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## CHAPTER 9: Preserving cultural heritage in times of conflict

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### *Introduction*

There are many professionals who on a daily basis struggle to safeguard all that the human mind produces, tangible as well as intangible products. Most of the time conservators try to protect our heritage against the natural process of deterioration. They fight the acidity of paper, the copper corrosion of miniatures, the chemical burning of leather, the shrinkage of overheated parchment, the disintegration of red silk or the yellowed varnish of paintings. At most, they can only stop these destructive processes temporarily as, in the end, nature will overcome all of our tangible heritage: all is lost that is delayed.

Next to the inevitable natural causes of decay, natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods, landslides, wildfires, tsunamis and tropical cyclones exact a heavy toll in terms of direct loss and irreparable damage to our cultural legacy. The consequences of the tsunami in Asia in 2004, the Katrina hurricane during the 2005 Atlantic season and the earthquake in northern Pakistan just before the severe winter of 2005/2006, were first of all horrifying because of the huge loss of human lives, but at the same time left entire regions devoid of libraries, archives and museums.

Manmade disasters can even outdo natural disasters in the detrimental effects on our collective memory of the past. Theft, war, civil disorder, terrorism, neglect and vandalism are human factors in the accidental or wilful destruction of our heritage (Teijgeler, 2001). Of these threats, armed conflict remains particularly intractable and disturbing. Regrettably, of late we have experienced more than once how shocking the effects of a violent struggle can be on the heritage of countries such as the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Statues are blown up because they are considered an insult to the 'only and right religion', archaeological sites are occupied by foreign troops and destroyed in the process, and archives are deliberately obliterated as part of an ethnic cleansing policy. Undoubtedly, the final decade of the 20th century was marked by destruction of heritage on a symbolic scale that has been unrivalled for the past several centuries.

Should the heritage worker take the ruinous effects of war, the ultimate failure of the human mind (Müller, 2005), as a fact of life or is there a way we can prevent the demolition of our cherished treasures? No, beyond personal responsibility it is not the primary task of cultural heritage management to prevent or stop war. Admittedly,

heritage institutions play an increasingly important role in post-conflict situations, but they are unable to bring a halt to an armed conflict. Politicians declare war and soldiers wage war. Nevertheless, what cultural institutions can do is to prepare themselves for the event of war.

The increasing number of natural disasters in Europe during the 1990s exposed both the vulnerability of significant cultural assets and the lack of preparedness of local emergency services. Most countries were simply not prepared to protect their own history. As a result of the calamities, needs assessments were carried out, manuals written and regional co-ordination programmes initiated in order to be ready for future disasters; many countries apparently had to learn the hard way. In these risk management plans, most of the attention was focused on natural disasters; hardly any attention was paid to man-made disasters, except for theft and burglary.

Only a few cultural institutions (e.g., in the UK and Spain) incorporated a possible terrorist attack in their plans. The shock of 9/11 forced some planners to consider the realities of a new international and radically different security environment. It is worth mentioning that two days after the Twin Towers came down in 2001 the Federal Emergency Management Agency changed the statement in the fact sheet on terrorism (published on their website) that a terrorist attack in the USA remains possible, though unlikely (Teijgeler, 2001). Yet, on the whole it remains to be seen how many organizations adapted their plans. While heritage management staff are slowly getting used to the idea of a possible terrorist attack, the idea of war in their backyard is considered absurd in spite of the recent intrastate conflicts. This changing reality compels any responsible person working in the heritage field to at least have another look at their risk management programme. The all-important question is whether we can prepare for war at all. Many of the heritage workers in war-ridden countries were badly prepared. Still, we can surely learn a great deal from them. In general, one can conclude that in cases where the staff take appropriate measures in good time much damage to the collections can be prevented.

### *Be prepared*

Man-made disasters strike worldwide. On the whole, armed conflicts declined considerably over the last 15 years, yet international terrorism is still rising, and the poorest countries are suffering the most (Human Security Centre, 2005; Marshall and Gurr, 2005). It is estimated that at the beginning of the 21st century nearly a quarter of the world's population was facing some type of crisis or post-conflict situation, and that two-thirds of the poorest countries were suffering as a result of current or recent conflicts (Malloch Brown, 2003). In the course of time, every country is confronted with damage to their cultural heritage as a result of either wilful or accidental destruction. It is unfortunate that local authorities and communities, especially those

in tight economic circumstances, do not understand the benefits to be gained by reducing losses today for an unknown tomorrow (Gavidia, 2001). Clearly, one of the lessons learned in heritage preservation from the Iraqi Freedom Campaign in 2003 is, according to Ann Hitchcock (2003, 36), that 'an emergency operations plan is critical to ensuring that emergencies do not turn into disasters. Not only do staff and visitors need to know what to do and where to go, but also staff need to know how to protect the collections.' This is crucial for the survival of any cultural institution; after all, what are we without our artefacts or documents? In short, disasters need to be managed in order to control them, or at least to mitigate the effects.

A Disaster Management Cycle should address issues relevant to all phases of the disaster cycle: preparedness, response, recovery, rebuilding, prevention and mitigation. Yet, it should be realized that each collection, each building and each situation is unique and that every institution has to prepare for disasters with its own unique plan. There is a vast literature on disaster preparedness: for an overview see Tejjgeler (2001); for examples see Conservation OnLine (2005).

Analogous to the well-known Integrated Pest Management method for killing insects, the newest approach to calamities is Integrated Emergency Management, which refers to a complex series of interdependent skills, knowledge and experience. The plan has to be flexible, it has to work on a holiday weekend or in freezing weather conditions, and at any location. It will need to be tested against specific scenarios. It should also be integrated into an organization's everyday working structure, and the activities of different departments within an organization should be integrated. Lastly, there is a vital need to co-ordinate arrangements with other authorities and organizations. Major disasters will almost always span boundaries, and indeed may spread.

Though the circumstances under which the damages are inflicted are rather specific, there is no particular type of damage uniquely associated with armed conflict. Damage resulting from armed conflict, depending on the nature of the armaments employed and the possibilities of secondary damages linked to the conflict (e.g. fire, flood), may resemble the impact of any or all natural disasters. Significant damage caused by armed conflict includes: full or partial destruction by bombs, shells and associated fire of structures and contents; loss of stability, weather tightness, or both, as a result of shelling which only partly destroys walls and roofs; damage to objects, collections and significant interior fixtures and fittings by heat, smoke and combustion by-products; and water damage resulting from efforts to arrest fire (Stovel, 1998).

