's programmes and policies in relation to Iraq and the Middle East, is the absence of a guiding strategy to inform its work and shape its activities in the foreseeable future.

As a leading international actor, evidenced by its growing financial commitments and political will to support Iraq's transition, the EU's increasing focus on cultural heritage represents an important moment in international assistance. Building on a strong partnership with Iraq, the prioritisation of cultural heritage as an increasingly integral part of international EU programming in the Middle East marks a major turning point, though one that is not informed by a long-term cohesive plan. It represents a realisation that the EU's own stability and the wider region is closely connected to what happens in the Middle East, and that the illicit trafficking of cultural goods funds terrorism and the cultural degradation of entire communities and countries leads to unstable, conflict prone, contexts that lead to extremism, migration, and cycles of long-term conflict based on ethnic and religious fragmentation. In sum, the stability of the Middle East and working to strengthen the basis for dignity and respect for human life is in the EU's interest. A cohesive and integrated strategy on cultural heritage can build on these existing initiatives and activities.

A number of existing EU frameworks on cultural relations, conflict and human rights exist, but there are no integrated cultural heritage and conflict related frameworks to inform policy. The 'Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations' for example calls for a stronger role of culture in international co-operation and diplomacy. Specifically, it advances three main strands as constituent features of its global engagement, namely supporting culture as an engine for sustainable social and economic development, secondly, promoting culture and intercultural dialogue for peaceful inter-community relations and thirdly, reinforcing cooperation on cultural heritage (EC 2016). Missing in such frameworks and strategies is a focus on the linkages between cultural heritage, conflict

prevention and reconciliation. Indeed, a future framework should build on and develop further the increasingly evident interconnections between cultural heritage and peace-making as a tenet of interventions and policy (UNESCO 2016).

The prioritisation of culture as a global concern paved the way for number of Iraq focused EU programmes and partnerships with international organisations. In 2017, under the Instrument Contribution to Stability and Peace (IcSP), the European External Action Service (EEAS) and UNESCO worked together to implement the 'Protecting Cultural Heritage and Diversity in Complex Emergencies for Stability and Peace' (UNESCO 2018c). Under the 18 month agreement, a number of stabilisation and emergency oriented heritage activities were implemented in the Middle East, including in Iraq (UNESCO 2017).

On April 2018, under the European Union's Development and Cooperation Instrument, the 'Revive the Spirit of Mosul' (UNESCO 2018a) initiative, which sets out to work in education, culture and cultural heritage with a view to foster social cohesion in Mosul and the Old City (UNESCO 2019a), was signed between UNESCO, the United Arab Emirates and the Government of Iraq. In support of the initiative, the Ministry of Culture and Knowledge Development in the UAE donated \$50.4 million to UNESCO to rebuild the historic and iconic cultural site of al Nouri Mosque and the leaning al Hadba Minaret, which had been destroyed in the war against the Islamic State (UNESCO 2019a). The rehabilitation of two 19th Century churches, the Syriac Catholic al Tahera Church and Our Lady of the Clock Church was included in late 2019 to UNESCO's agreement with the UAE (UNESCO 2019b). A grant from the German government will be used for the rehabilitation of the 19th Century Aghawat Mosque in Old Mosul (UNESCO N.d.). A Christian primary school will also be rebuilt, supported by the Government of Japan (UNESCO 2020). A key component of the initial agreement with the UAE, a planned memorialisation centre to be housed within the Nuri Mosque Complex, has been removed from the original proposal.

The European Union's Development and Cooperation Instrument also made a contribution of €23m to the Revive the Spirit of Mosul initiative, and similarly the Old City of Basra, which targets youth through job creation and skills development as well as the rehabilitation of cultural assets (Delegation of the EU to Iraq. 2019). Specifically, EU financing to UNESCO's activities include the rehabilitation of a handful of historic houses proposed by SBAH and the organisation plans to fundraise to undertake further work in this regard. About seventeen buildings close to al Nuri Mosque will also be rehabilitated. Additionally, UNESCO plans to work with UN Habitat to rehabilitate about one hundred residential buildings in Mosul.

A key part of the EU's cultural initiatives in Iraq is also rehabilitation of parts of the historic old city centre of Basra. In Basra, the EU's partnership with UN Habitat and UNESCO to explore historic building restoration and rehabilitation comes at a critical period when government neglect and socio-economic development has erased large parts of Basra's history and identity. This intervention should be considered to be strategic when many historic buildings that embody the city's rich and diverse cultural past are being torn down. This component in Basra is informed by UN Habitat's Old Basra Conservation and Development Plan, which was financed by the EU in 2018. Fifty-two historic buildings were identified for restoration of which UNESCO plans to rehabilitate a handful of structures in and around Al Ashar canal crossing in the Old City. Other work in al Ashar canal crossing amount to beautifying changes, such as cleaning the canal and cultivating trees. Al Mansour house that currently hosts the Association of poets in Basra will be rehabilitated as well as facades on a number of houses from both sides of the canal.

The EU is also supporting the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis with €11m. The Iraq component, worth €4.5m, is based in Erbil and is designed to support Syrian IDPs and to a lesser extent displaced Iraqis through short-term job creation programme centred around Erbil Citadel. The Fund utilises cultural heritage to create intensive employment and is in part focused on crafts training. It is envisaged that

a section of trainees will be able to use newly acquired skills to enter the semi-skilled and low skilled-jobs market in the region.

In the field of education, three interrelated large heritage projects led by the University of Bologna have been supported by the EU in recent years. WALADU was funded between 2016-2020 by the European Commission and co-financed within the framework of Erasmus+ Capacity Building Key Action 2 in the field of higher education. Working with Iraqi universities, the key objective of WALADU is to modernise and restructure BA courses in archaeology, in line with EU standards (UNIBO 2020a). EDUU was similarly another cultural heritage education project funded by the European Union in the frame of EuropeAid – Civil Society Organisations – Local Authorities Programme in Iraq. The project, which started in 2017 and ended in 2019, also works through university and museum partners as well as SBAH in Iraq to raise awareness about pre-Islamic heritage in the country (UNIBO N.d.). BANUU is another, more recent, project spanning 2020-2023 funded by Erasmus+ Capacity Building KA2 of the EU. The objective of BANUU is to build on WALADU and EDUU to strengthen employability and entrepreneurship for Iraqi students of archaeology and cultural heritage (UNIBO 2020b). Taken together, the EU should reassess its commitment to projects that have shown weak outputs and results and it should strengthen existing structures of accountability for results and how resources are utilised.

The European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) in Iraq provides strategic advice to the Government of Iraq on its civilian security sector reform (SSR) efforts (EUAM Iraq 2020b). EUAM Iraq was established on 16 October 2017 and its work has been extended to 30 April 2022. It is one of the EU's 17 ongoing Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations in the world. EUAM Iraq provides strategic-level advice and expertise to Iraqi authorities on implementation of civilian aspects of Iraq's National Security Strategy and associated plans and works closely with the Ministry of Interior (Mol) and the Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA) in these efforts. In the context of its civilian SSR mandate, the Mission supports Iraqi initiatives to counter terrorism, violent extremism and organised crime, with specific reference to border management, financial crime in particular corruption, money laundering and trafficking of cultural goods (EUAM Iraq 2020a). EUAM Iraq has forged good relations with the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), particularly its restitution department. EUAM in Iraq has met with SBAH representatives to speak about how it can strengthen its counter illicit trafficking programmes. EUAM Iraq has also organised workshops gathering European experts from INTERPOL, the Italian Carabinieri (Cultural Heritage Protection Unit) and the International Council of Museums together with senior Iraqi officials and experts from the Mol and the Ministry of Culture (Delegation of the EU to Jordan 2019). The EUAM in Iraq has shown an interest in supporting SBAH's legal department and efforts to combat illicitly trafficked cultural goods from the country. It has been proposed that the EUAM could support SBAH in updating its records and databases regarding cultural artefacts and help streamline existing methodologies in line with international standards.

Box 1: The potential of EU Member States in cultural heritage protection

In 2019 EU Member States adopted a new EU Regulation on the introduction and import of cultural goods as a collective approach to fight against illicit trafficking and terrorism financing. A 2014 EU Regulation rules the export of cultural goods, as well as other EU laws.

In parallel, EU Member States each have developed valuable know-how in the field of cultural heritage protection that could be fully exploited by EU concerted and coordinated initiatives.

Member States and the 1954 Hague convention:

- 25 Member States have ratified or accessed the 1954 convention.
- The first protocol has been ratified and accessed to by 22 Member States (11 ratifications, 11 accessions).
- Sixteen Member States have ratified or accessed the second 1999 protocol of the convention.

European know-how:

- In the EU there are strong social sciences and law enforcement communities specialised in intangible and tangible cultural heritage, past EU-funded programmes (in archaeology one could mention the Archaeological heritage network) – physical presence in the Middle East via specific centres or programmes.
- Several EU governments have contributed to multilateral initiatives and missions such as the Global Coalition Unite4Heritage (U4H) and UNESCO's Heritage Emergency Fund.
- Specialised European civil society organisations, philanthropic foundations and private companies already work on cultural heritage protection in conflict: Prince Claus Fund (Netherlands) and Gerda-Henkel Foundation (Germany).

Key initiatives and policies by EU Member States:

- Through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Archaeological institute, as well as its Museum of Islamic art, Germany has developed initiatives on urban cultural heritage protection in the Middle East (since 2018), with a focus on Yemen and Syria. Areas of intervention have included museum preservation, digitalisation, restoration as well as 'Protection and Care of Cultural Pluralism.
- In 2016 France launched, together with other partners - and in particular the United Arab Emirates - the Alliance for International Cultural Heritage Protection (ALIPH), which was one of the 50 recommendations made by a 2015 report on cultural heritage in armed conflicts situations. As a member of the UN P5, France has initiated several heritage related UNSC resolutions and decisions (Mali, Iraq).
- The Italian Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Culturale (TPC) created in 1969 has been a world leader and source of know-how in the field of cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the cultural heritage community. It has cooperated early with Interpol and Europol on the fight against illicit trade of cultural goods. The TPC has been particularly active in Iraq as well as in other Middle Eastern countries and contributed to several international multilateral security missions for NATO and the UN (2016 agreement with UNESCO on a specific Italian taskforce).
- The UK (before Brexit is enforced) has engaged lately (following its military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan) in cultural heritage protection. It launched its Cultural Heritage Protection Fund in 2016, in cooperation with the British Council, and has been supporting a variety of initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa. The fund has recently been replenished for a second phase of activities. Ratification of the 1954 Hague convention in 2017 and creation of a military unit dedicated to cultural heritage protection in 2018.

The United Kingdom has committed over £30m to the Cultural Protection Fund, which is managed by the British Council (2018). The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports, which presides over this financial commitment to cultural heritage in conflict affected countries in the Middle East and Africa has been viewed as a flagship project. In 2015, it funded the British Museum's Iraq Emergency Heritage Scheme with £3.2m to build the capacity of Iraq's heritage sector (British Museum 2017). The British Museum's project, the Iraq Emergency Heritage Management Training Scheme, was designed to support 50 Iraqi archaeologists in cultural heritage management and practical fieldwork skills. The training consisted of two months training at the British Museum, followed by two months of hands-on training on two archaeological sites, one in Southern Iraq and the other in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Whilst a component of the project was designed to strengthen SBAH capacity, the main focus was on archaeological digging and the pursuit of new finds as well as understanding existing British Museum collections. The project illuminates the ways in which emergency cultural funds are being used by archaeologists and cultural organisations, and for whom the benefit is for. In a context of the damage cultural heritage has sustained in Iraq, it is questionable whether US-European funding agencies interested in cultural heritage safeguarding and cultural protection should be funding excavations unless they are specifically oriented to protection. CPF funding has also supported the Oxford University based Endangered Archaeology in North Africa and the Middle East (EAMENA) which has documented threats to archaeological sites through satellite imagery (EAMENA 2019). EAMENA's work has the potential to be integrated into national databases and inventories and has become a key resource at a time of massive cultural change in the region.

