Intentional Cultural Destruction in Armed Conflicts

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the
University Honors Program
University of South Florida, St. Petersburg

May 1, 2018

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University Honors Program
University of South Florida
St. Petersburg, Florida

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Honors Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The intentional destruction of cultural sites during warfare provokes the question of why would armed actors invest significant resources into carrying out this activity, and what impact does it have in an armed conflict? This thesis identifies four main motivation types of intentional cultural destruction and how they may contribute to intensifying a conflict. It hypothesizes that as intentional cultural destruction events increase in an armed conflict, so does the occurrence of battles, intensifying conflict. To test its hypothesis, it utilizes the case studies of Syria and Yemen, conducting a STATA regression test for both. The Syrian case study resulted in a null hypothesis; However, a significant negative correlation between the occurrence of intentional cultural destruction events and battles arose for the Yemeni case study. This suggests that as battles decreased, intentional cultural destruction events increased, in the Yemeni case. While significant, many more case studies would need to be conducted, and possibly with alternative variables, to fully investigate intentional cultural destruction in armed conflict further.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my late grandfather, Stanojlo Knežević, who had said, "It is easy to destroy, but it is much harder to build,", worked on many building and construction projects in his life, and survived World War II and the civil war in Bosnia. His work ethic, strength, and wisdom have always been inspirations to me, as well as his endearing smile and sense of humor.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Dr. Smith and Dr. Mantilla for their invaluable guidance and support during this Honors Thesis project. They have helped immensely, providing crucial insights and feedback, as well as always being a joy to talk to and brainstorm with. Many thanks to the Smithsonian Institution's SCRI, the Conflict Culture Research Network, and the U.S. Department of State for the opportunity to partake in the Virtual Student Federal Service internship program, which inspired this thesis project. Great thanks to the Antiquities Coalition as well for providing accessible data crucially needed for the project. Special thanks to my younger brother Zoran for his encouragement and support too.

INTRODUCTION

The destruction of cultural property during conflicts is not a new phenomenon. As Brosche et al notes, "cultural property has been attacked in wars of conquest and colonization, during interstate and civil conflicts, by governments, rebels or rioters around the world" (2016, 248). There are many different terms for cultural heritage destruction including cultural property destruction, destruction of antiquities, and others. Slight distinctions between these terms are that "cultural heritage" refers to both the tangible and intangible elements of cultural heritage; "Tangible" being cultural properties (places of worship, monuments, libraries, museums, and others); "Intangible" being cultural practices, skills, knowledge, and even artifacts and objects. "Antiquities" refers to cultural heritage from the ancient past, Roman ruins in Syria, for example. Meanwhile, the term "cultural heritage" in general encompasses properties and intangible aspects from both ancient and modern times. Sites can also be damaged or destroyed accidentally, "as a result of indiscriminate attacks" during armed conflict (248). Therefore, there exists a clear distinction between intentional and accidental/indiscriminate damage (also known as collateral damage). The indiscriminate damage is entirely expected, given the violent context; however, the deliberate and intentional targeting has posed more questions and concerns.

One of the most significant questions has been: Why would groups use their finite resources towards destroying sites (248)? Is it a strategically rational practice? In some cases, they target people at the site, but in others, they target the structure itself to purposely damage it (248). Sometimes, groups expend resources to protect sites as well, such as bringing in foreign Shia militia fighters from Iran to protect the tomb of Zaynab (Muhammad's granddaughter) in Syria, for example. For this reason, this thesis considers only cases of intentional cultural

targeting and destruction, of which there is a significant quantity, as opposed to destruction resulting from indiscriminate attacks. It is clear that intentional cultural destruction is a recurrent practice in many conflicts, and that groups invest significant resources into targeting and destroying sites. This leads to several key questions: what impact does intentional cultural destruction have in conflict? What strategic objectives does conducting intentional cultural destruction fulfill for the groups that carry out this activity? Is it mostly symbolic, a display of power and hatred for the other group? Or does it fulfill strategic objectives or affect the duration of the conflict? Does it fuel further conflict? Knowing the motivations, and the extent of the impact of this phenomenon, can help determine whether it has been an overlooked factor in conflict or not, especially as policy concerns surface. That leads to the overarching question of this thesis: To what extent does intentional cultural destruction intensify conflict?

CHAPTER 1 - MOTIVATIONS

There can be a range of motivations for intentional cultural destruction: performative, retaliatory, genocidal/ethnocidal, and others. Brosche et al (2016) developed a typology of four main types of motives: meeting conflict goals (which also includes any goals of genocide/ethnocide), military-strategic, signaling strength (performative, like ISIS often has done), and economic motives (251). Brodie's (2015) description of motivations also mostly agrees with this model set forth by Brosche, by stating "archaeological sites, museums, historical monuments, and religious buildings were being damaged intentionally and unintentionally by military action, ideologically-motivated attacks, commercially-inspired theft and looting, and unauthorized construction works" (3). The existence of such motivations supports a hypothesis that intentional cultural destruction does or can intensify conflict. This is due to intentional cultural destruction providing significant "fuel to the fire"; this may occur in multiple ways, depending on the motive. The targeting and destruction of a cultural site can serve to advance conflict goals and strategy, attract recruits, provoke retaliatory attacks and deepen hatred, bring more foreign militias in to protect sites, and contribute to looting and the illegal antiquities black market (leading to more funding for groups to buy weapons and supplies). These motivations and their possible effects are demonstrated in the table below (See Figure 1) to support the hypothesis that intentional cultural destruction can intensify armed conflict overall.

Types of Motives:	Conflict Goal / Ideological	Military-Strategic	Performative	Economic (Theft and Looting)
Possible Effects:	-Provoking retaliatory attacks -Genocide and civilian targeting at sites -Ethnocidal: Harming ethnic relations, Identity, Collective memory, preventing return to land	-Takeover of a territory, and its resources. -Tactical advantages -Using a "taken-over" site as a tactical location for snipers, bases, weapon caches	-Intimidation and humiliation of opponents, potentially infuriating and provoking them. -Recruitment, advertisement, "look at us!"	- "war spoils" - Exchanging artefacts and loot for weapons and supplies - Fueling the illegal war-economy/black markets, who benefit from war.