The disaster cycle could in the event of war be subdivided into actions to be taken before the outbreak of an armed conflict (pre-conflict), during the conflict (peri-conflict) and after the conflict (post-conflict). In terms of international development,

most attention is paid to post-conflict situations and not so much to the two preceding phases. In the build-up to a conflict of arms, politicians should make sure that the international treaties protecting cultural heritage, should the fighting start, are signed. They should also press for the signing of the conventions that will facilitate the return of looted and stolen artefacts. Establishing contacts with international organizations will also be very advantageous in case of an emergency relocation of collections outside the country. International contacts will help the management to overcome their problems in all phases of the conflict but especially during the rehabilitation of the institution after the fighting stops.

The pre-conflict phase is also the time to start developing a contingency plan. These plans enable administrators to make choices in advance. It appears that in practice this is the most difficult part of the whole preparation strategy: deciding which part of the collection should be saved first or will require special attention. How do you determine the value of a book? Is the criterion the book's replacement value, or its popularity with readers, the uniqueness of the specimen, the artistic value or the cultural value? Under pressure, bad choices are often made and books are grabbed randomly from the shelves in order to save 'as many as possible'. That is exactly why we should make plans - to prevent chaos. It would be wise to learn from the hands-on experiences of our colleagues who had to see their cultural institution through an armed conflict. Reading about experiences of other institutions can not only help to avoid making the same mistakes but can give an idea of what to expect after a disaster.

### *International law*

There is much debate about the advantages and disadvantages of international law as a tool to prevent armed conflict and, consequently, to avert the danger of destruction of a nation's heritage. Some believe war is inevitable and part of human nature, and as such can be subject to humanitarian law. Others refuse to accept this notion for reasons of principle, and maintain that people should strive for a peaceful world where conflicts are resolved in a non-violent way - waging peace, not war.

Sadly, prohibiting wars has not prevented them from occurring. That is how humanitarian law came into being: to mitigate the most destructive effects of war. Humanitarian law is part of international law and seeks to protect victims of war and regulate hostilities. Its first aim is to protect the lives of individuals. But war is not only the enemy of man, it is also the enemy of the best that man has produced: the whole cultural and historic heritage (Toman, 1996). The tendency of recent warfare to move from interstate to intrastate has amplified the impact. The direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on cultural heritage have been devastating (Gergana, 2001). It appears that the scores for armed conflict, as a cause of destruction and damage for

archives, are extremely high in most of the continents (van der Hoeven and Albada,1996).

From time immemorial, war has gone hand in hand with widespread destruction and the 'right to booty'. The aim of war was to collect booty and thus the destruction of cultural property was considered an inevitable consequence of war. The first stirrings of a wish to protect works of art appeared during the Renaissance. The concept was further developed in the 16th and 17th centuries by writers on international law, such as Jacob Przuluski. In his 'Leges seu statuta ac privilegia Regni Poloniae (Cracow, 1553) Jacob Przuluski [Jacobus Prilusius] ... put forward the idea that every belligerent should show regard for a work of art, but not solely because of its religious nature' (Toman, 1996, 4-5). The protection of cultural property was also considered in non-western civilizations. Under Islamic law, the obligation to distinguish between civilian and military objects is clearly imperative and permits no exception. In accordance with the orders of the first Caliph Abu Bakr (AD 632-634) attacks should be strictly confined to military targets (i.e. objects that by their nature or use are intended for the pursuit of hostilities). Thus the Islamic concept presumes all objects to be civilian unless proven otherwise (Toman, 1996).

### *The Hague Convention*

The Hague Convention of 1899 (for the complete text of the Convention with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land, see [www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/INTRO150?OpenDocument](http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/INTRO150?OpenDocument)) and the Roerich Pact ([sangha.net/roerich/roerich-pact.html](http://sangha.net/roerich/roerich-pact.html)) signed in Washington DC in 1935 were the first major international agreements to create measures designed to protect cultural property during war. They were followed by the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict ([portal.UNESCO.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=8450&URL\\_D0=D0\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.UNESCO.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=8450&URL_D0=D0_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)), popularly termed the Hague Convention, adopted in 1954 at a conference in the Hague held under the auspices of UNESCO. This Convention was a response to the wide-scale destruction of cultural heritage during World War 2 and sought to ensure that cultural property, both movable and immovable, was safeguarded and respected as the common heritage of humankind. Cultural property and cultural institutions, as long as they were not put to military purposes, were to be protected in armed conflicts. The Convention's definition of cultural property is broad, including significant architectural monuments, art works, books or manuscripts of artistic or historical significance, museums, large libraries, archives, archaeological sites and historic buildings. The Convention was strengthened by the 1977 Additional Protocols of the Geneva Convention, relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts ([www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlallgenevaconventions?opendocument](http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlallgenevaconventions?opendocument)). Today 114 member states out of the 191 United Nations are signatories to the Convention. There are some prominent exceptions: the

USA, the UK and Japan have yet to join, but recently the People's Republic of China (2000) and Canada (1998) joined the signatories.

According to reports submitted to the Director-General of UNESCO, breaches of the treaty have occurred in far too many cases in countries such as Turkey, Israel, Iraq and the states that were formerly part of Yugoslavia. The Hague Convention has been violated in such instances as the Turkish bombardment of Paphos, Cyprus, in 1974, and military operations in and around the archaeological site of Tyre during the 1982-83 conflict between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in Lebanon. During the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, Iran reported Iraqi shelling of cultural and historic sites in Abadan and Shush. Iraq refused to mark its own sites with flags containing the emblem designated by the Convention 'because this emblem may be seen by aeroplanes not only by the missiles and artillery, which attack the Iraqi towns with no exception'.

During the more recent conflict in the Persian Gulf, Iraq violated the Convention both in its placement of war planes at the archaeological site of Ur and in the looting by Iraqi forces of the 30,000-piece Islamic art collection in Kuwait's National Museum (Levin, 1992). The most blatant violations of the Hague Convention occurred during the clashes in Yugoslavia when even the Convention symbol, the Blue Shield placed on historic buildings for protection, was actually being used as a target for violence in 'cultural warfare and terrorism'.

During Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003) the USA claimed that they were acting along the lines of the Hague Convention (personal communication with the staff of the State Department, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, International Cultural Property Protection office in September 2004). Indeed, during the initial air raids the US air force managed to avoid damage to important heritage sites. The list of 5,000 ancient sites and monuments that was handed over to the Pentagon by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago two months before the invasion of Iraq seemed to have been taken into account (Gibson, 2003). Yet, as the occupation continued there were too many occasions that were certainly not in line with the Hague Convention. The most remarkable disasters were the failure of the US forces to protect the looting of museums, libraries and archives after the initial fighting was over (al-Radi, 2003b; Gibson, 2003), the continuous looting of the archaeological sites (Garen and Carlton, 2005) and the illegal occupation of the archaeological site of Babylon by the coalition forces (Curtis 2004; International Audit Commission, 2004).

In contrast to the numerous breaches of the Convention, many instances can be quoted when the Hague Convention did make a difference. As the Senior Consultant for the Ministry of Culture (Summer 2004 - Spring 2005), I was able to convince the coalition forces on several occasions to withdraw from important archaeological sites

or monuments by referring to the Hague Convention. (For details on my role in the clearance of the military camp at the Babylon site, see Schwartz, 2005.) I also prevented extensive damage to the al-Hatra site by negotiating the reduction of the necessary nearby detonation programme by half, referring to the obligation of occupying forces to protect archaeological sites as stated in the Hague Convention. I called upon the same convention when arguing with the Deputy Chief of Mission about the historical and cultural value of the inner city of Najaf when the coalition forces were besieging the city. In one instance a local commander used the most infamous clause in the Hague Convention - the right to take over a cultural monument on the basis of 'military necessity' - but after two months of my working up and down the military chain of command the US army withdrew from the monument. This was famous Malwiya minaret in Samarra, dating back to AD 852. Indeed, the tower was the highest point in the city thus of strategic importance and a real vantage point for the soldiers to fight the insurgents who were attacking US soldiers. In January the insurgents shot at the soldiers on top of the tower, causing serious damage. When I finally managed to convince the commander to clear the minaret, he claimed he did not know the tower was that old. Admittedly, the outside of the minaret was restored in the 1990s, but 90% of the construction was close to 1,200 years old.

The conflicts of the 1980s and 1990s - when destruction of heritage became an element in campaigns of humiliation aimed at subjugating opposing ethnic groups - forced the international community to re-examine the Hague Convention, which had only partially addressed intrastate warfare. The result was the 1999 Second Protocol to the Hague Convention ([www.unesco.org/culture/laws/hague/html\\_eng/protocol2.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/culture/laws/hague/html_eng/protocol2.shtml)), which strengthens the Convention and creates a new category of enhanced protection for cultural property deemed to be of the greatest significance to humanity. The Second Protocol also outlines measures for safeguarding cultural property to be undertaken in peacetime.

These include:

the preparation of inventories, the planning of emergency measures for protection against fire or structural collapse, the preparation for the removal of movable cultural property or the provision for adequate in situ protection of such property, and the designation of competent authorities responsible for the safeguarding of cultural property.

The protocol is a great improvement as it obligates the signatories to work on prevention of war damage to cultural heritage during peacetime. In fact, this is the opportunity for cultural institutions to extend their disaster preparedness plans with a section on how to avert war damage. With the Second Protocol directors can easily

convince the authorities to act upon this extended covenant, once their countries have become signatories. However, patience is required as the Second Protocol has so far only been signed by 35 states and only came into force in 2004.

### *UNESCO and UNIDROIT*

The massive looting and illicit trade of cultural collections in peri- and post-conflict situations can be stopped, at least partly, when both the 'producing' and the 'consuming' countries - respectively the countries of origin and the market countries - sign the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property ([portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URLJD=13039&URLDO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URLJD=13039&URLDO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)) and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen and Illegally Exported Cultural Objects ([www.unidroit.org/english/conventions/1995culturalproperty/1995culturalproperty-e.htm](http://www.unidroit.org/english/conventions/1995culturalproperty/1995culturalproperty-e.htm)). Though looting and illicit trade in art objects are often associated with archaeological objects, the uncovered treasures, the substantial looting of the libraries, archives and museums at the beginning of the Iraqi Freedom Campaign and the debate about the Schøyen Collection, a collection of extremely important Buddhist manuscripts illegally exported from Taliban Afghanistan, among others, show us that the holdings of cultural institutions are not spared.

Sometime after the Taliban came to power a collection of Buddhist manuscripts from Afghanistan was added to the Schøyen Collection, Norway, allegedly the largest private manuscript collection formed in the 20th century, comprising about 13,500 manuscripts and inscribed objects. The acquired Buddhist manuscripts are often referred to as the 'Dead Sea Scrolls of Buddhism'. The single largest group of manuscripts in the collection are thousands of fragments of possibly 1,400 Buddhist manuscripts reported in 2000 and 2001 to have been taken out of Afghanistan. The manuscripts were said to have been found in a Cave close to Bamiyan, and may have come from a library that was damaged in the late 7th or 8th century. It is clear that this collection did not leave Afghanistan legally. Atle Omland's web page ([folk.uio.no/atleom/manuscripts.htm](http://folk.uio.no/atleom/manuscripts.htm)) presents the current debate concerning the ownership of these and other manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection (see also Omland and Prescott, 2002; Prescott and Omland, 2003).

Besides the aforementioned Conventions, the Protocol of the 1954 Hague Convention ([www.unesco.org/culture/laws/hague/html\\_eng/page8.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/culture/laws/hague/html_eng/page8.shtml)) - in particular chapter X, article I, subparagraphs 1- 4 - also provides for the prevention of exportation of cultural property and the return of illegally exported property from an occupied territory. While the 1970 UNESCO Convention creates strategies between states to prevent illicit traffic and to promote co-operation on the return of cultural

property, the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention ensures that private owners have direct access to the courts of another country where cultural property stolen from their owners is found.

It also allows states to sue in the courts of such a country for important cultural property belonging to certain categories which has been illegally exported. For obvious reasons, the last treaty is heavily opposed by the antiques trade; the art dealers, in particular, worry about the fact that the onus of proof lies with the insured. That is perhaps the reason why so many market countries are reluctant to sign the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention - so far the treaty has only 26 signatories.