Other UK based funding support to cultural heritage has been through the Department for International Development, now part of the Foreign Commonwealth Office. Among other UK university initiatives, one example is the British Government funded Nahrein Network, a University College London initiative with a focus on devolved funding was established in 2017 to support cultural heritage sustainability in Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon and to a lesser extent Iran (UCL N.d.). In Iraq, the project has been able to establish and ground a local network of Iraqi heritage professional and experts by working with Iraqi universities, civil society organisations and state bodies. In particular, it has been able to develop partnerships and genuine connections with Iraqi stakeholders with a view to elevating and supporting Iraqi voices at a critical time in post-conflict Iraq and working closely with partners to address Iraq's heritage related challenges.

In sum, the EU, Member States and the UK has shown a growing commitment to cultural heritage and has laid the foundation for building on this work in the foreseeable future. EU projects however, as listed above, are not guided by any vision or strategy. As a consequence, significant funding to Iraq from the EU is merely added to the UNESCO budget for Iraq. There are many repercussions to this practice, the most notable of which is that the EU continues to be handicapped in fully realising its mission and goals in Iraq. Importantly, the EU should, as stated in this paper, develop its own assistance infrastructure, in partnership with EU Member States, to pursue its cultural heritage related objectives. This would give the EU greater autonomy in addressing Iraq's core priorities and in addressing the connections between cultural heritage and conflict, which have not been effectively addressed.

2.2. International actors' activities in the field of cultural heritage for conflict prevention

Iraq has seen growing regional and international cultural heritage related activity. Increasingly, cultural heritage is becoming part of the apparatus of not only cultural diplomacy and bi-lateral relations but an integral component of foreign policy objectives. This section provides a brief overview of international actors' activities.

In 2018, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) initiated a \$350m project in support of rebuilding infrastructure and the provision of basic services for Christian and Yezidi minorities in Iraq,

namely in the province of Nineveh (USAID 2020). Some of this funding has been specifically designated for cultural heritage. A notable project has been the \$4m Mosul Heritage Stabilisation Program implemented by Penn Museum's Near East Section and funded under the US Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation and the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH) (Penn Today 2019). A notable restoration project funded by the US Embassy in Baghdad was the site of Prophet Nahum located in Northern Iraq. The rehabilitation of the site, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq controlled al Qosh, cost over \$1m and was completed by US-based non-profit ARCH International and Czech company GEMA Art International (Algemeiner 2020).

On August 2020, the State Department signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology to tackle international cultural property trafficking (US Department of State 2020). The agreement is a clear sign that the US Government is working to address the growth of criminal and terrorist networks and cultural trafficking as an issue that concerns its national security. Much of these new efforts build on existing initiatives to combat cultural trafficking. The US inter-agency Cultural Antiquities Task Force (CATF) for example is an active project to build the capacity of domestic foreign law enforcement agencies and works to train heritage practitioners internationally to protect and preserve cultural sites and objects (US Department of State N.d.a).

In recent years, new partnerships have also been forged between the US Government and EU Member States. USAID and other US based organisations are working closely with Hungary to support Christian communities in Iraq (USAID 2019). Much of these US led initiatives seem to be informed and promoted by Christian groups in Europe and the US (Knights of Columbus 2019). The focus of these international interventions targeting specific groups of people, even in places of that are characterised by multiple cultural groups, has been called into question and may have major long-term repercussions for places such as Nineveh (Torbati 2019). Significantly, the recent focus on Nineveh after the war on the Islamic State should be viewed in a context of the concomitant collapse of security structures as well as minority groups and the growth of competing Iranian and US interests in the province (Davison 2020).

On August 2020, the Prime Minister of Iraq and President of the United States met in Washington D.C. to discuss the US-Iraq Strategic Dialogue, which contains several tenets pertaining to cultural heritage, higher education and Iraq's state archives, some of which are held in the US and are planned to be returned to Iraq (US Embassy in Georgia 2020). It is most likely that the cultural heritage aspects of the strategic partnership between the US and Iraq will continue to grow stronger in the foreseeable future.

An increasingly active funding stream for cultural heritage in Iraq and internationally has been the US State Department managed Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (US Department of State N.d.b.). In recent years, the Ambassadors Fund has acted as a quick-response activity and projects have been funded in Albania, Nepal, Laos, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bahamas and Libya (US Department of State N.d.b.). It is envisaged that this funding stream as well as other initiatives managed by the US Department's Cultural Heritage Center will become an increasingly significant aspect of the US Government's global cultural diplomacy and bi-lateral relations. As part of these initiatives as well as other US funding streams, a growing number of US based organisations, including universities and non-profit organisations, are also working internationally in the field of cultural heritage, including the American Academic Research in Iraq which has opened an office in Baghdad (TAARII) and the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), which focuses on Syria, Iraq and Libya. ASOR has signed a number of agreements with the State Department and acts as a hub for the implementation of US supported projects in the Middle East.

US and European private foundations and charitable trusts oriented to the promotion and protection of heritage have also become increasingly active in recent years. As direct implementing bodies as well as grant-making institutions, these cultural organisations provide an important source of funding and support.

These organisations are increasingly mobilising new funding, similarly to government development agencies, in response to the destruction visited on cultural heritage by the Islamic State. Since then, those cultural institutions have themselves sought funding from private sources as well as government support in pursuit of such things as heritage related capacity-building, documentation, restoration and rehabilitation of cultural property. These organisations include the J. Paul Getty Trust and J.M Kaplan (J.M. Kaplan Fund N.d.). The J. Paul Getty Trust stated in 2019 that it would be spending \$100m over the next ten years on ancient cultural heritage, including on Iraq related projects (Getty 2019).

In Europe, the most active donor has been ALIPH, which was established in response to the Islamic State's destruction of heritage in Syria and Iraq (ALIPH website). ALIPH has the status of an international organisation registered in Switzerland. It is sponsored among others through French and UAE Government funding and is increasingly building a portfolio of work in the fields of documentation, conservation and rehabilitation of cultural property in war affected countries, including in Iraq. China and private donors have also contributed to ALIPH. ALIPH, which in Iraq mostly funds work related to cultural property, has focused much of its work on the province of Nineveh, though it is gradually expanding to other parts of the country. UNESCO is on the board of ALIPH, and both regularly communicate with each other to avoid duplication. Recently, ALIPH allocated \$5m as an immediate response to the explosion in Beirut and was able to galvanize international support for its work in Lebanon.

On April 2020, the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) signed an agreement with UNESCO to deliver practical on-the job training and skills development for residents in and around Mosul's Old City. Support includes training of professionals from SBAH and universities in Mosul. This first phase will also support planners, archaeologists and engineers. A second phase will see the development of training modules in such things as damage assessment and cultural recovery. The agreement with UNESCO will also support crafts, including in stonemasonry, carpentry and metal work. It is envisaged that one hundred 'master' trainers will have been created who could contribute to the rebuilding of Mosul and constitute a core group of experts to work on other projects in the province of Nineveh and beyond. One of the key challenges is the absence of a long-term plan and vision for how these capacity-building investments could support Iraq's rebuilding. There should be an urgent intervention in this regard to integrate these efforts within a broader strategy that will sustain support given to training and the establishment of a specialised cadre of experts. As such efforts have no long-term plan, they risk being ineffective. This is also required to address the potential for further damage of urban heritage in the coming years. Inviting trainees and participants from other parts of the country should also be considered.

In August 2020, the Ministry of Culture in Saudi Arabia and Iraq signed agreements regarding co-operation in cultural affairs (Alweeam.com 2020). In the same month, the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq met in Baghdad with the current Minister of Culture, Dr Hassan Nadhem, to discuss co-operation in the fields of tourism, archaeology, cinema and handicrafts. Saudi and Iranian rivalry has become increasingly apparent in the field of culture and heritage in Iraq with both countries rushing to sign agreements with the Ministry of Culture in Baghdad.

China has also shown interest in funding Iraqi cultural projects, such as the Iraqi Opera House. Whilst China has not yet been as active as the US in the field of international cultural heritage, this may soon be changing (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China 2019). The Chinese government has stated its growing interest in supporting cultural heritage, particularly in conflict areas (State council of the people's republic of China 2020). The table below (not including Iraq - see case study in this report) is not an exhaustive list but focuses on major conflicts of the past decade in which heritage was significantly affected and part of international recovery efforts. Entries are not based on individual projects. The EU has been active and in the lead in most cases.

Table 1: Overview of major international efforts on the post-war recovery of heritage

Country	Description of International Intervention relating to Heritage	Main Donors
Libya	Preservation of archaeological sites, historic monuments, and museum and other collections	US through the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation
	UNESCO programme for heritage in Libya	This programme is largely self-funded by Libya and implemented through UNESCO
	Rehabilitation of sites in Ghadames, Sabratha, Leptis Magna and of the National Museum (Tripoli)	ALIPH
Mali	Reconstruction of mausoleums, monuments, libraries in Timbuktu	- EU - Other donors were Norway, The Netherlands, Switzerland and a range of countries made smaller contributions through UNESCO's joint fund - ICC Trust Fund for Victims with ALIPH and UNESCO
	Restoration of heritage in Gao	ALIPH
	Conservation (including digitization) of evacuated manuscripts.	- EU - Other donors through UNESCO's joint fund - ALIPH
Syria	Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Cultural Heritage project - Observatory of Syrian Cultural Heritage	- EU - Additional funding from Austria and Flanders (Belgium)
	Aleppo Citadel project	Aga Khan Trust for Culture
	Restoration of Syrian moveable heritage	China
	Palmyra (Demining and road access; reconstruction planning; museum renovation)	Russia
	Documentation and digitization; Raqqa museum; archival preservation	ALIPH
Yemen	"Cash for Work" project on heritage and creativity, including rebuilding of war-affected heritage.	EU
	Restoration works at Dhamar museum; Taiz national museum and Al Badr palace; documentation and digitization work	ALIPH

2.3. UNESCO's role in the safeguarding of cultural heritage

UNESCO is the leading UN agency, actively involved in the safeguarding of cultural heritage. Its approach is guided by international conventions in the field of heritage, which set out standards for heritage safeguarding, and also provide a framework for operating in specific countries. Examples of UNESCO's cultural development programming in conflict situations implemented have, in recent years, included Afghanistan, Libya, Mali, Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. These programmes have generated valuable lessons that

ensure the success or failure of the proposed approach and link various issues, such as the drivers of conflict, community ownership, sustainable urban development and peacebuilding in a socially cohesive context.

Regarding UNESCO's recent involvement in Iraq², in February 2018 UNESCO launched a flagship initiative (funded by the EU – see section above) called 'Revive the Spirit of Mosul', aiming at the recovery and reconstruction of the Old City's physical infrastructure with a view to restoring the dignity of its people. Another foreseen intervention within the UAE-funded project relates to the 'Restoration and critical reconstruction of Al-Nouri Mosque and its Al-Hadba Minaret.' These two projects, amounting to circa 73M US dollars, focus on support to youth livelihoods, skills development, and social cohesion. Other key interventions supported by the Heritage Emergency Fund, and the Japanese, German and Flemish governments address the damage assessment and rehabilitation of cultural and educational facilities.

Box 2: Heritage Interests Among the UN Security Council's Permanent Members

Though interests and interventions in the heritage field vary widely among the P5, there is a clear and growing interest among all members. France has been most active bringing heritage issues to the attention of the Security Council (see box on EU Member States). Other P5 members have remained rather sceptical of heritage featuring on the agenda of the Security Council, adding to the impression that this is foremost a European interest. However, bilaterally, they have all been scaling up their efforts relating to heritage.

The US has traditionally been rather resistant in engaging with heritage on a multilateral level and has since 2019 no longer been a member of UNESCO. Bilaterally, on the other hand, the US, and individual institutions like the Smithsonian or ASOR, have been very active in conflict areas, with a focus on Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. At a policy level, the most significant efforts in recent years related to the illicit trafficking of antiquities, for which the Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act (2016) and various bilateral agreements have been adopted. As in the UK context, as well as in the US, efforts of the national Blue Shield committee since the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have impacted political and institutional awareness and engagement with heritage, especially through greater involvement of the military. The US has also invested in heritage projects in Iraq, guided by the US-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement (2008), which dedicates a section to cultural cooperation, and was triggered by a series of negative news events like the looting of the Baghdad museum (2003) or damage to the site of Babylon.

