

## Preserving Architectural Heritage in Iraq for Positive Peace

In 2013, I started my PhD studies in Architecture. I was heavily burdened with the trauma and memories of more than 30 years of successive wars, political unrest, and continuous armed conflicts in Iraq. As a war survivor architect and scholar, contribution to rebuilding peace in my country and other conflict zones has become a top priority.

In my Ph.D. dissertation,<sup>1</sup> the main focus was on seeking and examining whether there is a role for architecture in the process of rebuilding a sustainable ‘positive peace’<sup>2</sup> in postwar and conflict contexts. It was a new interdisciplinary area of research which essentially required engaging architecture with the disciplines of peace and war studies.<sup>3</sup> The research proved that architecture, as a complex, inclusive, belonging, and common-ground platform has the potentials to be activated for positive peace, especially in postwar contexts.

However, as I was in the process of investigating and building the theoretical framework of architecture for peace, another brutal war had erupted back in my country, Iraq; it was the war against ISIS, 2015-2016. The wide spread of ISIS terrorists in Iraqi cities had been associated with a brutal annihilation of architectural heritage. The further I was understanding architecture for

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<sup>1</sup> Venus Suleiman Akef, "Architecture for Positive Peace: The Role of Architecture in the Process of Peacebuilding within Conflict and Postwar Contexts," Doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2019.  
[http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc\\_num=ucin1559058624350655](http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=ucin1559058624350655)

<sup>2</sup> In peace studies, peace is defined as ‘Negative Peace’ and ‘Positive Peace.’ Negative peace is the case where there is no direct violence but the root causes of conflicts are still active. Positive peace is the structural transformation of conflicts for sustainable peace. These definitions will be addressed in detail in the research.

<sup>3</sup> In July 29, 2016, after winning the Many Languages – One World MLOW competition, I introduced the subject of my dissertation at the General Assembly of the United Nations: Architecture for Peace. Later, in same event, the president of the United Nations Academic Impact UNAI, Mr. Ramu Damodaran, announced my dissertation as being a direct response to the United Nations 2030 agenda for sustainable development.  
<http://webtv.un.org/watch/english-language-winners-global-youth-forum-on-%E2%80%9Cmany-languages-one-world%E2%80%9D-2016/5062517244001>

positive peace, the more I was realizing the underlying agenda behind the systematic destruction of architectural heritage committed by ISIS terrorists in Iraq. Architectural heritage is among the most influential platforms for positive peace. Therefore, the systematic destruction of the heritage in Iraq was not only a form of a massive cultural cleansing but also a deliberate act of eliminating any chances for rebuilding a positive peace and sustainable development in the country. In fact, it was a brutal attempt to destroy the history and the existence of a whole nation, and ultimately destroying their future. At this point, and as I was diving deep in the architecture for positive peace, I started to visualize the idea of saving and investing in the past for building the future.

ISIS had been defeated. The Devastation (of human being and architectural heritage) left behind the war was massive and never been healed. In 2019, with living cases of heritage destruction associated with the ethnic cleansing in Iraq, pictures and symbols from the history of the country and its architectural heritage have started to emerge, raised and embraced by young Iraqi protestors during the anti-government October Revolution. Experiencing this scene first hand had me rethink architecture for positive peace and realize architectural heritage as one of the active platform for rebuilding positive peace in Iraq.

This paper is an attempt to particularly investigate the possibility of activating cultural and architectural preservation as strategy not only to protect the heritage of the past but also for rebuilding positive peace and sustainable development in postwar and conflict context (heritage preservation for building the future).

**If the destruction of heritage is proved to be a systematic military strategy and a crucial aspect of warfare, then the discussion of the preservation of architectural heritage as a strategy for rebuilding positive peace in postwar and conflict contexts becomes valid.**

## Architecture as a political Weapon

As a war survivor Iraqi architect and scholar, I have perceived the brutality of wars through architecture. I know how architecture can truly *reflect* the devastation and the trauma of wars. However, examining the discourses of “architecture and war” and “architecture and peace” reveals that architecture does not only reflect the destruction of wars but also it’s been used a weapon.<sup>4</sup>

Architecture is being systematically politicized and instrumentalized to serve agendas of wars, cultural cleansing, oppression, occupation, social division and other aspects of violence and armed conflicts.<sup>5</sup>

One of the recent examples of politicized architecture is the case of converting the historical landmark and UNESCO World Heritage Site “Hagia Sophia” from a museum into a mosque in Istanbul, 2020. After being an inclusive public place (a platform for positive peace), it’s been transformed into more exclusive space with specific restrictions due to its new uses as a house of prayers for Muslim. What was the urgency behind this decision? Was there any serious needs to add more prayer houses in that particular zone in Istanbul (especially that the Blue Mosque - also known by its official name, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque- is a short walking distance from Hagia Sophia)? If there was an urgent need to accommodate more prayers, then why not building a new mosque instead of converting an existing historic landmark into a mosque? However, considering the sensitive and controversial history of this World Heritage site (Hagia Sophia), it is the identity of this iconic building and the political indications of turning it back into a mosque that is the goal. Despite being still open to public tourism – this decision was confronted with an international condemnation and caused a social division on religious basis among public. Sadly and expectedly, in many incidents, this act has derived aggressive reactions from many foreign tourists on this particular site, and faced with a counter reaction from Muslims, revealing the

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4 Eyal Wiezman, “Rebel Architecture - The architecture of violence,” *Al Jazeera English*, Sep 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybwJaCeeA9o>

<sup>5</sup> Venus Suleiman Akef, "Architecture for Positive Peace: The Role of Architecture in the Process of Peacebuilding within Conflict and Postwar Contexts," p: 29-71. Doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2019, [http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc\\_num=ucin1559058624350655](http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=ucin1559058624350655)

underlying fact that the world heritage site has been systematically activated as an architecture of violence and operationalized as a platform to serve a political agenda and to convey political messages.