The 1970 UNESCO Convention, on the other hand, has already been signed by 109 of the 191 member states of the United Nations. The willingness to sign this treaty seems to have grown over the last years as 18 countries have signed up since 2000, including powerful countries such as the UK, Japan, Sweden, Denmark and Switzerland. Several other countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands, are making preparations to sign. The growing political lobby in Europe (Brodie et al., 2000) to sign both Conventions appears to have been quite effective for the 1970 UNESCO Convention, but not so much for the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention. For European countries, the implementation of Council Regulation (EEC) no. 3911/92 on the export of cultural goods and Council Directive no. 93/7/EEC on the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of a member state are certainly of interest ([europa.eu/comm/taxation\\_customs/customs/customs\\_controls/cultural\\_goods/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/comm/taxation_customs/customs/customs_controls/cultural_goods/index_en.htm)).

When discussing the effectiveness of these treaties it is important to note that they provide the often poor countries of origin with legal instruments to claim the return of their stolen heritage. Of late, an increasing number of courts have sustained these claims, for example the June 2004 decision of the US Supreme Court in *Republic of Austria et al. v. Altmann*, which may open the doors of the US court system to a variety of long-standing claims against foreign governments ([a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/0ljune20041115/www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/03pdf/03-13.pdf](http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/0ljune20041115/www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/03pdf/03-13.pdf)). Still, complicated conflict of law issues inevitably arise due to the wide variety of legal norms and the cross-border nature of most cultural property claims (International Bureau of the Court of Arbitration, 2004). Whether international law really changes the illegal trade in the market countries depends on the willingness of the nation states to implement these rules and regulations, but often charity begins at home.

#### *A case study: the international criminal tribunal for former Yugoslavia*

For those of us whose professional life is focused on conserving heritage, it is painful to acknowledge that not only is our passion not shared by all, but that there are some

in this world who can and will vigorously eradicate what we work to preserve (Whalen, 2001).

Most in modern society, however, believe that these practices are no longer acceptable. Today, the deliberate destruction of cultural property, in the absence of over-riding military necessity, is a serious violation of international law and those responsible for ordering and carrying out such attacks can be prosecuted for war crimes. The Nuremberg Trials after World War 2 marked the first time that individuals were held accountable for cultural war crimes. Several Nazi officials were sentenced to death for a plethora of violations that included the destruction of cultural property.

Following that precedent, the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia ([www.un.org/icty/](http://www.un.org/icty/)) was empowered to prosecute individuals deemed responsible for the 'seizure of, destruction or wilful damage done to institutions dedicated to religion, charity and education, the arts and sciences, historic monuments and works of art and science'. Whether 'seizure' in this case covers the intentional removal of museum art objects from museums in Kosovo to Belgrade is uncertain. It could be argued that, at the time these items were taken, the Serbian Ministry of Culture had legitimate jurisdiction over the museums. Precedents are not encouraging in this regard.

Almost nine years after Serbian museum professionals were sent from Belgrade to 'evacuate' the art collection of the Vukovar Museum to Serbia, and nearly five years after the end of hostilities, not one of those items has been returned to the Croatian museum which owns them (Riedlmayer, 2000b). The indictments of Slobodan Milosevic for the 1991 attacks by the armed forces of Yugoslavia on the ancient city of Dubrovnik, Croatia, included one for the destruction of historic monuments ([www.un.org/icty/indictment/english/mil-ii011008e.htm](http://www.un.org/icty/indictment/english/mil-ii011008e.htm)). What made matters worse was the fact that two of the bombed monuments were protected under the terms of the Hague Convention and seemed to have been deliberately targeted (Brodie, 2003). The former Yugoslav president and other officials were also indicted for the destruction of cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo. We cannot but conclude that during and after the conflict the belligerents did not respect volens nolens the text or the nature of the Hague Convention.

While the 1954 Hague Convention requires that protected monuments be designated and marked as such, the 1977 Protocols I and II Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 use a more inclusive wording, which is also reflected in the tribunal's statute. Furthermore, it was evident that the criteria employed in listing monuments for protection by the Serbian authorities before the war had been conditioned to a considerable extent by ideological considerations (Herscher and Riedlmayer, 2000). The Conventions related to cultural war crimes, however, do not spell out the penalties that should be handed down for violations (Maass, 1999).

In this global era there is still a 'future' for warring states, and no humanitarian law will be able to prevent that. But multilateral treaties and conventions will certainly make a difference and at least protect part of the world's heritage. In the preliminary results of a recent survey, approximately 80% of the respondents, when asked to judge its importance, held the view that 'accidents, damage and loss can be prevented by providing appropriate legal protection at the local, regional, national and international level', while fewer (58%) felt that it could be achieved without difficulty. (The Conservation Management Questionnaire is part of the PhD research of Jeremy Donald Hutchings at University College London, and the first results will be published in late 2006.). Apparently, many heritage workers believe in the ability of international law to protect cultural heritage in times of armed conflict.

### *Risk preparedness*

Some of the cultural institutions saw the violent conflict in their country coming and prepared themselves to the best of their abilities, considering the local circumstances. The institutions that managed to save their collection, or part of it, had prepared themselves before the conflict broke out. Sometimes it was done in a systematic way but it was also not uncommon for the measures to be taken haphazardly. At the same time the practical experiences of our colleagues show us how creative they can be when the situation is dire. That is why risk preparedness, as part of a bigger risk management plan, should start to look at the measures that can be taken before a conflict breaks out. In other words, cultural heritage institutions should develop a strategy for the protection of cultural heritage in the event of an armed conflict. The Second Protocol of the Hague Convention (1999) will give the management the legal back-up to do so. The guiding principle in the development of such plans should, without a doubt, be that 'local problems need local solutions' All too often solutions from developed countries are chosen to address problems in developing countries.

### *Closedown*

A normal practice listed in every disaster preparedness plan is to close down the institution as soon as possible in case of emergency.

This is to prevent casualties rather than to safeguard the collection, as the iron rule in risk management is to put the interests of human beings before those of the collections. Once the doors are shut, the staff can pay full attention to securing the holdings.