China, like many others, is also scaling up its engagement with heritage as part of its foreign cooperation, though there is no particular focus on conflict areas. For the past three years, China has become more involved in the Middle East, including with heritage in Syria, and has become a contributor to the ALIPH Fund, indicating a growing interest in this domain. However, as for now, China's interests are foremost on promoting linkages between China's ancient history and that of other regions of the world. This is often done by channelling efforts through multilateral cooperation, although China's most expansive programme is essentially bilateral, e.g. the Silk Road project, which can be seen as a cultural arm of the 'One Belt, One Road' effort'.

Russia's engagement with heritage in conflict areas is part of the objectives of its Foreign Policy Activity state programme (2020). In recent years this has been foremost visible through its engagement in Syria, where it engaged for example with the archaeological site of Palmyra. Russia has also given Syria's heritage a prominent place in relation to its military engagement (especially in the form of support to mine clearance in and around Palmyra) (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation 2017).

² Main donors for UNESCO activities in Iraq are the United Arab Emirates, the European Union, Germany, Japan, the Government of Flanders, the Emergency Fund. UNESCO worldwide, in addition to the above-mentioned donors, received funds from Italy, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, China, Norway, Sweden, Spain, Switzerland and ALIPH - International Alliance for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Conflict Areas.

3. Iraq: assessing the relationship between politics and cultural heritage

3.1. Introduction

Iraq has suffered from several decades of conflict and war which has severely degraded its cultural systems and infrastructure. This section provides a brief overview of the interconnections between the country's post-2003 political system and the impact it has had on its cultural heritage. Specifically, the section provides an analysis of the outcomes of political sectarianism, which has now become integrated in Iraq's political structures and allocation of power and resources. International programmes should take into account analyses of Iraq's fragmented governance structures, especially in a context of heritage destruction and cultural loss. In most cases however, international heritage programmes have generally sought activities that have ignored addressing the connections between cultural heritage, politics and conflict.

Multiple ruptures witnessed over the past four decades have devastated Iraqi society and created increasingly fragmented social and cultural landscapes. Wars, dictatorship, international sanctions as well as the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage have repeatedly weakened Iraq's cultural infrastructure. The creation of the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan in the 1990s and the subsequent US Occupation of Iraq of the country in 2003 fundamentally reconfigured Iraq's centralised state institutions, producing multiple, competing and overlapping power structures within one country. The installation of a political system in 2003 to manage Iraq's politics, premised on ethnic and religious quotas, has exacerbated rather than alleviated social tension and has had major repercussions on the country's political economy and cultural landscape.

An integral component of Iraq's post-2003 political system is *Muhasa'sa* (or segmentation), an apportionment-based convention used for the allocation of Iraq's state resources to political and religious groups. *Muhasa'sa* has meant that Iraq's wealth is allocated to political elites who promote and identify themselves within frames of ethno-nationalism, religion and sectarianism. This system of political apportionment has percolated across Iraq's local and national state institutions and induced a hyper-sectarian operation of politics. The ethno-sectarian power sharing arrangement, *Muhasa'sa*, is premised primarily on ethnic and religious quotas. First introduced in 2003 by the US Occupation and later developed as the backbone of Iraq's new political system. An exclusive political arrangement between a handful of powerful political actors continues to operate on the basis of sectarianism based political bargaining.

Muhasa'sa as a system for managing politics is premised on division, fracture and sectarianism, and this is reflected on Iraq's cultural heritage. Essentially, it champions negative, dissonant notions of heritage, based on narratives of loss, trauma and victimization, for the operation of Iraq's politics. It is based on the promotion and propagation of competing notions of victimhood endured over the past four decades of war and dictatorship. Iraq's political system not only accentuates sectarian identities, but the promotion of sectional identities is integral to the practice and organisation of politics. To this effect, *Muhasa'sa* is based on crafting the state as one that is primarily focused on dispensing reparations to different and competing groups in society. The distribution of hundreds of billions of Iraqi state funds since 2003 through *Muhasa'sa* is not without major repercussions, which has produced strong vested interests in the reproduction of the system that serves ethno-nationalist and religious blocs in the country.

Significantly, the sectarian system depends on stoking ethnic and religious tensions and inter-community friction, which political elites thrive on as a basis to negotiate the extraction of resources from the state. As an outcome of *Muhasa'sa*, political elites have constructed competing structures to access the resources of the state which are sectarian in nature, rather than national, and are used primarily to secure continued

access to the state's resources. Such institutions and organisations erected to safeguard access to resources of the state include the control of significant swaths of heritage, now appropriated for political purposes and folded into sub-national political structures. Shrines, mosques, monuments and mausoleums have to varying degrees been erected and incorporated into these political projects, which has instrumentalised heritage for the purposes of promoting and legitimising the interests of sectarian politics.

Under this system, central state ministries and other institutions have commonly been allocated to competing political parties who usurp their resources for political party gain. The fragmented control of state ministries has done little to reform state institutions since 2003 which have become increasingly inward-looking, serving the interests of those who control them rather than being responsive to the needs of the general public. It has vested significant wealth in a handful of political parties who have expanded their presence across the sites of the state they control as well as outside it. In the absence of an effective system of internal accountability, political parties have significantly bloated state institutions with excess employment. As a consequence, there has been a marked absence of economic reform. Political parties, with access to these riches, have become gateways for employment and a semblance of financial security that access to state resources confers.

A concomitant state – society gap, evidenced by recent national protests but also by the spaces outside the control of the state, has illuminated the crisis of governance in Iraq. The development of cohesive and centralised system of government, able to govern through its institutions and provide services to the wider population, has been limited under Iraq's fractured governance structures. In practice, Muhasa'sa has accentuated political and social fragmentation, creating a faltering state system.

As a consequence, the state has been rendered as a cash-dispensing entity rather than as a vehicle for national development, governance and progress. Significantly, the Iraqi state is designed to appease the demands of political elites than organized around the delivery of public services and has therefore been a remarkably weak system of addressing Iraq's growing social and political ills, as witnessed by the growth and resurgence of the Islamic State and protests. Whilst it has generally appeased political elites who fashion themselves through sectarian and ethno-nationalist narratives, Muhasa'sa has been an exceptionally poor conflict-dispute management system, as we have seen in recent years with the collapse of large parts of the country to the Islamic State.

Whilst Iraq continues to possess centralized state institutions, their authority, reach and presence has been undermined since 2003, rendering their legitimacy, activities and interventions in wider society severely limited. The rise of the Islamic State in 2014 was an outcome of the inability of Iraq's politics to enact major reforms to create employment and deliver basic services. Iraq's political system has been an exceptionally weak to deliver national education, health and other development programmes for a population that has actively rejected sectarianism, corruption and the dominance of singular, ethno-nationalist and religious narratives. The majority of Iraq's population – 69% of whom are under 30 years old - are increasingly frustrated by the inability of successive governments to offer any meaningful change and respect social and political rights. Such calls for political reform, in a country nearing a population of 40m, will only grow over the next few years. In this context, international support to Iraq's cultural infrastructure and heritage sectors will support the country's transition to a more sustainable economy rather than contestation over oil-resources.

The Iraq Protest Movement, most notably from October 2019, acted as a shock to a system whose politics is largely dominated by disconnected political elites. With their sit-ins across the country, including in Tahrir Square in Baghdad, protestors openly rejected the post-2003 worldview imposed on the country that dictated a political trajectory based on ethnic and religious identities. Amongst the main messages of protestors in Baghdad and other major cities in the country was a call to end political sectarianism and a demand for human dignity. Hundreds of thousands of protestors in the country called for major reforms to the state and the post-2003 ways of doing politics. They asked for employment, security and called for reclaiming Iraq from

political sectarianism by asking for a 'homeland' that would represent them and their aspirations for a better future. In sum, they asked for inclusive citizenship and specifically a government that would represent the interests of the people of Iraq.

Iraq faces major economic challenges as oil revenues make up the bulk of its state revenues. Dependency on oil exports has remained unchanged and there have been no major reforms to diversify the country's economy. This has hampered the development of an active private sector which is still largely dependent on the state. Iraq's education, health and other social infrastructure continues to be dilapidated. The state is Iraq's largest employer which with major fluctuations in oil prices means that it is increasingly hard pressed to pay for salaries and pensions. In recent years, Iraq has suffered a severe economic recession because of the fall in oil prices. Growing inequality and increasing poverty rates represent sources of instability that have not been addressed to date. As an outcome, Iraq has not allocated sufficient resources to prioritise cultural heritage when its basic services are in a state of disrepair. In June 2020, the Government of Iraq declared in the wake of the fall in oil prices, which covers 92% of government revenue, that it would need to secure international loans to pay for government salaries. There are major repercussions of Iraq's failed economy and bankruptcy on its people, stability and cultural heritage.

State fragmentation, pervasive corruption and a faltering economy have produced a country replete with chronic crisis and endemic instability. Whilst it is not a panacea to Iraq's challenges, cultural heritage can be an important entry-point into national discussions about sustainable economies, helping Iraq shift to a post-oil reality – a necessary prerequisite for peace - ensuring access to heritage and culture and working towards a society built on a knowledge and appreciation of shared histories.

3.2. Types of cultural erasure in Iraq

The body of policy, position and strategy papers has in recent years focused on deliberate acts of destruction visited on tangible heritage by non-state actors and, increasingly, on marginalized cultural groups. International programming has been shaped by this orientation which has neglected to take into account other devastating forms of cultural erasure.

In Iraq, as elsewhere in the region, there are four forms of cultural destruction that should be considered in policy and heritage peacebuilding interventions, since these distinct motivations and impact would require different ways for addressing heritage in consecutive peacebuilding efforts. These are 1) deliberate acts of violence and impact of conflict and wars on heritage, 2) cultural appropriation, 3) neglect and 4) cultural erasure as a result of socio-economic change. These are addressed below.

3.2.1. Deliberate acts of cultural destruction and the effects of war

Acts of intentional destruction and damage of heritage are designed to undermine a specific cultural group or to alter the very fabric of society. In recent years, this specific intentional destruction has been illuminated by the actions of nonstate actors and terrorist organisations, including al Qaeda and the Islamic State. The destruction of cultural heritage by the Islamic State in Mosul and other parts of Iraq is an example of destruction which was designed, at least in part, to erase cultural diversity and build upon a scorched earth a new state beholden to the interests of the group. The effects of deliberate destruction have had major repercussions on stability and security. In Iraq, this was most glaringly witnessed in 2006 and 2007 in the destruction of al Askari Shrine in Samarra which caused social and political upheaval that led to a major humanitarian disaster, millions displaced and widespread sectarian killings. Other countries, including Mali, Libya, Syria and Afghanistan, have similarly witnessed cultural heritage destruction at the hands of nonstate armed groups.

3.2.2. Heritage appropriation

The capture and consequent usurpation of historic and archaeological sites for political and religious purposes is a deeply destructive process. Heritage appropriation is a process and entails the conversion of specific forms of heritage, usually by newly emerging political and religious actors. Heritage appropriation can take many forms but is usually characterized by the transformation of physical sites – both in architecture and character – to undergird politically and religiously oriented structures and the propagation of singular narratives. Heritage appropriation involves cultural division and fragmentation namely in pursuit of new, politically driven narratives about a group of people. It also entails extracting heritage from wider society and, fracturing it from the environment in which it exists. Both transform how heritage is interpreted by wider society and essentially restricts access, including symbolically, as new claims on the site are tied to the goals of political elites who attempt to govern and win credibility through the appropriation of heritage.

3.2.3. Heritage neglect

Whilst heritage can be undermined by deliberate acts of destruction and the impact of conflict and war, heritage neglect is an outcome of domestic politics and the way in which state resources are distributed. Since the early 1990s, Iraq's heritage faced insurmountable pressure from a lack of resources. Major historic city centres, archaeological structures and ruins and historic buildings, as well religious sites, are crumbling and withering away as a result of poor government support. Heritage neglect can be both deliberate – designed to undermine a specific cultural fabric not in the interests of ruling political parties or, secondly, unintentional, as an outcome of state paralysis and generalised institutional disarray. There have been attempts to revitalize major historic towns and urban centres, such as the Ihe'a initiative, which prepared an outline for the rehabilitation of the historic old town of Baghdad and al Rasheed Street (IHEA Baghdad website). Due to Iraq's fractured decision-making and structures of rule, such initiatives have not gotten off the ground.

