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COMPLEX DESTRUCTION: NEAR EASTERN ANTIQUITIES AND THE ISIS  
SPECTACLE

by

LAUREN BEARDEN

Under the Direction of Maria Gindhart, PhD

ABSTRACT

Throughout 2015, the Islamic State (ISIS) was a major news story for its destruction of Ancient Near Eastern collections and heritage sites, which created a spectacle across media. The focus of ISIS's infamous video uploaded in February of 2015 was the colossal statue of a Lamassu, which was an ancient Assyrian guard deity. By focusing on the Lamassu, this thesis aims to address the Western concept of a "cradle of civilization" and ISIS's motivation for destroying the sculpture. I utilize Kwame Appiah's philosophy of cosmopolitanism in order to flesh out the language in which ISIS is communicating, namely through its destruction. What becomes apparent is a complex relationship with Near Eastern antiquities, which is best understood by analyzing the motivations of local looters. To conclude, I use ISIS's destruction in order to offer thoughts on the concept of destruction with an aim to open dialogue regarding differing cultural value systems.

INDEX WORDS: ISIS, Destruction, Near Eastern Heritage, Cosmopolitanism, Looting, Spectacle

COMPLEX DESTRUCTION: NEAR EASTERN ANTIQUITIES AND THE ISIS  
SPECTACLE

by

LAUREN BEARDEN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2016

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2016

COMPLEX DESTRUCTION: NEAR EASTERN ANTIQUITIES AND THE ISIS  
SPECTACLE

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LAUREN BEARDEN

Committee Chair: Maria Gindhart

Committee: John Decker

Janet Stephens

Peter Lindsay

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2016

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Barbara and Reed Bearden, who have supported and encouraged me since the very beginning to pursue my research interests. I have always said, my father gave me the writing and history and my mother gave me the love of art. Thank you for everything.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout 2015, the Islamic State (ISIS) made headlines for its destruction of Ancient Near Eastern collections and heritage sites. Most prominently, ISIS uploaded a video on February 26, 2015 that showed ISIS militants drilling and hammering Near Eastern objects in the Mosul Museum.<sup>1</sup> Although the video was taken down the following day, it was replayed across Western news channels, creating an international outcry in response to the loss and destruction of these ancient artifacts. On the whole, the questions that non-Muslim audiences seemed to ask were: How could they do that to their own heritage? Why did they feel compelled to demand such a violent and total erasure of world history?

Despite the seemingly simple-minded destruction depicted in the video, ISIS has a complex relationship to these antiquities. Rather than seeing these works, and the Middle East, as the Western concept of a “cradle of civilization,” ISIS appears to interact with cultural artifacts on a more local level that does not conform to Western ideas. What are assumed to be barbaric acts against humanity instead unlock a deeper complex relationship between ISIS and historical memory, beginning with the Ba’ath regime and Saddam Hussein’s megalomania.

In addition to this issue, another question arises, namely is ISIS’s destruction motivated strictly by religion? While religion does play a part in its destruction, ISIS is not firmly motivated by it. One particular motivation is for recruitment. ISIS used its destruction to create a spectacle to easily feed the Western media’s need to consume images. After the video was published across mass media, which in retrospect was similar to ISIS leaving behind its business card, major news stations began reporting of Americans and Europeans attempting to flee their

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Mackey, “Historians Pore Over ISIS Video of Smashed Statues for Clues to What’s Been Lost,” *The New York Times*, February 26, 2015, accessed March 15, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/27/world/middleeast/historians-pore-over-isis-video-of-smashed-statues-for-clues-to-whats-been-lost.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/27/world/middleeast/historians-pore-over-isis-video-of-smashed-statues-for-clues-to-whats-been-lost.html?_r=0).

homes to join ISIS.<sup>2</sup> If these news accounts are to be taken at face value, it would be a measure of ISIS's success in using Western media in order to gain membership.

Further complicating ISIS's relationship to these antiquities is that it has used archaeological sites in order to finance its exploits and help build its identity as a functioning nation state, even going as far as establishing its own Antiquities Division.<sup>3</sup> These motives have been hidden by the fact that ISIS is a radical religious group, which rightly takes the prime focus in international news. By deconstructing these motives, my aim is to explore our concept of destruction and reevaluate ISIS's successful media play. ISIS's spectacular use of media was not a genius invention on their part. In fact, the Taliban's earlier destruction set a precedent that ISIS has followed.

In 2001, the Taliban famously and successfully destroyed a pair of 1,400-year-old Bamiyan Buddha statues in Afghanistan. Among the many reasons for this destruction of Afghani and Buddhist heritage was a dispute between the Taliban and the United Nations. To simplify a complicated issue, the Taliban demanded economic sanctions to aid the extreme poverty in the country and were appalled that the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) instead offered a large sum to save the 1,400-year-old Bamiyan Buddha statues.<sup>4</sup> In response, the Taliban council successfully destroyed the statues. To reach the Taliban's target international audience, they invited an Al-Jazeera journalist to be on

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<sup>2</sup> Clarissa Ward, "Recruiting for ISIS," CBS News Hour, June 14, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/recruiting-for-isis-60-minutes-2/>.

<sup>3</sup> Chiara de Cesari, "Post-Colonial Ruins: Archaeologies of Political Violence and ISIS," *Anthropology Today* 31, no. 6 (December 2015): 23.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Crossette, "Taliban Explains Buddha Demolition," *New York Times*, March 19, 2001, accessed January 20, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/19/world/19TALI.html>. See also, W. L. Rathje, "Why The Taliban Are Destroying Buddhas," *USA Today*, March 22, 2001, accessed January 16, 2016, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/science/archaeology/2001-03-22-afghan-buddhas.htm>.

site and film the destruction in order to send its message.<sup>5</sup> The response was quite astounding with some acknowledging that it was in their destruction that the Bamiyan Buddhas gained fame outside of the archaeology community.

On the surface, the dialogue between UNESCO and the Taliban seems to be a debate over what holds more value for preservation – human life or human heritage. This is a question that is at the heart of any issue regarding antiquities or heritage spaces that are located in conflict zones. Protecting world heritage in these areas involves more than simply acknowledging the threat on a communal past. Instead, it requires investigation into a series of questions on worldviews, morals, and values. ISIS's destruction offers direct insight into a complex relationship with these abstract concepts as they relate to our cosmopolitan, or global, world and the languages we use to communicate.

This analysis does not begin with Near Eastern history directly. Since this analysis is also a focus on the local perspective juxtaposed against the Western worldviews, it is imperative to establish the West's historical claim to these antiquities. The relationship between the West and Near Eastern artifacts is important because it is often absent in any discussion in regards to ISIS and the culture that the international world is so vehemently choosing to protect. Once the West's connection is established, an analysis of the local perspective allows for a better understanding of the historical factors that creates its viewpoint. To form the local perspective, I analyze the looting culture, as I believe it offers insight into ISIS's motivations. By adopting the philosophy of Kwame Appiah and his exploration of a cosmopolitan world, I aim to bridge our

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<sup>5</sup> Kevin D. Kornegay, "Destroying the Shrines of Unbelievers: The Challenge of Iconoclasm to the International Framework for the Protection of Cultural Property," in *Military Law Review* 221 (2014): 154.

understanding between the West and the unique local perspective in order to open meaningful dialogue in regards to heritage sites and the groups that threaten them.

## 2 WESTERN ACCEPTANCE OF NEAR EASTERN IMAGERY

The history of the Western world's acceptance of other cultures' heritage as part of their own is something unique in its own right. In the 1700s, British travelers set out to the Levant, Mesopotamia and Egypt and published travelogues with illustrations, aiming to explore and excavate the holy lands and sacred spaces of the bible.<sup>6</sup> This was also during colonialism when European nations invaded and captured territories across the known world. Britain's desire to explore these lands was expedited by competition from France's expedition to Egypt in 1798 that was led by Napoleon Bonaparte.<sup>7</sup> Speaking of this period, Dr. Edward Clarke wrote in 1801 that "[t]hese are favourable times for travellers in the Levant, when frigates are daily sailing in all directions and the English name is so much respected."<sup>8</sup> What began to cycle through British newspapers were images of picturesque landscapes, satisfying the curiosity of both literate and illiterate peoples that could not afford these trips abroad.

The search for a biblical past began with the humanists in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and continued into the Victorian period. The Victorian period explored foreign lands and exploited them through exoticism to raise interest with their home audiences. Britain aimed to secure its credibility as a colonial power beyond politics by promoting its efforts to find indisputable evidence of biblical connections to the Middle East. Britain's search began with locating and

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<sup>6</sup> Travelogues and descriptions of the Holy Lands pre-date the 1770s, but for this analysis, I am focused on the Victorian period, during which the Lamassu and Nineveh were excavated.

<sup>7</sup> See Bohrer, "Inventing Assyria: Exoticism and Reception in Nineteenth-Century England and France," for further information about France and Britain's rivalry over the acquisition of Assyrian antiquities.

<sup>8</sup> Steven W. Holloway, "Nineveh Sails for the New World: Assyria Envisioned by Nineteenth-Century America," *Papers of the 49th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, (Part One)*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 244.

excavating the lands described in Genesis that were part of the initial human migration. The most desired site to find was fabled Nineveh, which was described as having been annihilated. Finding such a site would be a difficult task, and it could be said that Nineveh's importance during this period was formed by its destruction.

