

**PRESS RELEASE
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20 November 2008

**Cambridge conference investigates the fate of heritage in the
wake of war**

***Culture Wars: Heritage and Armed Conflict in the 21st Century,*
11-13 December 2008, CRASSH*, University of Cambridge**

Culture Wars examines the fate of heritage in the wake of 21st-century military conflict. Focusing on historical monuments, archaeological sites, and cultural and human landscapes that have been put at risk or destroyed in recent conflicts, this timely conference brings together speakers** from museums, libraries and NGOs; archaeology, classics, and law; and experts from Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. Coinciding with the *Babylon* exhibition at the British Museum, it also presents the British Museum's *Operation Iraqi Heritage*.

Culture Wars are struggles played out within and beyond the arenas of military conflict. Where the word 'culture' once denoted benign enrichment, it is now a term conjuring up images of violent polarisation and conflicting interpretations. Different groups are now prepared to defend their respective ideas of where their cultural heritage begins and ends, who are its guardians and the role this guardianship entails. Entrenched positions strain 'the nexus between cultural heritage and human rights' as is evident in the Balkans, or in the Taliban's deliberate destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan.

Such critical moments demand an urgent debate about the changing meaning of cultural heritage and its attendant symbols. Whether the violation is carried out against ancient monuments or modern icons of corporate achievement such as New York's Twin Towers, the underlying motivation for such acts points to an unshakable belief in the validity of a specific cultural viewpoint. Preservation moves perilously close to iconoclasm. Professor Mary Jacobus, Director of CRASSH, points to 'the urgency surrounding the preservation of cultural sites and historical monuments in times of war' as the driving force behind this conference, a collaboration between CRASSH, the Getty Research Institute, and the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.

Full programme and registration available at: <http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/events/166/>.

Ends

20 November 2008

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Notes to editors:

* Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) supports research and researchers across the disciplines, at the University of Cambridge. Through a range of activities and programmes CRASSH aims to help stimulate fresh thinking and dialogue in and beyond the arts, humanities and social sciences, <http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/>.

** Confirmed speakers include:

Abbas Alhussainy (Former Chair of the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage)
Michael Barry (Princeton University)
Reinhard Bernbeck (Binghamton University (SUNY))
Patrick Boylan (City University, London)
Hugo Clarke (Headquarters 3 (United Kingdom) Division)
John Curtis (British Museum)
Saad Eskander (Iraq National Library)
Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly (Archaeologist - Journalist, Al Akhbar newspaper)
Tatiana Flessas (LSE)
Dario Gamboni (Université de Genève)
Jan Hladík (UNESCO)
Jonathan Lee (Researcher and Cultural Advisor)
Jolyon Leslie (Aga Khan Foundation)
Margaret Miles (UC, Irvine)
David Myers (Getty Conservation Institute)
Alistair Northedge (Université de Paris I)
Roger O'Keefe (Cambridge)
András Riedlmayer (Harvard University)
Marie-Louise Sorensen (McDonald Institute)
Peter Stone (Newcastle University)
General Barney White-Spunner (GOC 3 (United Kingdom) Division)
Oliver Urquhart-Irvine (British Library)

