Destruction and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage as Future-Making

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Abstract We need to manage the tangible cultural heritage with the best outcomes for the future as possible. But how people prefer to relate and give value and meaning to the past can be highly variable and is hard to predict. Before any specific reconstructions of the Buddha statues are commissioned, we should consider several alternative futures for the past: will there be new audiences for heritage among the growing populations of Asia? Will digital and interactive ways of presentation reduce the significance of genuine artefacts? Will the preference for dark and painful heritage grow and perhaps increasingly demand stories about the Taliban rather than about Buddhism? Or will heritage tourism come to an end altogether? In deciding on the appropriate management strategy towards the destroyed Bamiyan Buddha statues, the main question should be what follows from what the assembled stakeholders want the heritage in Bamiyan to do for the benefit of specific future generations. The fact that many current stakeholders appear to be passionate about the Buddha statues means that there is a lot of momentum that will facilitate the necessary and time-consuming work required.

Keywords Conservation theory · Guédelon castle · Heritage futures · Heritage theory · Heritage values · Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church Berlin · Reconstruction · Uses of heritage · World Heritage Convention

Published jointly by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 7, place de Fontenoy, 75007 Paris, France, the UNESCO Office in Kabul, ICON Compound, Supreme Road, Off Jalalabad Road, PD 9, Kabul, Afghanistan, and Springer Nature Switzerland AG, Gewerbestrasse 1, 6330 Cham, Switzerland.

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M. Nagaoka (ed.), *The Future of the Bamiyan Buddha Statues*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51316-0_10

1 Introduction: The Benefits of Cultural Heritage for Future Societies

Cultural heritage managers are often charged to preserve and thus save the cultural heritage for the benefit of future generations. According to the dominant preservation paradigm and its associated conservation ethics, the heritage sector has the duty to conserve the most valuable parts of the existing cultural heritage because it is seen as an inherently valuable asset that is non-renewable, cannot be replaced and must, therefore, be preserved for the benefit of future generations (Wylie 2005; Spennemann 2007). The UNESCO World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 1972) speaks of “the duty of ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage”, yet it does not specify what time is meant by ‘future’, what we can know about the needs of ‘future generations’ and how these needs can be met through the heritage we transmit so that our own conservation actions might be appreciated at that time and our shared ‘duty’ would thus be motivated today. In practice, the current logic of conservation and heritage management often assumes an extension of the present into the future: we preserve what is valuable to us today (Högberg et al. 2017; Holtorf and Högberg *forthcoming*).

However, the values and uses of cultural heritage are not inherent and timeless but change over time in relation to consumers and recipients in varying social and cultural contexts (Cameron 2010). Conservation in the present must aim at creating or enhancing future benefits of cultural heritage for multiple but particular audiences, while avoiding possible risks. What we, therefore, first and foremost need in any joint project aimed at revitalizing cultural heritage is a shared vision for the future. Future benefits may consist of lessons to be gained from remembering specific events or processes, a reinforcement of social coherence, a promotion of shared values such as those linked to human rights, or improved opportunities for relevant communities to make a living (Holtorf and Fairclough 2013). At the same time, heritage management needs to be mindful of possible risks such as the diversion of resources from other worthy goals or the inadvertent propagation of extreme ideologies, social exclusion, perceived cultural or political appropriation or even armed conflict invoking the cultural heritage (Meskell 1998; Sørensen and Viejo-Rose 2015). The approach taken in this chapter thus amounts to taking a functional view of cultural heritage: most important is what heritage, its management and interpretation actually *do*, both in and to society (Loulanski 2006; Holtorf 2013; Ross et al. 2017).

A functional view of heritage focuses on the values and meanings of cultural heritage and the stories told about it – in present or future societies. Cultural heritage is not defined in terms of its material fabric and thus assumed to be static, stable, and non-renewable but in terms of its appreciation and effects in society, thus continuously changing and being transformed and adapted to new circumstances (de la Torre 2013). I argue, therefore, that in determining specific management strategies for any one (tangible) heritage object, we must not be guided by doctrinal,

universal principles governing treatments of fabric but by the likely risks and benefits of specific outcomes of our actions in specific futures. It is these risks and benefits that need to be drawn up and weighed diligently before deciding any course of action.