The Book of Genesis includes Nineveh as one of the sites of the early migration of humans alongside Babylon and Nimrud. The prophet Jonah received God's words saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me." (Jonah 1:2) Jonah famously fled God's orders to a ship, and, while on the ship, a tempest halted it from further travels until Jonah cast himself out to sea to be swallowed by a fish for three days and three nights. Jonah was then spat out onto land with a renewed resolution and headed to Nineveh to preach of its forthcoming destruction.

The Book of Nahum describes Nahum's vision from God saying, "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth" (Nahum 1.2) and "he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time." (Nahum 1.9) God's prophecy for Nineveh is completed with its destruction with His decreeing that "all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? Whence shall I seek comforters for thee?" (Nahum 3:7) With Nineveh's ancient destruction, it had risen to become a fabled biblical city, with little chance of being identified, unlike its neighboring Babylon. Therefore, finding Nineveh, a city destroyed by God's wrath, would provide inarguable proof against European religious skepticism during this period.

During this period, foreign archaeology was another means by which colonial powers would exercise their political strength in the race for territory and political dominance. This discovery would then reinforce Britain's authority among colonial powers by displaying its archaeological

proWess. The prominent figure that achieved this great task for Britain was explorer Austen Henry Layard.

Layard is credited as being one of the most influential archaeologists and one of the leaders in transporting and staging Assyrian objects, namely the Lamassi, for European audiences. What comes of these excavations and eventual introduction to British audiences, which will be addressed below, is the ultimate deconstruction of an Assyrian context for these objects.

Layard's excavations took place in two parts. The first excavation and surveying began in October 1845 and lasted until June 1847, and the second took place from October 1849 to April 1851.<sup>9</sup> The Assyrian Lamassu is a colossal statue of part-bull (or lion) and part-man used as protection deities in the entryway to the Assyrian palaces. These Lamassi were illustrated in sweeping romantic imagery in the novel-like adventure log of Layard titled *Nineveh and Its Remains* (1849).<sup>10</sup> One of the original Lamassi that was still *in situ* in Iraq in



Figure 2.1 The Discovery of the Gigantic Head.  
*Ninevah and Its Remains*, vol.1, 1849, Murray, p. 66.

<sup>9</sup> Deborah A. Thomas, "Assyrian Monsters and Domestic Chimeras," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 48, no. 4 (Autumn 2008): 897.

<sup>10</sup> Shawn Malley, "Shipping the Bull: Staging Assyria in the British Museum," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 26, no. 1 (March 2004): 1-27.

2005 became the icon of ISIS's destruction in the infamous video that sent shock waves across social networks.<sup>11</sup> Yet, what conflicts arose after the Lamassi were excavated, and how have their identities changed from 1845 to today? To sum, how did the Western world consume this imagery?

The answer to this question is complex and during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was surrounded in controversy. For example, despite Britain's publicizing of exotic lands, there was not a large interest in exporting the antiquities. After failing to gain a financial backer to ship the Assyrian objects to Britain, Layard's personal publisher John Murray agreed to finance only if Layard, "promoted popular aspects of the expedition, namely excavation, exoticism, travel and biblical allusion, for which he was 'prepared to expend a considerable sum in illustrations...so that they shall be done in the most effective manner.'"<sup>12</sup> Once again, it becomes clear that the consumed

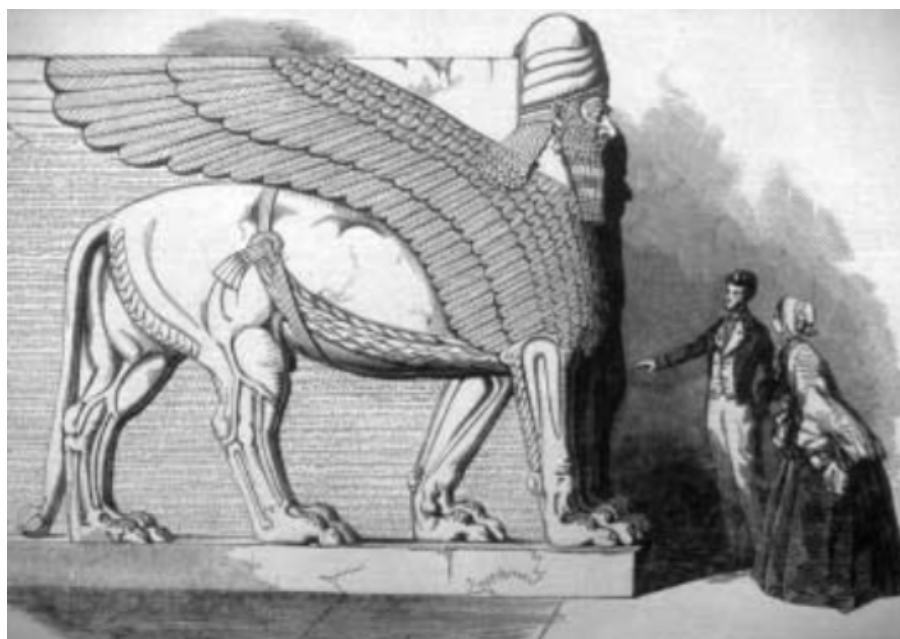


Figure 2.2 The Colossal Winged Lion,  
*Illustrated London News*,  
October 26, 1850.

<sup>11</sup> See Mackey, "Historians Pore Over ISIS Video of Smashed Statues for Clues to What's Been Lost."

<sup>12</sup> Malley, "Shipping the Bull: Staging Assyria in the British Museum," 5.



image of Assyria during its initial introduction to the British audience was one that was carefully fabricated and catered to popular British themes. Murray's foresight into the British consumer paid off when the publishing of *Nineveh and Its Remains* coincided with introducing images of the frontispieces of the Lamassu into British media. By using the media to create hype among a curious British audience, Layard and Murray were able to gain financing from the Trustees of the British Museum for shipment.<sup>13</sup>

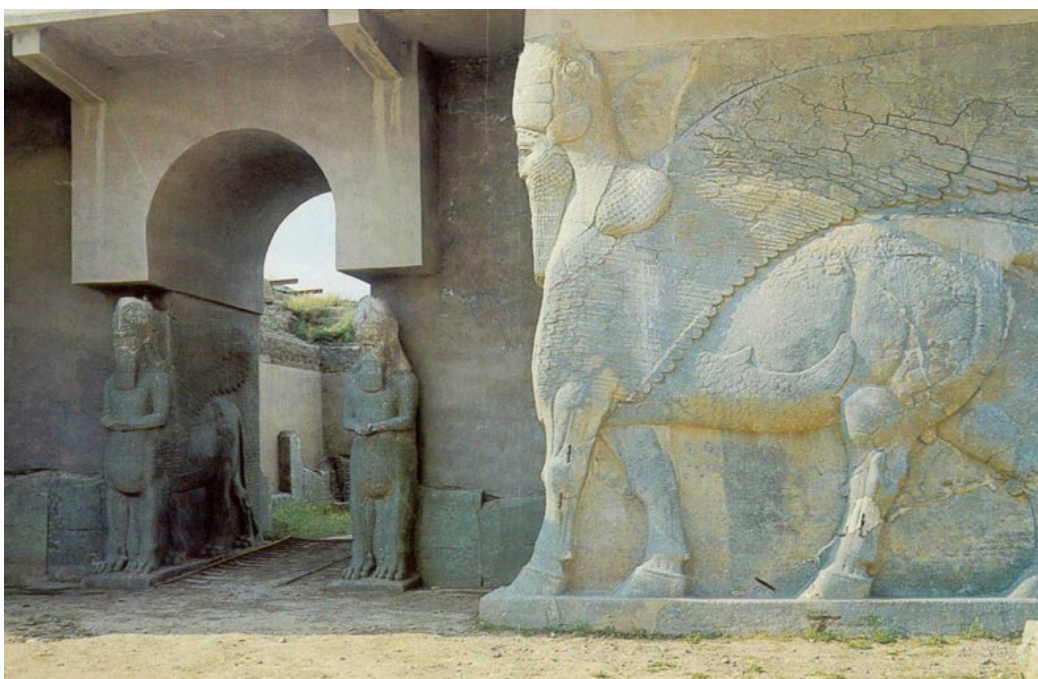


Figure 2.3 Lamassu at the North West Palace of Ashurnasirpal II. Located in Nimrud and destroyed by ISIS March 2015.

Part of the media spectacle involving the Assyrian shipment originated from the *Illustrated London News*, beginning in 1847, which promoted images of Assyrian objects. The success of the images from the *Illustrated London News* came from their inclusion of the British audience experiencing these foreign objects in curated spaces of familiarity. In figure 2.2 a male observer stands at the front of the Lamassu, appearing to point out features of the object to his female companion. The image provides a window that invites the reader to inspect the Lamassu

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

by illustrating it in a detailed profile. The Lamassu is divorced completely from its original context as a guardian for Assyrian palaces as seen at the ancient site Kalhu (fig. 2.3), known in modern times as Nimrud. Instead, it is the British couple in figure 2.2 that orients the Lamassu to its new British context, erasing links to its origin.

