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Portada interior:
PHILAE
Imagen: Sebah Pascal, dominio público.

What is the Arabic for "reconstruction"? The question of reconstruction of ancient ruins in the Arab Region: the case of Egypt

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Abstract

Reconstruction of archaeological ruins is discouraged by international conventions and charters, as Stanley-Price rightly states. He explains the arguments for and against reconstruction according to values. But what if ruins have different values due to different cultures, worldviews, and value systems? What if they have different values within the same society? The present essay endeavors to identify the values of ancient ruins in the context of the Arab Region as an essential step preceding the reconstruction discussion. I suggest that the coexistence of both modern and traditional views in the Arab Region today impacts the understanding and appreciation of archaeological ruins and consequently their conservation or reconstruction. Decision makers and conservation professionals adopt modern views, while local communities in old urban and rural settlements adopt traditional views. Each set of views form the values of ancient ruins and the attitudes towards their conservation. I take a step back and deconstruct the significance of ancient ruins in the region today for each set of views, using most examples from my country, Egypt. Before addressing the question of reconstruction for archaeological ruins, it is necessary to reconcile both sets of views and identify common values for ancient ruins in the region.

Keywords: ruins reconstruction, Arab region, traditional views, 19th century views, values of ancient ruins.

Introduction

"The reconstruction of ruins: principles and practice" by Nicholas Stanley-Price is an essential reading on the controversial topic of reconstruction. It tackles the question of reconstruction of archaeological remains from a practical approach, while covering the philosophical and theoretical argument concisely and with a neutral tone. The author goes through the pros and cons of reconstruction in the light of the "[p]rinciples enshrined in conventions and charters" that set the international guidelines for best practices. He then proposes "[s]ome principles of site reconstruction" charters (Stanley-Price, 2009).

I value the paper and I have great respect and admiration for the author, an international authority in the field. Nicholas Stanley-Price is an archaeologist and an academic who worked in the Middle East and is well published, particularly in the field of conservation and management for archaeological sites (ruins). He worked at the Getty Conservation Institute and taught at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London before his appointment as the Director-General of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). He currently lives in Rome and works as a freelance international consultant and an independent scholar.

The first time we met, he was seated across the table from me at the dinner of an international workshop in Amman, Jordan. We chatted informally about different subjects. I was impressed by Nicholas' perfect English pronunciation. He sounded and looked like an English gentleman coming out of a classical novel! I exclaimed, "You are so very English!" I did not know at the time that he was the Director-General of ICCROM. Most probably if I knew in advance, I would have been scared to chat away with him so informally. That was over fifteen years ago.

From my point view at the time, as a practicing conservation architect based in Egypt, I saw with great excitement ICCROM opening its doors to the whole world, exploring diverse ideas and views, particularly non-Western philosophies and worldviews. Thanks to Nicholas' attitude during his tenure as a Director-General of ICCROM, I gathered courage and submitted my PhD thesis to be peer-reviewed for possible publication. He encouraged me by noting that despite the diversity of cultures and regions that are represented in ICCROM's publications, there was not one publication devoted to Islamic views on conservation of cultural heritage. An adapted version of my thesis was published and is available on ICCROM's website.[1] Besides his instrumental role in publishing my book, Nicholas proofread the manuscript before publication.

Thanks to Nicholas I gained confidence in my thesis and the conviction that the Arab-Islamic worldview and value system do influence attitudes towards conservation in the Arab Region, and that they should be respected, studied and taken into account in the conservation practices in the region. I continue to explore these issues through my professional practice and academic research, including this essay.

I believe that international conventions and charters are rooted, to a great extent, in 19th century European history and worldviews despite endeavors to expand their scope and move them away from Eurocentricity. I would like to suggest that before getting into the discussion "to reconstruct or not to reconstruct," one should examine the significance and meaning of ancient ruins within different socio-cultural and geo-cultural contexts. The present essay explores this approach pertaining to the Arab Region using Egypt as an example. My premise is that attitudes toward conservation in the region, including the question of reconstruction of archaeological ruins, are formed by the combination of –and the conflict between– modern and traditional views regarding the meaning and significance of ancient ruins.

