

Is Syrian humanitarian tragedy a good reason to ignore the destruction of one of the most important cultural heritages in the world?

No. The victims of the Syrian conflict (well over a hundred thousand), the millions of refugees, the painstaking search for political and diplomatic solutions require the highest dedication of the international community. But why, we ask, does a thick layer of silence surround the appalling devastation and illicit trafficking that this inestimable World Heritage is subjected to?

You don't need to have visited **Palmyra; the Ancient Cities of Damascus, Bosra and Aleppo; Crac des Chevaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din; the 40 Ancient Villages of Northern Syria**, all UNESCO World Heritage Sites that have been placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. A basic understanding of Art and History is enough to appreciate the urgency of the situation, the scarring of a Country that hosted thousand-year-old civilizations.

Syria is the Land of the first alphabet, of city-states that were thriving more than three thousand years before Christ, of caravan stops that were the foundation of today's international commerce. The land of awe-inspiring monuments, the center of the Omayyade Empire, the heart of the schism between Sunni and Shia Muslims, the birthplace of three Roman emperors and seven Popes.

However, most people seem unaffected by the destruction of mosques, souqs, or sites where Aramaic (the language of Jesus) is still spoken. **We oppose the so-called pragmatism** that maintains a divergence between rescuing the human beings hurt by the conflict and protecting the cultural heritage; we must acknowledge the deadly offense to both values, and fight for them.

Watching the movie *The Monuments Men*, one is struck by the courage of those American soldiers who rescued part of the masterpieces seized by the Nazi regime, 70 years ago. We, as Italians, know many heroes that protected our cultural heritage through the centuries and we bear a special responsibility for the artistic and historic wealth we have inherited. And yet, what is happening today in Syria is overlooked by too many, even by the international organizations, whose reaction –up until now– has been too weak. With this Campaign, we encourage everyone to **react, and to join us in action. Now.**

Francesco Rutelli

Syria's forgotten victim: its cultural heritage



The campaign's main objectives

1. Create public awareness at the international stage, and inform as many people as possible about the ongoing situation and the potential solutions. The Campaign Video has been directed by young filmmaker Matteo Barzini, with a wonderful soundtrack donated by the Maestro Ennio Morricone.

2. Support the existing international programs, such as the Agreement between UNESCO and the European Union (with a budget of just two and a half million euros, absolutely insufficient to cover the long list of urgent needs).

Also considering the February 2013 meeting in Amman concerning the illicit trafficking of Syrian heritage, and the August 2013 meeting in Paris (at the UNESCO headquarters) on Syrian emergency, some of our key priorities are: to secure, anywhere possible, the Heritage in Danger (in Syria there are more than ten thousand monuments, sites, archeological areas, museums, old cities); to increase the number of guards and to guarantee the payment of their salaries; to push for collaboration among technicians and experts, notwithstanding their political orientation in the conflict; to fight against clandestine digs and the illicit trafficking of stolen art with neighboring countries.

3. Engage in the restoration of Heritage damaged during the conflict. No peace, no coexistence, no chance of economic development and employment –all tightly linked to cultural tourism– may blossom on the ruins of a Country that has been destroyed and pillaged.

4. Set up a European exhibition: “Syria. Splendor and tragedy”. Its first venue would be Rome. An outstanding International Scientific Committee is planning its content, aiming at gathering a number of Syrian masterpieces, illustrating through video and photography both marvels and destructions. President of the Scientific Committee is Professor Paolo Matthiae, dean of international archaeologists working in Syria, and celebrated discoverer of the city of Ebla. Other Committee members are curators of major European museums and scholars in Middle-Eastern, Classic and Islamic Archaeology such as: Eugenio La Rocca (La Sapienza, Rome), Frances Pinnock (La Sapienza, Rome), Stefano Tortorella (La Sapienza, Rome), Cristina Tonghini (Ca' Foscari, Venice), Pascal Butterlin (Sorbonne, Paris), Hartmut Kuehne (Freie Universitaet, Berlin), Karin Bartl (Deutches Institute, Amman, Beirut, Damasco).