As desire for Assyrian objects grew, so did concerns with their display, which was also followed by the *Illustrated London News*. Take for example figure 2.4, depicting a crowd of



Figure 2.4 The Colossal Winged Lion,  
*Illustrated London News*.  
October 26, 1850.

observers at the Entrance Hall where the Bull and Lion Lamassu were displayed. Scholar Shawn Malley, who has written extensively on the Victorian acceptance of Assyrian aesthetics, expands on this image:

The image suggests a desire to recreate the bull and lion's spatial, aesthetic and political function as portal guardians, but the attempt to reintroduce the bull and lion to their native habitat is compromised by the palatial spaces the illustration presents to the viewer.<sup>14</sup>

Malley's analysis points to a larger issue at play in the display of Assyrian objects in the West. In particular, it speaks to the need to construct and convey concepts of authority via cultural and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 18.

institutional means. It is significant that the British Museum's attempt to recreate the Lamassi's original function (fig. 2.3) by placing them as entryway pieces falls flat due to the predominately classical Greek-inspired architecture featured in the space. Yet, the issues of display are not limited to the insertion of Assyrian iconography into the British Museum's Greek-inspired aesthetic.

With the introduction of Assyrian aesthetics in museums came the threat of privileging images of the "other" over artifacts from Greece, which Europe had claimed as part of its cultural heritage. As Malley expands, "the plastic remains of Greece had to be historicized in relation to the 'lesser' artistic traditions of Egypt and Assyria among which they were displayed."<sup>15</sup> Much of Europe had claimed a certain heritage from the idealized ancient Greek world, and with it, an inherited hierarchal art canon with Greek art at the top. The popularity and sudden influx of Near Eastern images threatened to weaken this claim.

The Greek Elgin Marbles were considered the perfect balance of beauty, art, and archaeology, while the Near Eastern aesthetic was primarily categorized as an antiquarian artifact, in which aesthetics are not the dominating focus of its importance. In his writings, however, Layard went against contemporary views and expressed in detail the artistic quality of the Nineveh objects, championing it over contemporary art of the time.<sup>16</sup> By focusing on representing the aesthetic aspects, media latched onto his words, for example "exquisite taste," in order to heighten interest from all classes in Britain, not just the elite who favored Greek art. Perceptively, Layard knew when to temper his opinions like when writing to his private sponsors refining his words by stating that the artifacts are inferior to Greek works.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Bohrer, "Inventing Assyria: Exoticism and Reception in Nineteenth-Century England and France," 342-3.

While the exhibition of the Lamassu in the British Museum threatened the identity of both Assyria and Britain on an ideological level, there was also a discomfort with its pronounced hybrid appearance. The Lamassu was brought to the British people at Sydenham in 1854 through the Crystal Palace that had previously been used in the 1851 Exhibition in Hyde Park.<sup>17</sup> Featured in part of the “Fine Arts Courts,” the Nineveh Court offered British viewers a reconstruction of an Assyrian palace that was designed by architect James Fergusson. Although these sculptures seemed to have a place in the spectacle of a large exhibition, their relationship with the British audience had its complications. English scholar Deborah A. Thomas explains this further:

In his handbook for *The Nineveh Court in the Crystal Palace*, Layard repeatedly refers to these huge hybrid Assyrian sculptures as “monsters” – negative connotations rarely found in his original descriptions of these hybrid figures in *Nineveh and Its Remains*. Clearly... Layard recognized the need to describe the great hybrid sculptures for average British viewers who might be intrigued by these astonishing figures yet desire an officially approved label to hold them at some remove.<sup>18</sup>

One example of experiencing these objects and holding them at a distance is figure 2.2 where the image of the Lamassu is devoid of its context and actively invites viewers to examine it like the couple. This is not the only medium that the British audience used to experience and safely interact with objects seen as foreign monsters.

Other examples of hybrid animals are found in Carroll’s widely popular *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and satirical reactions that appeared in the popular British magazine *Punch*.<sup>19</sup> Thomas introduces an interesting notion from Carroll’s work in “Assyrian Monsters and Domestic Chimeras.” She argues that what can be observed from this example is a British anxiety towards Assyrian culture and aesthetics. Thomas demonstrates in her argument that Alice, a white-skinned, blonde-headed British girl is placed within a land of hybrid monsters and

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas, “Assyrian Monsters and Domestic Chimeras,” 898.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 899-901.

is forced to interact with them. It is by inserting hybrid characters through literature, as Thomas notes, or decontextualizing them, as I argue occurs in figure 2.2, that British culture was able to latch onto the unusual Assyrian imagery.

Following the discovery of Assyrian art, the British audience over time came to embrace the aesthetic and incorporate it into their own artworks. Art Historian Frederick Bohrer has pointed this out in his analysis of Ford Madox Brown's *The Dream of Sardanapalus* (fig 2.5).<sup>20</sup>



Figure 2.5 *The Dream of Sardanapalus*,  
Ford Madox Brown, 1871

Brown's representation of Sardanapalus derives from a precedent set by Lord Byron in 1821 to romanticize the image of Sardanapalus, the last King of Assyria, into one that could be the

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<sup>20</sup> Bohrer, "Inventing Assyria: Exoticism and Reception in Nineteenth-Century England and France," 349.

hero.<sup>21</sup> Brown's painting is from a scene from Lord Byron's play called *Sardanapalus*. The particular scene that Brown references is when Sardanapalus falls asleep and wakes from a nightmare, telling his slave Myrrha that he had been banqueting with all the dead Assyrian Kings before him. Bohrer remarks that Brown's image is remarkable in that he utilizes actual Assyrian references taken from found reliefs in order to evoke an Assyrian palace.<sup>22</sup> The Lamassu doorway is shown in the back left corner. Reliefs of Assyrian imagery line the walls of the palace, while his reclined figure is taken from actual reliefs excavated from Assyrian palaces. While this is still a British interpretation of the archaeological evidence, it nonetheless is one example of the progression from anxiety to acceptance by the British audience.

Great Britain was not the only Western country that was exposed to Near Eastern aesthetics and sought to contextualize them into their culture. While, the British audience had to absorb their anxiety towards these objects as they were displayed, the American audience faced a different set of conditions, which allowed for an easier transition of this aesthetic into American culture. Prominent scholar, Steven W. Holloway, who writes of the reception of Assyria in Western culture, details that prior to Nineveh's discovery, Americans closely followed British archaeologists' work in the Middle East.<sup>23</sup> American sermons and political rhetoric often included Nineveh as a means of discussing the deplorable Ottoman Empire to which the United States had sent missionaries. These sermons claimed that the present moral corruption of the Ottoman Empire was explicitly derived from Nineveh's destruction given from God's prophecy to Nahum. This, in turn, invigorated Christianity in America and the prime means in which

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<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Haynes, "Mesopotamia and Archaeology in the Imagination of the West," in *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 8, no.2 (Fall 2000): 136.

<sup>22</sup> Bohrer, "Inventing Assyria: Exoticism and Reception in Nineteenth-Century England and France," 349.

<sup>23</sup> Holloway, "Nineveh Sails for the New World: Assyria Envisioned by Nineteenth-Century America," 245-51.

Americans were able to access these Assyrian objects was through the illustrations in Layard's book.

*Nineveh and Its Remains* was published in America by George P. Putnam between 1849 and 1854.<sup>24</sup> Layard and artists at excavation sites were creating and publishing expert quality images through books and on-site engravings at the British Museum in order to reproduce them for audiences across Western countries. Within a few years of Layard's book making it onto the American market, picture bibles began to include Layard's images in order to enhance biblical aura and visual history. During this period, Americans were not interested in actual text and cuneiform tablets from these ancient cultures in which they did have access. Instead, the romantic visualization of these spaces and their biblical context trumped the physical evidence and writings from the ancient culture that were available, but required knowledge of Assyrian linguistics. To the benefit of Assyrian popularity, the exposure to these images created growing interest in establishing Assyriology as the study of Assyrian culture and history in America.

The first evidence of Assyriology instruction was in 1870, taught by a biblical specialist named Francis Brown from Union Theological Seminary. Then, in 1879, Harvard University professor Charles Eliot Norton gathered a group of "his colleagues and friends ... 'for furthering and directing archaeological and artistic investigation and research.'"<sup>25</sup> That meeting established the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA), which is currently one of the most prominent organizations for archaeological research. The AIA began with excavations in New England and branched out to form groups dedicated to Roman and Greek research. In 1899, the AIA founded the American School of Oriental Research (ASOR). ASOR was created to allow schools and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 249.

<sup>25</sup> Archaeological Institute of America, *History*, accessed March 31, 2016, <https://www.archaeological.org/about/history>.

institutions with interests in Near Eastern research to combine their efforts to study and excavate in the Near East. However, in 1882, just three years after the establishment of the AIA, David Gordon Lyons established Assyriology at Harvard.<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note that it took seventeen years for ASOR to be included despite the establishment of Assyriology at Harvard, the very institution that birthed the AIA. Despite the slow acceptance and interest, ASOR is currently a thriving part of the AIA and is evidence that the earlier Western anxiety towards Assyrian objects is markedly erased, but the question of cultural patrimony still remains.

Since the inclusion of Assyrian objects into Western museums, they have become part of the fabric of Western identity. Take, for example, the playing cards (fig. 2.5) presented to American soldiers occupying territories in the Middle East. The cards, part of a post-2003 initiative from the Department of Defense's Legacy Resource Management program, identify culturally significant sites with reminders for the soldiers to respect the property.<sup>27</sup> Their aim is to promote heritage protection. One text includes: "When possible, fill sand bags with 'clean' earth – earth that is free of man made objects, including broken pieces that may seem insignificant."<sup>28</sup> The top of each card includes "ROE first!" which is a reminder for the soldier to put above all else the military rules of engagement. It asks the soldiers to remember to analyze all aspects of the situation before including force, and more poignantly to weigh the value of their target against the protection of the heritage sites.

