



Political Crises' Implications on UNESCO World Heritage Sites

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to provide insights on the heritage sites of Yemen, Iraq and Syria, which are included in UNESCO World Heritage Site and which have been damaged and even ruined as a consequence of the political crisis in those countries. Crises are devastating events which primarily have impact on the surrounding environment and which may spread all over the world if they are failed to be stopped. Any type of crisis can lead to enormous impacts. However, the political crises which have occurred especially in the last five years have affected the whole world by morphing into armed conflicts, terror attacks and wars. Therefore, political crises without doubt pose the greatest threat to human life. They also pose a great danger for cultural heritage. Unfortunately, heritage sites become the primary targets of assailants who try to destroy the history, who want to ruin the evidence of history and erase the footprints of cultures. Heritage sites have great significance in the rebirth of a culture and a nation after a destruction. As Sheikh Edebalı said, "know your past well so you will step strong to your future; remember where you came from so you will not end up to the wrong destination." This is why heritage sites are of great importance for cultures, civilizations, nations, communities and history to carry on. Heritage sites need to be protected and repaired no matter under any circumstances.

Keywords: UNESCO World Heritage Sites, political crisis, war.

Politik Krizlerin UNESCO Dünya Miras Alanları Üzerine Etkileri

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı UNESCO Dünya Miras Listesi'nde yer alan ve politik krizler sonucunda zarar gören ve hatta yok olan Yemen, Irak ve Suriye'deki miras alanları hakkında bilgi vermektir. Krizler ilk olarak yakın çevresini etkisi altına alan ve durdurulamadığında tüm dünyaya yayılabilen yıkıcı olaylardır. Krizin her türü son derece etkili olabilmektedir. Ancak özellikle son beş yılda yaşanan politik krizler silahlı çatışma, terör saldırıları ve savaşa dönüşerek tüm dünyayı etkisi altına almıştır. Politik krizler hiç şüphesiz insan yaşamı için en büyük tehdidi oluşturmaktadır. Ancak kültürel miras için de çok büyük bir tehlikedir. Tarihi yok etmeye çalışan, tarihin kanıtlarını ortadan kaldırmak isteyen ve kültürlerin izlerini silmek isteyen saldırganların ilk hedefi maalesef kültürel miras alanları olmaktadır. Kültürel miras alanları bir kültürün, bir ulusun yıkım sonrasında yeniden doğuşunda çok büyük bir öneme sahiptir. Şeyh Edebalı'nın de sözünde belirttiği gibi "Geçmişini iyi bil ki, geleceğe sağlam basarsın; nereden geldiğini unutma ki, nereye gideceğini şaşırmasın." Bu nedenle kültürel miras alanları kültürlerin, uygarlıkların, ulusların, toplulukların ve tarihin devam etmesi için büyük bir öneme sahiptir. Bu alanların her ne şart altında olursa olsun mutlaka korunması ve onarılması gerekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: UNESCO Dünya Miras Alanı, kriz, politik kriz, savaş.

INTRODUCTION

Institute for Crisis Management (ICM) (2015) defines a crisis as "a disruption of routine operations of a business, which also could have a political, legal and financial impact on the business". Pauchant and Mitroff, on the other hand, believe that a crisis

is a disruption that physically affects the system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, its existential core (Ritchie, 2003: 70).

A crisis is in general a situation which, when present, disrupts normal flow of life, daily routines and can have very negative results. There are so many factors which result in the generation of a crisis. In this respect, it is possible to identify the types of crisis on the basis of their reasons. Overall, it is possible to review the crises encountered under topics such as economic crisis, political crisis, political violence-based crisis (terrorism), natural disaster based crisis, ecological crisis, biological crisis, social crisis, governance based crisis and technological crisis. Each type of crisis can cause substantial damages where it occurs. The political crises and negative impacts of political crises upon the places included in the list of UNESCO world heritage sites are reviewed in this study.

All the crises disrupt the order of business and cause panic environment. In case of crisis, it is necessary to take decisions promptly in order to return a business to its routine operations. The necessity to take prompt decisions may, however, cause to take wrong decisions. Therefore, the unforeseen crises cause psychological pressure on the governments, decrease productivity and are perceived as disasters (Çiftçi, 2015: 11).

