

Cultural Heritage Crisis in the Middle East Symposium

Speaker Profiles

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 ethnoarchaeological 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.

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Sarah Parcak is an Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology and the Director of the Laboratory for Global Observation at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Her research uses satellite imagery to investigate settlement patterns in ancient Egypt, and she has undertaken archaeological fieldwork in the Fayoum, Siani Peninsula, and the eastern Nile Delta of Egypt. Prof. Parcak was a National Geographic Explorer and a TED Fellow, and is well-known for her wide-ranging appearances in popular media, including the BBC's Egypt's Lost Cities (2011) and Rome's Lost Empire (2013), and CNN's The Next List (2012). Her recent work has been devoted to using satellite imagery to document looting and damage to archaeological sites in Egypt that has taken place since 2011.

Gil Stein is a Professor in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and the Director of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, the world's leading center for research on the history, archaeology, and languages of the ancient Near East. Prof. Stein's research explores the evolution of complex societies, political economies of early states, ancient colonial interactions, as well as craft specialization and subsistence strategies. He has directed archaeological field projects in Turkey and Syria, and currently in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Prof. Stein has been actively involved in cultural heritage issues across the Middle East, and he currently oversees a US State Department-funded effort to document and protect cultural heritage in Afghanistan.

Elizabeth Stone is a Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Stony Brook University and is a leading authority on the ancient civilizations of southern Mesopotamia. Her research explores the ways in which urban structures reflect underlying social, political, and economic organization. Whenever the security situation has allowed it, Prof. Stone has directed archaeological fieldwork at the ancient city of Mashkan-shapir in southern Iraq, and has also worked in eastern Turkey and elsewhere. For many years, she has worked closely with Iraqi antiquities officials on cultural heritage management and training, and directs a long-running research program to map looting and damage to archaeological sites using satellite imagery.

Jason Ur is a Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University who specializes in early urbanism and cultural landscapes in the ancient Near East. Using field survey and satellite remote sensing techniques, he has undertaken archaeological fieldwork around the major Bronze Age cities of Hamoukar, Tell Brak, and Tell Beydar, in Syria, and currently directs the Erbil Plain Archaeological Project in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. As one of the first American archaeologists to begin fieldwork in the Kurdistan Region, Prof. Ur has worked closely for several years with antiquities officials in Erbil on cultural heritage management issues and training of Iraqi staff.

Andrew Vaughn is the Executive Director of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), the primary professional organization for Near Eastern archaeology in North America with over 90 institutional and 1600 individual members. As part of ASOR's newly launched Cultural Heritage Initiatives, Dr. Vaughn takes a leading role in coordinating among various international organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders in the emerging cultural heritage crisis that has spread across the Middle East in recent years.

Cultural Heritage Crisis in the Middle East Symposium

March 5-6, 2015

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	1:40 PM
	Morag Kersel, DePaul University; Jordan/Palestine
9:10 AM	2:20 PM
Michael Danti, Boston University; Syria	Sarah Parcak, University of Alabama-Birmingham; Egypt
9:50 AM	3:00 PM Coffee & Cookie Break
Jesse Casana, University of Arkansas-Fayetteville; Satellite-based monitoring in Syria and Iraq	3:20 PM
10:30 AM Break	Susan Kane, Oberlin College; Libya
10:40 AM	4:00 PM
Jason Ur, Harvard University; Iraqi Kurdistan	Krista Lewis, University of Arkansas-Little Rock; Yemen
11:20 AM	4:40 PM
Elizabeth Stone, Stony Brook University; Southern Iraq	Andrew Vaughn, ASOR; ASOR's Cultural Heritage Initiatives
12:00 PM Lunch	5:00 PM
1:00 PM	Discussion
Gil Stein, University of Chicago; Afghanistan	

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