Figure 1: Motivation Types and Effects Chart; Based on the motivation typologies and descriptions from Brosche et al (2016) and Brodie (2015).

Motives with Immediate Impact: Conflict Goal/Ideological & Military-Strategic

For an example of a type of conflict goal motivation, an interesting concept of "territorialization" has been argued to explain how nationalism and intentional cultural destruction interact in genocidal/ethnocidal motives. van der Auwera (2012) explains how in the process of territorialization and the creation of ethnoscapes, "the community gets 'naturalized' and becomes a part of the environment, the landscape gets historicized and bears the features of the historical development of a community" (56). Therefore, since the landscape can only be allowed to reflect the historical development of one community when "territorialized" as a part of nationalism, "the erasing of symbols that mirror other communities" takes place, such as

through the destruction of cultural property that represents those other communities symbolically (56). In this way, destruction of cultural property can become a necessary step within the motive of committing genocide or ethnocide, such as when performing ethnic cleansing, as it strives to homogenize the territory. Militias reconfigure the ethnoscape by erasing the symbols of the previous ethnic community that lived there, as part of controlling and claiming the territory.

Intentional cultural destruction may also fall within the category of urbicide. Cultural sites are not the only structures vulnerable to cultural targeting, but also homes, various buildings, and infrastructure that are associated with a particular ethnic group (Graham 2003). This activity is not limited to insurgent or rebel groups, but can also be perpetrated by governments. For example, in 2002, "the Israeli Defense Force bulldozed a 40,000 square-metre area in the center of the Jenin refugee camp in the Northern West Bank", injuring and killing many in the process, and leaving 4,000 homeless (2003). Destruction by bulldozer has been a common method of executing intentional cultural destruction and urbicide (See Figure 2). Graham (2003) remarks that the bulldozer itself has been used as "an instrument of ethnic punishment and a means of territorial reconfiguration".

Figure 2: An example of a bulldozer attack; Bulldozing of the Maqam al-Nebi Daoud (Sanctuary/Tomb) in Dowaibeq, Syria by ISIL.

Photo Credit: Asor Cultural Heritage Initiatives Weekly Report 4 (September 2, 2014).

The IDF also destroyed "140 multi-family housing blocks", as well as destroying infrastructure, hospitals, and other facilities (2003). They then proceeded to claim that they did so in order "to dismantle the 'terrorist infrastructure" behind Palestinian suicide attacks" (2003). The evidence more so suggests that they used the global 'war on terror' as a pretense "to destroy the urban foundations of a proto-Palestinian State", depriving their "enemies"/combatants and their families of the social infrastructure necessary to sustain themselves (2003). In this case, the targeting and destruction become a part of a larger military strategy, and motivated by conflict goals and ideology. It bears similarities to van der Auwera's (2012) "territorialization" concept, in that "the demolition of the houses and cities is linked to a broader transformation of the landscape" (Graham 2003), rendering the landscape inhospitable and inaccessible to its settlers.

Furthermore, the IDF attack can also be characterized as military-strategic as it was destroying blocks of buildings that could pose an impediment in their next war. Military-strategic motives include targeting and destroying cultural sites in order to gain a tactical advantage. Achieving tactical advantages such as these through means of intentional cultural destruction may prolong conflict in that "strategic decisions shape the ability of actors to continue fighting as well as their probability of success" (Brosche et al, 2016, 6). For example, a captured and damaged site could serve as a weapons cache (6). A rebel group may purposefully choose to use a captured enemy site as a weapon cache or secret base because it is more discreet, "the government would be less willing and able to attack there" due to it being a cultural site (6). A prominent example is the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab, India, in 1984. Sikh militants had damaged it and then occupied it, fortifying it and turning it into a base (6). This led to a siege and attack from the Indian military, leading to many deaths (6). This is a clear case in which

intentional cultural destruction can instigate an attack or conflict through military-strategic motives, supporting the hypothesis that intentional cultural destruction prolongs conflicts by instigating and providing additional fuel to battles.

Motives with Delayed Impact: Performative & Economic

Recently, ISIS/ISIL has been particularly noteworthy for enacting cultural destruction in Iraq and Syria in multiple ways. This includes "smashing artifacts in archaeological museums, iconoclastic breaking and bulldozing of archaeological sites, dynamiting of shrines, tombs, and other holy sites of local communities, and burning of libraries and archives" (Harmanşah 2015, 1). ISIS has even posted videos of these acts on YouTube, deliberately displaying how they are destroying these sites and artifacts (2). Their case is considered a performative-motivated act of cultural destruction in this context, with an aim to "allure their sympathizers and patrons, recruit further fanatics, humiliate local communities while annihilating their sense of heritage, and offend the humanitarian West" (6). As Al-Quntar (2017) clarifies, "radical Islamists adopt the view that ancient artifacts are particularly associated with an art-worshiping West, [that] since Crusader times— [has been] trying to denigrate, divide, and humiliate Muslims" (23). Therefore, the iconoclasm of ancient objects also serves as a symbolic protest to the West as they see art and tourism as a part of "Western decadence". Overall, the amount of resources they invest in the targeting of cultural heritage sites and artefacts signifies its importance to achieving their aims of recruitment, mobilization, control of communities, and defiance towards the west; all crucial elements of sustaining themselves and towards the completion of their broader goals.

Furthermore, an added economic motive is the looting of cultural property. There has been major concern about the extent to which this contributes to the financing of actors and prolonging conflict (as it does not benefit participants in lucrative, illicit war economies for the war to stop). van der Auwera (2012) clarifies that "there is increasing evidence that the looting of cultural property is being used to help fund insurgencies, although Interpol is hesitant to confirm this link publicly" (59). Looting is also not a new phenomenon. For example, "the Nazis stole and/or sold cultural property and treasure for personal gain and to finance the war effort" (White & Lovati, 207). In fact, they even "destroyed cultural monuments and melted them to produce bullets and artillery pieces" (207). The problem is that the conditions of war - chaos, loss of law and order - enable the perfect conditions for criminals to conduct their activities undisturbed, such as to conduct illicit excavations, in the case of looters of ancient sites. These looted artefacts are then not only exchanged for cash, but for weapons too.