It would appear we have come to a point where we must train soldiers to be archaeologists; this is a dynamic that still has much to be explored. The card that draws the most

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<sup>26</sup> Holloway, "Nineveh Sails for the New World: Assyria Envisioned by Nineteenth-Century America," 253.

<sup>27</sup> Shawn Malley, "Layard Enterprise: Victorian Archaeology and Informal Imperialism in Mesopotamia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40, no. 4 (November 2008): 623.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



interest is the Seven of Hearts (fig. 2.6) that states: “Iraq is the ‘Cradle of Civilization.’”<sup>29</sup> The card references Austen Henry Layard by recreating a colored version of his illustration. Soldiers are often touted as proud nationalistic ambassadors, yet in this case they are driven to remember a communal past with the Middle East. I believe this may indicate that the notion of a “Cradle of Civilization” may not be as strong as it once was or that some soldiers come into the army with no knowledge of this concept. Their only exposure may be the physical history in front of them and the broad concepts and reminders compiled throughout the deck.

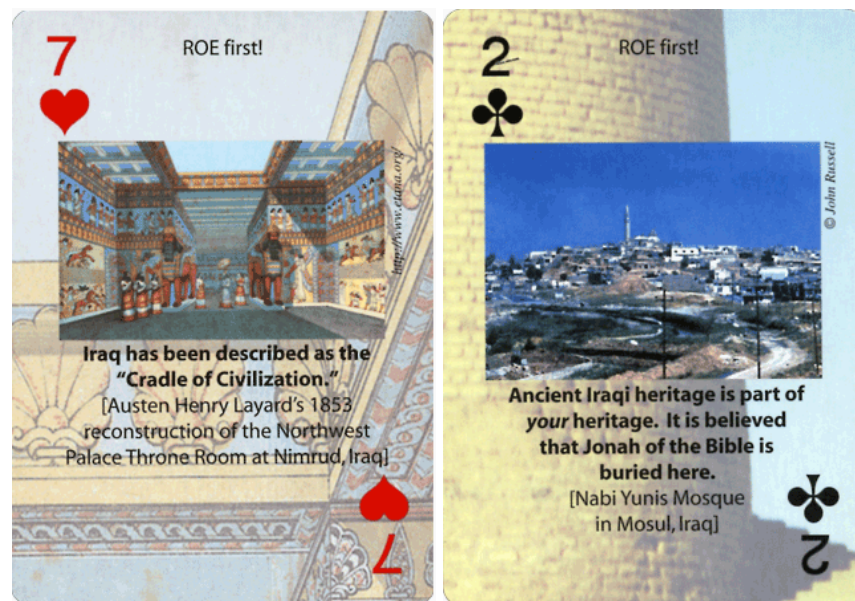


Figure 2.6 Seven of Hearts (left) and Two of Clubs (rights),  
*United States Department of Defense*

The Two of Clubs card, shown on the right (fig. 2.6), which references the prophet Jonah and the Bible, implies that most soldiers are religious while excluding soldiers whose religious backgrounds do not include the prophet Jonah or who are not religious at all. Furthermore, it is a reference to biblical archaeology, thus continuing the earlier notion that biblical heritage is world

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

heritage. I believe the cards, which are didactic tools, fail to hide that the concept of the “cradle of civilization” has weakened in contemporary times. There is a disjoint here in regards to scholarship and public knowledge.

While scholarship has shifted focus towards analyzing how diversity in cross-cultural relationships has influenced the development of culture, it does not seek to appropriate it into a homogenizing global history, like the “cradle of civilization.” The cards, however, reference the “cradle of civilization” in order to describe the general area of Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates. This is the public knowledge, based in general history, that the cards refer to and it is not the fault of the public. The “cradle of civilization” is a generalized term inherited and now accepted as part of Western’s global history. Instead, I believe, it is productive to question this concept and worldview and instead pay attention to the nuances between cultures and the where ideas might be exchanged across networks.

In this age, it is increasingly easy to connect across the globe, which has led to an emerging worldview called globalism. Joseph Nye, previously a dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, distinguishes globalism from globalization by stating that “at its core, [globalism] seeks to describe and explain nothing more than a world which is characterized by networks of connections that span multi-continental distances.”<sup>30</sup> Utilizing Nye’s definition, I believe globalism is too broad to be fully understood. Its language is bland and flexible. In fact, the idea of a global community, a community united as one through networks, does not begin to address the diversity of cultures in which those networks exist. While globalism hints at diversity, it does not fully address it. Therefore, I wish to use the term cosmopolitanism, coined by one forward thinker, Kwame Anthony Appiah, who uses it to further

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<sup>30</sup> Joseph Nye, “Globalism Versus Globalization,” *The Globalist*, April 15, 2002, <http://www.theglobalist.com/globalism-versus-globalization/>.

this concept by examining the diversity that globalism only implies. The strength of cosmopolitanism lies in the clarity of his arguments and inclusion and acceptance of diversity.

Appiah, whose philosophy is a touchstone for global studies and that I use for the framework of this thesis, finely executes his philosophical methodology on global living in his book *Cosmopolitanism*. He declares in his introduction the parameters of this ideology:

...there are two strands that intertwine in the notion of cosmopolitanism. One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and belief that lend them significance...we neither expect nor desire every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life. Whatever our obligations are to others (or theirs to us) they often have the right to go their own way.<sup>31</sup>

Appiah's background (born in Ghana and raised in Britain), which he references multiple times in his book, is diverse, and contributes to his unique voice that is able to conceptualize the networks Nye speaks of in a diverse world. Appiah's viewpoints are those of someone who recognizes the manner in which diverse cultures converge, but does not aim to negate any of them.<sup>32</sup>

Cosmopolitanism is an idealized worldview, and Appiah recognizes that it is not an achievable ideal. It does not aim to change values. Its purpose is for individuals to be able to mutually address differing values and in order to educate and coexist in a world of diverse cultural motivations. The foundation of cosmopolitanism rests in language, and defining malleable terms like "values" and "desires." By better defining something a culture values against what it desires, there is a better sense of how individuals take with them parts of their

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<sup>31</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2006), xv.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, xviii.

culture as they operate within a cosmopolitan world. Appiah addresses the issue of differing values, opining:

...[W]e would each have to end up saying, “From where I stand, I am right. From where you stand, you are right.” And there would be nothing further to say. From our different perspectives, we would be living effectively in different worlds. And without a shared world, what is there to discuss?<sup>33</sup>

So how can and should ISIS fit into a culturally diverse global community? Cosmopolitanism would condemn acts of violence, and ISIS has already broken one of its main creeds – the valuing of human life. A true cosmopolitan, however, would make an effort to understand the language in which ISIS acts.

This ideology emphasizes that it is important to recognize that different cultures hold different values; however, it is essential to investigate and then make judgments, positive, negative or neutral, based on individual personal value systems. To approach ISIS’s actions, an exercise in cosmopolitan philosophy better identifies the language ISIS is operating in, namely heritage destruction, and expands on its motivations beyond religion. In order to understand this language, an examination of the local relationship to Near Eastern antiquities is needed. The aim is to lead to a greater understanding of ISIS’s actions as well as Western responses, which is pivotal during this period when the destruction continues to occur.

### **3 THE COMPLEXITY OF LOCAL HISTORY**

The complex local perspective is one that is not to be ignored. The multiple factors that influence the locals’ unique relations to the ruins and excavations that surround them are pertinent to understanding ISIS and its background. My aim is not to generalize this complex relationship. Certainly, there are local people who have happily and enthusiastically adopted the Western concept of a “cradle of civilization” or, as will be expanded on later, a concept that is

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 30-1.

not entirely faithful to the Western original, which was introduced into the region by the Ba'ath party. The complex relationship between locals and these antiquities is in part due to a local way of thinking that is prevalent enough to be addressed. It offers valuable insight as to why Near Eastern antiquities may have a lesser value to locals than a Western, or currently international, audience. There is one particular group that is made up of individuals operating under diverse motivations that I believe offer a mosaic of answers towards ISIS's actions and this group of individuals is looters.

At first glance, comparing looting to ISIS's destruction appears to be talking of apples and oranges. However, looting is pertinent to ISIS as it is a local action common to these heritage sites and ISIS is built on the back of the people it allows to loot. Inarguably, looting is just one expression of ISIS's motives. As I stated early on, ISIS's motives are multifarious. ISIS has stated through its personal journal, *The Dabiq*, that its prime motive for all of its actions is to follow the words of Allah according to the group's radicalized interpretation.<sup>34</sup> But, could there be more to this than ISIS is willing to share?

Part of the puzzle of ISIS is that it did not simply annihilate all evidence of ancient heritage. It curiously sold objects on the black market, which has led to the question: why sell certain objects and publicly deface others? It has been reported that ISIS provides excavation licenses to looters with taxes in order to profit from the black market, with emphasis on American and European consumers who value these objects.<sup>35</sup> The artifacts that are portable, like jewelry, coins, statuettes, or books largely make it onto the market and the larger statues and

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<sup>34</sup> See ISIS, *The Dabiq*, 8, March 30, 2015, for the full issue, which can be downloaded at <http://jihadology.net/category/dabiq-magazine/>.