## The Preservation of Destruction

In Iraq, many cases of architecture of violence are evident such as the lavish presidential palaces of Saddam Hussein.<sup>6</sup> What is ironically known as *The Place of Peace - Al-Salam Palace* - in Baghdad is one example among many; it was built during the economic embargo in the 1990s, the first building destroyed during the military operations of the Second Gulf War in 2003, and never been reconstructed or even adaptively reused up until to this moment. The destruction is maintained and preserved.<sup>7</sup> The preservation of destruction in such cases is a political decision to convey political messages [Figures 1].

During warfare, the destruction of such architecture as *The Place of Peace - Al-Salam Palace* - often endows it with more historical significance to become possibly narrated as heritage; architecture rendered historically valuable by virtue of the violence inflicted against it.<sup>8</sup> However, it is the preservation of the destruction in post-war/conflict contexts that turns this architecture into an active platform for violence.

This exact image of the preserved destruction of the presidential palaces of the previous regimen still stands in Baghdad despite its association with both the devastation of the 2003 war and the precedent years of economic embargo and sanctions (1990-2003) which became part of the tragic collective memory for the majority of all Iraqis. It keeps provoking the roots of the conflicts and operates as a constant reminder of the traumatic experiences of wars, nation's suffering, and political unrest during the past 40 years in Iraq. Such platforms intensify the social division

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<sup>6</sup> Saddam Hussein, the former president of Iraq (1979–2003), most of his lavish palaces (80-100 palaces) were built during the tragic economic embargo in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War.

<sup>7</sup> (The preservation of destruction in Iraq) and (the political destruction of architectural heritage in Iraq) are new topics to be further examined.

<sup>8</sup>Andrew Herscher, "Warchitecture/Post-Warchitecture," *Volume#11: Cities Unbuilt*, (2007):69.

among Iraqis and provide fertile conditions for hate and violence to spread.<sup>9</sup> The considered number of the historical sites, landmarks, and important buildings which are constantly operating as active platforms for violence, if will not eliminate, then will definitely reduce the chances for rebuilding a sustainable peace, if there any, in such highly-tensioned post-war context like the one in Iraq.



**Figure 1:** The destroyed presidential palace after a bombardement 2003.

In *Divided Cities*, by Jon Calame and Esther Charlesworth, among many related important aspects, the relationship between evoking the tragic collective memories and the rising rates of violence especially in postwar and conflict contexts is highlighted, particularly in case of Belfast.<sup>10</sup> During the ethno-nationalist armed conflict in Belfast in the years 1969-1998, it was observed that throughout the year since 'The Troubles'<sup>11</sup> began, a measurable increase in deaths related

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<sup>9</sup> Jon Calame and Esther Charlesworth, *Divided Cities: Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Mostar, and Nicosia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 78.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 61-82.

<sup>11</sup> The Troubles were an ethno-nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland (1960s to 1998) Also known internationally as the Northern Ireland conflict. Its impact was increasing (spilled over into parts of the Republic of Ireland, England and Europe) that it was described as an "irregular war" or "low-level war." Despite being described as a religious conflict between the two sides of 'Protestant' and 'Catholic,' but it was not. It was more a political conflict between the unionists and loyalists for historical reasons. The Protestants, wanted Northern Ireland to remain within the

to sectarian violence was seen to have taken place in later summer. It was found that the rising rate of violence has been associated with Protestant Orange Order marches every summer on 12 July: the Glorious Twelfth or Orangemen's Day. The Troubles in Belfast, despite being publically known as inter-ethnic violence between Catholics and Protestants but it was not a religious conflict. The conflict was primarily political and nationalistic (it was a two-sided conflict of Republicans v. Loyalists, Nationalists v. Unionists), *and fueled by historical events*. The pattern of violence is linked to the marching schedule of Protestant fraternal organizations (such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians, Independent Orange Order, and Loyal Orange Institution) which are part of the Irish Protestant culture heritage, with no equivalent among Catholics.<sup>12</sup> The Glorious Twelfth or Orangemen's Day celebrates the Glorious Revolution (1688) and victory of Protestant king William of Orange over Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne (1690), which began the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland.

“Approximately twenty traditional marching dates are observed annually in Belfast by one or more of these groups, many in July and August to commemorate key historic events such as the Battle of the Boyne, the fall of Irish protestant soldiers at the battle of the Somme, and the Relief of Derry. Because these commemorations so often bring strong emotions and painful memories to the foreground of community consciousness, they have routinely provoked sectarian strife in Northern Ireland and Belfast in particular.”<sup>13</sup>

However, the case in Iraq is significantly serious as the platforms that provoke the tragic collective memories among Iraqis are constantly active through the destruction of heritage and the preservation of destruction - the Palace of Peace in Baghdad is one among many examples.

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United Kingdom. Irish nationalists and republicans, who were mostly Irish Catholics, wanted Northern Ireland to leave the United Kingdom and join a united Ireland.

<sup>12</sup> Jon Calame and Esther Charlesworth, *Divided Cities: Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Mostar, and Nicosia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 61.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 63.