Heritage sites that do not serve a particular religious or political purpose for those in power and who are working to consolidate their presence in the country, have been sorely neglected. The careful crafting of heritage sites for political purposes has meant only a slither of heritage structures have been protected and there is severe neglect of all forms of cultural heritage in Iraq. Major cultural sites that have been neglected include Islamic and other religious sites, but also Babylon and other pre-Islamic heritage, which has seen little if any governmental support. Since 2003, historic city centres, Abbasid, and Ottoman era buildings and modern architecture have not been afforded much protection and support. In addition, many forms of heritage within the control of religious endowments have also been neglected.

3.2.4. Development related cultural heritage destruction

Rapid urbanization, socio-economic development and the impact of reconstruction has severely degraded Iraq's cultural heritage. Historic buildings and archaeological sites, including monuments and major landmarks such as Babylonian and Assyrian heritage, have all been affected by unregulated urban sprawl and the break-down in Iraq's monitoring and regulatory apparatus. Across all of Iraq, including in KRI, heritage has faced insurmountable pressure by developers, oil companies, individuals and communities. In light of these ongoing and destructive forces, the European Union and other international actors should work with community-based civil society organisations and other key stakeholders who, in many places in Iraq, have shown remarkable tenacity and efforts to raise awareness locally about the threat and actions that undermine heritage.

3.3. Key Heritage Related Institutions and Organisations in Iraq

This section examines relevant institutions in relation to their work in the protection, promotion and development of cultural heritage in Iraq. It focuses on state agencies, civil society and universities as three

major fields of activity whose activities are important for the development of an EU strategy on cultural heritage.

3.3.1. Ministry of Culture and the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage

Antiquities, or specifically artefacts, in Iraq are managed by the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH). Established in 1923, SBAH has a long history in the protection of heritage in the country. It is an institution that was folded into the Ministry of Culture and Tourism after 2003. In the current arrangement, the Deputy Minister of Culture also assumes the directorship of SBAH and the Iraq Museum. SBAH is responsible for the management of Iraq's national heritage sites, including pre-Islamic heritage. The Iraq Museum and SBAH share the same location in Baghdad. SBAH is responsible for Iraq's museums and a SBAH Directorate Office is located in each one of the 15 provinces under the control of Baghdad's Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Since 1991 and over the past few years, SBAH has had no role in the affairs of antiquities and heritage in the KRI.

SBAH capacity was weakened under international sanctions which deprived it of essential resources and isolated its cadre from engaging in new methodologies and thinking about the role of heritage in society. It consequently suffered from the impact of abysmal state salaries, looting, and a deeply damaging brain drain. The Iraq War of 2003 further undermined SBAH and the Iraq Museum as it was not afforded US military protection, and its invaluable collections allowed to be looted. To date, thousands of artefacts are still missing from the looting of the Iraq Museum (Barker 2018). Combined with the repercussions of major degradation visited on archaeological sites by the US military from 2003 to 2011, looting and more recently the impact of the Islamic State, SBAH is reeling from insurmountable pressure on its meagre resources and capacity. The weight of responsibilities and urgent, emergency measures that have to be put in place are simply beyond the current resources of the SBAH. In this context, it is important to identify the situation since 2003 as one of cultural infrastructure collapse that has not been properly addressed by international organisations in Iraq or by central government authorities.

The long-term impact of the looting of the Iraq Museum and ongoing instability in the country, as well as a history of foreign disinterest in addressing SBAH's core needs, has meant that SBAH and its management feel marginalized by international programmes and donors. Core needs continue to go unaddressed, including in such things as support to the Iraq Museum's storage facilities, artefacts and archive holdings, as well as conservation support. International assistance to SBAH has largely been in the form of training, often outside Iraq, which has shown weak if any results. Seventeen years of such approaches has deeply frustrated SBAH management and experts and the track record of international support in support SBAH's core needs has been remarkably poor. The absence of needs assessments carried out by concerned international institution attests to this growing, unaddressed crisis. The forging of long-term partnerships – based on SBAH needs and priorities – will need to be undertaken in view of these ongoing challenges.

Since 2003, Iraq's cultural heritage has not been properly supported by the Government of Iraq. Its ethno-religious political system has meant a fundamental re-ordering of its politics and concomitantly the distribution of state resources. A major repercussion of this unfolding political system has been the undermining of national heritage and the growth of sub-national, increasingly sectarianised, forms of heritage controlled by competing political forces (Hasan 2019). Iraq's fractured politics has been deeply reflected on its heritage, and there have since been weak and ineffective national heritage rehabilitation programmes. It is only recently, as of 2020, that Iraq's Ministry of Culture and the Government of Iraq, has attempted to promote national symbols of unity and celebration. A major repercussion of changed politics in Iraq has meant that SBAH has been marginalised in Iraq's national budgetary allocations. Funding to the Ministry of Culture and SBAH in particular has not been viewed by Iraq's political elites as a key, front-line state institution. As a result, SBAH continues to suffer from poor budgetary support to conduct rehabilitation and cultural rebuilding, which has significantly slowed down the pace of work.

Strengthening SBAH through EU programming and intervention should constitute a core component of heritage peacebuilding and could go a long way in supporting an institution that is national in scope and has the potential to actively participate in the country's cultural rebuilding. As it stands however, there have been no programmes envisaged to support SBAH and its needs. How that is done is a matter of careful navigation of relationships, institutional structures and the pursuit of long-term strategies. The European Union and Member States can do this by spending enough time with SBAH staff and management on site to better assess and understand what their needs are.

Since 2003, SBAH's role has been circumscribed by the country's increasingly sectarian politics and rather than it being elevated to facilitate national dialogue and the promotion of shared histories, it has been marginalized. As a consequence, political parties in post-2003 Iraq have no interest to control SBAH as its remit largely pertains to pre-Islamic heritage. As SBAH is not viewed to be a front-line agency, it has been allocated a weak operational budget by the central government. It has no sizable budget to attract political party rivalry and control of it by political groups. The absence of proper reform since the 1980s and 1990s has meant that SBAH has been hindered by national state laws that generally are not encouraging to international engagement and support to Iraqi state institutions. Extra - budgetary support is not advisable to the Ministry of Culture but instead, developing strategic, long-term, dynamic partnerships, should be pursued with a view to building SBAH capacity and its national programmes. In this light, previous attempts to support SBAH from 2003 should be reviewed. The current Italian-Iraq Centre for the Restoration of Monuments in Baghdad is inactive as a conservation organisation.

Whilst since 2003 SBAH has been severely undermined by the emergence of new cultural and religious institutions, it continues to be the main antiquities institution in the country. Its role has focused mostly on the protection of antiquities and the heritage component of its remit has been neglected, especially intangible cultural heritage and urban heritage. The activation of these components of its work can help revitalize SBAH's role in the country and have a far-reaching impact on moving from the legacy of a property-ownership model that it was originally set up with to becoming a proactive national heritage institution. This will require developing a shared vision and strategy in line with its own core needs. Donors should urgently support a thorough needs-assessment of SBAH needs, prepared by carefully chosen experts willing to spend time in SBAH and who understand the institutional and intellectual legacies of how SBAH has evolved since its creation a hundred years ago. Proposing or imposing blue-print models of any sort are bound to have limited, on-the ground, results.

The fragmentation of the Iraqi state and concomitant absence of cohesive, centralized power to control and manage the entirety of the country's antiquities sector has meant that whilst archaeology heritage formally viewed in the Iraqi Constitution as a strategic resource, on par with oil, this has not been a high agenda or concern since 2003 of political elites in Baghdad. Whilst the Iraqi Constitution of 2005 treated Iraq's 'antiquities, archeological sites, cultural buildings, manuscripts and coins as national treasures', due to political divisions in the country, it has no role in the heritage affairs of the KRI and a severely limited one in the newly established post-2003 religious endowments (Constitute 2020).³ As much of Iraq's heritage has been fractured into competing segments controlled now by the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and religious endowments, in relation to religious heritage it largely plays a supervisory role in many cases. It is important to note the constitution of 2005 undermined existing heritage related laws in Iraq and came into conflict with it. The constitution states in Article 113 that 'federal authorities' have 'jurisdiction' of heritage and 'should be managed in cooperation with the regions and governorates' (Constitute 2020). These article provisions, which in essence state the legal primacy of federal authorities in Baghdad over cultural heritage as well as shared-

³ See Article 113 of the Iraqi Constitution which states 'Antiquities, archaeological sites, cultural buildings, manuscripts, and coins shall be considered national treasures under the jurisdiction of the federal authorities and shall be managed in cooperation with the regions and governorates, and this shall be regulated by law.'

ownership through joint management of heritage have fueled political contestation over Iraq's heritage, including key sites such as Babylon, which are repeatedly called on to be extracted from SBAH's control and management by provincial authorities, creating a situation of extreme vulnerability for the status and protection of cultural sites.

The great majority of international engagement with SBAH has been in pursuit of securing excavation licenses and approval for foreign funded programmes. Up to the period of the Islamic State's capture of parts of Iraq, there had been little concern, and therefore resources, to support Iraq's cultural heritage. Most notably, outside the KRI, UNESCO had not major portfolio in the country prior to 2014. This neglect is strongly felt by Iraqi institutional actors, including SBAH. The absence of real engagement and partnership has accentuated distrust between international donors, those working on their behalf and SBAH. SBAH continues to be neglected as foreign funded programmes directly implement their projects without actively involving the state institution and its experts and addressing its long-term needs. Such projects should thus be viewed as direct service-delivery activities rather than ones geared to building national institutional capacity. It is proposed here that the EU should directly work with SBAH and establish a strategic and long-term partnership to address its needs.

The absence of active and real engagement of SBAH archaeologists and engineers bodes poorly for strengthening domestic conservation capacity and in ensuring the sustainable maintenance of cultural sites over the long-term. Not actively involving SBAH through international funded programmes now, at this time means that Iraq's own internal capacity to address future attacks as well as more broadly cultural heritage will continue to be limited. Developing guidelines for international donors and organisations working in the field of heritage conservation and cultural rebuilding with a view to ensuring the involvement and participation of Iraqi cultural organizations and experts, including SBAH and universities, is essential.

The last major assessment of SBAH's conservation needs was conducted by UNESCO in 1972, which helped establish the Regional Centre for the Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (Asperen van de Boer et al. 1972). The development of the conservation centre – which also trained archaeologists and engineers from neighboring countries – helped support Iraq's cultural infrastructure. It undertook the conservation of major historic buildings and archaeological sites. This effort was hugely successful and contributed to building a strong cadre of skilled conservators in Iraq. After the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s the centre was closed and since then heritage conservation practices have only deteriorated.

Now, more than ever before, SBAH requires the establishment of a Baghdad-based conservation institute to strengthen existing, limited capacities to participate in cultural rebuilding. The current stock of conservation equipment at its disposal is at least over ten years old and of limited quality. The development of such a project, based on a needs-assessment, would amount to a major change and address an urgent need that has not been addressed properly for over four decades. A conservation centre or institute in SBAH, ideally established in close partnership with EU institutions, would be a good opportunity to introduce and integrate modern practices and methods on such things as intangible cultural heritage, peacebuilding and community focus and more broadly activating its broader heritage remit.

Major historical sites have been the preserve of SBAH and since 2003 other newly established elitist institutions. This has meant there has been an ongoing and lingering disconnection in relation to SBAH's ability to involve communities in its work, unless that activity has been focused on the protection of heritage. A holistic approach would be a good use of resources and work to help shift the property-ownership model with which SBAH has been molded into since its creation. Such a centre should be open to all of Iraq's archaeologists, engineers, heritage professionals, including from Iraqi Kurdistan, to engage in developing national heritage programmes, streamlining rules and addressing disparate conservation interventions, and more broadly creating a critical mass of activity in support of Iraq's cultural priorities. An important opportunity

exists now to shape how SBAH pursues conservation. The urgency of such an initiative is underlined by increased internationally funded conservation-based projects that rarely work with Iraqi expertise and instead utilize foreign conservators and engineers.