<sup>35</sup> De Cesari, "Post-Colonial Ruins: Archaeologies of Political Violence and ISIS," 22-3.

iconic spaces are publicly destroyed.<sup>36</sup> While most may blame ISIS for thinly veiling their looting activities under excavation licenses, there is in actuality a long standing precedent developed in the region that has close ties to Western archaeology, and Layard specifically, which has grown into an easy way for locals to sustain a livelihood.

By identifying levels of skill and motivations for looting, a broader understanding of ISIS's background and behavior towards Near Eastern artifacts emerges. This is not criticism of the museums and the people sworn to protect these sites. Instead, this is to recognize that looting is a realistic challenge that archaeological sites often face, and this area is no exception. Focusing on the looters highlights the depth of knowledge and understanding that the local communities embraced, misunderstood or neglected and why looting is integral to ISIS as a nation state.

The complex relationship between local looters and their heritage begins prior to 2003 in Iraq, with Saddam Hussein joining the Ba'ath party at twenty years old.<sup>37</sup> Syrian teacher Michel Aflaq founded the Ba'ath party in 1947. Influenced by radical Arab Nationalism and antigovernment sentiments, the party's goal was to unify Arabs under one party and one nation.<sup>38</sup> In 1953, the Ba'ath party united with the Akram Hawrani Arab Socialist Party to become the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. There were internal issues relating to egos and power as the party began taking control of parts of Syria, leading Aflaq to flee to Iraq. It was during this period that Saddam quickly rose as one of the standout leaders of the party and helped it gain control of Iraq in July 1968. Eventually, Saddam made his move, pushing out President Abu Bakr and gaining control of the country.

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<sup>36</sup> CBS News, "Following the Trail of Syria's Looted History," September 9, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-looted-syrian-ancient-artifacts-black-market-us-and-europe/>.

<sup>37</sup> Umangh Harkhu, "Does History Repeat Itself?: The Ideology of Saddam Hussein and the Mesopotamian Era," *South African Journal of Military Studies* 33, no. 1 (2005): 51.

<sup>38</sup> For a concise history see, BBC News, "Profile: Syria's Ruling Baath Party," *BBC News*, July 9, 2012, accessed January 19, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18582755>.

The way in which Saddam modeled his leadership, propaganda and military has been infamously tied to ancient Assyria. Scholar Umangh Harkhu notes that “Saddam, during his war with Iran, in an attempt to portray himself as the rightful leader of Arab nationalism, described Nebuchadnezzar as ‘an Arab from Iraq’ who fought against the Persians and Jews.” He further references that “[a]t the end of the war [Saddam] paid tribute to Nebuchadnezzar and other great figures from antiquity by holding official burial ceremonies for the remains of the ancient kings and building new tombs on their graves.” Saddam also instituted building projects, aimed at protecting this cultural heritage.<sup>39</sup> The goal was not just to maintain or reenact history, Hussein and the Ba’ath party sought to re-write it, as well as going so far as to call it “The Project for the Re-Writing of History.”<sup>40</sup> Ignoring the ideological issues of connecting modern-day Arabs to ancient Assyrians, the regime changed ancient Mesopotamia from the period of “ignorance” to the period of “Arabs before Islam.”<sup>41</sup> In yearly celebrations of this new history, the main motivation for Ba’athist and Saddam’s propaganda was to promote unyielding loyalty. Ironically, by linking his rule and party to this specific history, Saddam was the ultimate motivator for the beginning of its destruction.

The Baghdad Museum looting in 2003 has been retrospectively analyzed and deconstructed by governments, museums and scholars alike.<sup>42</sup> Matthew Bogdanos, a Marine Corporal and the lead investigator into the Baghdad Museum looting, introduces an important

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<sup>39</sup> Harkhu, “Does History Repair Itself?: The Ideology of Saddam Hussein and the Mesopotamian Era,” 67.

<sup>40</sup> Benjamin Isakhan, “Targeting the Symbolic Dimension of Baathist Iraq: Cultural Destruction, Historical Memory, and National Identity,” in *Middle East Journal of Cultural and Communication* 4 (2011): 261.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 262.

<sup>42</sup> See Lawrence Rothfield, ed., *Antiquities Under Siege: Cultural Heritage Protection After the Iraq War* (Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2008) for an illuminating collection of reflection essays from multiple perspectives about the Baghdad Museum looting.

concept in understanding the relationship between Iraqi looters and heritage objects. In sum, he argues the Iraqi people saw the museum as Saddam's "gift shop."<sup>43</sup> He suggests that looting and destruction of Iraqi cultural property were not an act against Iraqi heritage; instead, these looters were stealing and destroying in order to reclaim their identity from Saddam Hussein's rule.

While the idea of looting as a revenge tactic put forth by Bogdanos is valid, more questions arise regarding the level at which the looters operated. In his examination, Bogdanos suggests that there is evidence of three different levels of looters. The first level involved professional looters. These were people that had knowledge of what objects were considered the most valuable by museum standards. The second level of looters is comprised of amateurs who were interested in the basic materials they could grab. That is not to say they did not grab anything of high value, as placards alongside displays usually give hints to an object's status. The gap between level 1 and level 2 is not only their depth of knowledge for the market, but also the level of sophistication of tools used to loot. The last and most alarming of all the levels includes the staff of the museum. According to Bogdanos, there is some controversial evidence that staff members might have tried to take important objects, only to place the objects back in the museum on a storeroom floor.<sup>44</sup> Whether the staff members were trying to preserve the objects from looting or to steal it for themselves is unknown.

If level 3 is assumed to be true, it marks this looting as even more interesting as it not only includes professional looters and average civilians, but also museum staff that were aware of the museum's anxiety over the threat of looting as an aftermath to the combat between American troops and Iraqi forces. The common motivation among these distinct levels of looters

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<sup>43</sup> Matthew Bogdanos, "Thieves of Baghdad: The Looting of the Iraq Museum," in *Antiquities Under Siege: Cultural Heritage Protection After the Iraq War*, ed. Lawrence Rothfield (Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2008), 33.

<sup>44</sup> Bogdanos, "Thieves of Baghdad: The Looting of the Iraq Museum," 40-42.



comes down to profit. Extreme accounts of poverty are not unusual for conflict zones, and Iraq during this period was exemplary in its severity.<sup>45</sup> The dire need for money and the West's demand for Near Eastern objects on the black market was a significant motivator in this case.

Another layer to further piece together the complexities of looters in Iraq is one that shifts the paradigm of the standard perception of history, a point that may be reflective of some of ISIS's attitudes towards ancient Near Eastern culture. Prior to the Ba'ath party, there was minimal exposure to a world history like that taught in the West. It was not until the Ba'ath party created reforms during the 1940s and into the 1960s that rural Iraqis were exposed to the Western concept of a "cradle of civilization" as being part of their history. This is similar to the discovery and development of the West's shared history with Nineveh as described earlier. Yet, as mentioned previously, the history of ancient Mesopotamian cultures that was introduced was heavily rewritten to aid Ba'ath loyalty, even going so far as including yearly ceremonies retelling this fabricated version. Under the Ba'ath party, clanship societies began to dissolve as people drifted to opportunities in the cities where globalization was popular. Yet, the complexity does not end here. There were further actions taking place during this period affecting ideological shifts among locals.

As a result of the first Gulf War, the United Nation's Security Council implemented sanctions and created no-fly zones beginning in 1990 and lasting until 2003, which limited the role of a central government outside of Baghdad. This resulted in a reemergence of local clanship and customs, which became the center of social and political life, while also leaving Iraq in a state of poverty. Another outcome was that previous emphasis on local Iraqi history also found

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<sup>45</sup> Farchakh-Bajjal, "Who Are the Looters at Archaeological Sites in Iraq?," in *Antiquities Under Siege: Cultural Heritage Protection After the Iraq War*, edited by Lawrence Rothfield, (Maryland: AltMira Press, 2008): 50.

its breath again, possibly in reaction to reclaim the history the Ba'ath party attempted to do away with through their version of a “cradle of civilization.” To sum, local history held more value than the propaganda-laden history the Ba'ath party presented. This created the conceptual framework in which the looters worked.

The looters at the sites in Iraq and Syria according to Farchakh-Bajjalý, come from rural backgrounds and live near the sites. Their social structure functions as a patriarchy within a type of tribal system with a strong sense of clan identity whose basic rules of life are “dignity, honor, and loyalty.”<sup>46</sup> So, to whom might these people give their dignity, honor and loyalty? While neither Farchakh-Bajjalý nor I can speak for every individual personal choice, it is safe to assume that many of the locals who live on the outskirts near these sites have stronger loyalty to their family history, which is individualized to each clan.

So at what point can these two opposing worldviews coexist from the cosmopolitan perspective? The safe coexistence of the Western “cradle of civilization” and a prominent local history would be the ultimate goal. However, this is simply unrealistic considering the political and economic tensions in this region. As Appiah states in his *Cosmopolitanism*, “they often have the right to go their own way.”<sup>47</sup> After studying looters in this area first-hand, journalist Farchakh-Bajjalý asserts that “they did not see the difference between an archaeological mission and looting of a site.” It is then no surprise that looters who are extremely poor and in need of money often choose to work in a lucrative system that caters to Western demands – despite the illegality on both sides of the coin. But, is it the Western right to condemn these actions?<sup>48</sup>

Lastly, and even more poignantly, the early Iraqi archaeologists were taught by major

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<sup>46</sup> Farchakh-Bajjalý, “Who Are the Looters at Archaeological Sites in Iraq?” 50-55.