## Architecture, Human being, and War: Warchitecture The Assassination of Heritage for Ethnic Cleansing

The worst case of politicizing and instrumentalizing architecture for violence, and the most devastating, is the recruitment of architecture as a crucial aspect of warfare. Violence in the 21st century isn't necessarily directed at people and the destruction of architecture is no longer the outcome of blind rage. The violence against architecture during war is impossible to sanction.<sup>14</sup> Hence, to destroy the enemy by destroying his architecture and habitat has become increasingly a meticulous war strategy.<sup>15</sup>

In (*Cities Unbuilt*),<sup>16</sup> the discussion of the dramatic proliferation of unbuilt cities in most postwar contexts, worldwide, unfolded several issues but particularly focused on the political agenda behind the systematic destruction of architecture during warfare. Moreover, the relationship between architecture, human beings, and war is revealed and highlighted in many contexts including the wars during the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.<sup>17</sup> This relationship explains the unique sort of violence that is aimed precisely and systematically at architecture and reveals the main target: human beings. This process of targeting human beings through targeting their architectural identity during warfare is an extreme military strategy defined by Andrew Herscher,<sup>18</sup> as 'Warchitecture.'<sup>19</sup> Herscher based his analytical argument on the documentations of the destruction of architecture during the episodes of violence and counter-violence in Kosovo including the ethnic cleansing committed by the Serb forces against Kosovar Albanians in 1998-

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<sup>14</sup>Andrew Herscher, "Warchitecture/Post-Warchitecture," *Volume#11: Cities Unbuilt*, (2007):68-77.

<sup>15</sup>Ole Bouman, "The Architecture of Destruction," *Volume#11: Cities Unbuilt*, (2007):4-5.

<sup>16</sup> Ole Bouman, Rem Koolhaas, and Mark Wigley, *Volume #11: Cities Unbuilt* (Stichting Archis, March 2007). <http://volumeproject.org/issues/volume-11-cities-unbuilt/>

<sup>17</sup> The wars during the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s include – but not limited to- the wars in Slovenia, Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995), Bosnian War and Siege of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica massacre which was by far the bloodiest (1992–1995), and Kosovo War (1998–1999).

<sup>18</sup>Andrew Herscher is an assistant professor of architecture at the University of Michigan, was co-director of the Department of Culture of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, and founded the Kosovo Cultural Heritage Project.

<sup>19</sup>Andrew Herscher, "Warchitecture/Post-Warchitecture," *Volume#11: Cities Unbuilt*, (2007):68-77.

1999 and the violence waged by Kosovar Albanians against Serbs in 1999. He concluded that 'Warchitecture' in these documentations refers to the strategic violence that targets buildings but aims at a mass assassination of human beings; it is the new form of ethnic cleansing.<sup>20</sup>

As Warchitecture rises the rates of violence and expands the casualties and the brutality of any war into a level that guarantees mass extermination and ethnic cleansing, it has become a potentially crucial aspect of warfare.<sup>21</sup> (Here I could find many resources in the library that include examples of specific buildings destroyed during the wars of the breakup of Yugoslavia, but I am yet to read and analyze each of them carefully).

In addition to many other examples, the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, stand as evidence to the brutality of Warchitecture and its massive consequences on the long run. Another example is the catastrophe of targeting the Samarra Mosque in 2006, in Iraq which was brutal enough to cause the outbreak of the first civil war in history of the country. Three years following the military operations of the 2nd Gulf War of 2003, particularly on Feb 22, 2006, Iraqis woke up on the news of targeting the Samarra Mosque (al-Askari Shrine).<sup>22</sup> By the end of the same day, ethnic-based murder toll had risen to frightening numbers marking the outbreak of the first civil war in the history of the country. This systematic targeting of the Samarra Mosque has intensified the violence in Iraq to its highest levels and incited outrage, fear, and a degree of resentment that appears to be stronger than any mass murder can engender.<sup>23</sup> The normal daily patrols of US coalition forces and Iraqi security forces were temporarily suspended in Baghdad during the few days following the bombing. Revenge militias had broken into civilians' houses in every neighborhood in Baghdad killing innocent people on ethnic basis. The rising rates of daily deadly explosions, ethnic cleansing and systematic assassination based on the religious and political backgrounds, abandoned houses, closed shops, and dead bodies on the streets had

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<sup>20</sup>Andrew Herscher, "Warchitecture/Post-Warchitectre," *Volume#11: Cities Unbuilt*, (2007):68-77.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> The Samarra Mosque -al-Askari Shrine in the city of Samarra - 60 miles north of Baghdad - built in 944 and is one of the holy sites particularly for Shia Muslims.

<sup>23</sup>Ole Bouman, "The Architecture of Destruction," *Volume#11: Cities Unbuilt*, (2007):4.



become the everyday scene. I still remember that feeling of being unsafe, threatened, exposed to danger, and homeless despite being inside my own house in my own country.

By 2007, over 4 million Iraqis fled the country seeking refuge around the world.<sup>24</sup> 2.7 million Iraqis had been internally displaced into places where they found majorities of their same ethnic description. This displacement crisis was described by (UNHCR) as the largest population migration and the largest movement of people in the Middle East since 1948.<sup>25</sup> The number of Iraqi refugees has increased dramatically that by 2018 the UN refugee agency UNHCR announced that the situation in Iraq is desperate. This massive population movement transformed Baghdad's demographical structure from a coherent heterogeneous society into fragmented homogeneous groups [Figure 1].<sup>26</sup> The more the social structure is divided, the more the urban fabric of the city is segregated, leaving fewer opportunities for peace to prevail.

**At this point, among many important aspects related to the discussion of Warchitecture, one important question rises to direct the research trajectory:**

### What Architecture is the Target of Warchitecture?

Experiencing 'Warchitecture' first hand, and examining the discourse of 'architecture and war' with a time span that covers more than six decades of wars and conflicts in different contexts proved that targeting architecture during 'Warchitecture' is never a random act. 'Warchitecture' is an agenda-based military strategy of targeting what is typically narrated as '*heritage*'.<sup>27</sup> The recruitment of cultural and architectural heritage in support of a political project becomes

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<sup>24</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Statistics on Displaced Iraqis around the World," *UNHCR*, September 2007, <https://www.unhcr.org/470387fc2.pdf> (accessed January 2018).