2 Beyond the Preservation Paradigm

Heritage critic David Lowenthal (1996: 24) observed more than two decades ago that “[w]e value our heritage most when it seems at risk; threats of loss spur owners to stewardship”. Indeed, in the cultural heritage sector, there has long been a preference for avoiding losses over acquiring gains, even when they might be of the same value (Holtorf 2015). The Bamiyan Buddha statues are an extreme case in point. They were inscribed in the World Heritage List in 2003, i.e. two years *after* they had been blown up by the Taliban, in an effort to conserve what effectively had been lost already (UNESCO 2003; Harrison 2013: 182–191).

We assembled at the end of September 2017 in Tokyo to discuss strategies for conservation and principles for the revitalization and reconstruction of cultural heritage that has fallen victim to acts of unlawful destruction and deliberate violence. We were focusing especially on the Bamiyan Buddha statues acknowledging, among other things, “the positive role that the revitalization of heritage can play in fostering nations’ understanding of their history and identity, recognition of human rights, mutual respect among peoples and of the diversity and equal dignity of the world’s cultures” (UNESCO 2017). The adopted Conclusions of the 2017 meeting (see this volume, p. 351) acknowledge the need to address reconstruction of cultural heritage in such circumstances “through holistic strategies for the protection and advancement of human rights, promotion of peace building and sustainable development.” Such benefits are very important to consider. It is right that a focus on the merits of preservation and reconstruction alone, in the spirit of the preservation paradigm, will be too narrow. Unfortunately, the various manifestations of how present societies relate to the past have a tendency to become subsumed into the heritage preservation context. A decade ago, the English heritage manager Graham Fairclough (2009: 158) found drastic words to describe this trend:

The obsession with physical conservation became so embedded in twentieth century mentalities that it is no longer easy to separate an attempt to understand the past and its meaning from agonising about which bits of it to protect and keep. It is almost as if one is not allowed to be interested in the past without wanting to keep or restore . . . the remains of the past, which seem to exist only to be preserved. The wide range of how the past is used by society has been reduced to the literal act of preserving its fabric.

Bigger issues are at stake and have to be considered. As the Tokyo meeting recognized, cultural heritage concerns issues to do with human rights, diversity and

Fig. 1 The Old Town of Frankfurt being recreated through historicizing architecture, soon allowing inhabitants and visitors to relate to the area's past as it will be evoked by the buildings

peace, among others. We are easily losing sight of the rich variety of ways in which people and communities relate to the past beyond conservation, preservation, protection, restoration, and reconstruction of tangible fabric. Examples of meaningful practices that can evoke the past are story-telling (various media and genres), traditions, beliefs, art and architecture, guided tours, role-play and living history, gaming, humour and comedy, and last but not least even political arguments.

To give one brief example, in recent years, there has been a growing desire in urban environments for creating the appearance of a historical building or entire town quarter through historicizing architecture (Fig. 1). The point is not whether or not such designs evoking the past, or indeed other contemporary regenerations of the past, are historically accurate or in line with familiar doctrines of conservation, but, again, what they *do*, both in and to society. For one, they make the past accessible to contemporary audiences and enhance a sense of place; for the other, they correspond with the preferences of sizeable sections of the area's inhabitants and visitors alike, although there are others who have different preferences (Holtorf 2013). The extent to which any such evocations of the past are perceived as authentic depends on the extent to which they are trusted to evoke the past in the present. Even for the future we can confidentially assume that there will be a range of trusted modes of evoking the past, many of which may not immediately draw on the tangible fabric we will have transmitted to them but on some of the many other ways in which the past may be regenerated. Even destroyed sites can powerfully evoke the past so that less heritage may mean more memory (Holtorf 2006, 2015).

With these two points being made about the need to consider benefits and risks of our actions for specific futures and about the range of ways in which people and communities relate to the past beyond a concern for preservation and accurate reconstruction, I will move on to discuss two contrasting case-studies exemplifying different aims, strategies and outcomes of evoking the past in the present through cultural heritage, in the first case starting out with a badly destroyed building and in the second case with nearly nothing at all.

