

082:593: Special Topics in Cultural Heritage Preservation

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Culture, Preservation, and Politics in the Middle East

The Middle East is one of the richest archeological regions in the world. Yet, ironically, military conflicts aimed at establishing stability in the area have contributed to the deterioration of cultural artifacts and sites at an alarming rate. Military action, political indifference, and a vacuum of knowledge – linguistic, artistic, political, and cultural – have endangered the possibilities for preserving the essence of Middle Eastern art and archaeology and the roots of western European tradition. This course is about war and cultural heritage, politics and preservation as the new realities of our future. This course begins with a review of similar situations of war and art, from Napoleon to World War II and Vietnam (“we had to destroy it in order to save it”). Our work then moves quickly to a discussion of Middle Eastern art and archaeology, including the sack of the Iraq museum in Baghdad and the looting of sites in the countryside throughout the region. Half of the course is devoted to understanding both the art and archaeology of the region, and the other half is devoted to tracing their fate and their future under the challenge of present circumstances. This course will answer two questions. The first is: what do we need to know about the art history of Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Afghanistan? The second is: what are the threats to its survival for future generations? The course targets art history and CHAPS students. It will emphasize both visual approaches and preservation practices, and their relation to the respective social environments.

Requirements will include informal discussion of common readings, oral reports on specific issues, and a 15-page research paper.

Week 1:

Introductory Notes and discussion

Week 2:

Overview. PATTY GERSTENBLITH’s article

Week 3:

General issues (definitions and politics): Prott and O’Keefe’s article; Blake’s article; Startzmann’s article; Sauders’ article

Week 4:

Afghani case

Week 5:

Iraqi case

Week 6:

Iranian case

Week 7:

Egyptian and Syrian cases

Week 8:

Finish Egyptian and Syrian cases; Starting presentations

Week 9:

Presentations

Week 10:

Presentations

Week 11:

Presentations

Week 12:

Debate and conclusions