Modern views on ruins

Aesthetic values

Since the beginning of the 19th century, modern appreciation for the aesthetic values of ancient ruins in Egypt is manifested in visual arts, such as landscape paintings and sculpture. It is also expressed by historicist and revivalist architectural styles. In addition, they are expressed by the restoration and reconstruction of archaeological sites (Reid, 2002; 2015). Similar views were adopted in other Arab countries in different dates relating to the timeframe of their modernization efforts and the formation of their identities as modern nation states.[2]

While historic roots for the interest in the aesthetic values of ancient ruins in Europe are well known and could be traced back to the Renaissance (Makarius, 2004), there are hardly any traces of such interest in the Arab Region before modernization (Belting, 2011: 27; Hollis, 2009: 145). The same could be said about certain genres of visual arts such as paintings and sculpture (Radwan, 2016: 24-31; Lenssen, 2020).

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[1] Mahdy (2017).

[2] See Mahdy (2017; 2019) for a discussion on the timeframe, extent and main players pertaining to modernization efforts in Egypt and different Arab countries and issues of modern and traditional views on heritage conservation.

As for architecture, pre-modern Arabs recycled columns, lintels, and other architectural elements, which they salvaged from ancient ruins and integrated into their architecture (Abdulfattah, 2017). However, they did not construct their buildings following aesthetic or stylistic qualities of ancient ruins. No restoration or reconstruction attempts for ancient ruins are known to have taken place in the Arab Region before modern times (Mahdy, 2017: 44).

Premodern Arabs were greatly interested in the intellectual products of ancient civilizations. This interest was manifested by their great endeavors to translate, discuss and to add to seminal intellectual works from Greek, Persian, Indian, Chinese, and other early civilizations. However, this interest is not known to have been extended to the aesthetic values of ancient ruins, which may indicate that this disinterest in the tangible aspects of ruins was an intentional attitude (Hollis, 2009: 145-146).

As an important aspect of their modernization efforts, however, modern Arabs introduced the appreciation and celebration of aesthetic values of ancient ruins as well as 19th century European media and art genres that express this appreciation.[3] Pharaonic, Assyrian, Phoenician, Greek, Roman and other ancient ruins appeared in paintings, sculpture, and modern architecture throughout the Arab Region.

> *The work of the generation of Egyptian artists referred to as al-ruwwad (the pioneers) reflects a moment of tremendous cultural change in Egyptian society. Their work not only embodies al-nahda (the renaissance) in intellectual thought at the dawn of twentieth century but also underlines cross-cultural interactions between Egypt and Europe at the time. […]*
> *The fellah (peasant) and Ancient Egypt were the two main subjects addressed by the pioneers in their works and would remain intimately intertwined with Egyptian art for a long time* (Radwan, 2016: 26-29).

Scientific values

The search for antiquities, ancient curiosities, and treasures by 19th century Europeans in the Mediterranean Basin, including the Arab Region, evolved into archaeological research as a scientific methodology for the investigation and study of the material remains of ancient civilizations (Stiebing, 1993: 23-24). Consequently, ancient ruins acquired unprecedented scientific values. As these developments took place in 19th century Europe, Biblical studies (Rast, 2003: 54-59; Silberman, 1982: 46-47), Darwinian premises (Johnson, 2010: 164), and colonial ambitions (Johnson, 2010: 149) as well as Orientalists' assumptions (Reid, 2002: 131) influenced the beginnings and early developments of archaeology as a discipline.

Much of the early archaeological excavations were carried out in the Arab Region, where Biblical stories took place and ancient civilizations have left remains of artistic and architectural treasures. European archaeologists were granted access and support by colonial administrations at the time in different Arab countries including Egypt (Reid, 2015: 265). After independence, Arab archaeologists carried on the archaeological excavations and research that were initiated by the Europeans, even if initially motivated by Biblical, Darwinian, Orientalist and/ or colonial objectives and agendas. Praveena Gullapalli's critique of the state of archaeological research in India is equally valid for the Arab Region:

[3] This was considered "high culture" together with other forms of 19th-century European art genres such as classical music, opera, ballet, theater.