Three weeks before the American invasion in March 2003, the staff of the Iraq Museum closed the galleries to the public and began the task of protecting the museum and its content (al-Radi, 2003b). They were able to save important parts of the collections but they could not prevent the looting of 15,000 art objects at the unprotected museum. During the Gulf War (1990-91) the Iraq Museum was closed down only after the Ministry of Communications - located across the road from the museum - was bombed, and the resulting tremors shattered a number of the museum's showcases. Believing the war was not going to last long, the staff wrapped the displayed artefacts and locked them in the basement. However, they were wrong and in the end the stored objects disintegrated owing to inundation of the floor (Ghaidan and Paolini, 2003).

Unfortunately, the National Library and Archives of Iraq did not take any precautions before the American troops entered Baghdad. The employees simply did not show up and the building was left to the looters and set on fire. This resulted in a 60% loss of the state archives' records and documents, and a 25% loss of the library's book collection (Johnson, 2005). The new director of the Academy of Science and Technology in Baghdad was an unwilling eyewitness during the Gulf War when a pillaging mob entered the campus of the University of Basra, of which he was the dean, and ransacked most of the buildings, including the libraries. Even so, he was unable to convince his predecessor at the Academy to close the premises and safeguard the repository when the plunder started in 2003. After the crowd moved on, the library was left with 75% of its collections (personal communication with the director of the Academy of Science and Technology, Baghdad, October 2004).

The Kabul Museum in Afghanistan was officially closed down by the Najibullah Government (1986-92) because of increasing fears of an armed conflict and all objects were prepared to be moved (Grissmann, 2003). A decade later the collection was totally destroyed during the Taliban regime. Nonetheless, the Najibullah Government made the right decision.

### *Safe haven*

Once the institution is closed there are several options to secure the holdings, depending how much time is left. One option is to move (part of) the collections to safer premises outside the institution or even outside the country. Of course, such an operation takes time. Again this stresses the importance of a solid contingency plan in which an evacuation is anticipated. Usually the library, archive or museum has sufficient space in a building that is not too far away. An institution in a conflict-prone area should seriously consider relocating the collection outside the region: a project that can be realized with the help of international organizations. However, often the

mistake is made of transferring materials to surroundings that do not meet the minimum preservation standards.

### Lebanon

In the first years of the Civil War (1975-90) the collection of the National Library of Lebanon, founded in 1921, was relatively safe though in poor condition. In 1979 the Government ordered the evacuation of the entire collection to the UNESCO headquarters in Verdun, France. Later the 3,200 boxes were returned to Lebanon and stored in Sin al Fil, a suburb of Beirut. There they lay for 15 years until the 200,000 books and documents were unearthed and saved from dreadful climate conditions.

What was left was sent to the better climatized depots of the University of Lebanon, southeast of Beirut (Lebanese National Library Rehabilitation Project, n.d.). It is not clear why the books were moved from France back to Lebanon.

The National Museum of Lebanon in Beirut was set up in the 1920s and housed the major part of the collection of the Antiquities Department, as well as finds from excavation sites. The building is situated on the corner of a very important junction of three major arteries that lead into the city. In the early days of the Civil War, the director ordered staff to send all the items that they had no room for in the warehouses to the Department's stores in other parts of Beirut and some of the valuables to the Central Bank (Erlich, 2003). The small precious objects, the gold and other major pieces, were shipped to the French Archaeological Institute in Damascus for safe-keeping. Other objects were placed in the underground chambers of the Crusader Castle in Byblos, north of Beirut. The remaining objects stayed in the museum and were later buried (al-Radi, 2003a).

### Iraq

Another example that clearly shows us that relocating the collection is not always enough is the move of the Ottoman Archives in Iraq. This old archive, one of the few that survived the war, was rescued from the flooded cellars of the Ministry of the Interior in 2003. The 42,000 documents from the Ottoman and Royal eras were packed in 156 metal boxes and placed in cold stores, part of the kitchen of the former Senior Officer's Club. Since the electricity was constantly interrupted the temperature fluctuated from 0° C to 8° C, which caused a mould explosion. The only way to stabilize the documents was to deepfreeze them. They were repacked in acid-free boxes, loaded on to a freezer truck and transported to the premises of the National Library where the truck was parked under a shelter to protect it from the sun and flying bullets. Two generators supplied the necessary electricity (Teygeler, 2005).

The story of the evacuation of the Iraqi Jewish Archive to the US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) demonstrates that a transfer across borders can be highly political and sensitive. Rare, historic and modern books, documents and parchment scrolls pertaining to the Iraqi Jewish community were found in the flooded basement of the Iraqi Intelligence (Mukhabahrat) headquarters in Baghdad in early May 2003. Upon removal from the basement, the wet materials were packed into sacks and transported to a nearby location where they were partially dried, after which the materials were placed in 27 metal trunks. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) arranged for the materials to be frozen, which served to stabilize their condition and prevent further mould growth. At the request of the CPA, conservators from the NARA assessed the condition of the materials and made recommendations for their preservation (Iraqi Jewish Archive, 2003; Lufkin, 2004). In order to protect the documents from further damage it was decided with the consent of the chairman of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) to transfer the archive to depots in the USA. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed on 19 August 2003 and was valid for two years. Later that year articles appeared in the Arab press saying that US forces had, with the help of the Israelis, kidnapped the archive and shipped it off to Israel. Once in a while those biased reports were published again but in the spring of 2005 opponents of the Iraqi Transitional Government used this information to pressurize the Government. After the MOU expired in the summer of 2005, and under pressure of public opinion, the Iraqis asked for the return of the archive. Negotiations started in the spring of 2005 and a new MOU will be signed in 2006 to continue the preservation activities in the USA in full co-operation with Iraqi conservators and to ensure the safe return of the archive to Iraq (personal communication with the director of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, Berlin, November 2005).

Efforts to save the extensive and highly valuable manuscript collection at the House of Manuscripts from the impending war began four months before the war and continued right up to the week immediately prior to hostilities in April 2003. In the course of these efforts, all 50,000 manuscripts were taken to an air-raid shelter, while the microfilms and the CD-ROMs were taken to different undisclosed locations. The protection measures were undertaken even though the staff did not have official Ministry permission (as a matter of fact the Minister of Culture asked them to slow down their efforts). Today, the shelter contains almost 800 steel trunks filled with precious handwritten books collected in the 1990s from libraries all over the country. On three occasions looters tried to force the doors open but to no avail. On each occasion people from the neighbourhood chased the looters away and burned their vehicles. The US forces who were granted access to the shelter demanded that the treasure be taken to the Iraq Museum. Again when the military vehicles showed up the local crowd prevented them from loading the trunks on to their trucks. Later the CPA confirmed that their current policy was not to duplicate protection services in situations where local security measures appear to be sufficient (al-Tikriti, 2003).