<sup>25</sup> IRIN, "Iraq 10 years on: The forgotten displacement crisis," *IRIN*, humanitarian news and analysis: a service of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 23 April 2013, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/97905/iraq-10-years-on-the-forgotten-displacement-crisis> (accessed February 20, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Michael Izady, "Atlas of the Islamic World and Vicinity (Infographs, Maps and Statistics Collection)," Category II. Ethnographic and Cultural, Section A, Ethnicity: Baghdad, Iraq, Ethnic composition 2003-2008. *Gulf/2000* (as the host). New York, Columbia University, Gulf 2000 Project: 2006-present, <http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml> (Accessed February 20, 2014 and January 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Herscher, "Warchitecture/Post-Warchitecture," *Volume#11: Cities Unbuilt*, (2007):68-77.

inevitable.<sup>28</sup> The target of Warchitecture is the architecture that has specific symbolic values, and the architecture that stands as a symbol of the value system in a particular culture.<sup>29</sup> The target is the architecture that associates with the collective memory of a nation; the architecture that represents the nation's moral values and its historical, cultural, and national identity.<sup>30</sup> The systematic destruction of architecture which is the evidence of a community's historic presence and the emblem of its right to a continued existence (monuments and heritage), is a deliberate act of completely destroying that culture's memory and ultimately, its existence.<sup>31</sup> Architectural heritage is not anymore merely a historic building, it is a symbol of the presence of a nation marked for erasure. Beyond monuments and heritage it is the sense of belonging, the collective memory and the cultural identity that is being destroyed.<sup>32</sup>

In Sarajevo, stated by Lebbeus Woods,<sup>33</sup> in his *War and Architecture*,<sup>34</sup> during the Bosnian War 1992-1995,<sup>35</sup> when the city and its citizens were still under the Siege of Sarajevo,<sup>36</sup> the architecture *which has specific symbolic values* had been systematically destroyed for ethnic cleansing. One of the examples is the Sarajevo City Hall, the great library, which was set on fire

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<sup>28</sup> Andrew Herscher, András Riedlmayer, Monument and Crime: The Destruction of Historic Architecture in Kosovo, Grey Room, Inc. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2000. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1262553.pdf>

<sup>29</sup>Ole Bouman, "The Architecture of Destruction," *Volume#11: Cities Unbuilt*, (2007):4.

<sup>30</sup> Lebbeus Woods, *War and Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>31</sup>Robert Bevan, "Cultural Cleansing," *Volume#11: Cities Unbuilt*, (2007):6-8

<sup>32</sup> Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* (London, UK: REAKTION LTD, 2016).

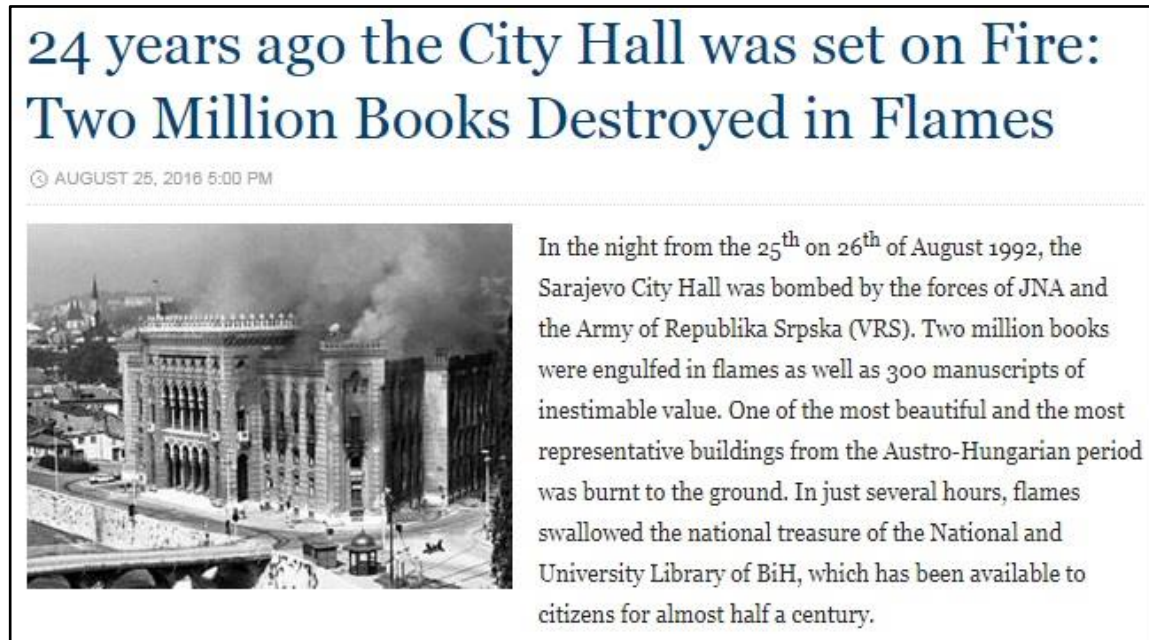
<sup>33</sup> Lebbeus Woods (1940-2012) was an American architect and artist known for his unconventional and experimental designs. The majority of his explorations deal with the design of systems in crisis.

<sup>34</sup> Lebbeus Woods, *War and Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>35</sup> The Bosnian War was an international armed conflict that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina on April 1992- and ended on December 1995. The war was part of the breakup of Yugoslavia.

<sup>36</sup> The Siege of Sarajevo was the siege of the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the longest of a capital city in the history of modern warfare. After being initially besieged by the forces of the Yugoslav People's Army, Sarajevo was besieged by the Army of the Republic of Serbia from 5 April 1992 to 29 February 1996 (1,425 days) during the Bosnian War.