<sup>47</sup> Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, xv.

<sup>48</sup> Farchakh-Bajjalý, “Who Are the Looters at Archaeological Sites in Iraq?” 55.

Western figures like Austen Henry Layard.<sup>49</sup> The 1800s, that period of biblical archaeology and a race between France and Britain to own the past, was instrumental to the development of archaeology. In this race, there was a reliance on local labor in order to expedite excavations and, through these interactions, there was transference of archaeological knowledge and technique. One example comes from the Assyrian Iraqi working alongside Layard, known as Hormudz Rassam.

Rassam worked on contract on behalf of the British Museum, heading the excavations at large archaeological sites. His main method of excavation was to trench and tunnel in order to gather thousands of cuneiform tablets and other objects.<sup>50</sup> The tablets were a popular item for the British Museum, most likely for their portability, as I have already mentioned the difficulties the museum faced financing the travel of the Lamassu. Ancient Mesopotamia expert McGuire Gibson states that “[o]nce it became clear that there was a monetary value in antiquities... Iraqis began to dig on their own, removing thousands of objects, particularly cuneiform tablets, from sites.”<sup>51</sup> Over the centuries, what is legal and illegal has changed based on political occupation. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the introduction of organizations like the AIA at these sites, more locals have gained exposure to safer excavation practices as these organizations advance archaeological methodology. However, despite this progress, the looters’ actions are residue from the earlier practices introduced by excavators like Layard.

The West instituted this culture, even partaking in funding it. And while the West has continuously worked to learn from its history, does it still have the right to condemn actions of a

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<sup>49</sup> McGuire Gibson, “The Acquisition of Antiquities in Iraq, 19th Century to 2003, Legal and Illegal,” in *The Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Iraq*, ed. Peter G. Stone and Joanne Farchakh-Bajjalay (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2008), 31.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

region devastated by war? The local perspective is laden with differing concepts of worldviews that were manipulated versions for political agendas like the Ba'ath regime and Saddam. Therefore looting, as it has been introduced, is a product of history, but its continuance is due to multiple motivations.

For some, it is to take back the loyalty that Saddam and the Ba'athists demanded. In this case, looters may be neighbors or regular citizens in cities or rural areas, seeking retribution for the unfathomable pain caused by their former political leadership. For others, it is the misrepresentation of Mesopotamian history from the Ba'athist party that can lead to a lack of information and therefore placing value elsewhere than Near Eastern antiquities. Lastly, it may strictly, and most generally, be for financial stability aided by the black market.

Identifying and defining what is motivating the local worldview, like the manipulation by the Ba'ath party, is the language of values Appiah desires for in a cosmopolitan world as he states:

The point is not that we couldn't argue our way to one position or the other on these questions; it's only to say that when we disagree, it won't always be because one of us just doesn't understand the value that's at stake. It's because applying value terms to new cases requires judgment and discretion. Indeed, it's often part of our understanding of these terms that their applications are meant to be argued about. They are, to use another piece of philosopher's jargon, essentially contestable.<sup>52</sup>

This is the underlying importance to cosmopolitanism, and it is a point to be underscored when addressing how locals may value family history over Near Eastern heritage. In a cosmopolitanism world, we need to identify and investigate our personal value systems to better engage those who may have a different set of values. Disagreements are important, and they strengthen our own stances on what we value most. It is here that I believe Appiah is most

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<sup>52</sup> Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 59.

convincing of a cosmopolitan world. Thus, these ideologies – the “cradle of civilization” and local – are not as stable as they seem.

While there can be no definitive answer as to whose history is correct, the recognition of competing interpretations of the past maps out the primary conceptual frameworks involved in this plight. By utilizing cosmopolitanism and analyzing local perspectives, it can be argued that the same issues facing the looters may be affecting ISIS’s actions, with its lack of value for these objects being ostentatiously displayed by destruction. It may also mean that ISIS is using the looters financial hardships to effectively erase Western values. As this is currently an evolving issue, nothing can be declared as certainty. Yet, an analysis of ISIS’s destruction does offer aid in understanding values of destruction at present.

#### **4 REDEFINING DESTRUCTION**

I believe a different reading is needed of ISIS and its destruction. The looting of objects certainly derives from a longer history – but what of their destruction? The destruction in this case has often been relegated to modern iconoclasm because of ISIS’s attack on idolatry in Christian, Shia and Yazidi communities, as well as the very public actions against the ancient sites and artifacts at Palmyra, Nimrud, Hatra and the Mosul Museum.<sup>53</sup> Certainly, the defacing of the Lamassu, which became an icon of Near Eastern archaeology thanks to Layard, would seem to be a direct attack against non-Islamic imagery. But is this interpretation correct? Possibly not. There are elements to this destruction that point towards more complex actions by ISIS.

On February 16, 2015, a five minute and three second video titled, “The Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice #1...,” was released to the international community. It depicted ISIS members defacing the ancient Assyrian Lamassu, among other objects, as a man

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<sup>53</sup> De Cesari, “Post-Colonial Ruins: Archaeologies of Political Violence and ISIS,” 22.

narrates.<sup>54</sup> What followed was a maelstrom of media outlets and articles condemning their actions. UNESCO’s director, Irina Bokova, decried the acts as a “crime against humanity” and a “cultural cleansing... to deny the identities of Others, to erase their existence, to eliminate cultural diversity and to persecute minorities.”<sup>55</sup> Why, though, did this get such a strong reaction?



Figure 4.1 ISIS Associate Destroying Lamassu  
Pulled from “The Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice #1...,” video, February 16, 2015.

The quality of the video resembles a professional news segment with ISIS’s symbol in the top right corner authorizing its authenticity. A representative of the group denounces the artifacts as idols against Islam as footage plays of ISIS members taking hammers and drills to these objects. A brief history is given of the Lamassu as an ancient Assyrian mythic deity followed by its defacement. The Lamassu as an individual object was given by far the most attention in the five-minute video. This was the second time in history that the Lamassu came to the forefront of Western media with such a spectacle, the first being the publicity from Layard’s book and the *Illustrated London News*. And, as if history is repeating itself, these Near Eastern

<sup>54</sup> ISIS, “The Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice #1,” Jihadology (blog), posted by Aaron Y. Zelin, February 26, 2015, <http://jihadology.net/2015/02/26/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-the-promotion-of-virtue-and-the-prevention-of-vice-1-wilayat-ninawa/>.

<sup>55</sup> De Cesari, “Post-Colonial Ruins: Archaeologies of Political Violence and ISIS,” 23.

objects are used to authenticate a self-image; in this case they authenticated ISIS as a powerful Islamic religious sect.

A major claim by ISIS is that it is the one true form of Islam and its current goals involve purification.<sup>56</sup> The video authenticated ISIS as the one true religion by polarizing people into either accepting and joining in their gruesome tactics or standing against them. Its aim is to create a distinguishable line between it and everyone else. Graeme Wood in his article, “What ISIS Really Wants,” allows for a more critical inspection of ISIS, one that rejects the media-friendly terrorist trope. He writes:

The reality is that the Islamic State is Islamic. *Very* Islamic. Yes, it has attracted psychopaths and adventure seekers, drawn largely from the disaffected populations of the Middle East and Europe. But the religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam. Virtually every major decision and law promulgated by the Islamic State adheres to what it calls, in its press and pronouncements, and on its billboards, license plates, stationery, and coins, “the Prophetic methodology,” which means following the prophecy and example of Muhammad, in punctilious detail.<sup>57</sup>

So when the representative in the ISIS video says, “God almighty says: ‘And we sent a messenger to you just to reveal that no God but I, so worship me.’ The prophet ordered us to get rid of statues and relics, and his companions did the same when they conquered countries after him,” he is explaining the authority that allows ISIS to destroy or “purify” these objects.<sup>58</sup> Yet, while this video is a personal proclamation and affirmation for ISIS, the international media took it as a violent attack on collective world heritage. By condemning these acts, Western media actually supported ISIS’s argument about why these icons needed to be destroyed. And in this

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<sup>56</sup> PBS NewsHour, “What Islamic State gains by destroying antiquities in Iraq,” last updated February 27, 2015, accessed July 20, 2015, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/islamic-state-gains-destroying-antiquities-iraq/>.

<sup>57</sup> Graeme Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants,” *The Atlantic*, March 2015, accessed July 20, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

<sup>58</sup> “What Islamic State gains by destroying antiquities in Iraq...”

case, ISIS certainly understood that it would be attacking the notion of a “world” heritage while asserting its religious beliefs.

The excerpt by Graeme Wood, of course, would not sit well with the majority of Muslims. It is vehemently attacked by Jack Jenkins in “What the *Atlantic* Gets Dangerously Wrong About ISIS and Islam.” Major points that Jenkins makes underscore Wood’s lack of expertise in handling Islamic discourse and especially his interpretation of ISIS’s promoting of the violent aspects of the Qur’an. This trope promoting the violent aspects of the Qur’an is well known in Western media as fear mongering.