The current cultural property protection policy in Syria is based on two conventions: "the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (including its First and Second Protocols), and the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property" (Brodie, 2015, 317). The Hague Convention actually stems from the 1863 Union Army's Lieber Code from the American Civil War, which also included a portion written to protect cultural property during the civil war (White & Livoti, 2013, 197). The Hague Convention was formed in response to cultural destruction and looting during World War II, in which the Nazi's did systematically loot and destroy synagogues, and other Jewish monuments, buildings, and cemeteries (198). According to White & Livoti, international law has not been

enough to protect cultural property, leading to different cultural and international organization taking the lead instead (200).

In 2014, UNESCO implemented an action plan called "the Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Heritage Project (ESSHP), supported for three years by $2.46 million of European Union (EU) funding" (Brodie, 2015, 319). This plan includes: 1) monitoring and assessment of damage, 2) raising national and international awareness, and 3) capacity building through training of police and heritage professionals in Syria, and the establishment of an International Observatory of Syrian Cultural Heritage (319). Then, in 2015, "the United Nation Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2199 placed limited trade controls on Syrian cultural objects with a view to securing their safe return to Syria" (Brodie 2015, 319). Brodie argues that these were concrete attempts to protect the sites and recover the looted artefacts; however, questions how effective they are or have been (319).

One proposal for preventing looting has been addressing the market for looted goods, as "if the market drives the incentive to loot, then a better understanding of the relative demand for specific artifact types can help develop better protection strategies" (Brodie, 2015, 461). Since looted artefacts rarely appear on public auctions, the main market is other dealers and art collectors (Lobay 463). Art dealers involved in smuggling of artefacts have been highly motivated by profit to participate in the activity, seeing it as an easy way to make a fortune; such as British dealer Jonathan Tokeley-Parry, "who was caught for being involved in a smuggling network of Egyptian artifacts for years, … generat[ing] an estimated three billion British pounds each year from these illegal activities" (Al-Quntar, 2017, 21). While many museums state that "their official policy is to only purchase artifacts with proper provenance, many stolen artifacts

with dubious provenience have ended up on display in museums" (Al-Quntar, 2017, 22). Some have argued that a policy that includes a market reduction approach that decreases demand, may be the best way to decrease looting and protect cultural sites (Brodie, 2015, 317).

A smuggler from Syria, interviewed in Time magazine by Baker and Anjar (2012) stated "War is good for us. We buy antiquities cheap, and then sell weapons expensively." The smuggler smuggles weapons from Lebanon's black market and then sells them to rebel groups in exchange for antiquities, which he then smuggles and exchanges for weapons in Lebanon as well. He stated that the Free Syrian Army units are "developing an association of diggers dedicated to finding antiquities in order to fund the revolution" (2012), who will exchange antiquities for weapons from him. This demonstrates how the destruction and looting of sites can contribute to prolonging conflict as it provides a steady flow of finances and weapons to groups. In addition, damaged and looted sites injure the important economic industry of tourism in Syria (which accounted for 12% of its national income previously), hurting Syria's post-conflict recovery as well (2012).

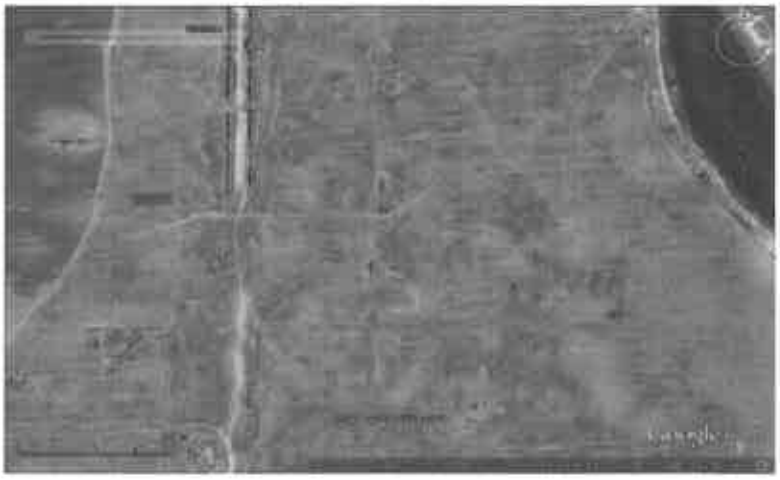
The process of looting itself is heavily reliant on social networks, as "a common route is for a looter to sell an artifact to a local middleman who, in turn, sells it to other middlemen and dealers who have international links" (Lobay, 2016, 459). This can be observed in the aforementioned smuggler's description of how he trades through contacts in Lebanon's black market and the Free Syrian Army. The artifact then continues moving through multiple hands indefinitely, often increasing in price as it does so, until it ends up in a private collection, the international antiquities market, and even sometimes, into a museum (Lobay, 2016, 459). Proulx (2011) describes the illicit antiquities trade as one of the largest illicit trades in the world,

consisting of "local small-scale thieves, larger groups of looters, and international connections with auction houses, galleries, museums, dealers, and collectors" (4).

Additionally, the illegal antiquities trade can also be placed into the broader context of commodities trafficking overall. Indeed, almost any valuable resource can be trafficked (Shelley & Metz, 2017, ix) and put towards funding insurgencies and war. A prominent example is the illegal "blood diamonds" trafficking that has funded many insurgencies and war activities throughout multiple countries in Africa. The illegal antiquities trade happens to be the prime one in the case of Syria and wars in much of the Middle East region in general, most likely due to the abundance of archaeological sites with valuable artefacts from ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia and Rome. As Shelley & Metz (2017) stated "in some cases, money obtained through trafficking is used to finance the activities of guerrilla armies, revolutionary forces, or autocratic governments" (3); supporting the hypothesis.

When finding sites to loot, the looters first probe the earth of an area they suspect to be an archaeological site, probing with "long metal rods, which are up to four meters in length and have a small handle welded to one end" (460). They do this in order to find "subterranean voids or the blockages that sometimes indicate the presence of archaeological sites" (460). When they succeed in finding a site, they then mark it with "rock piles or plastic sheeting" (460), and then, they return at night with shovels and pick-axes to dig more and retrieve artifacts (460). Looter pits can be highly numerous. For example, the Umma site in southern Iraq had 8,318 looters pits dug between 2003 and June 2005 (Brodie, 2015, 320). Once found, the artifacts are then concealed in different ways in order to cross borders (Lombay, 460). Veres (2014) reports that "only five to ten percent of the stolen objects are ever recovered, with an average recovery rate

of thirteen years" (94). The holes created from probing and digging are often highly visible in the satellite imagery of sites. For example, it can be seen when comparing the "before and after" satellite imagery photos of the Ancient Roman site, the Apamea (also called "Afamiya") Ruins in Syria (see Figure 3 below).