Box 3: Addressing Iraq's long-term cultural heritage conservation needs

A growing number of foreign funded projects are geared to the conservation and rehabilitation of cultural sites. Such projects are being funded by ALIPH, the government funded private foundations, UNESCO, the EU and UAE, as well as other organisations and institutions. Donors are supporting service-delivery contractors to rebuild sites without any strong notion of strategy, guidelines or thinking about the future of this work.

Religious endowments also regularly undertake the conservation and rebuilding of major religious and cultural sites which have undertaken by companies that have little knowledge of good conservation practices. In most cases, rebuilding, transformation and conservation work has resulted in significant damage to religious and cultural sites in Iraq and, UNESCO and international bodies would do well to speak to them about good international conservation practices and its benefits.

There is little thinking about the long-term needs of Iraq's own heritage and conservation needs. Not only does this bode ill for the sustainability and long-term maintenance of the sites that are being rehabilitated but importantly it does not build local institutional capacity. In most cases, the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage is merely asked to rubber-stamp projects. Also, issues of interpretation and meanings of heritage are nearly always ignored in these projects as external interventions are largely focused on rebuilding cultural sites. Key recommendations include:

- The preparation of a national conservation of cultural sites plan and strategy, in partnership with SBAH as well as other relevant institutions in the country
- To involve as a matter of priority in all aspects of conservation programmes SBAH's conservators, engineers and others – integrating Iraqi trainees on site is essential for building capacity and seek additional support from Iraqi universities.
- Prepare stronger SBAH monitoring of internationally funded programmes (as well as local projects) in the country, especially in relation to conservation quality, including materials, tools and techniques.

A central component of any conservation programme should focus on communities, integrating and respecting Iraqi perspectives of the sites, and involving people who live and work closely to these sites.

There currently exists no national heritage related co-ordination body or unit in Iraq and whilst ideally this should be established in SBAH with direct support from the Prime Minister's Office and other key stakeholders. The objective of the co-ordination body should build inter-ministerial and inter-agency communication, which is currently missing in Iraq. Ideally, EUAM or a combination of institutions could act in a supervisory role. The co-ordinational body should also be able to feed information to international organizations, on needs and priorities, as well as communicating information about criminal and terrorist networks involved in the illicit trafficking of Iraqi cultural goods.

It is also important to note that Iraq's Ministry of Culture and Tourism also includes a wide range of activities and responsibilities, ranging from fine arts, galleries, libraries, a network of national cultural centres, management of historic buildings and theatre, ballet, crafts and music institutions. In 2003, Iraq's national fine arts centre, housing its precious modern art collections, was looted and, as of yet, there have been no comprehensive surveys and mapping of the needs of the centre, the conditions in which precious art works lie, and documenting the losses that the centre suffered. These artworks should be viewed as critical archives

of Iraq's modern history. Unfortunately, international interest in artistic and creative industries in Iraq have been limited as they are generally not of interest to US-European academic and cultural organisations who are more interested in the knowledge obtained from the country's pre-Islamic cultural heritage. As a consequence, international support has been non-existent in these cultural fields.

Crafts and craftsmanship should be treated as a priority in terms of national cultural development. It is not just an appendix to tourism. Crafts provide an archive of functional forms of heritage that link people to their pasts and environment. It is an essential component of identity and community heritage. The development of Iraq's craft sector has multi-sectoral benefits, including the potential to create jobs and address the detrimental impact of cultural ruptures, a promising are crafts, which help revitalize local economies and provide a source of income. Protection and funding for traditional industries, which have suffered tremendously, much of which has collapsed, could help revitalize a sector that will become increasingly important as Iraq seeks to diversify away from oil exports.

Working with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, with a view to revitalizing intangible cultural heritage in the country, which is integral to championing values and Iraqist symbolism, is encouraged and should be a matter of priority in donor initiatives and future strategies in support of Iraq's peacemaking oriented cultural heritage.

3.3.2. Iraq's National Archives

National and other forms of archives represent a record of society, governance, and the histories of people. They are a central part of the formation of a country's identity and national pride and are of value to citizens (Ede 1980). The loss and fragmentation of a country's archives should be considered as a form of cultural erasure. The significant damage incurred on Iraq's national archives affects such things as civility, cultural progress, community relations and how, over time, people look back at their history and at each other. Archives can be a powerful medium and platform for the negotiation of identities and their loss in times of war, can be incalculable and permanent. Archives, in this sense, should thus be viewed broadly, as that which pertain to tangible and intangible heritage, and range from official government documents, to art collections, crafts, music and artefacts and monuments. The dispossession of Iraq of these archives has incalculable repercussions on its future. Damage to a country's archives and historical references means history can be manipulated in detrimental ways.

In Iraq, the damage to the country's national archives, which also included knowledge, information and records of the lives of people and communities, has been unprecedented in recent history. In 2003, the Iraqi National Library and Archives (INLA) and other archival and library holdings in the country were badly looted in the immediate days and weeks of the war (Al-Tikriti 2010 p.98). The major Ottoman and Hashemite archives that INLA in its care was moved to safekeeping but were found in August 2003 flooded in a basement. Consequently, unlike other archives that had received some international support, about 60% of the material was lost (Al-Tikriti 2010 p.101; Eskandar 2013) and, since then, there has been little support to digitizing and preserving what is left. Many other national archives faced a similar fate. To date, there has been no comprehensive assessment of the damage that the Iraq War and ensuing chaos has inflicted on Iraq's national archives.

In 2003, a large section of Iraq's state archives, known as the Ba'thist Archives – effectively a record of the state for over forty years – was spirited out of the country to the US and other locations. It was only in 2020 that the Government of Iraq had declared that it would return to the country. Similarly, the Jewish Archives was removed from Iraq and are now in the US. Archives also include knowledge contained in Iraq's Mesopotamian and religious heritage. Other records of human and artistic expression have also been looted in the aftermath of the Iraq War of 2003. Importantly, Iraq's rich intangible heritage, including crafts, music and film, languages and cultural practices – key to everyday functionality as well an integral to people's links

to the past - have been degraded by decades of war. The loss, when taken altogether, amount to an unfolding cultural catastrophe with major repercussions for the country's future and identity.

The Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs Central Library (Awqaf Library), one of the oldest depositories of manuscripts in Iraq also suffered deliberate burning and looting and was destroyed in April 2003. Some material had been saved and moved to safekeeping (Al-Tikriti 2010 p.101). The restoration of this collection was subsequently further complicated by the splitting up of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs into three endowments – Shia, Sunni and minorities and what was left of national state archives were distributed to them on the basis of sectarian control. The breaking up of Iraq's archival holdings on this basis undermines the notion of shared histories and national reconciliation and will have untold consequences on the future of the country (Moore and Pell 2010, 256).

More recently the archives of the Sunni Endowment in Mosul – holding over 7,000 Ottoman-era manuscripts that had previously been in the possession of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs Central Library in Baghdad prior to 2003 - were stolen in the ensuing chaos in the war against the Islamic State. The fracture of Iraq's archives into competing political and religiously oriented groups has severely weakened the physical protection and preservation of what is left. Similarly, one million books, some of them precious and rare, including records of the histories of Mosul and its people, were looted and burnt in Mosul University's Central Library. The loss was immense, including Ottoman-era manuscripts, 19th Century Syriac books, 19th and 20th Century newspapers and the collections of over 100 families that been donated to the University of Mosul. The library of the 265-year Latin Church and the Monetary of the Dominican Fathers, which had over 50,000 books and items in its possessions, was also destroyed by the Islamic State. Other libraries faced a similar fate, including Mosul's Public Library.

UNESCO's response plan, titled Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage in Liberated Areas of Iraq (2017-2019) mentions the need to prepare urgent protective measures, including lists of stolen and destroyed historical manuscripts, co-ordination with international bodies, including INTERPOL and consultation with local stakeholders. To date, a thorough assessment of the damage from 2014 has not been properly conducted and there has been no domestic or international effort to document and list what has been stolen or destroyed. Key persons including the head of the Waqf Library in Mosul and the former heads of Mosul University Central Library have not been consulted or interviewed even though they have important information, including photos, of some of the manuscripts and rare books that were stolen. After three years now since the liberation of Mosul, the disinterest of international actors, including UNESCO, to even speak to local stakeholders whose holdings were destroyed or stolen has caused deep frustration in Mosul and other parts of the country affected by the recent conflict. This loss comes on top of the cultural catastrophe of 2003 and similarly lists and records of missing manuscripts have not been updated or managed properly since then.

One of the main responses to the destruction wrought by the Islamic State on Iraqi cultural heritage has been in the form of growing interest and relatedly projects to digitise cultural heritage. There are many examples of such efforts, including Columbia University based Mapping Mesopotamian Monuments (Columbia University 2020) and ALIPH funded Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF) project to digitize libraries in Northern Iraq (ALIPH 2020). The Oxford University based Endangered Archaeology in Middle East and North Africa programme is a notable example that has worked to digitise through aerial images cultural heritage sites in Iraq and the wider Middle East (EAMENA 2019). Much of these programmes are spearheaded from outside Iraq and as of yet there are no real structured plans to effectively integrate these archives within SBAH and the Ministry of Culture as a repository of state archives.

3.3.3. Illicit trafficking of cultural property in Iraq

The devastation of the 1991 Gulf War and consequent looting of Iraq's provincial museums saw the flooding of international markets with thousands of Iraqi artifacts. The degradation of Iraq's cultural infrastructure under international sanctions and generalized impoverishment further witnessed unprecedented looting of its

major cultural sites, especially as the system of guards and site protection was faltering. The sheer number of Iraqi artifacts on the market and in private collections expanded the price range of higher-value goods and opened-up new, lower-end markets. As a result, the 1990s experienced unprecedented looting of major archaeological sites which was only overshadowed by the repercussions of the Iraq War of 2003. The looting of the Iraq Museum and the ensuing chaos of the war and disbanding of the Iraqi police, army and security services destabilized Iraq and undermined its cultural infrastructure, creating in its wake a spike in looting across thousands of archaeological sites in the country (Rothfield 2009).

The damage that war and destabilization has inflicted on Iraq's cultural heritage has not been addressed in any serious way. On the contrary, since the destruction of large swaths of cultural heritage by the Islamic State and concomitant looting and trafficking of cultural artefacts, the situation has gotten worse over the years. There has been no major needs or damage assessment at a national level, and we do not know the scope of looting in the country. The overwhelming pressure on SBAH and insufficient budgetary support since 2003 has severely undermined national supports to counter illicit trafficking of cultural artefacts and their restitution.

SBAH has only 4000 guards to protect over 12,000 archaeological sites. The small number of guards under its control can be compared with the 1980s where it then had no less than 10,000 guards. A smaller number of guards are also managed by the Ministry of Interior's police force and provincial governments. Whilst increasing the number of guards may help, a more holistic approach that involves communities, which is in part currently in place, needs to be scaled up.

A major challenge has been to raise funds to erect adequate protective walls around these sites; the far majority are left unprotected from organised looters and opportunist thievery. On some major sites in Southern Iraq for example looting continues to take place. On some major sites, local community members are employed by SBAH as guards, and whilst that system has come under severe pressure over the past few years, it is one of the most effective ways to protect Iraq's numerous sites. Small, community-based projects, particularly around income-generation, would significantly reduce looting on sites. Looting is expected to increase over the next few years in Iraq as its economy continues to suffer from recession and low-oil prices. A severely contracted, COVID-19 affected, economy would significantly threaten Iraq's cultural infrastructure and already weakened structures in place.

SBAH's weak budget has meant that its counter-illicit trafficking programmes are markedly ineffective. It has a small number of employees working in the department of illicit trafficking and no access to international legal support which it desperately needs. Calls for support from UNESCO Iraq have went unheeded. An effective and relevant database owned by SBAH and updated on a regular basis is an urgent priority, as proposed by EUAM. Such an initiative will improve the transmission of information about illicit trafficking in the country and help in identifying stolen and recovered objects to INTERPOL General Secretariat. SBAH's restitution department requires urgent support. Embedding counter-illicit trafficking experts in SBAH could significantly upscale existing capacity and help better co-ordinate international work. SBAH should be the main focal point of this initiative.

