

Protecting cultural property in conflict. Critical responsibility or unnecessary, impossible, distraction?

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Monday, 30 July 2018, 5:30PM
Quadrangle Building, Philosophy Room S249, The University of Sydney

Abstract

Cultural property (not only buildings and archaeological sites but archives, library and museum collections, and art) is always damaged and destroyed during conflict – it is what happens, and there is nothing that can be done about it. However, a proportion of such damage and destruction *is* frequently avoidable and has been regarded as bad practice by military theorists for over 2,000 years.

During both the First and Second World Wars military units were created to try to protect cultural property. These were largely broken up at the end of the Second World War and, despite the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols of 1954 and 1999, the military - and heritage community - essentially forgot the importance of trying to protect cultural property during conflict. It was only following the disastrous destruction and looting that followed the war in the former Yugoslavia and the 2003 invasion of Iraq that the issue returned to the agenda.

The Blue Shield organisation was created in 1996 in an attempt to raise the profile of cultural property protection. Since then it has worked with the military and other relevant organisations to flag the importance of this work. Progress has been slow but recently significant steps have been taken.

Bio



Peter Stone is the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Property Protection and Peace at Newcastle University in the UK; Chair of the UK Committee of the Blue Shield; and Vice President of Blue Shield International. He was previously Head of the School of Arts and Cultures and Professor of Heritage Studies in the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies at Newcastle University, UK. Before joining Newcastle he had worked for English Heritage, as a field archaeologist, and history teacher.

In 2003 he was advisor to the UK's Ministry of Defence regarding the identification and protection of the archaeological cultural heritage in Iraq. He has remained active in working with the military to refine attitudes and develop processes for the better protection of cultural property in times of conflict. He has written extensively on this topic including co-editing, with Joanne Farchakh Bajjal, *The Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Iraq* (2008) and editing *Cultural Heritage, Ethics and the Military* (2011). His article 'The 4 Tier approach' led directly to the establishment of a Joint Service Cultural Property Protection Unit in UK forces to become operational in 2019/20.

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