[Figures 2]; the historic building with over three millions books and inestimable manuscripts were engulfed in flames unfolding the other face of the 'Srebrenica Massacre.'<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 2:** Sarajevo Times: After 24 years of the city Hall and the national Library destruction. [Source: Sarajevo Times,

Targeting what is typically narrated as the '*heritage*' during wars implies a political message of domination of one side and the elimination of the other. Setting a new hierarchy of 'either/or' system during wars is more than enough to cause mass scale war crimes such as ethnic and cultural cleansings. This is exactly what happened in Iraq, particularly during the Fall of Mosul (2014–2016). The systematic and brutal annihilation of architectural heritage in Mosul, north of

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<sup>37</sup> The Srebrenica massacre, also known as the Srebrenica genocide was the July 1995 massacre of more than 8,000 Muslim Bosniaks, mainly men and boys, in and around the town of Srebrenica during the Bosnian War. The killings were perpetrated by units of the Bosnian Serb Army of the Republic of Serbia (VRS). The forcible transfer and abuse, of between 25,000 and 30,000 Bosniak women, children and elderly which accompanied the massacre was found to constitute genocide (*Bosnian Genocide case*,) when accompanied with the killings and separation of the men. In 2005, Kofi Annan, then Secretary-General of the United Nations described the mass murder as the worst crime on European soil since the Second World War.

Iraq during the invasion of the city by the terrorists of ISIL, is announced by UNESCO as a cultural cleansing.<sup>38</sup>

It was a systematic and deliberate destruction of architectural landmarks that represent every historical, cultural, and religious unit of identity that captures the coherent diversity of the social structure of the city of Mosul. The historical monasteries, churches, mosques, the high profile historic and ancient sites, the museum, and even the libraries and the modern and national architectural landmarks, were brutally destroyed by ISIL.<sup>39</sup> The ultimate goal behind this brutal assassination of architectural heritage was to assassinate the diversity of the existing social structure in the city in order to impose the one extreme terrorist ideological model of ISIL. The destruction of heritage by ISIS was to prove its dedication to its own belief.<sup>40</sup> The goal was to destroy the history of a whole nation and to extremely eliminate its national identity, collective memory, the sense of belonging, the cohesive social structure, and above all: it was the human being that meant to be destroyed.<sup>41</sup> The followings are examples among many other destroyed sites in the city:

- Dair Mar Elia, the oldest monastery in Iraq (1,400 years),
- Al-Tahera church built in 1862, and Al-Saa'a church which dates to 1873 in the old city of Mosul,<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> UNESCO, World Heritage Convention, UNESCO calls for mobilization to stop "cultural cleansing" in Iraq. Friday, 27 February, 2015. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1242>

<sup>39</sup> The United Nations, UN News, Global perspective Human stories, UNESCO deplores 'cultural cleansing' of Iraq as armed extremists ransack Mosul libraries. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2015/02/490042-unesco-deplores-cultural-cleansing-iraq-armed-extremists-ransack-mosul>

<sup>40</sup> RASHID International, The Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Iraq as a Violation of Human Rights, Submission for the United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/CulturalRights/DestructionHeritage/NGOS/RASHID.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> UNESCO, World Heritage Convention, UNESCO mobilizes the international community to end cultural cleansing in Iraq. Wednesday, 11 March 2015. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1247>

<sup>42</sup> UNESCO, Restoration of the Al-Tahera Church in Mosul, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5Fd0w5sdNU>

- Various ancient artifacts in the ancient city of Hatra (now a UNESCO World Heritage site),
- Nearly 3,000-Year-Old Assyrian Ziggurat of Nimrud which was the ancient city's central temple,
- The city of Nimrud was demolished and the local palace was bulldozed, while Lamassu statues at the gates of the palace of Ashurnasirpal II were smashed.<sup>43</sup>
- the Great Mosque of Al-Nuri and its historical leaning minaret of which gave the city its nickname "the hunchback" ( al-Ḥadbā'), first built in the late 12th century, (blown up and completely destroyed by ISIS in the aftermath of their defeat by Iraqi military forces in the Battle of Mosul in June 2017).<sup>44</sup>

#### RETHINKING THE DESTRUCTION OF ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IN THE WORLD'S HISTORY OF WARS

During the period of the history before the World War I, Iraq was a region ruled by the Ottoman Empire (1534–1920). Particularly in 1860s, the Ottomans destroyed 'the historic walls of Baghdad'<sup>45</sup> in order to use its brick to build a military camp for the ottoman soldiers in the Baghdad, (Today the building is known as The Qushla or the Qishlah - القشلة - registered as UNESCO World Heritage site -Building (1861-1868 AD). Nothing left from the historic Walls of Baghdad except one of its main gates known as Bab al-Wastani (Arabic: باب الوسيطاني) which also suffers from major structural damage

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<sup>43</sup> A. R. WILLIAMS, ISIS Smashes Priceless, Ancient Statues in Iraq: Shattered treasures include winged bulls that guarded entrance to ancient Nineveh. National Geographic, February 27, 2015. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/150227-islamic-militants-destroy-statues-mosul-iraq-video-archaeology>

<sup>44</sup> BBC NEWS, Why Mosul's Great Mosque of al-Nuri mattered, 21 June 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39339373>

<sup>45</sup> The historic Round City of Baghdad was built by the order of the Abbasid caliph Abu Ja'far Al-Mansour in 762 AD, with walls and four gates for defensive purposes. This round walled city was mainly to include the administrative and religious buildings in addition to other major activities. The city continued to expand on both sides of the river. By early 1100s, Caliph Al-Mustarshid Billah (1118 - 1135 AD), ordered to build a wall on the eastern side of the city, today known as (Rusafa). The Eastern Wall – which was very thick brick wall with several watchtowers and a deep moat connected with the Tigris - remained until late in the 19th century. The main gates were: Mu'adham (North) Gate, Dhafariya (Wastani) Gate, Halaba (Talisman) Gate, and Basaliya Gate. The only gate extant today is the Wastani Gate. [https://www.atlastours.net/iraq/baghdad\\_walls.html](https://www.atlastours.net/iraq/baghdad_walls.html)

and deterioration due to continuous neglect and lack of professional maintenance.