> *A consistent critique has been that colonial European investigations into the past and present were fundamentally shaped by the exigencies of rationalizing and maintaining power. Consequently, the historical and anthropological narratives created under those circumstances cannot be divorced from issues of power and domination and were, in many cases, in the service of reinforcing those power relations in favor of the colonizers. The frameworks developed during the colonial period did not end with colonialism but continue into post-independence scholarship as well* (Gullapalli, 2008: 37).

Today, the scientific values of archaeological ruins in the Arab Region are formally acknowledged and legally protected. However, they are not always integrated within the value systems of local communities, hence their association with bad history of the colonial period and the conflict between their interpretations and local views. Once more, Gullapalli's (2008: 37-38) critique is valid for Egypt and the Arab Region (Spek, 2011: 32-33).

Political values

Definitions and boundaries of modern Arab nation states, such as Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and the Maghreb, were formed by European colonial powers as their inheritance of the Ottoman Empire after its defeat during World War I (Fromkin, 1989). Other modern Arab nation states, such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, were formed as a result of the European instigation and support of Arab uprisings against the Ottoman Empire before World War I (Musallam, 1983: 1-24; Wilson, 1992: 270-288).

Arab national movements during the colonial period as well as national governments after independence followed the European 19th century example by establishing their national identity based on their ancient history (Bernhardsson, 2010: 61-62).[4] They further followed the European example of using ancient ruins as the material evidence and visual representation of the historicity and authenticity of their newly established national identities (Reid, 2002; 2015).

AWAKENING OF EGYPT, BY MAHMOUD MUKTAR, CAIRO.
Image: Public domain.

[4] See Janowits (1990) for the place of ancient heritage and its ruins in the formation of national identities in Europe.

Modern Arab national identities are represented by the archaeological remains of each Arab nation state. Postal stamps, banknotes, coins, and other representations of nations' sovereignties were and continue to be adorned by images of ancient ruins (Reid, 2015: 360). Furthermore, revivalist architectural styles are often chosen for public buildings. Statues representing ancient heritage were erected in important public spaces. Restorations and reconstructions of ancient ruins are carried out to ensure the grandness of the ancestors of different Arab nations (Reid, 2002; 2015; Mahdy, 2017).

POSTAL STAMPS USING PHARAONIC HERITAGE. *Images: Public domain.*

This Europeanized approach by modern Arab nation states was a remarkable departure from the Islamic basis of pre-modern societies in the Arab Region, even though Islam was and continues to be the *raison d'etre* for most of these communities and nations to consider themselves "Arabs" (Musallam, 1983: 3).

Economic values

Economic values of ancient ruins are initiated by mass tourism, which became a huge international industry in the last decades of the twentieth century. However, the beginnings were in Europe with the Renaissance, the 18th century grand tour and the 19th century travels, which were secured and facilitated by colonial administrations. Europeans traveled to Egypt, the Levant and other Arab countries motivated by religious sentiment to visit the locations of Biblical stories and by curiosity to see the exotic lives of the Arabs as portrayed by the body of popular Orientalist art and literature (Fahim, 1998: 8). By mid-19th century, Thomas Cook transformed travels to the Mediterranean, Egypt, and the Holy Land into an industry of mass tourism, including the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 (Reid, 2002: 89-92). Hussein Fahim observes from the point of view of an anthropologist a duality of attitudes by 19th century European travelers to Egypt:

This duality represents Egypt as a country with two contrasting cultures: an image that corresponded with, and also reflected Europe's common taste for the exotic nature of the Oriental world. This went side by side with its fascination with the antiquities of ancient Egyptian civilization. This dual cultural image of modern Egypt which by and large filled most European travelers' accounts seems, in my view, to have suited well the desire, if not the obsession, of both the public and intellectuals during the nineteenth century to seek knowledge of the exotic, the bizarre, of unfamiliar beliefs, customs and traditions of non-European cultures.

This knowledge was also required to provide evidence and support for an evolutionary scheme of human culture which ranked Europeans as superior and most civilized (Fahim, 1998: 8-9).

TOURISM BROCHURE USE BY THOMAS COOK & SON, 1898-1899.
Image: Public domain.

