

Conference Review

WAC Inter-Congress *Archaeology in Conflict*, Vienna, Austria, 6–10 April 2010

The international conference *Archaeology in Conflict* (<http://www.archaeologyin-conflict.org>), was held under the auspices of the World Archaeological Congress (WAC) and the Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield (ANCBS), in Vienna on 6–10 April 2010. The congress took place at UNO-City (a complex hosting the United Nations Office at Vienna) and was held with the support of the Culture Sector of UNESCO and under the patronage of the Austrian Commission for UNESCO. It was organised by Friedrich T Schipper (University of Vienna) and Magnus T Bernhardtsson (University of Iceland & Williams College), and was hosted by Michael F Pfeifer of the United Nations Youth and Student Association of Austria.

The conjunction of WAC — dealing with, amongst other things, the ethical and political aspects of archaeology — and the Blue Shield — aiming at protecting cultural sites in the event of armed conflict — gave rise to an important conference examining the multiple ways in which archaeology is being treated in a conflict situation. Following the previous WAC Inter-Congress in Ramallah in August 2009, entitled *Overcoming Structural Violence*, the aim of this conference was to tackle different aspects of cultural heritage and archaeology in armed conflict, from historical, practical, legal, ethical and moral standpoints. The main topics covered by the sessions were: governmental and non-governmental organisations dealing with cultural heritage; international legislation; archaeologists and cultural heritage professionals working with or embedded within the military; the ethics of conflict archaeology; archaeology in Middle Eastern and Balkan conflicts; archaeology of past conflicts; illicit trade; the Next Generation; and the closing session on archaeology in conflict — what role for the scientific community. The conference delegates also attended a lecture by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, delivered at the Austrian Parliament.

The speakers ranged from archaeologists and cultural heritage experts to military officers, graduate students and representatives from international organisations such as the United Nations, Red Cross, ICCROM and ICOM. They mainly arrived from Austria, the United States and the United Kingdom, but there also from many other countries, such as Ireland, Germany, The Netherlands, Italy, Hungary, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Turkey, Lebanon, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Brazil. Unfortunately participants from Iran, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Palestine and Algeria had to cancel their participation and could not attend the conference.

One of the most debated topics was the moral dilemma that archaeologists and cultural heritage specialists are facing when asked to cooperate with invading armies, especially with regards to the latest events in Iraq. Should scholars share their invaluable knowledge with the military during an armed conflict? If so, how is this

involvement supposed to take place? And does that mean that these experts are drawn into the conflict, actively encourage the invasion, or agree with it? In this conference, the general atmosphere was in support of the cooperation of scholars with the military. One of the participants, working for the US Army, made a good point saying that soldiers participating in the invasion of a foreign country do not necessarily agree with the politically made decisions to be there. It seems that some archaeologists conceive the military as a necessary evil, and would perceive themselves as actively taking part of invasion or violent act if they agreed to provide the army with information about cultural properties in the invaded country. The variety of debates during the conference generally decided that this is not the case. The military is expected to protect cultural property and archaeological sites, hence it is in need of professional archaeological inventories and accurate and reliable data regarding the cultural heritage of the land in which they operate. If heritage experts do not provide this vital information to the military, who will?

In addition, the conference encouraged crucial debates on the role of cultural heritage experts and archaeologists in times of war or an armed conflict; debated international legislation related to conflict situations, and its problems and limitations; discussed the role of international organisations in the protection of cultural property; offered interesting case studies on how to promote partnership between the military and scholars; and raised the issue of working in a post-conflict realities by involving local communities in the rehabilitation of their cultural heritage. A particular good paper was given by Howayda al-Harithy (American University of Beirut) on 'Reclaiming the past and post war reconstruction in southern Lebanon'.

The last session, symbolically dedicated to the Next Generation project, was an initiative aimed at connecting a younger generation of archaeologists and cultural heritage researchers in order to build relationships and promote discussions between students coming from different backgrounds. The participation of graduate students in this session, and throughout the conference, reflected their awareness of the importance of keeping open channels of communication, and their will to take upon themselves the difficult and politically charged task of dealing with the ethical and moral aspects of archaeology in modern times.

The proceedings of the conference are scheduled to be published in June 2010, in *Forum Archaeologiae*, Austria's online archaeology journal (<http://farch.net>). The next event dealing with the protection of heritage in times of conflict is a workshop at the next annual meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), entitled *Cultural Heritage Protection and Management — Protecting Heritage in War-zones and the Role of the Media*, and will take place in Atlanta, Georgia, on 17–20 November 2010 (see conference listing in this issue).

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