In 1680s, with the aim of re-conquering all European lands that the Ottoman Empire occupied, the “Venetian” army was assembled. In 1687, the “Venetian” landed in Athens. The occupying Ottomans fortified themselves on the Acropolis and used the Parthenon as a repository for their gunpowder. The Acropolis was bombarded by the Venetians and the explosion blew apart the long sides of the Parthenon, and the ensuing fire that lasted for two days left the building in the skeletal state we see today.<sup>46 –47</sup>

**Now, if the destruction of architectural heritage is proved to be a systematic agenda-based military strategy and potentially a crucial aspect of warfare, then the preservation of heritage for rebuilding a positive peace in *post-war* and conflict contexts becomes a valid discussion.**

## Heritage Preservation for Sustainable and Positive Peace

In Iraq, particularly in Baghdad, during the civil war 2006-2008, when the city was waged with high level of sectarian violence, huge concrete walls have been installed along the lines around the segregated sectors in the city. The justification behind installing these walls was to control and mitigate the effect of the deadly daily explosions. However, explosions continued, and the effect of the daily bombing was increasing targeting more civilians. These walls have functioned as nothing but an ‘act of separation’.<sup>48</sup> The presence of these concrete walls has not

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<sup>46</sup> Brendan Dooley, and Sabrina A. Baron, eds. *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*. Routledge Studies in Cultural History 1. London: Routledge, 2001. [http://cachescan.bcub.ro/e-book/ADRIANA\\_Taylor%20&%20Francis\\_24%20sep/559436.pdf](http://cachescan.bcub.ro/e-book/ADRIANA_Taylor%20&%20Francis_24%20sep/559436.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Philip Chrysopoulos, September 26, 1687: When the Venetians Bombarded the Parthenon, Greek Reporter, September 26, 2017 <https://greekreporter.com/2017/09/26/september-26-1687-when-the-venetians-bombarded-the-parthenon/>

<sup>48</sup> Eyal Wieszman, “Rebel Architecture - The architecture of violence,” Al Jazeera English, Sep 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybwJaCeeA9o>



only increased the urban segregation and deformation, but, as an act of separation, has also deepened the roots of the social division [Figures 3 and 4].



**Figure 03:** The concrete walls installed in Baghdad during the sectarian violence in 2006-2008. [Source: the BBC news at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8034522.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8034522.stm)].



**Figure 04:** The concrete walls installed in Baghdad in 2006-2008 sectarian violence. An Iraqi boy squeezes through a gap in a stretch of security barrier erected in Baghdad's Adamiyah neighborhood. [Source: the SF Gate at <https://www.sfgate.com>].

The concrete walls (the walls of wars – architecture of violence) were constant reminder of the brutality of the daily deadly explosions and the trauma of the civil war. Just like the ‘peacelines’<sup>49</sup> of Belfast during the Troubles<sup>50</sup> and the concrete borders between Palestine and Israel,<sup>51</sup> the concrete walls of Baghdad have become informal battlegrounds. The gray, solid, concrete walls, for Iraqis, have become part of the distorted urban image of the city and turned Baghdad – the City of Peace- into a military camp.<sup>52</sup> Both the act of separation and architecture militarization cause nothing but the proliferation of more violence.<sup>53</sup>

By the end of 2008, the country witnessed a rising of public refusal to the presence of these walls inside the city; paintings have started to emerge on these same concrete walls transforming them from gray walls of wars and segregation into colorful tableaux.

Most of the paintings shared common subjects depicting the glorious history of the country, its ancient civilizations, and the proud moments that associates with the collective memory of Iraqis. The architectural heritage of the country was the main subject painted on the concrete walls. In many cases, these patterns have been photoshopped, shared on social media, and went viral [Figures 5, 6, and 7].

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<sup>49</sup> The ‘peacelines’ of Belfast were physical partitions which were constructed separating the two opposing sides of the Troubles - the ethno-nationalist armed conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Belfast during the years 1969-1998. These ‘peacelines’ physically divided the city into ethnic enclaves of either Catholics or Protestants communities and increased the sensitive interfaces of local violence providing fertile conditions for the roots of the conflict to spread

<sup>50</sup> Jon Calame and Esther Charlesworth, *Divided Cities: Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Mostar, and Nicosia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 61-63.

<sup>51</sup> Eyal Wiezman, “Rebel Architecture - The architecture of violence,” Al Jazeera English, Sep 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybwJaCeeA9o>

<sup>52</sup> Venus Suleiman Akef, "Architecture for Positive Peace: The Role of Architecture in the Process of Peacebuilding within Conflict and Postwar Contexts," p: 222-235. Doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2019, [http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc\\_num=ucin1559058624350655](http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=ucin1559058624350655)

<sup>53</sup> Gred Junne, interviewed by Lilet Breddels and Arjen Oosterman, “The Social Scientist: Did someone say collaboration?,” in *Volume 26: Architecture of peace*. #4. (Stichting Archis, 2010): 16-19.





**Figure 05:** Artists have created a visual history of Iraq on a blast wall on Abu Nowaz Street in Baghdad. [Source: The National at <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/artists-add-colour-to-grey-baghdad-1.507254> ].



**Figure 06:** Painting on the concrete walls in Baghdad, 2008; it depicts the details of the Ishtar Gate and the walls in the ancient city of Babylon, about 575 BCE –the ancient history of Iraq [Source: public domain].





**Figure 07:** The concrete walls in Baghdad, 2008; this particular image of the concrete walls was edited by Iraqi artist, using Photoshop, to depict images from the proud ancient history of Iraq (from left to right): The Sumerian Lyre which is the first musical instrument in the history of the world, the statue of Hatra Queen, the historic Minaret at the Great Mosque of Samarra, The Ishtar Gate of the Babylon, Abo Ja'afar AlMansour Monument (the founder of the Baghdad the round city), and the al-Hadba' ("the hunchback") the minaret of the Great Mosque of al-Nuri (which had been later destroyed by ISIS). The edited copy went viral on social media in Iraq [Source: public domain].