Political instability is a situation where the elements working outside of the normal operation of the political system force the conditions, mechanism and rules of the state authority at a level to threaten the political validity. Political instability can also be an off-balance situation which a country encounters and in which prerequisites for controlling and sustaining social order are temporarily disrupted (Isaac, 2010: 22).

The political crisis which is also defined as “political instability” and which is described as weakening of administrative power of the central authority in a country can be diversified as loss of authority resulting from change of political power, chaos related to election process, domestic political issues, international tensions, terror attacks and wars (Küçükaltan, Tükeltürk and Çiftçi, 2015:17). The crises which initially start especially as a political crisis, turn to chaos and lead to a war and the impacts of those crises on UNESCO World Heritage Sites are addressed in this study.

1. Political Crisis and UNESCO World Heritage Sites

A crisis which initially occur as a disagreement between administrators, politicians of a state may change its dimension, turning to a civil war, an international war and violent terror acts. No matter what the reason is, the political crises which have substantial effects especially on the people of a country cause countless people to leave their country, families and the land where they were born and raised, to immigrate to other countries, to become unemployed and to starve. A great number of people try to continue their lives sick and injured and most of them lose their lives. There is no doubt that human life has the first priority in crisis situations. But, political crises also cause countries, civilizations, thousands years of history to vanish. History is the sole element which a society is responsible for preserving in order to continue its

existence and to build its future. For that reason, world heritage sites are increasingly becoming the collateral victims of political crisis all around the world.

Since the primary purpose especially in the political crises, which turn into violent terror acts and wars, is to do harm to society and culture, the initial target of the assailants becomes the cultural and and historical works of art. Unfortunately, very tragic examples of such situations have been encountered throughout history and even today. Political conflicts and wars, earthquakes and other natural disasters, pollution, uncontrolled and unplanned urbanization and unregulated development of tourism are the factors which constitute the greatest threat to World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, 2015).

Table 1. List of World Heritage in Danger by Region

Regions	Cultural	Natural	TOTAL
Africa	3	13	16
Arab States	16	0	16
Asia and the Pasific	2	2	4
Europe and North America	4	1	5
Latin America and Caribbean	5	2	7
TOTAL	30	18	48

Source: UNESCO, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Heritage List Statistics, List of World Heritage in Danger, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/stat/#s9>, Access Date: 12.03.2016.

A total of 48 cultural and natural properties are found in the “List of World Heritage in Danger” prepared by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. The cultural properties given in Table-1 were damaged by the wars and terror acts resulting from political crises.

Table 2. List of World Heritage in Danger by Country

Country	Cultural Property	Year
Afghanistan	Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley	2003
Afghanistan	Minaret and Archaeological Remains of Jam	2002
Bolivia	City of Potosí	2014
Egypt	Abu Mena	2001
Georgia	Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery	2010
Georgia	Historical Monuments of Mtskheta	2009
Iraq	Ashur (Qal'at Sherqat)	2003
Iraq	Hatra	2015
Iraq	Samarra Archaeological City	2007
Jerusalem	Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls	1982
Mali	Timbuktu	2012
Mali	Tomb of Askia	2012
Palestine	Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, Bethlehem	2012
Palestine	Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines-Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir	2012
Peru	Chan Chan Archaeological Zone	1986
Serbia	Medieval Monuments in Kosovo	2006
Syria	Ancient City of Aleppo	2013
Syria	Ancient City of Bosra	2013
Syria	Ancient City of Damascus	2013
Syria	Ancient Villages of Northern Syria	2013
Syria	Crac des Chevaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din	2013
Syria	Site of Palmyra	2013
Uganda	Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi	2012
Yemen	Historic Town of Zabid	2000
Yemen	Old City of Sana'a	2015
Yemen	Old Walled City of Shibam	2015

Source: UNESCO, List of World Heritage in Danger, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/danger/>, Access Date: 12.03.2016.

The “List of World Heritage in Danger” is arranged on a country basis in Table-2. It is seen that a large number of cultural heritage properties damaged by political crises have reached the phase of vanishing especially within the last 15 years. Looking at the table, it is possible to say that Syria, Iraq and Yemen have received the greatest damage from those crises encountered.

2. UNESCO World Heritage Sites and Protecting Laws

A large number of properties included in UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage List are affected negatively by the ongoing crises. Especially the wars and terror attacks cause those areas to be damaged and even destroyed unfortunately. UNESCO, focusing on this issue, created “The List of World Heritage in Danger” in the early 2000s. This list was prepared in order to inform the societies at international level and create the sensitivity required for repairing the actual damage (UNESCO, 2015). The cultural and natural properties included in this list are also supported by the

committees, commissions and funds created for that purpose, and the pecuniary resources required for carrying out the necessary restoration works are furnished.