2.1 The Value of Ruined Heritage (Berlin, Germany)

Ruined buildings and damaged heritage can be a very powerful force in society. Not all destroyed heritage needs to be restored to retain its values and meanings. Indeed, values and meanings may emerge from ruins, too. A good example is the late nineteenth century Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin, Germany. This centrally located church was destroyed by bombs during World War II. After the war, its remains were saved from complete clearance, and since 1961 they have been incorporated into a new church built on the same location (Kappel 2011; Waldera 2015).

Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church is the name the church had from the beginning. It had been commissioned by the German Emperor (Kaiser) Wilhelm II (1859–1941) to honour the memory of his grandfather Wilhelm I (1797–1888) in the fast expanding German capital city. The church was dedicated in 1895, even though the inside was not completed until some years later. After the abdication of the Emperor and the end of the German Empire in 1918, the church became during the Weimar Republic a local landmark of this flourishing area in Berlin, surrounded by cafés, cinemas and shops along the Kurfürstendamm and not far from the railway station Zoologischer Garten (Fig. 2).

Heavily destroyed during an air raid on the night of 23 November 1943, after the war a discussion started about the respective merits of complete removal, restoration and new construction of the church at the same site or elsewhere. In 1954/1955 some parts of the badly destroyed building were cleared away but the Western tower remained as a ruin. Soon afterwards an architectural competition was carried out, which was eventually won by Egon Eiermann (1904–1970) who wanted to build an entirely new church on the old location. At this point, the local population started a campaign to retain the ruin of the tower due to its character as a landmark of the Kurfürstendamm and West-Berlin and as a memorial for the violent destructions the city had suffered during the war. Due to popular demand the plans were changed, and Eiermann designed a number of new buildings around the damaged tower. The new church was opened on 17 December 1961, only a few months after the construction of the Berlin Wall along the border between East- and West-Berlin and 18 years after the bombing.

Ever since, the ruined tower has been reminding Berliners and their visitors of the outcome of World War II and the value of peace. But it also retained its character as a landmark and became an iconic symbol for the free West-Berlin during the

Fig. 2 View of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, Berlin, in 1939. Bundesarchiv, B 145 Bild-P014310 / CC-BY-SA 3.0. (Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_B_145_Bild-P014310,_Berlin,_Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche.jpg)

Cold War. With the old City Centre either destroyed or now on the territory of East-Berlin, the characteristic silhouette of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church effectively marked the heart of West-Berlin for the local population and visitors alike.

The ruined tower of the church complemented other forms of remembering a troublesome twentieth-century past, such as commemorative rituals (including those held every Friday inside the church), oral history, memorials, historical museums, and archaeological sites. Over several decades, this partly destroyed cultural heritage site contributed significantly and positively to future-making in Western Germany, in ways that would probably have been impossible had the original church survived intact, been fully restored, or reconstructed elsewhere. The Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church retained its appeal even after the unification of Berlin in 1990 and the subsequent intense building activities and creation of landmark architecture elsewhere in the city that had become the entire Germany's capital again (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 View of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in central Berlin today

Arguably, the preserved remains of the ruined church tower have been far more widely appreciated than the complete church in its Neo-Romanesque style ever was.

2.2 The Value of Reinvented Heritage (Guédelon, France)

Entirely reconstructed and reimagined cultural heritage can have significant benefits in society, too. As products of the imagination, contemporary recreations may not easily attract World Heritage designation but that is not my point. What matters most to me, and what I think should matter most to us all, is what UNESCO's heritage initiatives can do to maintain, revitalize and develop significant cultural heritage in present and future societies rather than vice versa.

In Guédelon, since 1998 a Medieval castle is being built from scratch on a reimagined thirteenth century construction site located in an abandoned quarry in remote woodland of central France, a good two-hours drive south of Paris (Fig. 4). The emerging castle is the result of an application of thirteenth century building techniques to a new design inspired by several already existing Medieval castles (Martin and Renucci 2011: 28–9).