According to the theoretical framework of architecture for positive peace, the presence of the architectural heritage on the concrete walls, in its deep philosophical structures, was a process of dismantling the impact of the concrete walls as an act of separation, and transforming them from gray walls of wars and segregation (architecture of violence) into common-ground inclusive platforms (architecture of peace) for reconciliation, re-bridging the divided social structures in Baghdad, and rebuilding a positive peace. It was a process of activating common-ground patterns to which all Iraqis are proudly belong regardless of their political affiliations and religious backgrounds.

Ten years later, on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 (with the re-rise of Iraqi nationalism against state corruption, political and religious sectarianism, foreign intervention, poor public services, and many other major issues in Iraq) a series of protests consisting of demonstrations, marches, sit-ins and civil disobedience have started. The protests (known as October Revolution) soon had spread over the central and southern provinces of Iraq. This was not the first demonstrations in the country, but it was the first time after decades of wars that the protesters embrace a united national identity. No pictures or signs of specific religious or political affiliations such as in the previous protests. Instead, the pictures of the Lamassu (the same iconic statue destroyed by ISIS in Mosul) and other inclusive and common-ground emblems, icons, and symbols from Iraq's historic, cultural, and architectural heritage, that represent all the Iraqis, have emerged again depicting the underlying desire for reuniting the goals, bridging the divided social structure, and rebuilding what the politics and wars have destroyed [Figures 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12].





**Figure 08:** One of the pictures that went viral on Facebook and social media since the beginning of October Revolution in Iraq: the Lamassu (Sumerian protective deity) protecting the high-rise building overlooking AL-Tahrir Square in central Baghdad known as the Turkish restaurant which is now the center of the protestors.



**Figure 09:** Paintings depicting the destruction of heritage (the Lamassu) in Iraq by ISIS terrorists. Published by Omur Harmansah , in (ISIS, Heritage, and the Spectacles of Destruction in the Global Media) - University of Illinois at Chicago - September 2015.



**Figure 10:** Some of the Pictures that went viral on Facebook and social media since the beginning of October Revolution in Iraq, 2019: The analogy between the Iraqi protestors of October Revolution, and symbols from the ancient history and the architectural heritage of Iraq





**Figure 11:** Painted by the Iraqi artist, Khalid Al Mudallal, the analogy between the Iraqi protestors of October Revolution, 2019 and their ancestors in the Royal Standard Of Ur, "War" And "Peace" Side (C.2600 2400 B.C.E.)



**Figure 12 :** The word Peace is written in Arabic (سلام) with Cuneiform letters, painted by Osama Art on top of the al-Sinak Parking building which occupied by the Iraqi protestors, October 2019 [Source: Courtesy Osama Art].

## Why Heritage Preservation is Especially Crucial in Postwar and Conflict Contexts for Rebuilding a Sustainable Positive Peace?

Peace and war studies, particularly the treatises of Johan Galtung and John Paul Lederach,<sup>54</sup> emphasize the fact that the end of the wars, or the absence of direct violence, does mean peace is being achieved. In peace studies, this no-war/no-peace state, which includes almost all post-war and conflict contexts, is best defined by Johan Galtung as 'Negative Peace'.<sup>55</sup>

The postwar contexts, as a case of negative peace, is considered as significantly serious. Despite the cessation of direct violence, the structural levels and the root causes of the violence are still active and neither been addressed nor structurally transformed. The more the root

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<sup>54</sup> Johan Vincent Galtung, the Father of Peace Studies, the principal founder of the discipline of peace and conflict studies. He is the founder of TRANSCEND: A Network for Peace, Development and Environment; the founder of the world's first academic research center focused on peace studies: the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) in 1959; the founder of the Journal of Peace Research in 1964. He is founder of the TRANSCEND Peace University, the world's first online Peace Studies University in 2000. He was appointed the world's first chair in peace and conflict studies, at the University of Oslo in 1969. He has served as a professor for peace studies at University of Hawaii, a professor of Global Peace at the International Islamic University Malaysia, in addition to universities all over the world, including Columbia (New York), Oslo, Berlin, Belgrade, Paris, Cairo. He has mediated in over 150 conflicts between states, nations, religions, communities since 1957. Galtung is a holder of the Right Livelihood Award (AKA the Alternative Nobel Peace Prize) in 1987, and many other awards of peace. He is the author or co-author of more than 1600 articles and over 160 books on peace and related issues, including *Peace by Peaceful Means* (1996). <https://www.transcend.org/galtung/> <https://www.transcend.org/galtung/#bio>

John Paul Lederach is an American Professor of International Peacebuilding. He became the founding director for the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University in 1994. He served as a professor of conflict studies at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, and as a scholar at Eastern Mennonite University. Lederach is the author of several books on Conflict Transformation, conflict resolution and mediation, among them is: *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford University Press, 2005), and *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (USIP, 1997). Lederach is a holder of many awards such as the Community of Christ International Peace Award in 2000, Martin Luther King Order of Peace Medal in 2006, and the Distinguished Scholar Award - International Studies Association in 2014.