Apamea Ruins, Syria - July 2011

Apamea Ruins, Syria - April 2012

Figure 3: Looting - "Before" and "After" comparison of the Apamea Ruins in Syria

Photo credit: The Penn Museum. 2014. AAAS Satellite Image Analysis.

In Syria, looting had already been a well-established problem prior to war. Brodie (2015) states "it was well known that Syrian archaeological sites were being looted in the 1990s and 2000s and that Syrian cultural objects were being illegally traded". Therefore, looting networks have had a long time to develop in Syria, and they exploit the war situation to continue to profit even more. For example, "the Syrian director of museums Hiba al-Sakhel was quoted as saying in 2012 that the looting of archaeological sites had been ongoing for many years, but had accelerated as sites had been left unprotected during the fighting" (Brodie, 2015, 321). During the 1990s', "international sanctions on oil and gas exports led Saddam Hussein's regime to expand smuggling networks across the borders with Turkey, Syria, and Jordan", leading the Islamic State to "seize the old smuggling routes when it rampaged across Iraq and Syria in 2014, making $1 million or more per day from the war economy" (Mansour & al-Hashimi, 2018). Evidence has also demonstrated the involvement of influential politicians and parties from Iraq and neighboring countries in this illegal smuggling, demonstrating the role of corruption in fueling the black market as well (2018). In fact, a member of the Iraqi parliament who belongs to an anti-corruption committee said "everybody is corrupt," including himself, and that the elite profit from the black market (2018); leading to little hopes of the problem being addressed internally, requiring international intervention.

Lastly, when an artifact is looted instead of properly excavated, it is removed from its original context and this context (location in which it was found, room in which it was found, position in relation to other objects, information about who the ancient owner could be, information about function, etc.) is lost forever, harming the ability to accurately interpret the object even once it is recovered. In areas so vastly looted such as Syria and Iraq, this may limit

our understanding of ancient Mesopotamia, ancient Rome in the Middle East, the role of other civilizations in the other area and encounters between them, and ultimately our understanding of the ancient and historical development of Syria and Iraq themselves – damaging potentially crucial insights irreversibly.

Undoubtedly, it also does a disservice to all of the different peoples who make up present-day Syria and Iraq, as a large portion of them may be the descendants of those civilizations, and the inheritors of the land where all of those lost treasures were produced. The situation has been so bad that "in Europe, dealers [have been] circulating photographs of relief fragments from palaces at Ninevah and Nimrud. Cuneiform tablets, cylinder seals… [being] sold openly" (Brodie, 2003, 16). It is not limited to ancient objects and art objects either, but also treasured books and manuscripts have been sold and destroyed, the likes of which have never been translated, placed into a digital archive, or mass-produced; the knowledge contained in them lost forever.

Research and Databases

As Brosche et al reveal, "most existing research has focused on documenting the circumstances and extent of destruction in specific cases rather than the motivations behind such behavior" (2016, 248), leading to a paucity of literature on the subject. However, various studies have indicated that targeted attacks on cultural heritage sites are particularly prevalent during "campaigns of ethnic cleansing, identity-bound wars and iconoclastic actions" (248). Nevertheless, no common conceptual framework about motivations has been developed, making it difficult to do cross-case comparisons and advance research in this field (248). More research

on the motivations of targeted cultural destruction would help in "design[ing] policies to prevent such attacks or predict where the risk is greatest or why" (2).

There also exist formidable challenges in developing a database of the cultural destruction of sites. For example, wartime conditions in the country make it virtually impossible to conduct fieldwork and quite difficult to gain access to information about the sites (Isakhan, 2015, 3). While there have been studies on "libricide" (destruction of libraries) and "urbicide" (destruction of built environments), these have been comparative case studies "without being systematically recorded or empirically measured in a database" (3). For a long time, the field of heritage studies lacked a methodology for documenting heritage destruction. It was not until 2013 that researchers developed the first database methodology to catalogue incidents of cultural destruction in Iraq, the Iraq Cultural Property Destruction (ICPD) database (1). With that also came the development of a Heritage Destruction Index, a method to calculate "the heritage 'significance' of a site and the overall level of destruction" (1). The development of these methodologies has powerful implications for not only tracking destruction in Iraq, but also those in many other complex conflicts across the world. In the case of Iraq, looting, arson, and other forms of destruction have been highly prevalent since the beginning of the occupation, directed towards state institutions, ancient sites, and Ottoman-era mosques alike (1).

Although there has been a lack of databases of targeted cultural sites, there have been databases of specifically looted artifacts to aid their retrieval. For example, "in 2003, the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago compiled the 'Iraq Museum Database' (IMD), a comprehensive database of archaeological artefacts and other historic objects" that were in Iraq's museums (2). Interpol and other organizations have also created databases of stolen artefacts and

historical objects from Iraq (2). Therefore, as Isakhan highlights, "while the overwhelming emphasis in the literature has been on the looting of relics, manuscripts and artworks, little attention has been paid and no effort has been made to catalogue the countless heritage buildings of Iraq that have been damaged or destroyed since 2003" (3). The Iraq Cultural Property Destruction (ICPD) database from 2013 is the first attempt since the 1990s' at building a cultural heritage database again, incorporating a destruction index as well.

In response to the cultural destruction during the Balkan war in the 1990s', Andras Riedlmayer made a database of the cultural destruction of sites in the Balkans during that time (3). However, Riedlmayer's database had several limitations in its methodology. For example, it only displayed the number of certain building types destroyed, rather than any calculations and details about site significance and similar things (4). These are important because there is great difference between a site that is revered globally versus one only known locally, or between a site with a few bullet holes versus one that is completely destroyed (9). Therefore, the ICPD database builds upon and expands Riedlmayer's original methods and Bosnia database from the 1990s', while the Smithsonian's Syrian Cultural Heritage Inventory builds upon Isakhan's 2013 ICPD database.