This unique 25 year-long project, to be completed in 2023, is run as a private company employing 40 full-time staff plus a further 25 seasonal staff, mostly

Fig. 4 A thirteenth century castle in the making at Guédelon, central France

financed by the 300,000 visitors per year, including 80,000 school children, who pay for entrance tickets, gifts, and food. Most employees are qualified craftspeople, including blacksmiths, quarrymen, stone hewers, masons, woodcutters, carpenters, tilers, carters, and rope makers (Fig. 5). Many had previously been unemployed and found a future for themselves on this Medieval construction site (Minard and Folcher 2003: 13).

Behind the project stands Michel Guyot who had long been dreaming about rebuilding a Medieval fortress by bringing its construction site to life: “The project’s goal would not be to finish the castle itself, but to explore over 25 years the daily life of a medieval construction site” (Martin and Renucci 2011: 17). By the same token, the aim of the craftspeople is not to complete a castle from nothing, or to create a realistic interpretation of what society and individuals’ lives were really like in the thirteenth century, but to be working today as Medieval builders. They are assured though that however Medieval the construction site may be, contemporary health and safety regulations do apply.

This heritage project is valuable and meaningful for the lessons to be learned about building practices without modern tools. The challenges involved catch the interest not only of visiting school classes and tourists but also of the participating

Fig. 5 Medieval craftspeople at work at Guédelon, central France

craftspersons themselves and of associated historians, archaeologists and architects that advise the project through a Scientific Committee. In the words of Guyot, the site generates for him and for “everyone, from the tourist to the researcher,” a sense of “complete happiness in which reality and fiction blend back together” (Minard and Folcher 2003: 11).

The very process of building a Medieval castle in Guédelon is a way of future-making in contemporary rural France (Fig. 6). The castle illustrates that although cultural heritage can have a strong tangible dimension, its main value may be related to intangible aspects, in this case ancient building practices and the very construction process that attract many visitors and engage skilled local specialists. The authenticity of this emerging, fictitious castle lies in the credibility of its building techniques and performed workmanship. As the short film displayed on site explains for the visitors of Guédelon:

It is a collective, educational, and scientific venture. A journey back in time, rediscovering our heritage and heritage skills. Guedelón is a 20th ct. medieval adventure. And when the castle is finished, in 10, 15, 20 years, new structures will spring up, for a future return to the past.

Fig. 6 Future-making by rebuilding a Medieval castle. A time-line of the contemporary past on display at Guédelon, central France

3 Discussion: Where Next in the Bamiyan Valley?

As my examples and case-studies (among many possible others) illustrate, contemporary manifestations of how people prefer to relate and give value and meaning to the past can be highly variable. The preservation of tangible cultural heritage covers only a small section of the multiple ways in which the past is evoked and gains

significance in contemporary societies. That particular section is, however, of special importance because it is part of the planning process, governed by public policy, managed by civil servants, supported by relevant legislation and to some extent publically funded. We need to make sure that we manage the tangible cultural heritage with the best outcomes for the future as possible.

Preservation, and indeed reconstruction, are not self-evident unless we can identify the future beneficiaries of our work and confidently describe how exactly they will benefit from it, while preventing harm to others. Therefore, in deciding on the appropriate management strategy towards the destroyed Bamiyan Buddha statues, the main question should not be whether or not reconstruction is allowed as a matter of conservation doctrine but what follows from what the assembled stakeholders want the heritage in Bamiyan to do for the benefit of specific future generations. The fact that many current stakeholders appear to be passionate about the Buddha statues means that there is a lot of momentum that can help carrying out the necessary and time-consuming work that will be required.

The World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines do not specify, or require the development of any specific visions for the future of the enlisted sites. But, in my opinion, when the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 1972) in Article 4 refers to a “duty of ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage”, there is an implied requirement for those managing world heritage sites to build capacity that allows specifying what is meant by “future generations” and how the heritage transmitted will benefit those generations that will actually live in that future.

In considering the future of any heritage site, we are well advised to consider thoroughly the potential of various other modes of relating to the past besides preservation and reconstruction. I discussed two very different case-studies that can each provide lessons for the range of options in the case at hand, the Bamiyan Buddha statues.