[http://kroc.nd.edu/assets/226608/fullsize/john\\_paul\\_lederach\\_cv\\_2014.pdf](http://kroc.nd.edu/assets/226608/fullsize/john_paul_lederach_cv_2014.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Negative peace is the absence of direct violence but the root causes of the conflicts are still active and yet to be addressed and structurally transformed. It is a no war/no peace state. The system is yet to be cured, but the violence has been halted. Negative peace is a very vulnerable system that any minor negative act can cause violence breakup at any moment. The system in this state requires urgent and careful intervention to address all the root causes of violence and structurally transform the context into the state of positive peace. Otherwise, the context remain a fertile site for violence breeding.

causes of the violence remain active and unaddressed, the more these roots are deepened in the society leaving fewer opportunities for rebuilding 'positive peace'.<sup>56</sup>

Because the immune system has not yet been built, the postwar context does not have the capacity to avoid breeding more violence in the future. Therefore, the postwar contexts becomes so vulnerable and unstable that even minor acts of stirring up troubles or agenda- based external interventions can tip the system back into new cycles of extreme violence.<sup>57</sup> This is exactly the case in Iraq; the country has continued in a serious case of negative peace for more than 40 years. All the root of the conflicts are still active and never been addressed nor structurally transformed. The result is a proliferation of more cycles of violence and long years of social division and political unrest. Targeting the Samarra Mosque in 2006, for example, was more than enough to cause the catastrophe of the civil war in Iraq.

During the states of negative peace (postwar contexts), it is crucial to address the root causes of conflict and activate inclusive common-ground platforms in order to structurally transform the contexts into the state of positive peace. This process of structural conflict transformation requires careful strategies for intervention.<sup>58</sup>

The destruction of heritage and the preservation of destruction – the example of the presidential palaces in Baghdad - operates as a strategy to promote more violence as it deepens the root causes of conflicts and intensifies tension and social divisions rather than preparing the ground for rebuilding a sustainable positive peace.

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<sup>56</sup> Positive peace is a state where the root causes of the conflicts and violence have been addressed and structurally transformed in a continuous process of creative conflict transformation and life enhancement. A system in a state of positive peace is cured, and its immune system/resistance and preventing disease/violence from breeding in future, has been built up. In the state of positive peace, the equilibrium is more stable, because its capacity for self-restoration has been built. Platforms that promote the self-restoration and enhance the system's resistance to conflicts and violence are active.

<sup>57</sup> Johan Galtung and Han Park, *Dialogue of Positive Peace*, a lecture at the Global Studies Institute at Georgia State University. Published in 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40PPH2K71fQ>

<sup>58</sup> Johan Galtung, *One on One*, an interview to the Al-Jazeera English. Published in 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJf0m-Nz35E>



Whereas, the preservation of architectural heritage, as it activates common ground, inclusive platforms (heritage), it stands as a strategy for structural conflict transformation and rebuilding a positive in postwar context.

Platforms- such as architectural heritage - promote social reconciliation and consolidation of national identity. These are crucial steps for building common-ground and inclusive platforms in the process of moving forward to rebuilding a positive peace and sustainable development in postwar contexts. Heritage preservation, in this sense, is a strategy to systematically improve the cultural and structural patterns underlying the context of conflict. It is to enhance resistance (building the immune system) in order to make the system more stable with a capacity of self-recovering and conflict resistance.

**Heritage preservation is not only to protect the architecture and the legacy of the past, it is also to rebuild a positive peace and sustainable development; Heritage preservation is a strategy to protect and rebuild the future.**

### Why This Research is Important?

The importance of this research (heritage preservation for positive peace) comes from being a response to the United Nations 2030 agenda for sustainable development, particularly Goal #11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. In this agenda, building sustainable peace is considered a top priority; bold steps and action plans are announced as being urgently needed.<sup>59</sup>

This research is a response to the core missions and visions of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO. This organization seeks to build a sustainable peace through international cooperation in education, sciences and culture in contribution to the

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<sup>59</sup> United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," The *United Nations*, *un.org*, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in the 2030 Agenda, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.<sup>60</sup>

This research is also a response to the calls from the field of peace studies that declared peacebuilding as a collaborative work; practitioners and scholars are urgently encouraged to activate the basic framework of peacebuilding in their fields of expertise.

Finally, and the most important point: this research addresses the current conditions in Iraq highlighting the major issues related to the tragic loss of the architectural heritage in the country.

Despite that Iraq is the cradle of civilization and the land of Mesopotamia that embraces the most valuable treasures from the first history of human being,<sup>61</sup> the field of historic preservation in Iraq is not yet up to the expected levels. The country has been a battle ground for more than four decades. Its rich architectural heritage and high profile historic sites have either been destroyed during wars and conflicts or left neglected lacking the least expected maintenance.

Heritage preservation in Iraq faces serious challenges such as:

- The lack of awareness about importance of heritage preservation as a sustainable development strategy.
- The lack of professional experience,
- The lack of academic discourses and rigorous research within the graduate and undergraduate programs in Iraqi universities.
- The lack of top down support,
- The lack of bottom up collective endeavors.
- The lack of public awareness about peacebuilding strategies and the seriousness of post-war contexts.

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<sup>60</sup> UNESCO, <https://www.unesco.org/en/brief>

<sup>61</sup> "Long known as "the cradle of civilization," Iraq is home to more than 10,000 cultural heritage sites, ranging from the 5,500-year-old cities of Sumer—where evidence of the earliest writings in the world are preserved—to archaeological remains of the Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, and Parthian cultures. Baghdad was one of the Arab world's earliest and greatest capitals, and the rest of Iraq enjoyed a golden age of architectural and political achievements in the Middle Ages. More recent monuments, such as Ottoman palaces and public buildings, as well as the work of modern international architects, have great value and significance in Iraq's history. The World Monument Fund, <https://www.wmf.org/project/cultural-heritage-sites-iraq>

## New Research Trajectories to be Further Investigated:

- 1- **Between Iconoclasm and Wraarchitecture: The Lost Heritage of Iraq**  
David Freedberg, Iconoclasm, University of Chicago Press, 2021.
- 2- **The Unwanted Heritage of Iraq**
- 3- **The tyranny of public spaces in postwar democratic Iraq: Any chances for rebuilding a sustainable peace?**
- 4- **The preservation of destruction in postwar Iraq**

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