

Europamagazin

URL: <http://www.daserste.de/information/politik-weltgeschehen/europamagazin/sendung/wdr/sendung-vom-29032017-niederlande-monuments-men-kulturerbe-100.html>

March 29, 2014: 12.45 CET (item appears at 13.10)

Translation German -English

Netherlands: Monuments Men – The saviours of cultural heritage

They come with bombs and axes, planes and tanks, they destroy what survived 4000 years.

Transcription video

Newsreader: The Taliban did it as well as IS (Islamic State) in Iraq: wherever war is, irreplaceable cultural heritage is being destroyed, looted, sold – to everyone in the world, also in Europe. A Dutch man with some like-minded colleagues tries to rescue what can be rescued. Cornelia Kolden reports:

Bombed monuments, art in cross fire of the warring parties; in minutes cultural heritage falls to rubble and ashes that survived millenniums before. The world is horrified because it is OUR cultural heritage. The main evildoer is IS, but is this true? Already in 2003 the National Museum in Baghdad was dramatically looted and many objects were destroyed. During this war a Dutch scientist helped to recover and restore objects. Today he is retired but in peaceful Utrecht he continues to fight for endangered cultural heritage, with the association [Heritage for Peace](#).

René Teijgeler, Utrecht

“There was a library which was attacked by Assad’s army. 24 Hours before this attack the director was clever enough to bring the most important books and instruments from the museum, from the repository into private houses. He told us about this and we advised him how best to do it.”

Archaeologists and museum staff, nobody gets paid in wartime. That’s why Heritage for Peace (H4P) collects money for them. H4P advises and trains the few who remain in war zones trying to secure and document historic site and antiquities for the time coming.

For the famous city of Nimrud the help comes too late. The material shown is from an archive, recently IS destroyed Nimrud. In many spaces looters and vandals leave only moonscapes. But must one care for cultural heritage while so many people die?

René Teiggeler, Utrecht

“-Where they burn books, so too will they in the end burn human beings-. It is like an extension of genocide. One can kill, erasure, shoot people but if one destroys the souls and what the people represent, where do the people remain?”

Extirpation that is what IS aims at, destruction of the nation's identity but in the destruction lies also another message to the West: Look, art treasures are getting rare! And that's why one can sell them for higher prices. Not only IS is doing this, they are just more present in the network.

René Teiggeler, Utrecht

“The impression produced is that IS is the one destroying cultural heritage. But this is not true. Assad does the same, al-Nusra does the same as well as the Free Syrian Army, maybe to a lower extent, but then we talk about quantity. All of them do it.”

Also chic and wealthy Dubai benefits from the endangered cultural heritage because Dubai is an important free port to transfer the looted art from the Middle East for highest prices. Wealthy art collectors appreciate Dubai's free port where blood-stained art and antiquities are whitewashed. Their provenance is being concealed there.

René Teiggeler, Utrecht

“They get new consignment notes that can easily be bought there. Then the artefacts are transferred, mostly to the West. But in Dubai and in the Gulf states the wealthy sheikhs and art collectors want to add these objects to their collections.”

Ruthless art collectors without qualms also come from Germany and the Netherlands. Particularly in these countries objects are sold repeatedly that are obviously looted.

Maybe buyers believe that they protect the objects from destruction but they harm the people who lost them and who cannot seek help from the law.

René Teiggeler, Utrecht

“We are people who care. But most of my colleagues in England and America believe that the people are the most important ones to care for in times of war, and less for antiquities. 250,000 People were killed during the last for years. But the objects that we are trying to rescue are for the people, not for us, not for you, not for me.”

Teiggeler is glad that the National Museum in Baghdad shines almost in its old gloss but currently the circumstances do not allow the museum to open. Until the people can see their cultural heritage the treasures are slumbering in the darkness – until peace is back.

Author: Cornelia Kolden

Translation: Heritage for Peace