Once the heaviest fighting in Baghdad was over and plundering crowds took to the streets, Shiite clerics, helped by local residents, opened the doors of the National Library and loaded their pick-up trucks with anything they could lay their hands on. The books were soon piled up against the wall of the local mosque and guard posts were set up. Some of the archives were packed into boxes and scattered around Shiite neighbourhoods (al-Radi, 2003b). It is not precisely clear what has actually been saved from the National Library because a few days later the whole library went up in flames, including all the catalogues.

The vault of a bank is for obvious reasons a very popular site to temporarily preserve artefacts. Before the Gulf War the treasure of Nimrud, consisting of Neo-Assyrian gold jewellery excavated at Nimrud between 1988 and 1990, had been placed in the vaults of the Iraq Central Bank. It was never removed, and was found safe when a team of Iraqi officials and representatives from the US military opened the vaults in 2003. However, the vaults had unfortunately been flooded during the fighting in 2003, which particularly affected the ivory objects (al-Radi, 2003b; Ghaidan and Paolini, 2003). The vault of the Bank of Lebanon was also used, at least for some time, to stock rare manuscripts and documents from the National Library of Lebanon upon their return from France, while the bulk was stored at Sin al Fin (Lebanese National Library Rehabilitation Project, n.d.).

After the massive plundering of the museums, libraries and archives in the immediate aftermath of the US-led invasion in Iraq and the continual looting of archaeological sites, the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) tried to get back as much of the cultural property as possible. Most of the stolen art objects appeared on the black market in Europe and the USA. Nearly 1,400 artefacts, however, were confiscated at the border of Jordan and are kept in secret storehouses in Amman. As quite a few junior archaeologists were trained in Amman with the help of Jordan's Department of Antiquities, the SBAH decided to store the confiscated artefacts provisionally with their Jordanian colleagues and use them to train the aspiring Iraqi archaeologists and customs officers in Amman. Syria, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait also seized Iraqi art objects and will for now hold them in safekeeping on their territory in agreement with the SBAH (Jordan Times, 2004; Villeda, 2005).

### Afghanistan

During the Soviet-backed Najibullah Government (1986-92) the Kabul Museum ordered all objects on exhibit, numbering around 600, to be brought down to the storerooms and prepared to be moved.

To minimize the risk of concentrating the objects in one place, some trunks were moved to the Central Bank Treasury vault in the Presidential Palace, others to the Ministry of Information and Culture, while the rest remained in the various depots of the Kabul Museum itself (Grissmann, 2003).

At several points in the tragic history of modern Afghanistan, those in power constantly meddled with Afghanistan's heritage. In general, moving the holdings of a cultural institution when armed clashes are expected is a sensible thing to do. However, transferring collections because the new rulers need the building or for any other incomprehensible reason is very harmful because of frequent handling and continuous changes in temperature.

The contents of the Kabul Museum were constantly on the move. In 1979 the museum was abruptly ordered to move the contents from Darulaman into the large and deserted house of Mohammed Naim, next to the French Embassy in Kabul. The objects were piled up to the ceiling in every room, in hallways and in the basements. The library ended up in the garages. One year later everything was taken back to Darulaman. In 1989 the Najibullah Government (1986-92) transferred the collections of the Kabul Museum again as it was on the frontline and considered too vulnerable. The manuscripts and miniatures were transported to the National Archives, yet a few years later they ended up on the black marker after all. Other art objects were stocked at the vault of the Central Bank Treasury or at the Ministry of Information and Culture, while some remained in the various depots of the Kabul Museum. Before the arrival of the Taliban in 1996 it was decided to house what was left of the rich collections after the destruction of the museum in 1992 and the looting in 1993 at the centrally located Kabul Hotel. Over 500 crates, trunks, and boxes were again shifted in 1998, when the hotel became a Taliban guesthouse. They were stored on the ground floor of the Ministry of Information and Culture. In March 2001 the world watched in impotent shock as the Taliban not only dynamited the Bamiyan Buddhas, but also destroyed big pieces left in the Kabul Museum and vandalized the Ministry and the museum's storerooms. Trunks were forced open and objects smashed (Grissmann, 2003).

The 23 years of war that have ravaged Afghanistan's cultural heritage made some of the museums' staff think of their connections abroad. For many years the Kabul Museum had historical ties with the Guimet Museum in Paris. During the Taliban Regime (1996-2001) they asked their colleagues in Paris to take temporary charge of a number of collection pieces.

With the permission of the authorities, the Guimet Museum took care of art objects retrieved by the Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage (SPACH), while waiting for the situation to stabilize (Cambon, 2003). In 1999, an 'Afghan Museum in Exile' at the Swiss Afghanistan Institute in Bubendorf was set up

with the help of UNESCO. At the request of both the Taliban in the south and the Northern Alliance, the museum was asked in 1998 to assist them in the protection of the artefacts of Afghanistan. This museum has been given the task of temporarily housing confiscated objects from the illicit art and antiquities trade until Afghanistan returns to more peaceful times. No articles may be purchased by the museum as this would be an encouragement to looters. It currently houses 3,000 pieces from Afghanistan (Bibliotheca Afghanica-Afghanistan Museum in Bubendorf, Switzerland, 2004; Recknagel, 2002).

### *Safekeeping within the walls*

Often there is not enough time to move the collection to a safe location outside the institution or the country, and this is certainly always the case in the absence of a contingency plan. Then, the only option is to find a solution within the building itself. In particular the art objects on display will need considerable attention as they lack the general safety of a depot and thus are considered the most fragile.

Partly owing to a lack of time, the big objects will have to be protected in situ, while the small ones can be wrapped up, packed and transported to the storage rooms. Some of the museums displayed great ingenuity in preserving large objects from war damage. From the real-life cases we can learn that hiding small collections of objects of value can certainly be worthwhile. In this case the rule is that the fewer people who know about the secret stashes the better.