In addition, a number of international conventions and agreements have been prepared and signed in order to protect the sites which are damaged by the political crises such as armed attacks, terror acts and wars. Those can be listed as follows:

- **1954** - Hague Convention protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict
- **1970** - UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property
- **1972** - Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage
- **1995** - UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects
- **2001** - Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage
- **2003** - Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
- **2005** - Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions

From the conventions given above, the “Hague Convention” signed in 1954 has a privileged importance. The main object of this convention is to protect the sites which are damaged as a consequence of the armed attacks. The Hague Convention is the first multilateral convention, made on the global scale, aiming to ensure protection of tangible cultural heritage against armed attacks and wars. It covers protecting immovable architectural monuments, historical artifacts, artistic and historical archaeological sites, movable works of art, statues, books and other historical collections. All such property is generally protected under the Convention, regardless of its origin or ownership (Hladík, 2006: 2).

The Hague Convention of 1954 however fell short against the political crises occurring in the form of armed attacks, and the Second Protocol was drafted by expanding the Convention in 1999. The Second Protocol elaborates the provisions of the Convention relating to safeguarding of and respect for cultural property and the conduct of hostilities; thereby providing greater protection than before. It creates a new category of enhanced protection for cultural heritage that is particularly important for humankind, enjoys proper legal protection at the national level, and is not used for military purposes. It also specifies the sanctions to be imposed for serious violations with respect to cultural property and defines the conditions in which individual criminal responsibility shall apply (UNESCO Armed Conflict and Heritage, 2015).

All these signed conventions aim to protect UNESCO World Heritage Sites. But, unfortunately, it is seen that they do not impose any sanctions upon the persons who are responsible for political crises. Ruining and destroying historical and cultural properties must also be judged as a major crime against humanity. It is absolutely forbidden to damage hospitals and safety zones pursuant to Article 14 and neutralized

zones pursuant to Article 15 of the Geneva Convention, which was signed on 12 Ağustos 1949 (ICRC, 2015). However, historical and cultural properties were not included in the scope of this convention. Protection of historical and cultural properties must be included in the scope of the Geneva Convention by way of a new update.

3. Case Studies

In this section of the study, the historical and cultural properties which have been damaged by the political crises experienced in the recent past are examined. In this context, information about the damage caused by the political crises on the cultural and historical properties in Yemen, Iraq and Syria will be provided.

3.1. Case Study-1: Yemen

In March 2015, a complex and long-running political crisis in Yemen rapidly escalated into all-out conflict. Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, was heavily bombarded during the night of May 11, 2015 as part of the assault that the Arab Coalition led by Saudi Arabia carried out against Shia Houthis in Yemen, and this assault caused serious damage upon many historical sites. In addition, the city of Sa'adah, included in the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage and the archaeological site of the pre-Islamic city of Baraqish were also damaged as a result of the bombing (UNESCO, 2015).