To shed light on this topic, Jenkins brings insight from Islamic scholar Jerusha Tanner Lamptey who states that “[t]exts have never been only interpreted literally. They have always been interpreted in multiple ways...[Wood’s comments] create the [impression] that Islam is literalistic...and we’ve moved past that narrative.” Lamptey continues that “it’s not really about one perspective being literal, one being legitimate, one ignoring things...it’s about diverse interpretations.”<sup>59</sup> She laments, as do most people, that Wood’s rhetoric of a “literal” and legitimizing interpretation in effect delegitimizes the more commonly accepted interpretations.

This is a common struggle in all religions and one that Appiah acknowledges. First he puts forth that “[d]esires – or, more precisely, basic desires – set the ends we aim for; beliefs specify the means for getting them. Since these desires can’t be wrong or right, you can criticize only the means people adopt, not their ends.”<sup>60</sup> He later explains in what is arguably his most illuminating point that “[t]he concept of kindness, or cruelty, enshrines a kind of social consensus. An individual who decides that kindness is bad and cruelty good is acting like Lewis

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<sup>59</sup> Jack Jenkins, “What The Atlantic Gets Dangerously Wrong About ISIS And Islam,” February 18, 2015, accessed July 15, 2015, <http://thinkprogress.org/world/2015/02/18/3624121/atlantic-gets-dangerously-wrong-isis-islam/>

<sup>60</sup> Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 20.



Carroll's Humpty Dumpty, for [whom] a word 'means just what I choose it to mean – neither more, nor less.'"<sup>61</sup> The word destruction, I believe, is a concept like kindness or cruelty whose term is caught in the broad understanding of its concept. With the complex aspects, like local worldviews, political motivations, recruiting, and financing to name a few, it is easier to understand now that ISIS's concept of destruction deviates from the West and international communities idea of destruction. To sum: ISIS is operating by a different set of values and motivations for its destructions that is difficult to understand by the international community. This is where cosmopolitanism steps in and asks the international community to first define ISIS's language.

ISIS is operating in a world of language, a language of their interpretations. What cosmopolitanism suggests is that we do not judge them for their belief in the words of Allah set forth in the Qu'ran, which is common to all Muslims, as it is part of their desire to attain Allah's acceptance to reach *jannah* or paradise. What is to be contested is the mode by which ISIS aims to achieve this, which stems from what ISIS values. And similarly to Humpty Dumpty, destruction is a value, and, as with Appiah's values, "they are after all, language."<sup>62</sup> Analyzing the ideologies to which ISIS members were exposed, mainly through looters, allows for an open dialogue for judgment, which can only be made on an individual basis. Though a clearer picture of ISIS emerges, it does not address how Near Eastern antiquities and their destruction are empowering ISIS as an able-bodied political state.

Wood mentions ISIS's use of "press and pronouncements... on its billboards, license plates, stationery, and coins."<sup>63</sup> This is important because it shows that ISIS is operating as any

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants."

standard state. It has its own currency, advertisements, an identifiable flag and an icon. I believe, too, that its use of antiquities, like looting by handing out archaeological licenses, attests to its desire to function as a state. The licenses further demonstrate that they are operating under a system of laws. To prove this point further, Chiara de Cesari states that:

[a]ccording to the US Department of State officials, evidence uncovered during the raid ...[of] finance manager, Abu Sayyaf, shows not only a well-established antiquities trafficking network but a fully-fledged ‘ministerial’ infrastructure. [ISIS] has created an ‘Antiquities Division’ ...as part of its ‘Diwan for Natural Resources’...

The complexity of its Antiquities Division continues into subdivisions, which include excavation, marketing, exploration and administration. De Cesari notes that this is “uncannily similar to those of state heritage agencies all around the world.”<sup>64</sup> ISIS’s aim beyond religion, recruiting and monetary value is to build what is becoming a nation state with its own unique culture. This culture is being backed by fragments of generally accepted aspects of nation states like an Antiquities Division, despite the little twist ISIS throws in by using it as a front for looting. The looting, however, plays an important part for the local population that is under ISIS’s command. One looter, interviewed by CBS’s London affiliate, states that “[t]here is no more work in Syria...If you find an artifact, you take 80 percent and ISIS takes 20 percent.”<sup>65</sup> For those located in ISIS occupied territory with nowhere to turn, they are either to be looters or ISIS fighters. This is a sobering picture considering the criminalizing image of these looters portrayed across the news.<sup>66</sup>

There is one last aspect of ISIS to be analyzed and that is its spectacle on film. ISIS’s destruction on video, which provoked the international community, was well-crafted and

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<sup>64</sup> De Cesari, “Post-Colonial Ruins: Archaeologies of Political Violence and ISIS,” 23.

<sup>65</sup> CBS News, “Following the Trail of Syria’s Looted History,” September 9, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-looted-syrian-ancient-artifacts-black-market-us-and-europe/>.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

appeared to be more planned and performative than a man simply taking a tool to an object's face. But, what does this exactly express about ISIS and its video? A new line of thinking, introduced by Ömür Harmanşah, argues that ISIS's destruction is a performance that encourages spectacle for exposure to feed its identity and its values and that it is with this insight that its motives can be fully deconstructed.<sup>67</sup> I believe that the spectacle gives significance to ISIS's main objective, which is to become a formidable state among the international community, by appealing to the Western notion of a "cradle of civilization" in order to fund, recruit and self-validate. In his analysis, Harmanşah notes that the actors are the ideal versions of ISIS warriors with animated and exaggerated attacks against heroic symbols of Near Eastern archaeology.<sup>68</sup> ISIS, I believe, is fulfilling its ideal version of itself through these theatrics and then memorializing it by letting the international audience multiply it across all types of media.

In fact, the world consumed these images and then parodied them in response, as is demonstrated in Figure 4.2, which shows ISIS militants carrying a decapitated Lamassu, with pleasing grins on their faces. The satirical image, done by Iranian cartoonist Mehdi Rasooli, attacks what the cartoonist envisions as ISIS's barbaric and primitive assault on world heritage. The Lamassu is not defaced, as seen in the video. Instead, it is beheaded, an action ISIS has unfortunately used with humans on multiple occasions. The beheaded Lamassu is paraded around as if the Lamassu is an actual animal, not an ancient deity whose power was most likely the most threatening during its Assyrian years. The cartoon attempts to scoff at ISIS for being unable to distinguish the harmlessness of the ancient Assyrian sculpture from its mythic past.

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<sup>67</sup> Ömür Harmanşah, "ISIS, Heritage, and the Spectacles of Destruction in the Global Media," *Near Eastern Archaeology* (The American Schools of Oriental Research) 78, no. 3 (September 2015): 173.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 173-6.

While this cartoon is valid in its attack on ISIS, it is missing a certain aspect presented by Harmanşah.



Figure 4.2 ISIS Militants Carry a Decapitated ancient Assyrian Lamassu Sculpture, By Mehdi “Amo” Rasooli.

In the most poignant part of his argument, Harmanşah offers that “ISIS is a super-modern phenomenon, incorporating the most powerful tools of hyperreality in disseminating their violent acts.” Harmanşah’s conclusion, which aligns with my own views, is that ISIS’s acts are a rhetorical act of historical reference. His commentary is not just about ISIS and its methodology; it is about the object of the spectacle, which is Western culture and the attack on the “cradle of civilization.” By delivering high quality visuals, ISIS created a story that Western news could not ignore. Western news relies on reporting spectacular stories to connect Western audiences with international communities. The West found ISIS’s invitation in the video, one that could play without censorship like the previous clips of beheadings and human atrocities. Media unintentionally allowed ISIS to have a platform to reach Western audiences by playing it *ad nauseam* across television and news articles.

Although the video was only briefly released, and taken down the next day, that did not stop it from multiplying across social media. On Twitter, Facebook and news sites, the images

were replayed and dissected. It did not matter if you were a scholar of Islam or my next-door neighbor, people of all levels of education and knowledge were able to comment and draw conclusions from the images. This destruction in fact multiplied the images of the Lamassu and raised it even higher in its already iconic status.

My last points then become less of a question about ISIS and more about the future of destruction in a world with ever-inventive technology. I am curious as to how destruction is valued. Values, as Appiah states, are language. Destruction at its base is the annihilation of *something*. Destruction can be negative, like a natural disaster destroying a home. It could also be destroying a condemned building, in which case the destruction would have a positive reception. But, are there other concepts of destruction hidden by popular terminology? I believe there is something that most technologically savvy people are conditioned into doing for their devices, yet never think twice about: upgrading. I argue that *upgrading* is a term that hides the concept of destruction by relating it to positive action.

Take an example for instance, in an alternative reality, where the monarchy is dissolved in Great Britain and a new ruling government takes its place. Clearly, not everyone is happy with this result, yet the majority rules. The new leaders find the old imagery and icons of the monarchy to undermine their new system of government. They decide to take on a new building project, by upgrading their facilities. Buckingham Palace is completely overhauled over the course of two years to the point that signs are erected outside the fence showing old pictures of what used to stand there. The new leaders are delighted that its aesthetic is demolished in order to allow new styles to emerge. There are, of course, people dissatisfied with this result, but it is nonetheless accepted as a newer Britain. If we are to take ISIS's destruction as a method to

create an identifiable nation state, the essence of the alternative reality of Great Britain may mirror ISIS's mentality and actions.