CHAPTER 2 – CASE STUDIES

Methodology

Neil Brodie (2003) has said that "warfare fuels the global trade in looted antiquities", but can the exact opposite be true too? To test the hypothesis that intentional cultural destruction intensifies armed conflict, or contributes significantly to it; a time-series regression test is conducted via the statistical program STATA to test whether there is a relationship between the number of intentional cultural destruction events and the number of battles in a specific armed conflict. A cumulative ICD_lag variable is also included to differentiate between the types of motives; with ICD_lag representing motives whose effects take longer to manifest. For example, the increase in supplies and arms from the economic benefits of looting would not be predicted to affect the state of the conflict immediately, but rather, it would be predicted to impact the conflict a few months down the line. The same goes for the increase in recruitment and intimidation from the performative motive, it is not expected to impact the conflict immediately either. In contrast, the conflict goal/ideologically motivated attacks may provoke a retaliatory attack or response rather quickly, within a few days or weeks. The military-strategic motivated attacks are also predicted to impact the conflict quickly, in that they may be conducted in preparation for a battle or as a part of a battle; or may contribute to the overall battle-readiness of the group at any point, making them more likely to launch an offensive.

Therefore, the ICD_lag variable represents ICD events with motivations whose consequences manifest at a farther point in the conflict, while the ICD variable represents ICD events with motivations whose consequences can be inferred to occur sooner. The number of ICD events and the number of battles are collected by each month of the armed conflict. This is

done for multiple case studies to see if the relationship is consistent across multiple conflicts and to what extent it can be generalized. In choosing a variable to accurately represent "intensification of armed conflict," number of battles was selected as the appropriate unit in that a state can be considered to be in an armed conflict so long as there are battles of any scale occurring. Therefore, the hypothesis is essentially that as intentional cultural destruction events increase, the occurrence of battles will increase as well; and therefore, that intentional cultural destruction intensifies conflict by providing impetus and resources for new battles to begin, and for existing battles to last longer. A STATA regression graph is conducted for each of the armed conflict cases separately, and the results of each case are compared to see if the phenomenon of intentional cultural destruction behaves consistently in multiple cases or not.

Case Study: Syria

The Syrian conflict has been ongoing for seven years thus far, since it first erupted in March 2011. There has been much killing and destruction, including the disturbing usage of chemical attacks; the conflict leaving over 465,000 people killed, more than a million injured, and over 12 million refugees and displaced persons so far (Al-Jazeera 2018). The conflict has been protracted, spilling over into multiple states, and complicated by the number of actors (both international and domestic) involved. It started when the successful uprisings of the Arab Spring inspired Syrian activists to peacefully protest for democracy as well. Bashar Al-Assad and his government responded by killing and imprisoning an innumerable amount of protestors. Subsequently, in the summer of 2011, the Free Syrian Army organized itself to overthrow the government. The conflict itself is not inherently sectarian, but developed sectarian conflicts as

the government's security forces consist mostly of members of the minority Alawi sect, even though the majority of the Syrian population are Sunni Muslim (Al-Jazeera 2018).

Laub (2017) has characterized the multiple actors of the Syrian conflict into four main groups: Pro-Government Forces, Opposition Forces, Islamic State, and the Kurdish People's Protection Units. The Syrian government's *mukhabarat* (armed forces and security services) consist of mostly Alawis, but also a fair number of Sunni Muslims due to mandatory conscription and recruitment (Laub, 2017). Due to a high number of casualties, they have had to rely on foreign militia and outside forces (Russian air-power, for example) more and more (2017). In fact, their air force can be considered the most lethal part of their military, as they have heavily relied on committing air strikes with crude barrel bombs, in addition to chemical weapons attacks (2017). They have attacked not only rebel groups, but also civilian institutions and centers such as hospitals, violating international humanitarian law (2017). Most of the battles between the Pro-Assad forces and rebel groups have been along the western side of the country where the main cities are, that have the highest population numbers and are the most important economically; as can be seen in Figure 4. The Assad government is also supported by Shia Hezbollah groups, that receive arms from Iran through Syria, and would not be benefitted by a Sunni-led Syria. Other Shia militia have been mainly coming from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq, who originally came to protect Shia cultural sites, but have stayed and contributed to the pro-Assad and Hezbollah forces (2017).

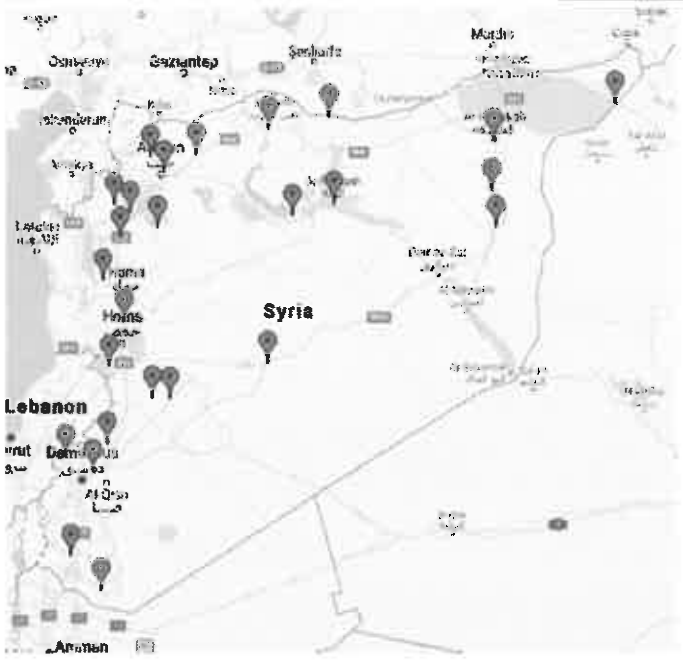


Figure 4: Map of Battles in the Syrian Civil War. The markers represent locations, so they can represent multiple battles in one place.