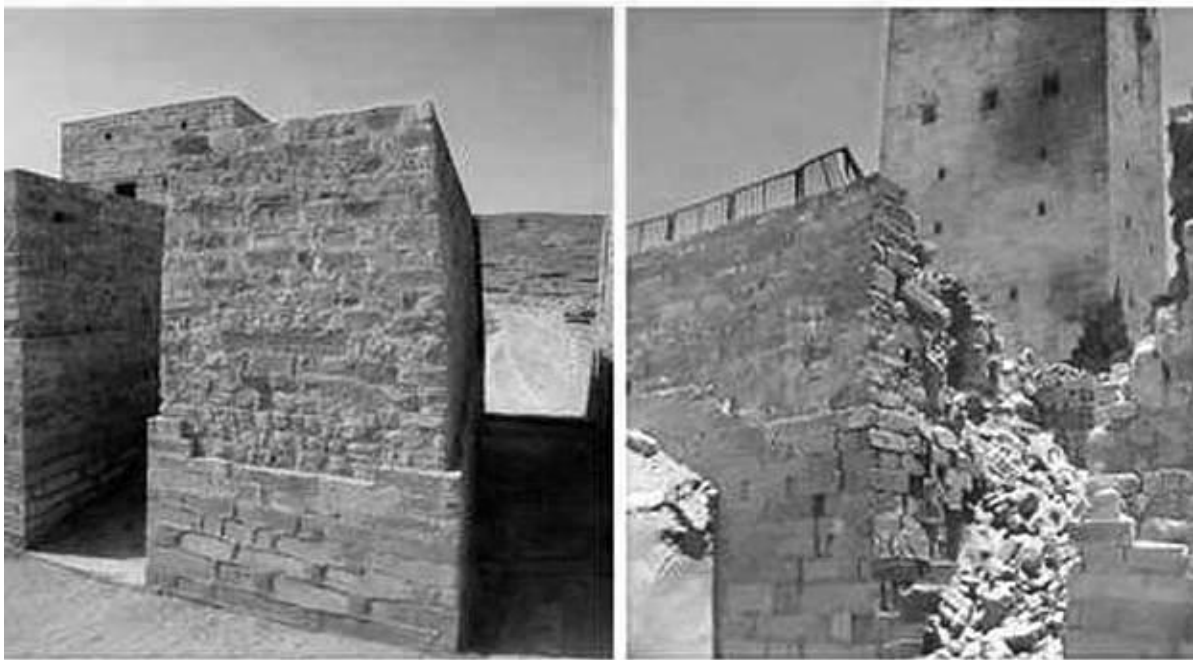


Figure 1. Before and after photos of damage to the Great Dam of Marib

Source: Telegraph UK Daily News, Photo: DAI/Burkhard Vog
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/middleeast/yemen/11678151/Yemen-the-Unesco-heritage-slowly-being-destroyed.html>

From figure-1, are seen the photos of the Great Dam of Marib before the bombing (left), and after the bombing (right). It is possible to state that the Dam of Marib, which is one of the important historical properties of Yemen, received considerable damage as a result of the assaults.

Yemen, with a long-standing history, has three cultural properties included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Historic Town of Zabid was included in the list in 1993, Old City of Sana'a in 1986 and Old Walled City of Shibam in 1982. Also, 10 of the cultural properties were included in the Tentative List in 2002.

Table 3. Yemen's UNESCO Tentative List

Archaeological Site of Marib
Historic City of Saada
The Historic City of Thula
The Madrasa Amiriya of Rada
Jibla and Its Surroundings
Jabal Haraz
Jabal Bura
Balhaf / Burum Coastal Area
The Hawf Area
Sharma / Jethmun Coastal Area

Old Walled City of Shibam, Old City of Sana'a and Historic Town of Zabid, which are the three of the important cultural heritages of Yemen, were added to the List of World Heritage in Danger. The Old City of Sana'a and the historic centre of Saa'dah suffered quite serious damage as a result of the bombing raids carried out against them. Several other properties of Yemen included in the World Heritage Tentative List also received damage during the attacks. Citadel of Taz, the archaeological site of the pre-Islamic walled city of Baraqish, the archaeological sites of Marib from the end of 2nd millennium B.C., and the Great Dam of Marib, a marvel of technical engineering. Movable heritage has also suffered severe losses, as in the case of the Dhamar Museum, which used to host a collection of 12.500 artefacts, and was completely destroyed in May 2015 (World Heritage Center, 2015).



Figure 2(a). Sana'a, before the bombing raid



Figure 2(b). Sana'a, after the bombing raid

Source: UNESCO Media Services (2015), http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/singleview/news/the_director_general_of_unesco_condemns_the_destruction_of_historic_buildings_in_the_old_city_of_sanaa_yemen/#.Vn0iZ7aLTMw.

From figure 2 (a), are seen the photos of the Old City of Sana'a before the bombing and figure 2 (b), after the bombing. The city of Sana'a was built 2,500 years ago. The city turned to be an important religious center where Islam was an important religious center where Islam was accepted in the 7th and 8th centuries. Sana'a hosts both religious and political buildings. Within this framework, there are more than 6.000 houses which were built before the 11th century as well as 103 mosques, 14 hammams in the city. Sana'a's many-storeyed tower-houses built of rammed earth add to the beauty of the site (UNESCO, 2015). The city of Sana'a was added to the UNESCO World Heritage Site list in 1986, but many of the buildings were destroyed as a result of the air raids on the city, and consequently the city was added to the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2015.