Syrian cultural heritage is at risk every day

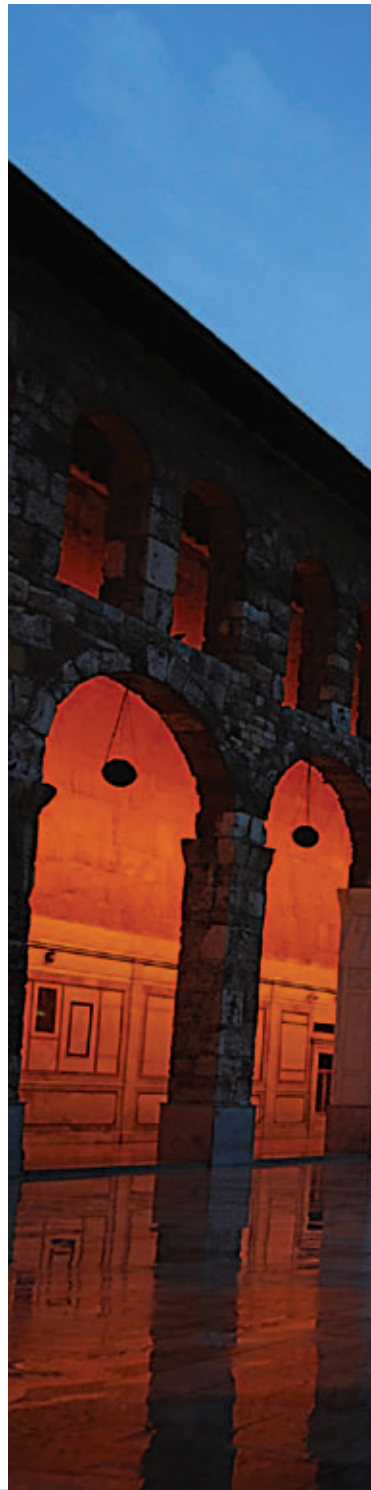
■ Paolo Matthiae

Syria is a Country of extraordinary historical and cultural significance. Birthplace of the first Neolithic experiences of sedentary life, agriculture, the ancient cities of the second World urbanization (such as Ebla and Mari), the creation of the earliest alphabet in history. Syria was the home –in Roman times- of unique men of culture (Apollodorus of Damascus, creator of the Trajan's Forum), seat of the magnificent Umayyad Caliphate, heir to the Arab, Byzantine, Persian traditions and, for the following Centuries, a bridge between the Christian West and the Muslim East. A land rich of extraordinary masterpieces dating back to Prehistory in a varied natural landscape between green hills and deserts, memory and fascination.

Syria has always been almost a symbol of peaceful coexistence and tolerance between cultures and religions, a meeting point between the Muslim and the Christian world.

Today, in a situation of deep crisis, where dramatic human suffering is the main source of concern, Syrian cultural heritage is at risk every day, suffering itself irreplaceable losses. The international public opinion is not fully aware of the danger of losing forever one of the most precious heritage that belongs to all mankind.

This initiative aims to inform the general public and the decision makers, both in Europe and globally, of the Syrian affliction, encouraging urgent action to preserve the cultural heritage and, hopefully, to start the process of a renaissance.



“If the world were clear, art would not exist.”

*(Albert Camus,
The Myth of Sisyphus)*

The horrible conflict in Syria

After three years of deadly conflict, the prospect of peace in Syria, of an outcome respectful of human rights and fundamental liberties of the Syrian people, still seems dire. This Campaign supports the efforts of the international community, that have achieved –with great difficulties and contradictions– an agreement for the destruction of chemical weapons and for UN-based negotiations that started on January 22 in Montreux, Switzerland.



“Art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance... and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process.”