Photo credit: Google maps

The Syrian opposition groups have mostly consisted of different Sunni-majority factions. The primary one is the Free Syrian Army, which aims towards a democracy; However, there are a variety of Syrian opposition groups, including ones with extremist ideologies, such as Jihadi groups. The main difference between the Jihadi groups and the Islamic State is that the Jihadis do not have transnational aims, but are simply nationalistic. There is the Jabhat al-Nusra Front (now known as Jabhat Fatah al-Sham), which originally broke off from Al-Qaeda, but claims to have no transnational aims now and mostly consists of Syrians (2017). Furthermore, the Free Syrian Army can also be said to have broken off into different factions, with some operating as criminal groups, participating in smuggling and trafficking of various kinds (2017), including that of antiquities. As Freedom House (2017) reports, "some rebel commanders, including from

brigades nominally aligned with democratic powers and their allies, have been accused of looting, extortion, and theft". However, this activity has also been equally observed among "militias that are nominally loyal to the regime but largely autonomous and free to exploit the population in regime-held areas" through "looting, extortion, and the erection of arbitrary checkpoints" (Freedom House 2017).

An additional factor is the Islamic State, which has the transnational aim of making a caliphate state from Iraq and Syria. The Islamic State operates mostly in the desert areas of the country, and recruits globally. The Islamic State has also fought against the other opposition groups, including the al-Sham (al-Nusra) Front, and the Kurdish YPG. Lastly, the Kurdish YPG (and the associated party PYD – the Democratic Union Party) seeks to autonomously govern the northern part of Syria called Rojava. It claims to want to do so within a decentralized Syria, but Turkey suspects it of having separatist aims (2017). The United States has supported the YPG with air power to fight the Islamic State, while Turkey has objected to that (2017). Overall, the complexity of the Syrian conflict is marked by the complexity of armed actors and ethnic groups involved.

As Al-Quntar (2017) has said, "the Middle East has been a place where civilizations met, mingled and developed, more than they clashed" (25). Indeed, the present-day diversity of Syria's religious and ethnic groups can be a testament of that. These groups include: Syrian Sunni Muslims, Syrian Shia Muslims, Alawites, Druze, Turkmen, Sufi, Kurds, Circassians, Syrian Romani's, Syrian Christians, Afro-Syrians, Syrian Bedouins, Syrian Maronites, Palestinians, Jews, Armenians, and more (Smithsonian 2017). According to Al Quntar (2017), historical narratives of national identity in the Middle East often change or fluctuate in response

to regime changes (22). Some regimes emphasize a Pan-Islamic or Pan-Arab heritage, while at other times, the same regimes may switch to emphasis the glories of the Pre-Islamic civilizations, and so forth – holding contesting narratives and visions of what it means to be Syrian, or Arab, or Muslim (22). The rule of the Ottoman Empire and colonization undoubtedly contributed to these dilemmas and contestations of identity. The Ottoman Empire ruled Syria for 400 years until 1918, when troops led by Emir Feisel successfully captured Damascus (BBC, 2018). Emir Feisel then becomes King of Syria in 1920; however, a few months later, Syria and Lebanon are placed under French mandate by the San Remo Conference where the WWI Allied Powers decided how they would partition the territory of the Ottoman Empire after its dissolution (2018).

Sequentially, several uprisings happen during the first decade of the French rule as Syrians wanted independence (2018). In 1936 and 1941, France agrees and promises Syria independence. Finally, in 1943, Shukri al-Kuwatli becomes the first president of Syria, with Syria reaching full independence in 1946. After the formation of the Arab Socialist Baath Party in 1947, there are several coup attempts throughout 1949 to 1954. In 1955, al-Kuwatli returns to power and there are closer ties with Egypt, culminating in the short-lived United Arab Republic formed between Syria and Egypt in 1958. The republic is brought to an end in 1961 as a group of Syrian army officers reclaim Damascus. After the six-day war in 1967, Hafez al-Assad overthrows the president Nur al-Din al-Atasi in 1970, becoming president himself (2018).

Hafez al-Assad was oppressive, but also brought stability to Syria. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood started forming in Syria and holding riots. In 1982, when a Muslim Brotherhood uprising breaks out in Hama, Hafez al-Assad and his army

responded by killing "tens of thousands of civilians" (2018) – which some have compared with Bashar al-Assad's reaction to protestors in March 2011. After Hafez al-Assad's son Basil al-Assad is killed in a car accident in 1994 (Basil al-Assad being the planned successor), Bashar al-Assad takes the position in 2000, upon their father Hafez al-Assad's death. Throughout the 2000s', Bashar al-Assad does arrest pro-reform activists, demonstrating the continuation of authoritarianism in the country. This authoritarianism then led to the protests and war that break out in 2011.

The most well-known and prominent attack on cultural heritage during the Syrian war is the capture and attack of Palmyra by the Islamic State in May 2015. Before, the war, the ancient Palmyra site was known as "the pearl of the desert" and used to attract 150,000 tourists annually (Time, 2015). Now ISIS has destroyed many of its incredible and valuable monuments, such as the shrine of Baal Shamin and the Temple of Bel (see Figure 5), both of which are around 2,000 years old (2015). They also destroyed the Arch of Triumph monument at Palmyra, which "was constructed during the reign of Emperor

Figure 5: A "Before" and "After" of the Temple of Bel of Palmyra in Syria.
Photo credit: REUTERS/Sandra Auger; REUTERS/Omar Sanadiki

Septimius Severus, who ruled from 193 to 211" (newpalmyra.org). The New Palmyra project has been an open-source project to recreate Palmyra in 3D digital form, a means of preserving the site and creating digital models and data; that can then be used for academic and creative projects including addressing cultural site preservation policies, and creating art exhibits at museums, and more. However, in 2017, the Syrian regime killed the founder of the project, Bassel Khartabil.

Being featured in *Foreign Policy* magazine's 2012 list of Top Global Thinkers for his innovative projects, Bassel Khartabil was a Syrian-Palestinian open-source software developer who worked passionately on digital freedom and access to information (newpalmyra.org). In fact, he was "the project lead for Creative Commons in Syria" and considered "instrumental in negotiating the terms of CC licensing throughout the Arab world" (newpalmyra.org). He was first arrested by the Syrian government in March 2012 and stayed in jail for years as a political prisoner until execution (newpalmyra.org). His execution has been condemned by Creative Commons, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and many other organizations (newpalmyra.org). However, the New Palmyra project continues, in his memory. Therefore, in the Syrian conflict, the citizens and people of Syria are simultaneously experiencing a daily physical threat from bombings and warfare, suppression of voice as political dissidents are targeted and detained, and the erasure and destruction of their past and communities – as their landscapes, homes, and cultural sites/monuments are territorialized and destroyed by oppressive forces, primarily the al-Assad's pro-regime forces and the Islamic State (ISIS).

