



DESTRUCTION/RE-CONSTRUCTION

Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Cultural Heritage in Conflict



Ruins have often captured human imagination and, in one way or another, they have been inscribed in a community's memory, history, or lore. The past decades, however, have witnessed a considerable shift of meaning concerning deliberate destruction and the symbolic character of ruins. The detonation of Stari Bridge in Mostar has become one of the iconic images representing the Bosnian War. The targeted demolition of the Bamyān Buddhas in Afghanistan can be seen as a prelude to the then-impending military intervention. The destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India, stands out as a symbol of communalism, a religiously exclusionist nation-state, and the deliberate attempt to eradicate centuries of peaceful Hindu-Muslim coexistence, while the deliberate destruction of heritage sites, museums, and libraries in Iraq and Syria serve as a symbol for the atrocities of a still ongoing conflict that has left thousands of people displaced or dead.

The history of destruction is as old as humanity. What has changed, however, is the way how acts of destruction are promulgated, celebrated, and perpetuated by carefully staging and filming them as well as by distributing these records on video-sharing websites. Similarly, the reactions that destruction causes among the viewers of these records gained more and more importance. While ancient temples or statues feel no fear, anguish, or pain when they are blown up, it is societies that are distressed by their fate. During the past decades, there has been an ever-growing number of publications, commentaries, and conferences on the destruction of cultural heritage. At the same time, artists and writers have also turned to the question of destruction, be it under circumstances of war and conflict as outlined above, or in the context of neo-liberal urbanization and gentrification, proposing ways of challenging these developments through their artworks, installations, and writings or by initiating grass-roots projects in the attempt to preserve buildings and create awareness for their value among urban authorities.

An international and interdisciplinary conference held in Beirut in autumn 2019 aims at discussing the cycle of the creation and decay of architectural heritage, thereby investigating

- the historical, philosophical, and social implications of destruction and (re-)construction (or the deliberate decision to leave a building in its ruined state),
- the effects of destruction and (re-)construction on individual and collective psychology,
- human interventions in the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage through means of law and prosecution,
- the language and imagery in which deliberate destruction is described in different media today,
- the way artists and writers have turned to these questions, not just taking them up in their work, but also by becoming activists for the preservation of architectural heritage,
- the manner in which destruction and construction are inscribed in communal memory, not least by the importance ascribed to ruins in the cityscape or by the representation of destruction in museums.

The conference welcomes contributions from various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, law, architecture, and the arts. It is organised by the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA), Working Group “Transformation”, in collaboration with the Orient Institut Beirut (OIB). Organizing committee: AGYA Members Mohammad Alwahaib (Kuwait City), Hanan Badr (Berlin), Christian Fron (Stuttgart), Julia Hauser (Kassel), Konstantin Klein (Bamberg) and Lena-Maria Möller (Hamburg). The conference will take place in Beirut, Lebanon, 30 September–2 October 2019. The conference will also feature a panel discussion with contemporary artists and writers open to the general public and followed by a reception. The conference language will be English.

Those interested in presenting papers are requested to send a tentative title, a short abstract (c. 250 words) and a short CV (one page including relevant publications) to:

Konstantin Klein (konstantin.klein@uni-bamberg.de) until 15 March 2019.

There will be no registration fee. Travel costs, board and lodging for confirmed speakers will be covered by the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) depending on final budgetary approval.



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