Figure3(a). Shibam, before the bombing



Figure 3(b). Shibam, after the bombing

Source: Twitter, Photo by Bin Alawi Alhashmi, <https://twitter.com/HishamAlRadhi>

From Picture-3, are seen the photos of the Old Walled City of Shibam before the air raids (up), and after the air raids (down). The bombings caused massive damage to this city. The 16th-century city of Shibam is one of the oldest and best examples of urban planning based on the principle of vertical construction. Its impressive tower-like structures rise out of the cliff and have given the city the nickname of “The

Manhattan of The Desert" (UNESCO, 2015). Also it's often called "the oldest skyscraper city in the world". Shibam was added to the UNESCO World Heritage Site list due to its unique features in 1982, but it was damaged heavily as a result of the raids on the city, and consequently the city was added to the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2015.

3.2. Case Study-2: Iraq

With a long standing history, Iraq has plenty of cultural and historical sites. A total of four cultural properties of the country which are Ashur (Qal'at Sherqat), Erbil Citadel, Hatra, Samarra Archaeological City are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Also, eleven cultural properties have been added to the UNESCO Tentative List. These properties are as follows:

Table 4. Iraq's UNESCO Tentative List

Name	Accepted Date
Ur	2000
Nimrud	2000
The Ancient City of Nineveh	2000
The Fortress of Al-Ukhaidar	2000
Wasit	2000
Babylon - Cultural Landscape and Archaeological City	2003
The Marshlands of Mesopotamia	2003
The Site of Thilkifl	2010
Wadi Al-Salam Cemetery in Najaf	2011
Amedy city	2011
Historical Features of the Tigris River in Baghdad Rusafa, which extends from the school Al-Mustansiriya to the Abbasid Palace	2014

Deliberate destruction and theft of cultural heritage has been conducted by ISIL since 2014 in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. The destruction targets various places of worship under ISIS control and ancient historical artifacts. In Iraq, ISIS has plundered and destroyed at least 28 historical religious buildings (Khalid, 2015). ISIS announced their intention to destroy many artifacts, claiming that such "graven images" were un-Islamic, encouraged shirk and could not be permitted to exist, despite the preservation of the site for 1,400 years by various Islamic regimes. Isis militants pledged to destroy the remaining artifacts (Cockburn, 2015).



Figure 4. The site of the Prophet Jonah Mosque before the attack in 2013

Source: Photo by Mohammad Al-Katib (RFE/RL) <http://www.rferl.org/content/iraq-mosul-islamic-state-czech-archaeologists/26972365.html>

In Figure-4, it's shown Iraq Prophet Jonah Mosque. The mosque which had been preserved pretty well until ISIS' attacks, was then became as seen in figure-5 following the air bombardment, and was demolished almost entirely.



Figure 5. The site of the Prophet Jonah Mosque after its demolition by ISIS in July 2014

Source: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com.tr/makale/kesfet/isidin-yok-ettigi-tarih/2431>

The World Heritage site of Hatra in Iraq inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger on July 2015 due to damage inflicted to the property by armed groups. Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1985, the remains of the city, especially the temples where Hellenistic and Roman architecture blend with Eastern decorative features, attest to the greatness of its civilization. Two other Iraqi sites are inscribed on the World Heritage List in Danger: Ashur (inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2003) and Samara Archaeological City (inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2007) (UNESCO, 2015). According to the Iraqi Ministry of Tourism report ISIL destroyed the

remnants of the 12th-century Bash Tapia Castle in Mosul. Adding to that, 20% of Iraq's 10,000 archaeological sites has been under ISIL control (Toronto Star, 2015).

3.3. Case Study-3: Syria

ISIS, like the other terrorist organizations, brings heavy damages on the habitat, killing people. In addition to this, ISIS does damage to and destroy historical artifacts, archaeological sites, museums, historical books, ancient cemeteries and world cultural heritage properties (Engele, 2015: 142). These destroyed artifacts have an important position in enabling the history of humanity and the antecedents of civilization to be understood since a very long time ago. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic said "Those who do not know their own history can not steer their own future". This saying clarifies the importance of history and historical properties. History primarily relies upon written records and documents to interpret the broad strokes of previous lives and events, and archaeology provides another source of information for these time periods and allows us to perceive a time before written language to understand how earlier humans interacted with their world.