SBAH suffers from weak communication and co-ordination within Iraq and with international bodies concerned with the illicit trafficking of cultural goods and direct lines of communication with police services in Europe and other parts of the world, INTERPOL and international institutions needs to be either established or strengthened. These impediments to improving international co-ordination is part of a broader set of challenges where SBAH continues to be isolated from the outside world. Previous efforts at international co-ordination on heritage and illicit trafficking of cultural goods, which had been established by UNESCO in 2003 through the International Coordination Committee for the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage of Iraq and

included international experts and cultural organizations, was discontinued in 2012 (UNESCO. N.d.a.).⁴ According to UNESCO, the Emergency Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq, a co-ordination effort, initiated in 2014, which works to combat illicit trafficking of cultural property, in collaboration with INTERPOL, ICOM, the World Customs Organisation and law enforcement agencies (UNESCO N.d.b.). Its activities, to date, have however been none-existent. A new institutional arrangement should be urgently established.

Co-ordination with neighboring countries on the issue of illicit trafficking of cultural goods is also limited and a discussion needs to take place about which state institution in Iraq should lead on this. Communication with regional states has been hampered by a number of issues, including the absence of adequate funds and Iraq's continued diplomatic isolation in the region. In addition, antiquities agencies in the region and beyond have also shown weak initiative to engage with Iraq to support SBAH and participate in knowledge exchange. Some members of regional antiquities agencies are also known to be participating with suspect private sector entities and collectors to falsify and legitimize provenance paperwork. The fact that these archaeologists have not been held to account by their own governments has created a sense of frustration within SBAH about partnering and working with neighboring countries.

Looting is a form of cultural heritage destruction, and those and those who trade, purchase and exhibit illicitly trafficked and plundered cultural goods should be viewed as participating in cultural erasure. It also important to note that SBAH and other cultural institutions are aware that the surge of Iraqi artefacts on the international market and for sale on the internet has not been properly addressed by international institutions. More recently there has been a massive spike in the number of Iraqi artefacts sold by private collectors and traders and auction houses and galleries, many based in Europe and the United States, continue to trade in Iraqi cultural goods (McGlone 2020). New museums established in the past few years, including the Museum of the Bible (US Department of Justice 2020) in Washington D.C. as well as Lebanon based Nabu Museum (Tahal 2019) continue to hold large illicitly trafficked cultural goods from Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries. Political will has been much weaker than the vested interests of the art market to clamp down on illicit trafficking of goods (Rea 2020) – and concomitantly absence of international programmes to support SBAH and its staff in this area – is reflected negatively on EU and Member States in Iraq that there is no serious interest to address this ongoing crisis. Similarly, countries such as Lebanon, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates have been major hubs for the trafficking of cultural goods from Iraq and Syria (Sargent et al. 2020). UAE has also been accused of directly pillaging artefacts from Syria (Al Jazeera 2020) and, along with Saudi Arabia, damaging Yemen's cultural infrastructure (International Journal of Middle East Studies 2017). Unfortunately, in relation to Iraq, UNESCO has not conducted any assessments of cultural looting in recent years. This is all the more worrying as revenues generated from looting and sale of artefacts contributes to the continuation of violence in Iraq and other parts of the region and fuel the destruction of cultural heritage.

3.3.4. Iraqi Religious Endowments

The ratification of the Iraqi Constitution in 2005⁵ allowed for the formal creation of religious endowments in Iraq that replaced the pre-2003 institutional arrangement, which had organised religious affairs in the through the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA). The religious endowments created were the Office of the Shia Endowment (hereafter the Shia Endowment), the Office of the Sunni Endowment (hereafter the Sunni Endowment) and the Office of Christian, Yazedi and Sabeian Mandeian Endowments (here after the Minorities Endowment). Sanctioned by the state, these institutions were tied to religious and political groups, became under Iraq's Muhasa'sa system, and in a context of state break-down, significant players in the field

⁴ In 2003, the then Director General of UNESCO, Koïchiro Matsuura, created the International Committee for the Safeguarding of Iraqi Cultural Heritage, which comprised of twenty international experts and chaired by the Ministry of Culture. The committee made a number of relevant and pertinent recommendations, most of which were not realized and need to be revisited. Within a few years, the committee was disbanded and other than conference-based meetings of donors there have been no international co-ordination work regarding Iraq's cultural heritage for over ten years. See further UNESCO. N.d.a.

⁵ See Article 43 of the Iraqi Constitution, 2005 (Constitute 2020).

of heritage in Iraq whose budgets far exceeded that of SBAH and the Ministry of Culture. Such institutions represent Iraq's post-2003 politics, where power shifted away from the centralised state and into these quasi-state institutions that were oriented towards the interests of aspirant religiously oriented groups who now wielded significant power over Iraq's religious political parties and ruling political elites and some parts of society.

Now that the endowments were defined under the Iraqi Constitution as 'independent Commissions'⁶, they were conducted themselves independently from state control and worked and competed to usurp and control resources, seemingly on behalf of the religious or cultural group they represented and expanded religious and commercial affairs across the country. Over the past few years, the endowments have fought fiercely between each other and with existing state institutions such as SBAH to extract cultural resources and land, for its own benefits. Land and shrines expropriated from MERA and from SBAH added significantly to the religious and commercial portfolio of the endowments. The rapid flow of income made from commercial investments, such as private schools, universities, hospitals and agricultural projects, as well as donations from the general public, have significantly expanded the endowment's reach and presence in society and often led to cases of corruption and internal infighting. The Shia Endowment's Shi'i clerical class – made up of religious families - that lead it have significant sway over Iraq's politics today and yield enormous power and influence in the country.

Ownership of Iraq's religious and cultural sites have been major points of contestation, particularly between the Sunni and Shia Endowments. In many cases, 'Sunni' mosques have been transformed into 'Shi'i' mosques. As mosques and cultural sites have adjoining land – often markets and other commercially viable land - which have risen in exponentially in value since 2003, competition for control has been fierce, especially as control of a site adds commercial value to the respective endowment. As it is not always clear whether a mosque is 'Sunni' or 'Shi'i', whether now or historically, the endowments have used their positions in society and access to partners and allies, to control cultural and commercial property. The position of the endowments is commensurate with the nature of power in the country, meaning that the Shia Endowment's rapidly growing resources and powers in this period was largely due to the support it received from militia groups and Shia political parties in power. A case in point was the demand by the Shia Endowment for control of over 20 mosques after the liberation of Mosul, a claim made on the basis that these sites bore the names of Shia religious historical figures, and therefore should be relinquished from the Sunni Endowment (Hasan 2019). The takeover of these sites by the Shia Endowment has detrimentally affected its image in Mosul and other provinces in the country and led to the sectarianisation of large swaths of Iraq's heritage, which rather than being a force for good, has instead been fiercely contested for by competing interest groups whose goals were anything but the promotion of share heritage and values across society.

The Shia Endowment has major plans for building Shia Islam oriented museums which it sees as an important component of promoting its Shia-centric narratives. With this in mind, and similarly to other interest groups that claim to represent sub-national religious and ethnic communities, the construction of museums and development of shrines, both old and new, as well as other places of worship and religious pilgrimage, is about cementing the respective group's presence in the country. The Shia Endowment is currently building one of Iraq's largest museums – the Imam Hussein Museum – in Karbala. Much of these newly emerging museums and mausoleum and monuments in Iraq promote competing notions of victimisation, ranging from the marketing of Halabja as a part of Kurdish nationalist aspirations, to Yezidi group interest in constructing a museum to the victims of the Islamic State to more religiously inclined museums that accentuate and promote the suffering of a group of people. The ways in which these sites of 'remembrance' have been erected is not oriented towards reconciliation and social cohesion but with a view to exacerbating the notion

⁶ See Article 103 of the Iraqi Constitution 2005 (Constitute 2020), which states that 'The Central Bank of Iraq, the Board of Supreme Audit, the Communication and Media Commission, and the Endowment Commissions are financially and administratively independent institutions, and the work of each of these institutions shall be regulated by law.'

that one group has suffered more than others and are therefore designed as a way for political elites to construct and control singular victimhood narratives. Other museums in the country include the proposed Museum of Kurdistan, whose theme revolves around suffering (McKnight 2016 and Studio Libeskind 2009). In a context of Iraq's divisive and contested statebuilding process, important to view the construction and appropriation of cultural sites as intimately connected to the control of resources by religious and political elites, who trade on the propagation of religious or ethnic based narratives as a way to legitimise their presence and extract resources from the Muhasa'sa dominated state system.

In recent years, the gap between wider society and those seemingly representing confessional groups has also grown, as it has become increasingly apparent in Iraq that the furtherance of sectarian and religious agendas offers little if anything in terms of employment and security to Iraq's youth-based population. Also, the fissures emerging between religious groups over control of Najaf and Karbala for example, and its enormous potential for religious legitimacy and pilgrimage trade and commerce, is an ongoing process as Iraq's politics and power structures continue to be in a state of flux.

Box 4: The Shrine of Prophet Ezekiel – Cultural loss and heritage appropriation

The appropriation and consequent restructuring of the Shrine of Prophet Ezekiel in the province of Babylon – the most important Jewish Shrine in Iraq – was pursued by the Shia Endowment after the site and adjacent commercial holdings, including the nearby Daniel Market, was expropriated from SBAH. Such examples, which abound across Iraq, represent forms of cultural loss and erasure.

Al Kifl in the province of Babil (or Babylon), containing the Shrine of Prophet Ezekiel, is Iraq's most significant Jewish cultural site. It represents the historical continuity of Iraqi Jews, exiled from Judea under Nebuchadnezzar II and brought to Babylonia, and their eventual integration in Ancient Iraq. The Shrine of Prophet Ezekiel, according to Iraqi Jews, dates back to at least 2,500 years, and as a Babylonian site, al Kifl could be much older. On the complex lies an adjoining synagogue, the remains of a post-Abbasid mosque, Ottoman-era guest houses and a historic market. It is also said by some that Imam Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammed, had prayed and organised his military campaigns from the site. Al Kifl is thus multi-cultural and represents the civilisations that emerged from Iraq as well as those cultures that passed through it and made it their home.

Since the expulsion of Iraqi Jews in the 1940-50s, al Kifl was under the protection of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage and saw no major structural changes to the site in the period up to 2003. In the changed context from 2003 the sectarian based distribution of Iraq's national cultural resources, and in light of a claim made by the Shia Endowment, its custodianship was transferred from SBAH to the clergy-run organisation. Once under its control, the Shia Endowment undertook a multi-year transformational plan of al Kifl, which saw it restructure the site, demolish the Ottoman-era guest houses and transform the synagogue. A new expanded mosque was built. The Shia Endowment contracted an Iranian company which undertook conservation interventions on the 800-year minaret on site, non compliant with UNESCO/ICOMOS standards.

By 2015, the site had become fully integrated into the Shia Endowment's network of mosques and religious sites. Its rich history was severely undermined by the physical restructuring but also symbolic transformation of the site. If there had been more vigilant international action and an earlier, more serious international commitment to Iraq's heritage, the appropriation and consequent destruction of al Kifl might not have taken place. Indeed, in 2007 the UNESCO organised International Coordination Committee (ICC) for the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage of Iraq note that SBAH representatives called for al Kifl to be submitted for the Tentative list of World Heritage Sites which went unheeded at the time.

3.3.5. Cultural heritage institutions in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The antiquities sector is managed by the Directorate of Antiquities of Kurdistan, which is part of the Kurdistan Regional Government. Since the early 1990s, antiquities have been managed separately from the rest of the country. The Directorate of Antiquities of Kurdistan is charged with issuing excavation licenses and over the past few years there has been strong interest from foreign expeditions to work in the KRI. It is responsible for supervising international archaeological activity in the region through its sub-regional departments⁷ and manages regional antiquities museums. Its budget is derived from the KRI's budget and therefore has no relationship to the rest of the country. As in other parts of the country, the KRI has hugely benefited from the Muhasa'sa system in Iraq. The KRI receives a share of Iraq's oil wealth based on a quota system which is then distributed internally between ruling elites and political parties.