During the Gulf War of 1991 the staff of the Iraq Museum decided to move the artefacts from all 20 galleries to the basement of the museum's old store building after they were shattered as a result of the bombing of the Ministry of Communications, located opposite the museum. They wrapped the most fragile objects in cotton wool and the metal ones in rubber padding and placed them in metal trunks, believing the war would not last long. However, the bombs did not stop and the generators supplying the electricity were destroyed causing the floor to be flooded. The metal cases corroded, allowing humidity to reach the protective cotton wool and rubber padding and turn them into nesting grounds for bacteria, moulds and other harmful organisms. The employees were rendered helpless as the import of necessary chemicals was not authorized by the UN Sanctions Committee (Ghaidan and Paolini, 2003).

In March 2003 the staff of the Iraq Museum transferral most of the moveable objects on show in the galleries to the underground storerooms. Metal gates in front of the doors were welded shut. The larger objects and statues were left in place, and foam rubber pads were placed in the area around them to protect them in case they fell off their pedestals. The rubber pads were also placed in front of the Assyrian Reliefs, and

on the floors of all the storerooms. The staff hoped that these would protect the objects if a direct hit toppled the metal shelves. When US soldiers entered the museum after one month they noted that the protected art objects were much better off than those left unprotected (Bogdanos and Patrick, 2005).

Discussions were held as to whether the staff should protect and conceal the steel doors of the storerooms with additional cement or brick walls. The curator's argument was that if the museum received a direct hit from an incendiary bomb and the storerooms caught fire, the firemen would be unable to reach them in time to put the fire out. So the storerooms were given no further protection. It was a calculated choice, but it turned out to be the wrong one on this occasion (al-Radi, 2003a). The museum only suffered one direct hit, and it did not cause any damage to the collection. Yet, in the early days of April several groups of looters entered the museum and were able to carry off 15,000 objects. The door to the Museum Library was one of the few that were covered up with a brick wall and all the books deposited were saved (al-Radi, 2003b). Part of the collection was secured in different secret compartments inside the museum known only to the board of directors, and they were never found by the plunderers (personal communication with the director of the Iraq Museum, Baghdad, November 2004).

The wartime story of the National Museum has become part of Lebanese legend. The museum in Beirut was totally unprepared when the Civil War (1975-90) broke out. It was located right on the demarcation line. At the start of the conflict the objects that were not transported elsewhere were stored in cardboard boxes in the offices on the second floor while the more resilient objects were placed on shelves in the basement storage rooms (al-Radi, 2003a). As the fighting became more violent, the director, assisted by his wife and several employees, took the opportunity during a ceasefire to empty the display cases and hide them and thus was able to rescue most of the artefacts (Pharès, 2003). They took out all the exhibited antiquities, took photographs of them and put them in boxes after having made lists of them. Afterwards, they moved them (including the intricate gold statues) to underground storage areas, and covered them with earth for camouflage.

Only four people in Lebanon knew the location of the ancient artworks. One of those people who knew the true location of the museum collection bore a particular burden as rumours spread that he was personally profiting from the sale of the museum's works.

All the items that they had no room for in the stores were transmitted to the Department's stores in other parts of Beirut and the valuables were taken to the Central Bank (Erlich, 2003). The large and immovable objects had to be left in place. A handful of people carrying bags of cement, plywood and rolls of thick sheets of plastic were seen going into the museum to work. The larger objects (the sarcophagi,

the floor and wall mosaics and statues) - cumbersome to say the least - could not be moved, and so had to be protected in situ. The sarcophagi were encased in a box made of plywood planks - they were literally 'boxed' in. Then they built another plywood box and the space between the two 'boxes' was filled with cement. Once this cement had dried the whole 'box' was covered over with another, thicker layer of cement. The sarcophagi looked like large rectangular cement blocks. The large marble statues were protected in a similar manner. However, the floor mosaics needed another solution. They were covered with a sheet of thick plastic on which plywood planks were placed. Then cement was poured over the whole until nothing showed; the mosaic was completely hidden under cement. They could not, however, treat the vertical mosaics in a similar way. Luckily, they survived the war and only one was damaged. At one time the museum even served as a base for the Syrian Army, but nobody discovered the ancient sarcophagi or the mosaics. Yet, the objects left in the underground storage rooms fared very badly. The metal shelves had buckled and rotted from standing in fetid water for so many years. The objects were saturated with humidity and became very fragile. Rain had seeped into the building from the racecourse behind the museum, causing decomposition in that closed environment for 18 years. It took many years to complete the restoration of the objects in the museum (al-Radi, 2003a).

### *Neglect*

As with every social process, war is not a static event, but has a build-up phase and a winding-down phase. In the years preceding the armed conflict between different factions within one state, one culture dominates and oppresses the others over and over again. In these intrastate conflicts, cultural pluralism has become a problem, where increasing cultural differences lead to homogeneity. The culture and even the mere existence of a particular ethnic or religious group is increasingly threatened over the years. In the end, this may lead to ethnic cleansing and cultural war crimes, as in the former Yugoslavia. Entire collections are carried away to the cultural institutions of the dominant leaders. The budgets for culture in the subordinate regions are skimmed and the sector is cut to the bone. International boycotts also have unforeseen consequences for the culture sector. The UN sanctions for Iraq, for example, which were supposed to harm the country's economy, also had detrimental effects on all cultural institutions. It became extremely difficult for conservators to update their knowledge, acquire new equipment or proper materials. Most of the materials required were chemical products, the import of which into Iraq was forbidden (Ghaidan and Paolini, 2003). The Oil-for-Food Programme did not change that; on the contrary, it made things worse (United Nations Independent Inquiry Committee into the United Nations Oil-For-Food Programme, 2005). It should be clear that any programme for the protection of cultural property in times of conflict has to deal repeatedly with cultural institutions in decline, institutions that have suffered years of neglect. Ironically enough, at the same time this situation enables

the institutions to start afresh. In many instances it provides the opportunity to replace outdated card-cataloguing systems with digital catalogues in conjunction with bringing the organization into the electronic age.

When Slobodan Milosevic, party leader of the federal state of Serbia and later President of the Republic of Serbia, announced an 'anti-bureaucratic revolution' in Kosovo in 1989, he in fact put the region under Serbian rule.

