



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Preserving the Past Amidst Destruction: Cultural Heritage and Civil Society Responses in Raqqa, Manbij, and Palmyra

SABRINE I. 1*

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Abstract

ISIS, also known as ISIL, seized control over critical locations in Syria, such as Raqqa, Manbij, and Palmyra, sites of immense historical and cultural importance. Raqqa, with a history dating back to antiquity, once served as the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, establishing it as a key site in Islamic history. Manbij, known in ancient times as Hierapolis, was a significant religious and cultural center from the Hellenistic period onward. Palmyra, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is globally renowned for its ancient ruins and extensive cultural legacy.

In 2014, ISIS declared Raqqa its de facto capital, transforming it into an operations and propaganda hub. Manbij was under ISIS control from 2014 to 2016, serving as a strategic transit point. Palmyra fell to ISIS twice, in 2015 and 2016, during which time ISIS destroyed numerous monuments and artifacts, causing irreparable damage to the cultural heritage of the region.

This presentation examines ISIS's targeted destruction of cultural heritage in these cities and highlights the efforts of civil society post-liberation. Focusing on heritage protection, documentation, and researching illegal excavations, illicit antiquities trafficking, it spotlights initiatives of Heritage for Peace NGO such as the Rafekatuna Initiative, the Herpolis Initiative, and Palmyrene Voices Initiative.

Keywords

Civil society, Raqqa, Munbij, Palmyra , Illicit traffic

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