


EDITORIAL

Editorial

Sophie Vigneron 

Email: s.vigneron@kent.ac.uk

The second issue of the year includes a range and variety of subjects that correspond to the diversity of the field: the securitization of heritage, trafficking, restitution, underwater heritage, and intangible heritage. They have in common the critical issue of the preservation of cultural heritage and have been written by scholars from different continents, perspectives, and disciplines, reflecting the journal's commitment to interdisciplinarity. Together, they provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and strategies to protect and safeguard both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Lynn Meskell and Benjamin Isakhan's examination of heritage conflict and the roles of the UNSC and UNESCO in Iraq and Syria reveals the complex interplay between cultural heritage preservation and international security. The securitization of heritage, involving military training, peacekeeping, international law, and cultural property protection, is presented as a necessary response to the threats posed by conflict and terrorism. Yet, the authors emphasize the need for a humanitarian approach that considers the local context and the lived experiences of communities affected by heritage violence to forge a better relationship between heritage, security, and peacebuilding.

The conflict in Syria has led to the destruction and trafficking of its cultural heritage some examples are found in the ICOM's Red List of Syrian cultural objects. Ammar Kannawi, Salam Al Quntar (Al Kuntar), Daren Gahli, and Neil Brodie examine in detail the fate of one artifact, *The Lion Statue of Ain Dara*, a colossal basalt statue of a lion that was located at the archaeological site of Ain Dara in northwest Syria. This statue is a prominent local symbol of great importance for the collective memory of northwest Syria, especially for the people of Wadi Afrin, and its disappearance has affected the local economy as it was an important tourist attraction. Their case study sheds light on the networks responsible for looting and trafficking Syrian antiquities, the factors that have enabled their growth during the conflict, and the role of civil society in reducing their harmful impact on local communities.

The following article also analyses trafficking but in Thailand this time, and focuses on the need for accurate provenance research and historical documentation. Tanongsak Hanwong, Lalita Hanwong, and Stephen A. Murphy investigate the trafficking of the Prakhon Chai Hoard to debunk long-standing myths and misidentifications, some made innocently and others made with the intention to conceal and deceive. Their meticulous research highlights the importance of rigorous scholarship in this field.

The next article by Staffan Lundén is a critique of Dan Hicks's *The Brutish Museum*. He addresses the contentious issue of historical narratives and what he calls the distortion of facts in Benin's historiography. Lundén calls for a balanced approach to restitution that acknowledges the complexities of history and the need for justice.

Andreas Giorgallis provides a detailed analysis of the legal protection of underwater cultural heritage in Cyprus. Despite its rich underwater heritage, Cyprus has not adopted the

2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage. Giorgallis's work highlights the gaps in legal protection and the need for comprehensive policies to safeguard underwater heritage.

Finally, Chidi Oguamanam and Angela Yeboah-Appiah's exploration of Kente weaving among the Akan and Ewe peoples of Ghana underscores the importance of intangible cultural heritage. Kente weaving is not merely a craft, it embodies these communities' social and cultural fabric, reflecting gender roles, traditions, and identities. The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage aims to protect such practices, ensuring they are respected and preserved. The authors highlight the need for global recognition and support for these cultural expressions, which are integral to the identity and continuity of communities.

Together, these articles underscore the critical importance of preserving cultural heritage in all its forms. They call for a concerted effort from the international community to protect and respect the diverse cultural legacies that enrich our world. As we move forward, it is imperative that the international community contributes to the protection of the tangible and intangible heritage for a sustainable future.

Reference

"Emergency Red List - Syria." International Council of Museums. Accessed 13 December 2024. <https://icom.museum/en/ressource/emergency-red-list-of-syrian-cultural-objects-at-risk/>.