Jesse Casana is an Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology and the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Arkansas. His research explores settlement history, changing patterns of land use, environmental relationships, and political landscapes in the ancient Near East and beyond. He has directed archaeological field projects in Turkey, Syria, Dubai, and Cyprus, and currently co-directs a regional project in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Prof. Casana is a specialist in the development and application of geospatial technologies in archaeological research, and through the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) Syrian Heritage Initiative, he oversees a project to map looting and damage to archaeological sites in Syria and Iraq through analysis of recent satellite imagery.

Michael Danti is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Archaeology at Boston University and also the co-director of the US State Department-funded Syrian Heritage Initiative (SHI), a major project organized through the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) that is dedicated to monitoring damage to archaeological and heritage sites in Syria as well as to developing plans for mitigation and post-war preservation efforts. Through his work with the SHI, Prof. Danti has become one of the world’s leading experts on the cultural heritage issues brought about by the war in Syria and Iraq. Prior to the start of the war, he directed an archaeological excavation in Syria at the site of Tell es-Sweyhat, and currently directs a new regional project in the Iraqi Kurdistan.

McGuire Gibson is a Professor in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, and is one of the world's leading authorities on ancient Mesopotamia. Over his long career, he has directed fieldwork in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, including at the well-known city of Nippur, the religious center of ancient Mesopotamia. Following the first Gulf War in 1991, he began working to bring attention to the problem of looting in Iraq, and in 2003 served on a National Geographic delegation in Iraq to inspect archaeological sites damaged and looted in the wake of the US-led invasion. Since that time, he has remained one of the most vocal advocates for the protection of cultural heritage in Iraq and the broader Middle East.

Susan Kane is the Mildred C. Jay Professor of Art and Classical Archaeology at Oberlin College, and has conducted field research across much of the Mediterranean, including in Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, Tunisia, and Libya. Her research focuses on classical sculpture, architecture, and ancient building technologies, with an emphasis on archaeological science applications in these arenas. Prof. Kane has long served as the Director of the Cyrenaica Archaeological Project in Libya, and through this role has worked closely with Libyan antiquities authorities to manage cultural heritage and train Libyan staff, through the long history of conflict in that country.

Morag Kersel is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at DePaul University, whose research focuses on the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age of the eastern Mediterranean, as well as on cultural heritage protection, museums, and archaeological tourism in Jordan, Palestine and Israel. Her work combines archaeological, archival and oral history research in order to understand the efficacy of cultural heritage law in protecting archaeological landscapes from looting. Prof. Kersel is the co-director of the Galilee Prehistory Project in Jordan, and is widely known for her efforts to raise attention regarding the illicit trade in antiquities in the region.

Krista Lewis is an Associate Professor and Chair in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock. Her archaeological and ethnographic research investigates communities of the Arabian Peninsula and their role in international Indian Ocean trade routes, especially regarding the spread of agricultural techniques and culinary innovation. Dr. Lewis has conducted extensive field research in southern Arabia, and is currently the director of the Land of Frankincense Archaeological project in Oman, as well as the Dhamar Archaeological Survey Project in Yemen.
Conventional war and civil conflict, political upheaval and revolution, military coups and religious extremism, organized crime and war profiteering, the breakdown of state power and official corruption have all contributed – with escalating frenzy – to the rampant destruction, pillaging and looting of countless world heritage sites in the Middle East. Prehistoric sites – excavated and untouched – and historic urban quarters, religious shrines, palaces, castles, libraries, museums and archives have become zones of combat, targets of puritan zealots and/or suffered the indifference of those with more immediate imperial, expansionist, and totalitarian ambitions.

This conference brings together leading scholars with years of hands-on experience in the Middle East – from North Africa to Central Asia – who will speak to what has been lost, what remains under threat, and what might yet be done to track and, ultimately (if idealistically) preserve artifacts, texts and structures that speak to our past and that are part of our global cultural and civilizational heritage.

THURSDAY, MARCH 5

Attempting to Protect Cultural Heritage in the Middle East
Keynote lecture by Professor McGuire Gibson, University of Chicago
7:00 PM Willard J. Walker Hall Auditorium 218

FRIDAY, MARCH 6

Cultural Heritage in Crisis in the Middle East Symposium
9:00 AM - 6:00 PM Willard J. Walker Hall Board Room 504

9:00 AM Welcome
9:10 AM
Michael Danti, Boston University; Syria

9:50 AM
Jesse Casana, University of Arkansas-Fayetteville; Satellite-based monitoring in Syria and Iraq

10:30 AM Break
10:40 AM
Jason Ur, Harvard University; Iraqi Kurdistan

11:20 AM
Elizabeth Stone, Stony Brook University; Southern Iraq

12:00 PM Lunch
1:00 PM
Gil Stein, University of Chicago; Afghanistan

1:40 PM
Morag Kersel, DePaul University; Jordan/Palestine

2:20 PM
Sarah Parcak, University of Alabama-Birmingham; Egypt

3:00 PM Coffee & Cookie Break

3:20 PM
Susan Kane, Oberlin College; Libya

4:00 PM
Krista Lewis, University of Arkansas-Little Rock; Yemen

4:40 PM
Andrew Vaughn, ASOR; ASOR’s Cultural Heritage Initiatives

5:00 PM Discussion