On the other hand, cultural tourism was known by pre-modern Arabs for religious purposes, which continues to the present day, mainly for performing *hajj* pilgrimage to Makkah, which is one of the five pillars of Islam that should be performed at least once in the lifetime of each capable Muslim. Nevertheless, modern Egypt and other modern Arab countries adopted the European model of cultural tourism, which is mainly a continuation of its 19th century beginnings, mixing leisure, entertainment, and education, including the dual image of

modern Egypt as described by Fahim. Public and private sectors in several Arab countries invest in infrastructures aiming to accommodate great numbers of tourists and to cater for their hospitality. The sole motivation for modern tourism industry in the Arab Region is to generate substantial economic benefits for societies and local communities (Farid, 2018). For example, "In 1977 the U.S. band The Grateful Dead spent $500,000 to ship 23 tons of equipment to play in front of the Sphinx" for a concert that was attended by 10 000 young people. In 1993, the Pharos Rally took place by the pyramids and was attended by five hundred drivers. Also, performances of Verdi's *Aida* had been held in front of the Sphinx several times (Kuppinger, 2006: 332-3). Ancient ruins acquire, therefore, crucial economic values, which are painfully missed by local communities and businesses, whenever numbers of tourists drop dramatically due to political, economic, or other unpredicted challenges (Farouk, 2014).

Traditional views on ruins

For more than fourteen centuries, values and attitudes that formed traditional views pertaining to ancient ruins in the Arab Region were mainly formed by the Islamic worldview and value system. Traditional views persisted up to the present partially or totally –collectively or individually– particularly in informal contexts. They continue to be highly relevant to the Arab collective conscious despite the formal adoption by modern Arab nation states of modern views that were modeled after 19th century European views (Mahdy, 2017: 79-88).

Emotional values

The emotional values of ruins go back to pre-Islam times, when the Arabs lived nomadic lives. They were constantly on the move in search for water. As they were often forced to leave their homes and settlements behind, the encountering of ruins in the landscape triggered strong nostalgic emotions. The Arab Bedouins immortalized these emotions in their poetry, which was their most important form of cultural expression. Pre-Islam Arabic classical odes often started by a line or more describing the poet weeping as he was emotionally moved in front of the ruins. This genre of poetry is called *atlaal*, which is one of many Arabic words for ruins (Tuetey, 1950: 5).

As Islam and Arabic language spread outside the Arabian Peninsula into countries with urban lives and grand ancient ruins, *atlaal* poetry continued to be used to describing one's emotions in front of deserted buildings, cities, and ruins of ancient civilizations. Until today, Arabic poetry and popular songs continue to use the *atlaal* theme as a popular form of emotional expression. Perhaps the most remarkable example of *atlaal* poetry from early Islamic period that was composed on the subject of ruins of pre-Islam civilizations is al-Buhturi's ode (Ali, 2010: 153):

> *[…] the court poet al-Buhturi (d. 897) composed an unusual but intense poem. In it he left behind haughty patrons and the urban setting of Samarra and ventured out to the ruins of a Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon, twenty miles south of Baghdad, famed for its sole remaining ruin – Khosrow's Arched Hall, or Iwan Kisra.*
> *[…]*
> *As if the Arched Hall, by its wondrous craftsmanship,*
> *Were hollowed in the cliff of a mountain side.*
> *It would be thought, from its sadness –*
> *To the eyes of morning and evening visitors –*
> *Distraught like a man torn from company of loved ones,*
> *Or distressed by the breaking of nuptials* (Ali, 2010: 158).[5]

[5] Translations from Arabic are by Ali (2010).

Ethical values

According to the Qur'an, ancient ruins are of ethical values as they present the tangible evidence that all material things and all living beings, including highly achieving human civilizations, will one day perish. The Qur'an instructs Muslims to travel and visit the ruins of ancient civilizations in order to reflect on the fate of ancient peoples, who perished despite their great material achievements. The lesson that a Muslim should learn from visiting ancient ruins is that moral values and attitudes are what matters.

> *[...] Do they not travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those before them? But the home of the hereafter is best, for those who do right. Will ye not then understand?* (The Qur'an, 12: 109).