The Parthenon marbles that were removed and taken overseas, and which have now become widely known as the Elgin marbles, are victims of destruction. I will not mince words here. Digging and cutting into the Parthenon in order to remove the marbles, just as Layard removed the Lamassu from its original context, in essence destroys their original meaning. Return back to Figure 2.2 of the Lamassu from the *Illustrated London News* standing in profile as a British couple observes the sculpture. There is absolutely no context to which the object belongs. There is no indication in the image that it served as a portal guardian. If that image were to stand alone without any information, there would be no evidence of it being Assyrian at all. I believe it would be as realistic as a fable character than as a physical object used in antiquity. This picture alone demonstrates that the Lamassu, divorced from its context, has in fact undergone a form of destruction. Once an object is divorced from its context, scholars can only piece so much of its original meaning back together through illustrations like Figure 4.2.

There have been major attempts by scholars and museums to remedy these issues, even creating models of the original structure and placing the objects in them. In contemporary times, objects like the Near Eastern antiquities and the Elgin marbles, which were removed and transported to foreign museums have instigated discussions of repatriation. Art works in foreign museums can even be used as transactions of goodwill and initiate positive relations between countries, like the Teotihuacan murals that the United States and Mexico worked together to

repair.<sup>69</sup> The point being, despite large strides in education and good intentions, the removal of these objects is still destruction.

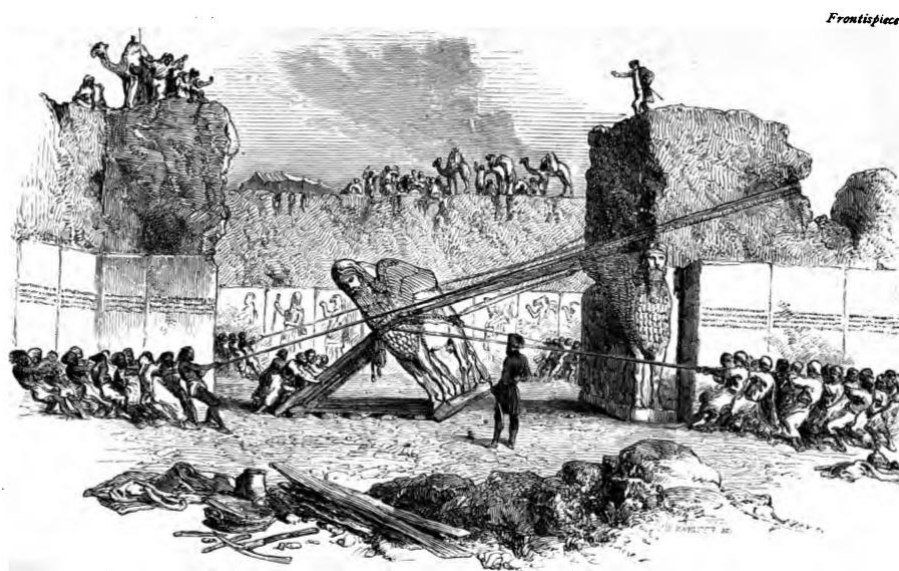


Figure 4.3 Lowering the Bull  
*Ninevah and Its Remains*, vol. 1, 1849, Murray, frontpiece

Going back to our example of Great Britain, imagine that Buckingham Palace is going through another renovation. This time, the builders tear down the entire structure and, over the course of five years, rebuild it in its exact likeness. There are celebrations for this new structure that is still called Buckingham Palace, but is it the same building? Visitors who went as a child and returned as aging adults would still be able to navigate the structure in the same manner as forty years prior. The wood would not be original, while the flooring would be new with upgraded material, and freshly painted windows and fixtures decorate the new palace. Without the wood that Queen Victoria walked on, or evidence of aging material of a lived in residence, would this still be an acceptable copy?

<sup>69</sup> See Thomas Seligman, “The Murals of Teotihuacan: A Case Study in Negotiated Restitution.” In *The Ethics of Collecting Cultural Property: Whose Culture? Whose Property?* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Phyllis Mauch (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999) 73-84.

This example is important to consider. With new technologies, we are constantly faced with this predicament. ISIS's destruction of the Lamassu and other Near Eastern objects has certainly led to this exact circumstance. Project Mosul aims to restore these lost artifacts through 3D modeling from photos.<sup>70</sup> One example that has been uploaded is of Nimrud, showing the Lamassu *in situ* with its original image. Every day, virtual realities often become our real ones. Over the years they have become more tangible and concrete the more we interact online. I have never stood before a Lamassu, yet I can identify it out of any images of Near Eastern deities. The images online from a simple search that yield photographs of the Lamassu, which are supposed to be substitutes for viewing the physical object, are becoming accepted versions of the original. In fact, it is photos from those that have seen the original pieces that are used to recreate the 3D models for Project Mosul.<sup>71</sup> So while the photo is understood to be only a false replication of the original since it is 2D, it is through this medium that we accept without a doubt the authenticity of a physical 3D print. Certainly, most would argue that it is a copy, not the original. Yet, images of the Lamassu online often stand in for the original with credibility.

These replications from 3D printing are not only available for viewing. Now, any user with a computer is able to download the 3D version straight to their computer and print in 3D thanks to artist Moreshin Allahyari.<sup>72</sup> This is a turning point for how we view and access art. With the ease of replicating originals, multiplying these images and being able to sit them on a

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<sup>70</sup> You can visit the website for videos of the remodels here: <http://projectmosul.org/gallery>

<sup>71</sup> Bridget Butler Millsaps, "Project Mosul – Artifacts Destroyed by ISIS Will Be Restored Thanks to 3D Printing," *3D Printing.com*, March 16, 2015, accessed January 10, 2016, <http://3dprint.com/51531/3d-print-isis-mosul-museum/>

<sup>72</sup> Casey Quackenbush, "These ISIS-Destroyed Artifacts Are Now Available to Download and 3-D Print," *Observer*, February 17, 2016, accessed February 29, 2016, <http://observer.com/2016/02/these-isis-destroyed-artifacts-are-now-available-to-download-and-3-d-print/>



computer desk or bookshelf places them in new intimate contexts. It also further divorces the original from its Mesopotamian context, a process already shown taking place in Figure 2.2.

When digging deeper, it becomes apparent now that destruction is very versatile. It is masked by cultural practices and the language of value. Values, which are based in language, and language itself, like Appiah's Humpty Dumpty, and can be molded as one sees fit. Appiah states that "our vocabulary of evaluation is enormously multifarious. Some terms – "good," "ought" – are, as philosophers often put it, rather thin. They express approval, but their application is otherwise pretty unconstrained: good soil, good dog, good argument, good idea, good person."<sup>73</sup> The same could be said of destruction: ISIS destruction, Buckingham Palace upgrades, the removal of the Lamassu to Great Britain, and 3D restoration. My aim is to open the dialogue regarding how destruction is determined and what cultural values are present when negotiating such destructions, which I believe is imperative as we move forward with ISIS and their actions.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

It has been more than a year since ISIS posted that infamous video. Articles have come out in droves, cataloguing the events and critiquing their motives for destroying Near Eastern heritage. The video, which sent social media ablaze, did so in part because of long-held beliefs about world heritage and specifically the notion of a "cradle of civilization." Near Eastern history is part of most Western school curricula. Yet, most have not asked, "why is this Western history?" Instead, it has been ingrained and therefore generally accepted knowledge.

My issue is not that the West has this viewpoint. My concern lies with its lack of inclusion and acceptance regarding other's views of history. What the West might see as theirs, because of a collective humanity, may not be as valuable to others. This debate on worldviews is

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<sup>73</sup> Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 47.

to open dialogue and address what has created our own perceptions. After I watched the video, I asked myself – “how could ISIS do that to its own heritage?” This question led me to find that their local perspective is one that is not often part of the discussion, and it has driven me to this issue of diverse worldviews. What I uncovered was that ISIS’s destruction involved much more intricate motives than news outlets could ascribe in a ten-word headline.

One of the questions posed early on in the media was why some objects were sent to the black market. Looting in the region, which stemmed from earlier archaeology introduced by the West, seems to hold the most plausible answer. The question, however, remains: if it was strictly religiously motivated, why destroy some and not others? I believe Harmanşah has made the missing connection. ISIS was performing for an audience in the video. It was articulate and quite astute as to what images would motivate Western media, and, in large part, the video was successful in that it could be played without censorship. ISIS had its characters, which were idealized versions of ISIS members, and so animated with their brutality that their imagery was quickly picked up by cartoonists across the world.<sup>74</sup> ISIS gave the world a spectacle to build its nation state in wealth, population, identity and culture. By its destruction, ISIS knew that the West would pay attention to it and, in doing so, led me to ask the question – what is destruction?

In my view, destruction is more than an action. It is a value, and we see it played out every day. We install apps, customizing our phone, destroying the factory version through upgrades in order to improve the function and aesthetics. In the example I put forth earlier, Buckingham Palace was either upgraded to fit the new government, or its destruction was the product of a new version in the same image. Destruction does not always mean physical destruction or annihilation of an image. It can also constitute the destruction of meaning. In the

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<sup>74</sup> Harmanşah, “ISIS, Heritage, and the Spectacles of Destruction in the Global Media,” 172.

case of the Elgin marbles, the original context is destroyed. This is similar to the Lamassi brought over to Great Britain by Austen Henry Layard. Their original context was destroyed and a new concept of the Lamassu emerged that was based on Great Britain's reception of such imagery. There is no simple answer to the questions I have posed, but I believe there should be more dialogue about not only what ISIS is and its motives, but also to what is being destroyed and how cultures partake in destruction and value it.

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