(Henry James, Letter to H.G Wells)

Awarding the brave

WHO FIGHT TO PRESERVE SYRIA'S CULTURAL CIVILIZATION

Who are the brave defending and preserving the Cultural Heritage in danger? The goal of the **Cultural Heritage Rescue Prize** is to know them, to introduce them to the international public opinion and to honor them with an Award. This new initiative, promoted and coordinated by Francesco Rutelli (former Italian Minister of Culture and Mayor of Rome; now Honorary President of the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy and Chair of Associazione Priorità Cultura), together with a prestigious International Jury, whose members are: Mounir Bouchenaki (former ICCROM Director, now Special Advisor to the UNESCO Director-General), Bonnie Burnham (President, World Monuments Fund, New York), Noah Charney (Director, ARCA – Association for Research into Crime against Art), Stefano De Caro (Director-General, ICCROM), Jack Lang (former French Minister of Culture, now President, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris), Giovanni Nistri (former Commander of Carabinieri per la Tutela del Patrimonio Artistico, now Director, Great Pompeii Project), Hanna Pennock (Director General a.i. ICOM - International Council of Museums), Ismail Serageldin (Director, Great Library of Alexandria), Peter Watson (writer, expert on the fight against Illicit Trafficking, London).

Principles and rules of international law that mandate an action for the protection of the syrian cultural heritage

■ Tullio Scovazzi

A) As stated in its preamble, the Parties to the Convention for the protection of cultural heritage in the event of armed conflict (The Hague, 1954; Syria is a party to it) declare themselves convinced that damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world. Under the Convention, the Parties are bound to refrain from any act of hostility directed against cultural property, to avoid any use of such property for military purposes and to put a stop to any form of theft, pillage or vandalism of it. These provisions do apply also to armed conflicts of non-international character.

B) The Convention for the protection of the world natural and cultural heritage (Paris, 1972; Syria is a party to it) is based on the principle that certain properties of the cultural heritage present an outstanding universal value that requires their preservation as elements of the common heritage of mankind as a whole. To this aim, the international community is called to contribute to the protection of such properties through forms of collective assistance that, without replacing the action of the State concerned, can effectively complement it.

Under the Convention, six Syrian cultural properties have been inscribed on the World Heritage List (properties having an outstanding universal value for whose protection it is the duty of the international community as a whole to cooperate). In 2013 all the six Syrian properties have been inscribed on the List of the World Heritage in Danger.

C) The Convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property (Paris, 1970; Syria is a party to it), is based on the principle that cultural properties constitute one of the basic elements of civilization and national culture and that their true

value can be appreciated only in relation to the fullest possible information regarding their origin, history and traditional setting. Accordingly, it is essential for every State to become increasingly alive to the moral obligations to respect its own cultural heritage and that of all nations. Under the Convention, the States Parties are bound to cooperate against the illicit traffic of cultural properties, that represents one of the main causes of the impoverishment of the cultural heritage of the countries of origin. They undertake to fight this practice and to effect the restitution of removed properties, as provided for in the Convention.

D) In an analogous instance, the United Nations General Assembly adopted in 2001 Resolution 55/243, that noted (unfortunately without effect) that the destruction of the statues in Afghanistan, in particular the unique Buddhist sculptures of Bamiyan, would be an irreparable loss for humanity as a whole.

After the destruction of the sculptures, the UNESCO General Conference adopted the Declaration on the Intentional Destruction of the Cultural Heritage (2003), which recalled that the tragic destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan affected the international community as a whole. Under the Declaration, a State that intentionally destroys cultural heritage of great importance for humanity, whether or not it is inscribed on an international list, bears the responsibility for such destruction, to the extent provided for by international law.

E) In another analogous case, United Nations Security Council Resolution No. 1483 of 2003 provides that all Member States shall take appropriate steps to facilitate the safe return to Iraq of cultural properties and other items of archaeological, historical, cultural, rare scientific, and religious importance removed from the Iraq National Museum, the National Library, and other locations in Iraq since 6 August 1990, and shall establish a prohibition on trade of such items.

The Resolution has been implemented, for all Member States of the European Union, by Regulation No. 1210 of 2003.

F) More generally, some considerations expressed in the preamble of the UNESCO Constitution (London, 1945) may be recalled to support an action for the protection of the Syrian cultural heritage, today exposed to very serious dangers: since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed; as a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, peace must be founded upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.