The Prophet instructed his companions, as they were passing by al-Hijr archaeological ruins,[6] to refrain from entering the site unless they were weeping and reflecting on the fate of those who once lived there. By doing so, he has established an etiquette for Muslims with regards to visiting the sites of ancient ruins, which is similar to the Islamic etiquette of visiting cemeteries: with respect, humility, and reflection (Al-Bukhari, 846).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF AL HIJR, SAUDI ARABIA. *Imagen: Public domain.*

Social values

Local communities valued the ancient ruins that were located in their vicinities. They often saw them as attributes and determinants of the spirit of place (*genius loci*). They included them in their folk tales, songs, and mythology. This is manifested in many ways and forms across the Arab Region (Abdulhakim, 1980).

[6] Inscribed on the World Heritage List as Al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Madain Salih) by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2008 (criteria (ii), (iii)).

For example, the local community in Baalbek told visitors in medieval times that the temple with its huge columns was built by the *jinn* for King Solomon (Al-Ghirnaty, 2002). The local community in al-Qurna in Luxor visit the tombs of the Nobles and the Valley of the Kings for fertility issues, particularly the tombs with wall paintings portraying daily life scenes, such as family life, children, food, and agricultural production, as the community associates the survival of these images with an inherent vitality (Spek, 2011: 300).

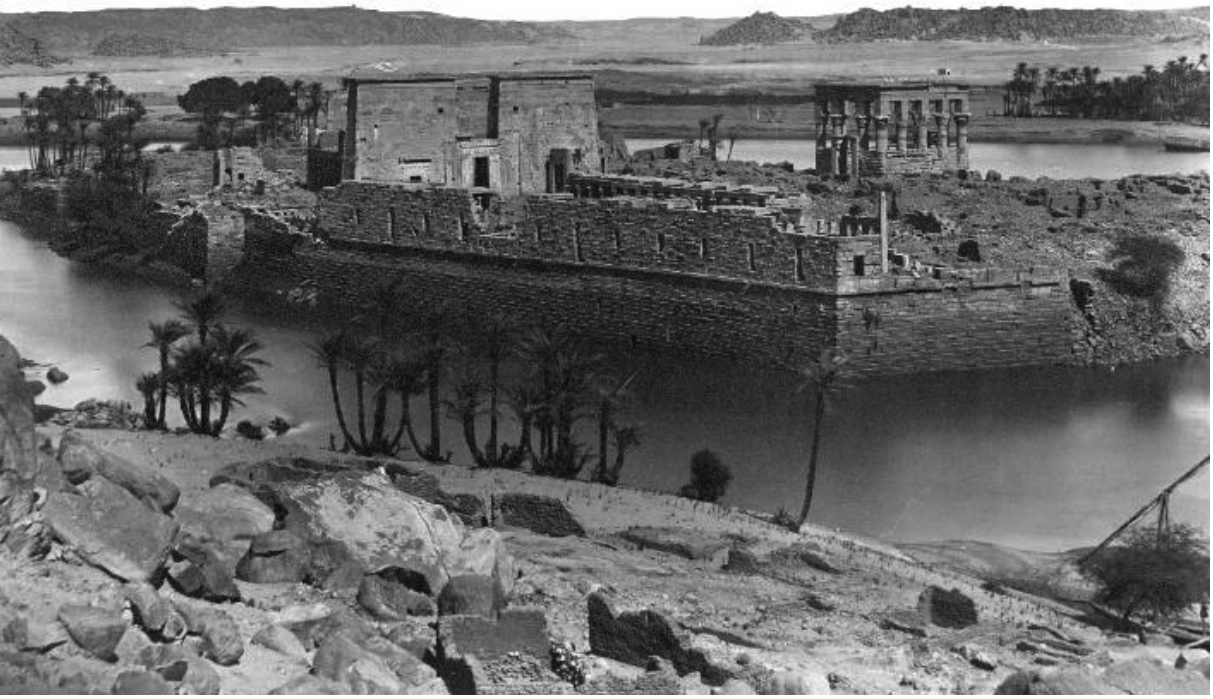
> *The transferal of meaning from archaeological artifact to magical relic is commonplace in Egyptian folklore where, especially in Upper Egypt, the perceived life-giving power* –baraka– *of ancient monuments is still widely appropriated to influence some personally held concerns. While such concerns generally operate in the realm of the social or the medical, at al-Qurna they also demonstrate that the linking of archaeological artifact with some external and socially constructed focus is a recurring feature of a traditional worldview to which many Egyptians, overtly and covertly, subscribe* (Spek, 2011: 294-296).

