

Outside the Archive: Museums, Institutional Boundaries and the Difficulty of Writing Histories of Archaeology and Heritage

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Recent crises involving the destruction of archaeological sites in the Middle East raise new questions about the very concept of 'heritage' and how it developed across the 19th and 20th century. The current discussion tends to split 'East' and 'West' in an unhelpful and inaccurate way and promotes 'preservation' over 'destruction' at the expense of a more nuanced and potentially more effective understanding of how heritage has been determined over time and from different perspectives. This project will develop a historically based critique of what constitutes heritage in conceptual and visual terms, which, like archaeology, is an 'invented construct' shaped by Western ideology and power. Practices concerned with heritage and preservation, including photography and the discipline of archaeology, emerged through historical trajectories of fieldwork, survey, and museum-building in the colonial and post-colonial Middle East. It is these practices that this project will re-assess. The project will historicize and contextualize a range of approaches to the preservation of architecture, focusing on indigenous preservation practices in the former territories of the Ottoman Empire, and its relationship with photography. Through these, the project will draw attention to polyvalent approaches that may be instructive today.

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