Antiquities is an integral component of the regional government's ethno-nationalist statebuilding process. Since 2003, antiquities and control of heritage has become an increasingly important part of the KRI's politics. Much of these efforts are inspired by the pursuit of linking Kurdish identity and notions of statehood with a historical presence in the region and, as a result, there is an active and ongoing process of the politization of heritage in the region. The control of archaeology for political purposes features heavily as part of the region's political ambitions and separatist tendencies from the rest of the country. Controversially, the KRI has issued excavation licenses to US, British and European archaeological expeditions to work in 'disputed territories' in Diyala and Nineveh, resulting in violations of existing Iraqi laws and the extraction of artifacts to museums in the KRI without permission from the SBAH. In some cases, archaeological samples have been removed from Iraq for analysis without permission from SBAH.

Archaeology in the KRI is part of a broader politics of seeking and showcasing independence, which similarly to the control of oil, is integral to Kurdish political aspirations (Eichberg 2018). As a result of these processes, heritage, including archaeology, is increasingly being folded into the KRI's vision of seeking independence. Key historical sites, such as Erbil Citadel, are gradually being integrated within the KRI's statebuilding project. These processes of political uses of heritage have, whilst creating a sense of pride and connection for Kurds to Iraqi Kurdistan, have come at the cost of respecting the rich cultural history of the region's multiple cultural groups, who are now viewed as minorities, and are themselves afforded quota shares of 5% in KRI's parliament. US-European archaeologists and heritage experts, including international organisations, have generally been unwilling to speak openly about how history should be presented and interpreted and have therefore considered these issues to be beyond their seemingly technical and professional approaches to heritage and archaeology.

The attempt to win independence from the rest of the country through a referendum was preceded by heightened ethno-nationalism, which aggravated tensions with other cultural groups in the KRI and in the rest of the country. The use of ethno-nationalist symbols, premised on notions of suffering and self-determination, have created a hyper-nationalist politics that dominates the autonomous region which is oriented away from Iraq and notions of cultural diversity and shared histories. Monuments and mausoleums have been erected by political parties to assert the presence of particular groups in KRI society, and in some cases, suffering and notions of victimhood, have been marketised and branded as an integral component of Kurdish identity and aspirations. The proposed Kurdistan Museum is one such example, which is planned to be built on the buffer zone of Erbil Citadel, and is envisaged to represent notions of Kurdish suffering and political aspiration (Studio Libeskind 2009).

The KRI has been a major beneficiary of international aid in the field of heritage. As a result of the damage visited on Babylon under the US Occupation of Iraq, the State Department's Bureau of Educational and

⁷ Sub-regional departments, include the Department of Antiquities of Erbil, the Department of Antiquities of Sulaimaniyah, the Department of Antiquities of Dohuk, the Department of Antiquities of Garmiyan and the Department of Antiquities of Soran.

Cultural Affairs (ECA) Cultural Heritage Centre and the US Embassy in Iraq responded by offering in 2008 a \$12.9 million grant which was designed to support SBAH. The grant established the Iraq Cultural Heritage Project (Bureau of educational and cultural affairs 2015) whose objectives were to offer training in conservation, infrastructural support to the Iraq Museum and assistance to international organisations to work on Babylon's preservation and documentation (WMF N.d.). A component of this grant was offered to open a conservation institute and training centre (Kopanias and MacGinnis 2016). As a result, the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage (IICAH) was established in Erbil in 2010 on the basis that the security situation in Baghdad was not conducive to the security requirements of international trainers and partner institutions. Over the past few years, the institute has largely operated as training centre for archaeologists in KRI and the rest of Iraq and in part managed and run by the Smithsonian. Since its establishment, IICAH has increasingly become separated from the Ministry of Culture and SBAH in Baghdad and there is little if any co-operation (Lione et al. 2017). In addition to offering conservation training, IICAH is used as a platform for international expeditions and programmes in such places as Nineveh. The institute's trainers and teaching team is composed of conservation experts from the US (UR 2017), funders include the U.S. Department of State, the Smithsonian, the University of Delaware, the Prince Claus Fund, the J.M. Kaplan Fund, and the University of Pennsylvania (Smithsonian Global N.d.).

3.3.6. The role of civil society in cultural heritage

Although there is a rich and long history of civil society and cultural development, Iraq's post-dictatorship domestic NGO Sector was established in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1990s and in the rest of the country from 2003. Thousands of domestic organisations claiming to be civil society organisations were established to promote various and often competing interests in society. Iraqi NGOs were established as a way to promote the interests of their members, namely in a post-totalitarian environment where NGOs became a medium for promoting personal and group interests. The exceptional growth of Iraq's NGO Sector from 2003 ran in tandem with huge international funding streams that usually spiked in humanitarian and political crises in the country. Much of European and US funding since 2003 has been directed to the fields of human rights, civil society strengthening, gender issues, security and governance. Heritage and culture have been markedly neglected by international donor agencies. Support to Iraq's cultural infrastructure and to heritage in particular from 2003 to 2014 has been exceptionally weak as those activities were then not officially incorporated within international and peacebuilding models promoted by US and European aid agencies.

The majority of domestic NGOs in Iraq are independent of political party interests, though room for [manoeuvre](#) is circumscribed by ruling political and religious elites. Political party NGOs and those connected to religious groups were widely vilified in society as they represented the sectional interests of new political elites and political party members. Over time, seemingly professional and donor-preferred Iraqi NGO having worked on huge funding stream under the US Occupation seemed to be serving the interests of international organisations and donors and became increasingly disconnected from the social environment from which they seemingly targeted. Thousands of domestic NGOs were established around spikes in international aid money to Iraq, particularly in situations of major security crises.

Civil society can play an active role in the protection and promotion of heritage and is therefore indispensable in strengthening EU-Iraq partnerships and collaborations. They are an essential layer and an underutilized resource to work towards the objectives of heritage for peace in the country, and to date, international programmes have not been able to effectively reach out or work with this significant stratum of Iraqi society. Civil society and community groups who are independent from religious groups and political party interests are more likely to work across fragmented geographies in Iraq and be viewed as credible organisations in society. In Iraq, there are thousands of cultural organisations and non-formal groups – an essential feature of cultural life in Iraq – which are fundamentally oriented around social gathering in the fields of poetry, arts and theatre. These cultural organisations, most of which are non-registered, are an important civil society resource as they promote an Iraqi culture free of sectarianism and are diverse in character. They work mostly

around intangible heritage, and shape national debates about culture and politics. They can play an important part in cultural healing too, working across provinces and by discussing the role of the past and the type of future the people of Iraq aspire to have. With some exceptions, most of these cultural-social NGOs and groups in Iraq work do not work on tangible heritage, though there are some exceptions. Such organisations, based on voluntary contributions, are potentially a significant resource to pressuring government institutions to support heritage protection as well as more broadly shape pertinent national public debates and topics of concern in this field. Other key benefits include promoting local tourism and entrepreneurship in the field of culture.

3.3.7. Iraqi universities and cultural heritage

Academia and universities constitute an important component of a country's heritage landscape. Iraq's academic community, particularly researchers in the fields of archeology and architecture, have historically been key contributors to the country's cultural development. Since 2003, academics have been increasingly frustrated by the lack of programmes to support Iraqi universities to engage in addressing priorities pertaining to culture and cultural heritage.

Iraq's academic communities are an important though underutilized human resource to address the country's degraded cultural infrastructure. They provide a central resource for the strengthening of a Strategic Framework for Action on cultural heritage. In a context of state paralysis and poor resources to rehabilitate Iraq's heritage, universities and academics can offer an important force for the protection and promotion of cultural heritage. Universities in Iraq should, in this sense, be considered to be an important tier of civil society and a potential bulwark, if employed effectively, to counter the unfold detrimental effects of the country's dilapidated cultural landscape. International support to Iraqi academics in the fields of heritage and archeology will continue to reap important benefits as it builds on existing expertise and a keen interest in actively contributing to the country's rebuilding. International programmes of this nature provide an important intervention in an otherwise resource deficient sector. Significantly, developing partnerships between Iraqi and foreign universities can help assist Iraqi academics in the field of cultural heritage.

In actively participating in rehabilitating Iraq's heritage, universities in the country, as well as the Ministry of Higher Education, will need to pursue major reforms and institutional changes. Universities in Iraq continue to be characterised by heavy bureaucracy, comparatively little connections to wider society and poor resources. Other major challenges include markedly poor academic production, both in quality and quantity. Humanities and social sciences departments are under-resourced and whilst there are notable exceptions, there is a marked absence of academic freedom in Iraqi universities to speak about politics and religion. Academics continue to be isolated from the outside world and require continued support to strengthen skills to better document heritage destruction and play a more active role in writing about and analysing heritage destruction. Where academics are active beyond the university setting, this has largely been on the basis of their own volition and, over the past few years, there are an increasing number of Iraqi academics actively participating in civil society activities that provide a space, beyond the academy, to contribute to rebuilding society.

A detrimental outcome of Iraq's political system has been the absence of Ministry to Ministry co-operation. The Ministry of Higher Education, for example, has little if any formal co-ordination and joint project work with the Ministry of Culture. Also, there are little if any formal relationships between universities in the KRI and the rest of the country. Over time, this has weakened Iraq's resolve to address heritage destruction at a national level. The current and ongoing cultural crisis in Iraq glaringly illuminates the detrimental impact Iraq's political system, and Muhasa'sa in particular, has had on Iraq's education and cultural heritage sectors. In recent years, some academics have been increasingly able to tap into international funding streams. New, heritage and education oriented, international programmes have provided Iraqi academics with an opportunity to conduct activity outside the strict university structures that they are part of. International funding provides

Iraqi academics with much needed resources to participate in heritage related activities and work in wider society. New forms of support that promote heritage related activities through universities have been enormously effective as such initiatives seem to address the challenges associated with academics' continued isolation, poor resources and keen interest in reaching out to wider society and to work in the field of cultural heritage.

3.4. Consequences of Iraq's fragmented national heritage structures

The fragmentation and changing political economy of Iraq's state institutions has resulted in a fundamentally transformed heritage landscape. Competing state actors representing different stakeholders, overlapping power structures, poor budgetary support, the absence of institutional reform and the impact of Muhasa'sa are factors undermining national cultural heritage in Iraq. The impact of these structures and corrosive processes has severely circumscribed national state capacity, reach and presence in the country and resulted more generally in major challenges that have not been addressed in any meaningful way.

As a consequence, rather than cultural heritage being a resource for national unity and peacemaking, heritage has instead become a tool for political groups to further division and fracture. Unless heritage is seen as a national priority by the Government of Iraq - with a view to stressing its significance for national cohesion and potential for peacemaking - heritage will continue to be exploited by ethno-nationalist and religious groups in the country for the promotion of sectional interests. Some of the main outcomes of this state disarray in relation to heritage include:

- **Weak institutional capacity**

A combination of factors resulted in paralysis in Iraq's state institutions. As mentioned, Iraqi Ministries and state institutions are distributed on the basis of a quota-apportionment system, which has meant a marked absence of reform over the past few years of making institutions more effective and responsive to the needs of the Iraqi population. In addressing pressing cultural issues in the country, SBAH is a responsive rather than proactive institution. Insufficient budgetary support from the central government has exacerbated generalised institutional lethargy. Significantly, as civil servants are employees for life, there has been little institutional incentive for ensuring optimal performance in the state system, including in heritage related institutions.

The impact of sanctions in the 1990s and subsequent wars and conflicts has gutted Iraq's major cultural institutions. The growth of post-2003 neo-patrimonial networks, which saw the addition of millions of new employees across Iraq's state system has meant there are only a small number of people in any state institution that are effective in performing their duties. In addition, the politisation of state institutions under Muhasa'sa has severely weakened retention and the building of skills within institutions.

- **Competing and unenforced heritage laws**

Since 2003, legal frameworks pertaining to Iraq's institutions and the relationship between them have not properly revised. New institutions with a separate body of law, such as the religious endowments, have been created without much regard for existing, pre-2003 laws. Iraq's main heritage law of 2002 has become increasingly redundant as new political actors, with their own state-sanctioned laws, have increasingly usurped the space that SBAH had previously occupied. Heritage related laws are increasingly divergent between Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Due to changing power structures in the country, the Heritage Law of 2002 has been made ineffective and inoperable and Iraq's Constitution of 2005, which states federal authorities as primary guardians of Iraq's cultural heritage, have not been respected.