BAALBECK, LEBANON. Postcard. *Image: Public domain.*

Another example is the temples on Philae island[7] in the Nile close to Aswan. Amelia B. Edwards visited the site the late 19th century and described its visual impact:

> *The approach by water is quite the most beautiful. Seen from the level of a small boat, the island, with its palms, its colonnades, its pylons, seems to rise out of the river like a mirage. Piled rocks frame it in on either side and purple mountains close up the distance* (Edwards, 1982: 207).

[7] The temples were moved to the Agilkia Island as part of the international campaign initiated by UNESCO to save the Nubian built heritage before the 1970 completion of the Aswan High Dam. They were included in the World Heritage List as "Nubian Monuments from Abu Simbel to Philae", inscribed by Egypt in 1979 (criteria (1), (iii) and (vi)).



PHILAE, ANTONIO BEATO, 1910. *Image: Public domain.*

In pre-modern times, the Egyptians knew the island by the name Uns El-Wujood,[8] which coincides with the name of one of the stories of the *Arabian Nights*: "the story of Uns El-Wujood and El-Ward Fi-L-Akmam". The story describes "an impregnable palace," where the Wezeer imprisoned his daughter whose name is El-Ward Fi-L-Akmam[9] in order to prevent her from seeing her lover, whose name is Uns El-Wujood. The palace was built on an isle surrounded by crocodiles (Lane, 1902: 248-255). It is not known whether the story was inspired by the island and its ancient ruins. Or that the local community saw the similarity between the palace in the story and the ruins on the island. In either case, the social values of the ancient ruins for the community cannot be undermined.

Historical values

The historical values of ancient ruins are central to the Islamic belief and worldview. The Qur'an tells the stories of ancient peoples to explain abstract concepts of right and wrong. From an Islamic point of view, man should learn lessons from history with the objective of refraining from repeating the same pitfalls as previous peoples.

> *There is, in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding. It is not a tale invented, but a confirmation of what went before it, a detailed exposition of all things, and a guide and a mercy to any such as believe* (The Qur'an, 12: 111).

[8] A poetic Arabic name, roughly meaning the pleasure of existence.

[9] A poetic Arabic name, roughly meaning the hidden roses.

Ancient ruins were often included in historical accounts as material evidence for the lessons that should be learned from history.

> *How many populations have We destroyed, which were given to wrong-doing? They tumbled down on their roofs. And how many wells are lying idle and neglected, and castles lofty and well-built?*
> *Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts (and minds) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts* (The Qur'an, 22: 45-46).

Pre-modern Arab historians often started their written works by stating the objective of writing and reading history with reference to the Qur'an. "The close association between history and theology gave to much of medieval Islamic historiography […]" (Crabbs, 1984: 28). For example, al-Maqrizi, the prominent Egyptian historian of Mamluk times gave his main historical work the title *Al-mawa'iz wa al-I'tibar fi dhikr al-khitat wa al-athar,* which means "the lessons and thoughts from the mention of urban fabric and ancient architectural remains". Arab historians were often brief on the material and visual description of ancient ruins. On the other hand, they were often exhaustive on the history of the ruins in question and the people who built them (Al-Maqrizi, 1911).

According to the Islamic view on history, traditional communities and individuals in the Arab Region value ancient ruins for the stories they tell and the lessons they teach, rather than for their material or visual characteristics and qualities (Ashraf, 1980).

The question of reconstruction

In pre-modern Cairo, the same Arabic word *ansha'a* (literally meaning constructed) was used in legal documents and was inscribed on buildings to indicate construction, reconstruction, restoration, extension, or the establishment of revenue-generating endowment *waqf* (Mahdy, 1992). The significance and valorization of old buildings were based on their intangible values according to traditional views (as explained above: emotional, ethical, social, and historical values). These views continue to be adopted today by local communities and informal sectors. Thus, no discussions or implementations of reconstruction for archaeological ruins are known to have been initiated according to traditional views, both in modern and pre-modern times.