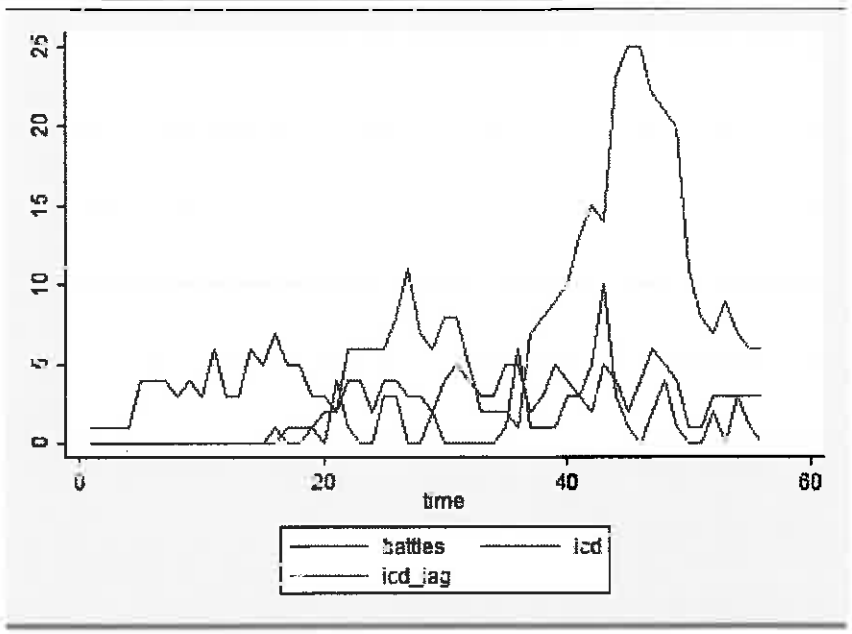


Figure 6: STATA Regression Graph of # of ICD events, # of battles, and a ICD_lag variable to account for delayed effects of performative and economic motives in Syria.

To test whether there is a correlation between occurrence of intentional cultural destruction events and battles in Syria, the dates of a random sample of intentional cultural destruction events and battles were collected. 72 instances of cultural destruction in Syria were collected from the Antiquities Coalitions' interactive map on their website (https://theantiquitiescoalition.org/culture-under-threat-map/). Their data is as of May 13, 2016; therefore, only the conflict time periods from late 2011 to mid-2016 were considered. Although the Syrian conflict technically ensued in March 2011, this data considers events from late-2011 onwards, as intentional cultural destruction events did not start prominently happening until late 2012, demonstrated by the data sample indicating zero events for the time periods Sept 2011 through August 2012. Meanwhile, 71 battles and their dates were compiled from Wikipedia's "Category: Battles of the Syrian Civil War". Battles that occurred after April 2016 were

excluded, as well as any spillover battles (such as spillover battles in Lebanon) were excluded in the collection of the sample.

The STATA regression graph indicates no correlation between the occurrence of intentional cultural destruction events and battles for neither the immediate-impact motives (represented by the ICD variable) nor the delayed-impact motives (represented by the ICD_lag variable) in the Syrian conflict. Therefore, it cannot be said that Intentional Cultural Destruction events intensify conflict or produce more battles so far. However, this does not necessarily mean that Intentional Cultural Destruction events do not have a role in the Syrian conflict, or armed conflict more generally, or that they may not intensify it in other ways. A different dependent variable, besides "battles", may need to be tested. In the case of Syria, there may be far stronger factors fueling the war forward or intensifying it, such as the amount of actors involved and their different diverging interests and demands. Undoubtedly, the different groups may have far greater sources of recruitment, and greater sources of funding and weapons, such as the smuggling of oil, kidnappings, wealthy donors, and different illegal activities. This would possibly make looting a secondary or tertiary source of funding, or an inconsistent source of funding that is pursued irregularly.

Case Study: Yemen

Similarly to Syria, the Arab Spring inspired an uprising against Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh, which would spark the Yemeni Revolution. Nonetheless, this did not result immediately in war. After the uprising, Saleh resigned in 2012 and Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi was elected as president (Amnesty International). However, human rights violations by the

government continued. Once the government slashed fuel subsidies, mass protests started, led by the Houthi militant group. In 2014, they succeeded in seizing the city Sana'a, Yemen's capital. However, the country did not deteriorate into war until "March 25, 2015, [when] an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia launched air strikes against the Houthi armed group in Yemen sparking a full-blown armed conflict" (Amnesty International). The Houthi's are considered "a Shiite rebel group with links to Iran and a history of rising up against the Sunni government", and there has been evidence of the Houthi receiving arm shipments from Iran (CFR), resulting in what some have termed a "proxy-war" between Saudi Arabia (supporting the Sunni-majority government) and Iran (supporting the Shia/Shiite rebels). However, Al Jazeera (2018) warns that it is far more complex than a Sunni-Shia conflict. Again, bearing similarities to Syria, there are "multiple factions with diverging interests", making reconciliation exceedingly difficult (Petrova, 2017). The Islamic State and AQAP (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) have also taken advantage of the situation as the political turmoil in the Yemeni conflict has created a vacuum for them (CFR). Meanwhile, more than 10,000 civilians have been killed so far, 3 million are refugees or displaced, and an estimated 17.8 million suffer hunger (CFR).

Figure 7: An example of an attack by AQAP in Yemen; Destruction of graves and the Mosque of Omar by bulldozer in Mukalla, Yemen on September 23, 2015.