Syria has a vast historical and cultural richness extending from prehistoric ages to the end of the Ottoman Empire. As a consequence of this, the whole country is surrounded with thousands of archaeological sites, historical artifacts and monuments. This country as the home of the oldest civilizations of the world is fairly an outdoor museum. However, the terror attacks experienced by the country has unfortunately endangered the archaeological and cultural heritage of the country by damaging this heritage. The terror and conflicts experienced have turned all these historical and cultural sites into a battlefield (Cheikhmous, 2013: 351).

The other sites of the country included in the UNESCO's World Heritage List were also examined through satellite images. As a result of the examination, it was stated that the ancient cities found in the north of Syria were damaged seriously by the conflicts. The ancient city of Palmyra, dating back to 19th century B.C., which once hosted tourists from all around the world, M.Ö. has turned to a battlefield and a terror headquarter. According to the UNITAR report, 24 of the ancient cities were completely destroyed, 189 of the sites were partially damaged and 77 of those were seriously damaged (Shaoul, 2015).

There are a total of six cultural properties of Syria included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, which are: Ancient City of Aleppo, Ancient City of Bosra, Ancient City of Damascus, Ancient Villages of Northern Syria, Crac des Checaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din and Site of Palmyra. Additionally, twelve cultural properties of the country have been added to the UNESCO Tentative List. This list is as follows. But, as a result of the attacks encountered, these six ancient cities which were once included in the World Heritage List were then transferred to the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2013.

Table 5. Syria's UNESCO Tentative List

Name	Accepted Date
Noréas de Hama	1999
Ugarit (Tell Shamra)	1999
Ebla (Tell Mardikh)	1999
Mari (Tell Hariri)	1999
Dura Europos	1999
Apamée (Afamia)	1999
Un Château du désert: Qasr al-Hayr ach-Charqi	1999
Maaloula	1999
Tartus: la cité-citadelle des Croisés	1999
Raqqa-Râfiqa: la cité abbasside	1999
L'île d'Arwad	1999
Mari & Europos-Dura sites of Euphrates Valley	2011



Figure 6. The Old quarter of Aleppo, before and after bombing

Source: <https://alisariram.wordpress.com/2013/04/18/bearing-witness-the-destruction-of-the-old-city-of-aleppo-the-second-oldest-city-in-the-world-part-three-continued/>



Figure 7(a). The ancient Roman Theatre in Bosra, before bombing



Figure 7(b). The ancient roman theatre in Bosra, after bombing

Source: <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=41214>



Figure 8. The Baalshamin Temple in Palmyra, before and after bombing

Source: Cuneo, A., Penacho, S., Gordon, L. (2015), ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives Special Report, Update on the Situation in Palmyra.

Another UNESCO World Heritage Site which was under the control of ISIS is the ancient city of Palmyra. Palmyra was used by the militants as a headquarter and

the majority of the city was damaged seriously and destroyed partially. According to the report prepared by the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), a massive damage was caused on the archaeological sites of Baalshami Temple, The Temple of Bel, and at least seven tower tombs within the Valley of the Tombs. Also 646 incidents of reported cultural heritage damage and destruction in Syria compiled from approximately 480 preliminary reports from various sources (American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), 2015). The authorities reported that 125 archaeological artifacts were damaged as a result of the grave digging most of which were unauthorized and illegal in the ancient city of Palmyra during the period from 2012 to May, 2015. Also, at least 24 objects were reported to be lost (Ali, 2015:50).

CONCLUSION

The political crises encountered can lead to civil wars, armed conflicts, terror attacks, genocides and even international wars when failed to be brought under control. In this study, it is aimed to describe the damaging and destructive effects of the wars and terror attacks which originally arise as a political crisis but then evolve into a situation in such a way to bring the countries to the brink of destruction.

The political crises experienced impose damage to heritage sites in many parts of the world. But, in this study Yemen, Iraq and Syria, each of which especially have a long standing history and which has suffered the mentioned effects most recently are considered as a case study. As a common pointü each of these countries are located in the Middel East. The conflicts occurring in these three countries, which are very close to each other geographically, have caused massive damage to the heritage sites, and caused many of the sites once included in the UNESCO World Heritage List to be transferred to the List of World Heritage in Danger. Since the conflicts and attacks are still being carried out, a reparative response can be provided to those sites suffering the resulting damage to a limited extent. However, it is necessary to take strong measures in order to protect these sites against wars and to rewrite the international laws of war, and the country administrators need to collaborate in the process of protection and repair. A better protected history will light the way to a better built future.

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