On the other hand, modern views on archaeological ruins in Egypt and the Arab Region are based on tangible values: aesthetic, scientific, political, and economic values. Accordingly, the question of reconstruction is crucial. Formal and professional bodies systematically produce physical, artistic, and hypothetical reconstructions of ancient sites and buildings throughout the Arab Region.

Nicholas Stanley-Price presents five justifications for reconstruction and seven arguments against it. They are all based on values and principles enshrined in conventions and charters (Stanley-Price, 2009). For modern views in the Arab Region, the justifications for reconstruction are highly tempting while arguments against reconstruction are not strongly forbidding, given the present political and economic contexts of mainly authoritarian regimes with neoliberal economies. Saddam Hussain's reconstructions in Babylon[10] and other ancient Iraqi sites are well known examples of the great interest of political authoritarian regimes in reconstruction

[10] Despite the massive reconstructions by Saddam Hussain, Babylon was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2019 (criteria (iii) and (vi)).

of ancient ruins with little or no consideration for the authenticity of their fabric. Since 2014 and up to the present, General Sisi of Egypt has been relocating and reconstructing obelisks, sphinxes, and other Ancient Egyptian artifacts and architectural elements to serve the image of a proud nation state with glorious past.[11]

SPHINXES, LUXOR. *Image: Public domain.*

Conflicts created by modern *versus* traditional views are based on aesthetic *versus* emotional values, scientific *versus* ethical values, political *versus* social values, and economic *versus* historical values. This dichotomy is the result of the dismissal of traditional views by Arab

[11] An obelisk was relocated from Cairo to the New Alamain city, which is under construction on the Mediterranean shore to serve as the summer capital for the present Egyptian government. An obelisk was relocated and currently being reconstructed in Tahrir Square in Cairo. An ancient Egyptian tomb was cut and relocated to the museum of the New Administrative Capital of Egypt, which is under construction. The reconstruction of the Avenue of Sphinxes in Luxor is another example of the current practices of the Egyptian government at present.

modernists since the early days of modernization and up to the present. Formal conservation approaches, policies and practices in the Arab Region continue to hold on to views that are based on 19th century European attitudes that were introduced to the region by colonials and orientalists. Even if these attitudes were discarded in Europe and internationally in favor of more holistic, inclusive and participatory approaches.

I would like to argue that the conflict created by modern and traditional values is an artificial one. An inclusion and reconciliation would produce a rich and clear understanding of the significance of ancient ruins, which should lead to clear attitudes towards their conservation, restoration, and reconstruction. Most importantly, an inclusive attitude would secure proactive participation of local communities in the conservation and management of ancient ruins. Unfortunately, however, formal authorities and decision makers in the Arab Region are not close to endorsing such reconciliation as they continue to dismiss traditional attitudes. Furthermore, the ongoing armed conflicts and civic unrests that destroyed and continue to destroy great sites, buildings, and cities across the region raise patriotic cries to reconstruct the ruins as an unquestionable aspect of post-war reconstruction of nations and communities.

Conclusion

I have argued that the significance and values of archaeological ruins should be agreed upon before a clear argument can be initiated regarding their reconstruction, and that this is a culture-specific issue. In the Arab Region, the process of modernization produced a complicated situation, which I discuss focusing on the case of Egypt as an example.

In modern times views were heavily influenced by European 19th century attitudes, which were based on tangible values. The process of modernization at the time dismissed traditional views as backward and unscientific. Today, formal institutions continue to adopt modern views in their 19th century version with little or no change. According to these views, reconstruction of ancient ruins is desirable, particularly after destructions by armed conflicts.

In pre-modern times views were based on intangible values. Despite their dismissal and marginalization by formal institutions, traditional views continue to matter today for traditional communities and informal sectors. According to these views, reconstruction is hardly relevant.

In theory, this dichotomy of views could be reconciliated, which would produce a solid basis for forming a clear attitude towards the reconstruction of ancient ruins. However, in the real world such reconciliation is not possible within the current political and economic context.

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