- **Absence of cohesive national strategy**

The impact of instability brought about by Iraq's precarious security situation and the repercussions of Muhasa'sa – namely the political trading of key state bodies – has meant that heritage institutions have been unable to devise and implement a long-term strategy for Iraq's heritage. National and regional events, including the National Protest Movement, which became a notable social and political force in October 2019 has added to the sense of insecurity within SBAH, especially around the protection of Iraq Museum collections. As a direct outcome of fragmentation, co-ordination and communication between different heritage related institutions has been circumscribed, especially between Iraq's central state institutions and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

4. Lessons from the EU's current engagement in Iraq's fragmented cultural heritage context

Strategic relevance for the EU of cultural heritage protection in the Middle East

The EU's own stability and the wider region is closely connected to what happens in the Middle East. This includes that the illicit trafficking of cultural goods is considered to fund terrorism and that cultural degradation feeds into strategies of ethnic and religious fragmentation. Such a context can create unstable, conflict-prone conditions that can lead to extremism, migration, and cycles of long-term conflict other words, better considering heritage when working towards stability in the Middle East, based on heritage's role for dignity and respect for human life, is in the EU's interest.

Added value of an EU cultural heritage protection and enhancement strategy in Iraq

An Iraq-focused cohesive, integrated strategy on cultural heritage and conflict can strengthen existing programmes and make them more effective and relevant to local needs and society

The EU currently mostly relies on UNESCO (often employing European experts) in much of its cultural heritage work in Iraq. As a consequence, the EU remains a bit at a distance from local stakeholders, and is therefore also beholden to UNESCO's priorities. This also means that opportunities for the EU to better integrate its support to cultural heritage to its other objectives in Iraq and the wider region, cannot be fully harnessed.

With an explicit cultural heritage protection and promotion strategy, the EU could seize more opportunities in Iraq to develop strong and more sustainable policies and relations with the people and institutions.

Cultural heritage in conflict and political economy analysis

Case studies like the one on Iraq presented in this report, demonstrate that heritage plays a significant role in armed conflicts, and can influence the attainment of other strategic and foreign policy objectives. At the same time, evidence on how exactly heritage interventions contribute to peace or conflict is highly fragmented and often still lacking.

An EU cultural heritage related strategy in Iraq should be premised on an understanding of the political order and political economy of the country's domestic heritage landscape.

Cultural infrastructures: backbones of peace

The EU should work closely with key ministries and state agencies to address their budgetary concerns and priorities, even if this consists of working in parallel with such institutions rather than offering direct-budgetary support.

Because of weak funding, SBAH relies on international funding to support its work, which is largely now in supervising international conservation interventions. Given the scale of cultural destruction in Iraq, SBAH should be allocated sufficient state support and resources to lead the country's heritage rebuilding but has lagged behind in realising its priorities.

The value of fairness and equitable access to cultural heritage

EU and other international cultural heritage protection activities should ensure equitable access to cultural heritage and cultural resources at large to gain credibility from communities and state interlocutors so as to nurture sustainable and trust-based EU-Middle East partnerships and relations.

5. Towards an EU Strategic Framework on Cultural Heritage protection and enhancement in conflict and crisis situations

The EU's international presence and impact could be strengthened by complementing its approach to international cultural relations with a strategic framework on cultural heritage protection and enhancement in conflict and crisis situations.

Building on the case study presented in this report and on existing EU's priorities in the field of international cooperation and external action on cultural heritage, this section outlines possible pillars of an EU strategic framework for action on Cultural Heritage in conflict and crisis situations. This is based on the understanding that heritage and culture writ large play an important role in today's international relations, and that the EU is increasingly investing in this field. The report therefore recommends for the EU to strengthen its strategic orientations in such a way that they ensure better linkages between its financial support in the heritage field and a number of key policies and strategies for its interventions (including mediation) in conflict and crisis situations.

The below proposed Strategic Framework would contribute to guide EU programming for the next budgetary cycle 2021-2027 by placing cultural heritage firmly within international EU external action.

Figure 1: The EU & cultural heritage protection in conflicts and crisis situations



Source: Culture Solutions 2020

5.1. Cultural heritage: a strategic asset in external conflicts and crises

At a time of increasing politicisation of cultural heritage, the following key principles guiding the EU strategic framework on cultural heritage in conflict and crisis situations will set standards for EU and potentially other international cultural heritage actions.

Cultural heritage bears strong symbolic and strategic significance

Cultural heritage is a double-edged sword: it is both a peace opportunity factor and a source of security threats. It is often associated with individual and collective trauma and can trigger seemingly irrational or emotional reactions. Given the highly politicised and symbolic nature of cultural heritage, it should be systematically covered by EU conflict and crisis analyses. Reversely, all external EU cultural heritage protection and enhancement initiatives should be conflict sensitive.

A time connector: heritage connects conflict tensions with past and future peace

As a time connector, cultural heritage is a powerful asset in conflict dialogue, mediation and negotiation processes. When properly addressed as a conflict variable, it can be a source of appeasement, recognition, reconciliation, and transitional justice.

A space for multi-stakeholder negotiations

Protecting and promoting cultural heritage always requires the engagement of a diverse range of stakeholders that have to negotiate their respective involvement. It is often a peacebuilding laboratory.

Securing buy-in from local heritage champions, within relevant state agencies, civil society, including different stratum of society, and communities, is key to building trust and long-term partnerships. Similarly, the development of local networks tied to EU programmes is essential to these endeavors.

People-centred cultural heritage policies

Cultural heritage is both a cultural expression of individuals and communities and an essential part of their everyday life and well-being. As for other cultural policies, participatory approaches and community-based methods are essential elements for successful EU interventions in cultural heritage protection and enhancement.

Cultural heritage as a multidimensional conflict and peace variable

Cultural heritage is connected with almost all EU external policy realms such as development cooperation, counterterrorism, peacebuilding or migration. A strategic approach to cultural heritage could therefore be built on policy connections and cross-department cooperation and the mainstreaming of cultural heritage in EU external action.

Cultural heritage entry points: all along the conflict cycle

Each conflict, at every stage, has several cultural heritage entry points through which peacebuilding interventions can take place.

5.2. Cultural heritage in the EU integrated approach to conflicts and crisis

The EU should incorporate and promote cultural heritage as an integral component of its activities all along the conflict cycle by intervening through cultural heritage entry points.

1. Conflict Prevention and peacebuilding through cultural heritage cooperation:

In peaceful times, successful national cultural heritage policies have the power to address and manage conflictual memories so as to transform them as shared heritage. Investing in EU's partners' national cultural heritage policies contributes to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Cooperation between EU and partner countries' law-enforcement agencies on cultural heritage protection legal frameworks and the implementation of international conventions is a key element of conflict prevention through cultural heritage diplomacy.

Technological and higher education cooperation programmes such as Erasmus and civil society support programmes and research networks have the potential to foster international cultural heritage policy exchanges and collaborations.

2. Dialogue and mediation in crisis: negotiating cultural agreements

Upstream EU conflict analyses that have covered cultural heritage conflict variables provide valuable insights and keys to intervene in crisis situations that are connected with heritage dimensions. EU Member States' experts' in-depth knowledge of cultural heritage-related tensions and history is a strong asset for EU conflict mediation and crisis dialogue.

Strengthened cooperation between EU conflict, security and cultural heritage experts has the potential to bear fruits in peace negotiations and mediation processes.

3. Crisis response and cultural heritage protection

EU coordinated crisis response on cultural heritage, when informed by sound heritage-related conflict analysis and following a clear political objective and do-no-harm principles can bring added value to peace enforcement and peacemaking interventions.

Strengthening national cultural infrastructures is essential to addressing priorities in conflict and war situations, namely immediate emergency preparedness and associated measures, immediate responses during conflict and mid- to longer-term recovery and reconstruction. Interventions should thus focus on heritage fundamentals at all stages and concentrate on urgent and underlying heritage priorities. Underlining strategic outcomes will build trust with partners and reduce the risk of funding projects that do not address core cultural heritage priorities.

4. Civilians access and transmission of intangible heritage

Civilians in conflict, refugees and internally displaced persons all carry with them and survive thanks to parts of their communities' (intangible) heritage, and access to heritage has been demonstrated to be an importance factor in successful return. With a strong record in humanitarian aid, refugee relief and civil society support, the EU can contribute further to the peace potential of cultural heritage as a binding resource between cultural groups and for wider society. By focusing on sustainable and equitable access to cultural resources, (and prevent them from being usurped and exploited by radical political and religious groups), the EU would enrich its peacebuilding and conflict prevention toolbox.

5. Counter terrorism and fight against organised crime and anti-trafficking

Robust EU partners' national cultural heritage policies contribute to counter-terrorism when they provide data and assets to trace, track and prosecute illicit cultural traders, in cooperation with EU and other security forces intervening in conflict zones. EU civil-military cooperation in that field, involving Member States' intelligence, customs, the military, police and justice departments as well as partner international organisations could have significant impact in counter terrorism. EU development cooperation programmes dedicated to security cooperation also have a lot to contribute in this area.

6. Post conflict rehabilitation interventions

The EU has a strong record in post-conflict reconstruction including in the field of cultural heritage. By recognising the significance of cultural heritage reconstruction and enhancement as a peacebuilding factor, the EU will maximise the use of its development cooperation and rehabilitation programmes. It will thereby strengthen its contribution to post-conflict socio-economic transitions by adding to it a cultural heritage component with strong peace and sustainability potential.

6. Key partners

1. Working with bilateral partners

The EU is in the process of including cultural heritage in its bilateral relations with all third countries, including its strategic partners. The specific dimension of cultural heritage protection and enhancement will complement existing EU initiatives on international cultural heritage cooperation (Strategic approach to international cultural relations). It will in particular focus on the accession to and ratification of the main UN conventions and treaties in this policy area.

2. Working with international organisations

The EU has been one of the key partners of UNESCO for heritage-related projects in conflict and crisis situations. It has also cooperated and will continue to cooperate with other UN agencies (including DPKO, UNHCR, UNICEF) and international organisations (Interpol) on the cultural heritage dimensions of conflict.

Cooperation with other regional organisations such as the Council of Europe, the African Union (AU), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Organisation of American States, the Arab League (ALESCO), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Pacific Islands Forum shall also be enhanced.

The EU shall also benefit to develop its cooperation with dedicated international foundations such as ALIPH.

3. Working with local partners

In conflict and crisis situations, interventions and projects unfold within a terrain constituted by changing cultural, social and political contexts. The needs of partner countries should form an integral component of a strategy on cultural heritage. The development of an EU Strategic Framework for Cultural Heritage rests on supporting state institutions, societal actors and communities with a view to building strategic partnerships to address cultural collapse and loss.

The EU will benefit to work with three main types of stakeholders, namely civil society and community-based organisations that are embedded in local society, universities and thirdly, state institutions (including ministries of culture, tourism and other relevant public bodies specialised in cultural heritage). Working with key stakeholders who have been marginalised and deprived of essential resources, especially those that work in pursuit of a civic, inclusive state and society, is central to strengthening the EU's future policy in cultural heritage.

List of interviewees

Name	Organisation
David. C Harvey	Aarhus University
Louise Haxthausen	UNESCO
Gaetano Palumbo	UCL Qatar
Eleanor Robson	Nahrein Network / University College London
Diana Walters	Plymouth University
Mathiew Goodstein	EU
Giovanni Boccardi	Consultant
Matteo Salvatori	EU
Anne Bourlond	EU
Marina Schneider	UNIDROIT
Tijn Van Winsen	EU
Rosalba Tuseo	EU
Sarah Spencer-Bernard	EU
Ghada Hameed	EU
Barbara Egger	EU
Claes Andersson	EU
Leopold Gritschneider	EU
Gilles De Kerchove	EU
Elie Cavigneaux	EU
Briane Lione	Smithsonian
Edouard Planche	UNESCO
Paolo Fontani	UNESCO
Brendan Cassar	UNESCO
Mathieu Goodstean	EU
Angela Atzori	EU
Sam Hardy	Researcher
Valery Freland	ALIPH
Zaki Aslan	ICCROM
Rashad Salim	Safina Projects
Ramon Blecua	EU
Bijan Rouhani	EAMENA / Oxford University
Sonia Pistidda	Politechnico Milano

The names of Iraqi interviewees, including from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, have been purposely omitted from the list above.

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