

as forms of preservation, what may be lost during these transformations? How do existing memorial and heritage interventions influence or constrain our approaches to these sites as archaeologists. The impact of archaeology on sites of recent conflict includes: the discovery and excavation of new features, the assessment of standing buildings, conservation of existing monuments, and the recovery of artefacts. Archaeological work can directly shape memorialisation, for example when artefacts are incorporated into monuments or put on display. New archaeological evidence may destabilise settled narratives. The immediacy and emotive power of archaeological discoveries can elicit new public engagement with past conflicts, but also risks being divisive or exploitative since archaeological practice itself is inherently destructive in nature and also operates within current socio-political discourses. This session invites both theoretical discussions and critical field-based examples to explore the intertwined nature of sites or landscapes of violence, archaeological processes, and memorialisation. The focus of this session is on all forms of conflict including warfare, protest, economic or environmental violence, political repression, encompassing all geographical areas in the 20th and 21st Century.

CONTRIBUTION ABSTRACTS

188. BY ORDER OF ASSAD: STRATEGIES FOR RE-IMAGINING CULTURAL HERITAGE DURING THE SYRIAN ARMED CONFLICT

Contribution format: Oral

Contribution authors: Nour A. Munawar – James Symonds (University of Amsterdam (UvA))

There is a well-known truism that history is written by the victors. When wars end the victors invariably use cultural heritage to commemorate the events and individuals that have supported their struggles and rise to power. The armed conflict in Syria (2011 – 2024) resulted in the destruction and looting of numerous historic sites and cultural institutions and prompted international dialogues on how best to preserve, protect and rebuild the country's cultural heritage in the post-conflict era. This paper provides an overview of how the long civil war impacted Syria's rich cultural heritage and the ways in which the past was appropriated and used to support the al-Assad regime and the Syrian governing elite. The paper stresses the significant role that heritage reconstruction and memorialisation practices have on war-damaged sites and monuments and explores how practices orchestrated by the al-Assad regime aimed to (re-)shape cultural identity and public spaces in Syria and to selectively re-imagine the nation's symbols and heroes during an unfinished conflict.

860. THE LEGACY OF BELLIGERENT LANDSCAPES IN UKRAINE: BETWEEN REUSE, DESTRUCTION, AND ETHICAL DEBATES

Contribution format: Oral

Contribution authors: Oleksandra Ivanova (National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy)

Military landscapes do not disappear after conflicts end. They transform and persist as part of the long-term continuity of strategic spaces. They are not merely witnesses to former defensive frontiers but active elements in shaping military strategies across different historical periods. In Ukraine, we can trace the reuse of belligerent landscapes over centuries: from Scythian and Rus' fortifications to Cossack strongholds, Polish and Moscovium border defenses, pillboxes from the time of the Second World War, and contemporary fortifications built during the ongoing full-scale Russian invasion. The same locations have been deliberately chosen for military purposes time and again, adapting to evolving warfare technologies. However, modern reuse of fortifications raises complex ethical questions. Ongoing military actions in Ukraine have led to the construction of new defensive structures on ancient sites—hillforts, fortified settlements, and fortress ruins. This process is simultaneously “destruction” in the legal sense and “continuation of tradition” from the perspective of historical continuity. According to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, “any act of hostility directed against historic monuments, works of art or places of worship which constitute the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples” is prohibited. Yet, when defensive structures are built as a necessity for survival, how should we approach these landscapes in research? Can we separate destruction from strategic reuse? This presentation considers belligerent landscapes as active agents in historical interactions and analyzes them as institutions regulating military engagement over centuries. Using case studies from the Kyiv region, I examine how the current war influences the perception, preservation, and academic interpretation of military landscapes. Can we define these processes as destruction when they have been occurring for centuries? How should archaeologists navigate the ethical challenges of studying conflict-related landscapes?