The West Berliners built part of their collective identity and post-War pride on the ruined monument of the badly destroyed Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. They did not prefer a regenerative reconstruction of the church, and they did not long for an opportunity to undo the damage inflicted by the bombs and thus to create a symbolic victory over those that bombed their city (or those that caused that bombing to happen in the first place). By the same token, the blown-up Buddha statues could have a positive impact on the future development of the Bamiyan Valley even when they remain absent from their former positions. As recent research about tourist interest attracted by sites that have lost their materiality indicates (Ross et al. 2017), the very absence of the monuments in the Bamiyan Valley, if interpreted and presented in the right way, could become (or indeed remain) a widely recognized and somehow even appealing symbol for an entire landscape, its people and their development over time. Perhaps the empty niches could be secured and made available for carefully chosen new uses of the site, possibly including

appropriate commemorative rituals or cultural performances such as historical story-telling? Arguably, the Bamiyan Buddha statues have never been more iconic around the world than in their current metamorphic state, i.e. with their niches being empty.

In Guédelon, a Medieval construction side has been created from scratch in order to engage people in ancient building techniques and attract broad public interest in the thirteenth century past. Here, through historically informed practice the past is resurrected and comes to life, creating jobs in present society irrespective of the lack of ‘original’ tangible cultural heritage at the site. In the Bamiyan Valley, a process of inventively recreating the past could have a positive impact on future development too. Maybe locals and visitors alike could participate in a gradual physical reincarnation of one or more huge Buddha statues lying flat in the valley (if not upright in another part of the cliff)? Maybe the remaining fragments, rubble and dust of the statues could be put to new, creative uses. Or, as Jones et al. (2018) recently have shown is possible, maybe joint practices of creative design and production could result in digital visualizations that inspire audiences to re-investigate relations between people, places and sites in the Bamiyan Valley, while experiencing new forms of authenticity? In other words, there may be more options than those linked to the physical resurrection or rebirth of one or both of the original Buddha statues. Even in the World Heritage context it must be permitted to ask whether there are circumstances when anticipated gains can compensate for suffered losses (Holtorf 2015).

I would like to stress at this point that my argument must not be read as an unequivocal argument against reconstruction. In the light of the fact that there appear to be considerable doubts, at least for the time being, about the technical and financial feasibility of any full-scale reconstruction, and not even speaking of the threat of a new destruction once the reconstruction is complete, I am merely emphasizing that there are additional avenues to consider.

Whether or not the reasoning by which the Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley was inscribed on the World Heritage List under five (!) criteria of the Convention can be maintained unchanged in each eventuality and under all circumstances remains to be seen. In the context of this publication assembled by UNESCO it should be permissible to suggest that maybe the question of the inscription of the site under the World Heritage Convention is not the only, or even the most important question at stake. I note though that in fulfilment of Criterion (iii) of the Convention, the Bamiyan Valley is said to bear “exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition in the Central Asian region, *which has disappeared*” (UNESCO 2003, my emphasis). Ironically, it seems that, if anything, the present state strengthens the value here. By the same token, a reconstruction might actually diminish the association of the site, as mentioned regarding Criterion (vi), with repeated damaging “at different times of their existence, including deliberate destruction in 2001, which shook the whole world” (UNESCO 2003).

4 Conclusions: Managing Cultural Heritage as Future-Making

A good start for further deliberations among the relevant stakeholders and decision-makers about an overall Conservation Approach for the Bamiyan Buddha statues may be to evaluate carefully not only feasibilities but also, and especially, likely benefits and outcomes as well as risks of a range of possible interventions aimed at improving future society. It is very appropriate that the adopted Conclusions of the 2017 meeting (see this volume, p. 352) recognize clearly (in paragraph 7) the need to draft and consult on a long-term strategy for what to accomplish with the cultural heritage in the area. This need for long-term planning will have to be realized in conjunction with the requirement expressed in relation to the UNESCO Cultural Master Plan to outline a new “vision and mission for Bamiyan Valley” while assuring that “[c]areful overall planning must balance the interests of the different stakeholders, villagers and rural people, citizens and business people, and investors and land developers, but also the Provincial administration, the Government and, of course, international assistance organizations” (Jansen 2014: 18). Such ambitions are far from easy to achieve. As the chapters by Helaine Silverman and Marie-Louise Stig Sørensen (this volume) illustrate, much more social science research will be needed concerning the complexities of collective memory, heterogeneous communities, and the best strategy concerning contested local heritage in the Bamiyan Valley.