The impact on Kosovo was drastic and not only were the political institutions abolished, but Albanian cultural autonomy was also drastically reduced. Pri\_tina University was purged, television and radio broadcasts in Albanian ceased and the only Albanian-language newspaper was banned. From 1996 until NATO intervened in 1999, Albanian separatists fought a guerrilla war with the Serbian and Yugoslav security forces. The Archive of Kosovo, built around 1970, was not damaged during the Kosovo Conflict (1989-99). The years of conflict were a decade of systematic neglect of all public services and institutions, including libraries and archives. Many of the present heads of archive services suggest that it was a deliberate policy of neglect (Riedlmayer, 2000a). Albanian staff of the Archive of Kosovo were, it is claimed, forced from their jobs on ethnic grounds from December 1990, and those who remained after this were not allowed to enter storage areas unless accompanied by a Serb. Other actions included the transfer of the Kosovar archival heritage - such as the housing of the City Archive of Pristina in rather low-quality, damp basement accommodation at the Archive of Kosovo - and the removal of equipment in whole or part, including parts of microfilm equipment, and office transport. Financial records of the archive from 1990 to 1999 were also taken (Jackson and Stepniak, 2000).

As early as March 1991, records appear to have been deliberately removed. When the Serbs finally withdrew in 1999 public records and archives comprising almost the entire documentary base for the orderly functioning of government and society in Kosovo were removed; some municipal registries were even burned on the spot. The Ministry of Justice in Belgrade announced that public records in Kosovo had been removed to Serbia 'to prevent the Albanian secessionists from destroying or forging [them]' (Jackson and Stepniak, 2000). Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Kosovars, who were deprived of their personal documents when they were expelled in the spring of 1999, whose passports or licences have expired, who wish to register a marriage, buy or sell property, settle a legal dispute or claim an inheritance, are left stranded in a legal and documentary limbo (Frederiksen and Bakken, 2000; MacKenzie 1996; Riedlmayer, 2000a).

The situation of the archives in the Kosovo Conflict also applied to the libraries. At the beginning of October 1990, ethnic Albanian faculty and students were ejected by Serbian police from classrooms and offices, and the University of Pri\_tina became an apartheid institution reserved for ethnic Serbs only. At the same time, non-Serb

readers were banned from the National and University Library and Albanian professionals were summarily dismissed from their positions at the libraries. The acquisition of Albanian-language library materials effectively ceased. No records and printed books relating to the Albanian community were acquired after 1990 and only 22,000 items were added to the collections in Kosovo in that period. A few years later a number of library facilities in Kosovo were converted to other uses. Parts of the National and University Library building in

Pristina were turned over to a Serbian Orthodox religious school; library offices were used to house Serb refugees from Croatia and Bosnia. For almost a decade, Kosovar Albanians, the majority of Kosovo's inhabitants, were not allowed to set foot inside their libraries. The Library's reserve collection - multiple deposit copies of publications in Albanian kept for exchange and for distribution to public libraries elsewhere in Kosovo - were gone; they had been sent to the Lipljan paper mill for pulping before the war by order of the Serbian library director (Riedlmayer, 1995, 2000a).

The Kosovar museums did not fare much better. The collections were despoiled, not by acts of deliberate destruction but by appropriation. Before the war in 1999, some of the more valuable items in the collections held by the religious communities in Kosovo - most notably the treasuries of the three major monastic institutions of the Serbian Orthodox Church - were reported to have been sent to the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade.

By order of the Serbian Ministry of Culture, hundreds of archaeological artefacts from three important museum collections in Kosovo - the Museum of Kosovo, the Municipal Museum in Mitrovica and the Regional Archaeological Museum in Prizren - were removed to Belgrade at the beginning of 1999, ostensibly for an exhibition. The small Gjakova museum had been closed to the public since 1990, and the Albanian staff were sent home. Unlike many other institutions in Kosovo, which had their archives shipped off to Serbia when Yugoslav troops withdrew at the end of the war, the Kosovo Museum has retained its working documentation, thanks to staff members who hid the files in their homes during the war (Riedlmayer, 2000b).

### *Conclusion*

The relatively recent examples given above illustrates some of the actions museums, libraries or archives can take at the threat of war. It goes without saying that even more tragic events can be quoted from earlier armed struggles, especially from the two World Wars in the 20th century. Some institutions were even destroyed twice. Consider the tragic fate of the ancient university of Leuven in Belgium. In World War 1 the library, dating back to 1438, was reduced to ashes. During the German invasion, within a few hours 300,000 books and 1,000 valuable manuscripts went up in flames. Rebuilding commenced immediately after the war and the first stone of the restored

university library was laid in 1921. As fate would have it, the library was again burned to the ground in World War 2: this time 900,000 books were reduced to ashes. It took until 1951 before the ill-fated library partially re-opened and another ten years before the book stock reached its pre-war proportions. In World War 2 in particular, many collections, private and public, changed ownership illegally. Today the descendants of the victims are taking on whole nations and winning.

The dire fate of the libraries in the Baltic States is also catastrophic. Because of political upheavals, the Baltic States - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - saw their collections constantly changed and cleansed according to the desired history of the different occupiers. The Baltic States regained independence from the Russians in 1918, but the Russians invaded the region once more in 1940. They started to burn unwelcome titles until Nazi Germany took over in 1941. However, the Russians were able to continue their cleansing policy after 1945 when they defeated Nazi Germany. In 1991 the three Baltic nations re-declared their independence. They started to re-write their history and extended the library collections accordingly. Not only in Kosovo were precious books destroyed by sending them to the paper mill. The Nazis did the same with entire private libraries confiscated from Dutch Jewish citizens in World War 2 (Presser, 1965). Milan Kundera (1981, 159) puts it very well: 'the first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history'.

Sadly, the wilful destruction of cultural property has a lengthy history. It should be clear from the above that it does make perfect sense to prepare for the future, even if it has many disasters in store for us. At least then our heritage has a chance to survive. The timely close-down of the cultural institution, the transfer of the collection to a safe haven (within the country or abroad), hiding the collection inside the institution: these are all actions that might well contribute to safeguarding our heritage, providing it is well packed and is stored under reasonable climatic conditions. Some of our colleagues were very inventive in finding solutions under pressure. Let us learn from them and prepare for the worst.

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