2213. MEMORY AND MATERIALITY IN CONFLICT LANDSCAPES: SPONTANEOUS MEMORIALS IN THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

Contribution format: Oral

Contribution authors: Diana Nahirna (Ukrainian Institute of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) – Alisa Demina (National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy)

The war in Ukraine is transforming public and private spaces through destruction and acts of violence. Some of these places are becoming memorials or spontaneous shrines, while others are avoided. Some, particularly living spaces, are attempting to return to pre-war life. Along with the transformation of physical spaces, people's memories of the tragic events are also evolving. The materiality of war and human perception of it continue to shape one another as the conflict continues. This research bridges the material analysis of trauma-related objects, spaces, and memorials with psychological studies on their impact on mental health. Given the ongoing nature of the war, the primary form of civilian memorialization observed is spontaneous, grassroots initiatives - memorials created by individuals, local communities, or eyewitnesses and relatives of the victims. Recognizing that memory is dynamic, especially in the context of an active war, a key component of this study is tracking changes in both the physical condition of these memorials and public perceptions of them over time. By examining how these spaces emerge, change, or disappear, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between conflict, material culture, and memory.

1767. TREES AS LIVING MEMORIALS AT VIMY RIDGE? COMMEMORATION, CONSERVATION AND REGENERATION IN TIMES OF CHANGE

Contribution format: Oral

Contribution authors: Esther Breithoff (Birkbeck, University of London) – Layla Renshaw (Kingston University UK)

The Battle of Vimy Ridge in April 1917 was fought in the Pas-de-Calais department of France, during the First World War. The main combatants were the four divisions of the Canadian Corps in the First Army, against the German 6th Army. The huge losses sustained by Canada meant that Vimy became a central focus of their WWI heritage. The former battleground is now a memorial park and site of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial, which commemorates Canadians killed in France who have no known grave. The landscape at Vimy is inseparable from the aesthetic effect of the monument. The monument is located at the crest of this ridge with panoramic views across the plain below. The planting of this area with imported pine and maple trees has been integral to emphasising the natural drama of the topography, shaping the choreography of how visitors traverse and relate to the site. At Vimy, the species, positioning, geographical provenance, and aesthetic appearance of the plants have densely layered association, stories, and mythologies. This paper investigates how this carefully curated aesthetic has become unsettled with two recent developments. Firstly, the die-off of the original planting due to a fluctuating climate and, secondly, a centenary project nearby to install Vimy oaks, believed to be the offspring of acorns collected as mementoes by a Canadian soldier in 1917. Using a natural-cultural heritage perspective to think through the instability of the seeming permanence of the trees at Vimy, this paper will consider the memorial affordances of plants in shaping ideas of identity and nationalism, as well as discuss the impact of climate change on “natural” commemorative landscapes within a (post)conflict setting.

1075. PRACTICES OF MEMORY: CRIME SITES, CEMETERIES, MONUMENTS. INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH ON THE KATYN MASSACRE

Contribution format: Oral

Contribution authors: Olgierd Lawrynowicz – Magdalena Majorek-Lipowicz – Anna Zalewska (Institute of Archaeology, University of Lodz) – Aleksandr Krupa-Ławrynowicz – Sebastian Latocha (Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Lodz)

The research project “Lexicon of Katyn Archaeology (1990–2015)” aims to collect, systematise and make available information on archaeological research related to the war crime committed by the Soviets against 22,000 Polish prisoners of war. This crime, known as the ‘Katyn Massacre’, took place almost simultaneously in many places in 1940. The intention of the perpetrators was to erase and cover up the material traces of this crime. For many decades, the perpetrators maintained and strengthened the so-called ‘Katyn Lie’. Our contribution will present issues related to methods of archaeological research used in the course of the search and exhumation works and their results, as well as their public perception and significance. Emphasis will be placed on justifying the thesis that it is legitimate to consider an interdisciplinary approach as inalienable in the study of memory practices. We will show that, in addition to archaeological, historical data, ethnographic interviews with the descendants of the victims and researchers are a very important element. By analysing the areas where Polish war cemeteries were established after archaeological research at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the relationship between the practices of remembrance and the problem of the transformation of the landscape of crime sites will be revealed. We will present official and private practices of remembrance and commemoration: cemeteries, monuments, relics, events. We will propose answers to the questions: what is remembered and how? Who protects the memory of the victims of the Katyn massacre? While the core case will be the memory practices in and transformations of the Katyn Forest - where the first war cemetery was established as early as in 1943 after exhumations carried out by Germans - some references will be made to Mednoye, also in Russia, as well as to Kharkiv and Bykivnia, now in Ukraine,