Photo credit: The Antiquities Coalition Map; Mukalla Today

In contrast to Syria's history, Yemen was not under long Ottoman control historically. The Ottomans had brief periods of control in Yemen, but not extensively. Aden, Yemen did fall under British control in 1839, and was used as a major refueling port (BBC). In 1849. the Ottomans did return, but quickly faced revolt. North Yemen, ruled by Imam Yahya, became independent in 1918. In 1948, Imam Yahya is assassinated and succeeded by his son Ahmed. After Ahmed's death and succession by his son as well, South Yemen (also called the People's Republic of Yemen) is formed in 1967. In 1969, South Yemen is over-taken by Marxists and renamed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. After crackdowns on dissidents, many from south Yemen flee to the North in 1971, and border clashes begin between North and South Yemen, with the Arab League successfully brokering a cease-fire in 1972. Fighting happens again between North and South Yemen in 1979. However, North and South Yemen unite in 1990, with Ali Abdullah Saleh becoming president. There is an attempted split during the 90s', but it does not sustain. Throughout the 2000s', Houthi revolts begin, and there are several clashes and protests, but none culminate in war until 2015 after much frustration and many failed reform demands.

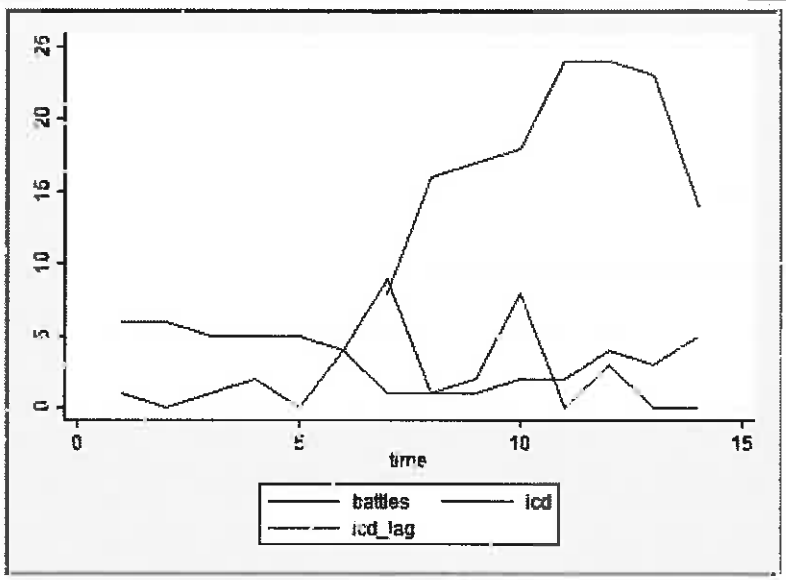


Figure 8: STATA Regression Graph of # of ICD events, # of battles, and a ICD_lag variable to account for delayed effects of performative and economic motives in Yemen.

A STATA Regression test was also conducted to test the correlation between ICD events and battles in Yemen. The sample size was much smaller, most likely due to the war being much more recent than the Syrian one - collecting 35 instances of intentional cultural destruction from Antiquities Coalitions' interactive map (https://theantiquitiescoalition.org/culture-under-threat-map/), and 15 battles from Wikipedia's "Category: Yemeni civil war (2015–present)" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Yemeni_civil_war_(2015–present)). A significant negative correlation was demonstrated between the ICD variable and Battle variable (see Figure 7 below), but not the ICD_Lag variable. This means that as battles decreased in Yemen, intentional cultural destruction events increased – occurring during lulls in the conflict. However, the p-value was 0.088, so it can be considered a significant correlation, but not particularly strong. Furthermore, there was a correlation for battles and the ICD variable, but not the ICD_lag one, favoring intentional cultural destruction events that have immediate-impact motives

(conflict goal/ideological and military-strategic) instead of those that have delayed-impact motives (strength-signaling/performative and economic).

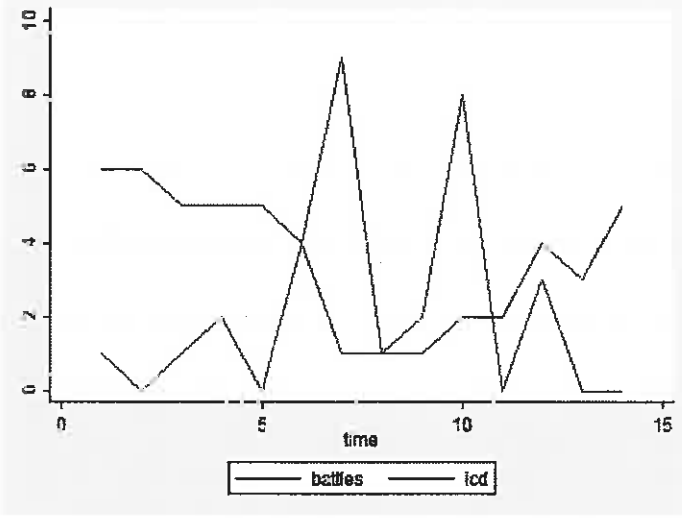


Figure 9: STATA Regression Graph of # of ICD events and # of battles in Yemen, demonstrating a negative correlation between the two variables.

This would suggest that intentional cultural destruction events that occur during lulls in conflict may spark new battles as the result of immediate-impact motives (conflict goal/ideological provoking a retaliatory attack, for example; or military-strategic leading to a tactical advantage and capability that leads to an offensive). In the Yemen sample, there were many more attacked cemeteries than in the Syrian sample, with Houthi Shia militants attacking Sunni cemeteries and vice-versa, supporting the idea that retaliatory or conflict goal/ideologically-motivated attacks are more likely to occur in the Yemen case during lulls and provoke further conflict. Therefore, the Sunni-Shia divide may be stronger in the Yemeni conflict, contributing to this negative correlation moreso; in contrast to the Syrian conflict which has a sectarian element, but is more greatly characterized by fighting the regime and ISIS attempting to expand itself.

CONCLUSION

Overall, four main types of motivations for intentional cultural destruction were identified from the literature: conflict-goal/ideological, military-strategic, strength-signaling/performative, and economic. These were then further characterized into immediate-impact motives (conflict-goal/ideological and military-strategic) and delayed-impact motives (strength-signaling/performative and economic). A STATA regression test was conducted for both the case studies of Syria and Yemen. The Syrian case study did not reveal a relationship between the occurrence of intentional cultural destruction events and battles, while the Yemeni case study did indicate a significant negative correlation between the two. However, this was not a very strong correlation. Therefore, much more research and case studies would be needed before a strong conclusion could be made about the role of intentional cultural destruction events in prolonging conflict. In general, there is a lack of research on motivations to target cultural sites and there is a lack of databases, even though that is growing with the work of the Smithsonian Institution in conjunction with the Conflict Culture Research Network.

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