Already in 2011, an International Forum held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the violent destruction of the Buddha statues intended to contribute to progress in Afghanistan, as indicated in the title of the meeting, “Towards Cultural Rapprochement and Tolerance”. The 2017 Conclusions mention the need to acknowledge “the identity, history, integrity, memories and dignity of local populations” as well as the expectation that “any activity should aim to provide socio-economic benefits for local communities” (paragraph 10). Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the Conclusions commit all those involved in reconstruction to consider “the protection and advancement of human rights, promotion of peace building and sustainable development.” UNESCO (2017) also recognizes the significance that “the concerned government representatives, technical experts and donors recognize the importance of the role culture can play in the peace-building and development process specifically in conflict or post-conflict regions” and the potential in the Bamiyan Valley specifically “to effect a fundamental contribution to peace and state-building initiatives through the promotion of a positive cross-cultural discussion, interaction, understanding and respect for cultural heterogeneity and human rights.” This applies even in relation to tourism development that is hoped to contribute to future economic growth within a world region that despite progress is currently still unsafe. All these high aspirations and any realistic ways of implementing them to benefit specific future generations will be important topics to consider in much more detail at all appropriate levels (Holtorf and Högberg [forthcoming](#)).

The philosopher James Janowski (2013: 69) remarked that the “decision-makers are obliged to think through (...) what the site might mean, and what the site *ought* to mean, in the future. And while this is definitely a hard question, they need to ask: just what should Bamiyan mean over the next millennium—or in, say, *another* 1,400 years?” Contrary to what Janowski suggested in his paper, I would like to stress, however, that reconstruction of one or more of the Buddha statues is not a necessary part of the answer to that question. The heritage of the Bamiyan Valley and its multiple values will keep changing, requiring flexible strategies of management and creativity in designing or enhancing timely manifestations of heritage.

Before any specific reconstructions of the Buddha statues are commissioned, we should consider alternative futures for the past (Cameron 2010: 211–5): will there be new audiences for heritage among the growing populations of Asia? Will digital and interactive ways of presentation reduce the significance of genuine artefacts? Will the preference for dark and painful heritage grow and perhaps increasingly demand stories about the Taliban rather than about Buddhism? Or will heritage tourism come to an end altogether? Drawing on a statement of Mahatma Gandhi, Marta de la Torre (2013: 162) came to the following conclusion that may even be applied to Bamiyan:

if ‘a nation’s heritage resides in the hearts and the soul of its people’, then heritage will change as people’s values change, and changes both in people and in heritage are inevitable. And the way heritage is conserved will have to change too.

5 Summary Recommendations

1. Think about the future, not (just) the past: what do you expect the Buddha statues *to do* in and to future societies which will invariably differ from present societies? What are the benefits and risks of particular actions in the present for specific future generations?
2. Do not forget the many ways beyond reconstruction, taking both tangible and intangible expressions, in which the past can be valuable and meaningful for people. Even lost sites and ruined heritage like the destroyed Buddha statues can contribute to future-making.
3. Consider that creatively re-imagined heritage can successfully manifest and enhance heritage values. A range of processes and practices through which the Buddha statues may be re-invented and come to life in the present can contribute to future-making, too.

Acknowledgments The question of the permissibility and the qualities and impact of reconstructions of tangible cultural heritage has long been at the heart of the theory of cultural heritage and its management. I wish to acknowledge the extensive literature on this topic, singling out Winfried Nerdinger’s impressive catalogue (published in German in 2010) which provides an excellent

recent account of the issues at stake and many relevant case-studies. During the Tokyo workshop, I was very inspired by Michael Turner to think deeper about the distinctions in Jewish thought between resurrection and reincarnation on the one hand and metamorphism and regeneration on the other hand; I have not yet done full justice to these subtleties in my thinking concerning destruction and reconstruction of cultural heritage as future-making. I also acknowledge intellectual stimulation gained from discussions within our AHRC-funded “Heritage Futures” research programme (www.heritage-futures.org).

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