

# **Razing History**

**Newspaper narratives of ISIS' destruction of Palmyran cultural heritage**

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Master's Thesis

General History

Department of History and Ethnology

University of Jyväskylä

Spring 2022

# JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta - Faculty Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta	Laitos - Department Historian ja etnologian laitos
Tekijä - Author Teemu Hepola	
Työn nimi - Title Razing History - Newspaper narratives of ISIS' destruction of Palmyran cultural heritage	
Oppiaine - Subject Yleinen historia	Työn laji - Level Pro Gradu -tutkielma
Aika - Date 15.6.2022	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 47
<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Vuonna 2014 perustettu Islamilainen valtio eli ISIS tuli pian syntymänsä jälkeen surullisenkuuluisaksi kulttuuriperintökohteiden tuhoamisen ansiosta, ja muun muassa Palmyran antiikkiset rauniot Syyriassa joutuivat heidän uhreikseen. Kansainvälinen lehdistö etenkin länsimaissa uutisoi tapahtumista laajasti.</p> <p>Tässä maisterintutkielmassa analysoin englanninkielisen länsimaalaisen sanomalehdistön uutisointia koskien Palmyran kulttuuriperintökohteiden tuhoamista aikavälillä 1.6.2014 – 31.12.2017. Englanninkielistä lehdistöä ovat edustamassa amerikkalainen <i>The New York Times</i> sekä englantilainen <i>The Guardian</i>. Lähilukua hyödyntävän ensisijaisen analyysin jälkeen tutkimusmateriaaliksi muodostui 45:n artikkelin muodostama alkuperäislähteistö.</p> <p>Aihetta on tutkittu verrattain vähän aikaisemmassa tutkimuksessa, ottaen huomioon Islamilaisen valtion huomattavan suosion tutkimuskohteena. Omassa analyysissäni keskityn sanomalehtien luomiin narratiiveihin, joita käsittelen narratiivianalyysin kautta.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tulokset nostavat esille kuinka molemmat sanomalehdet luovat sekundäärisiä narratiiveja kulttuuriperintökohteiden tuhoamisen antaman primäärinarratiivin ohelle. Sanomalehtien narratiivien väliset, usein huomattavat, erot tulevat myös esille analyysin aikana.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords Narratiivianalyysi, Narrative analysis, Close reading, Lähiluku, Islamic State, Islamilainen valtio, ISIS, ISIL, IS, Daesh, The New York Times, The Guardian, Syria, Syyria, War, Sota, Palmyra, Tadmur, Cultural heritage, Kulttuuriperintö, Newspaper, Sanomalehti	
Säilytyspaikka Jyväskylän yliopisto	
Muita tietoja – Additional information Englanninkielinen – Written in English	

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background and Goals of the Research

Humanity is no stranger to harming, or even destroying its own heritage. To name but a few iconic examples: the burning of the temple of Artemis 356 BC by an arsonist seeking fame; the various sackings and destructions of the monastery of Monte Cassino by Lombards, Saracens, Revolutionary French forces and most recently in 1944 during the eponymous battle; and the accidental destruction of the Notre-Dame in 2019 all exemplify the diverse ways in which cultural heritage can be lost at our own hands. And these examples are only from the Western world.

The destruction of cultural heritage continues even to this day. As the latest major example, the Islamic State has, in a relatively short period of time, managed to gain great infamy by destroying countless cultural heritage targets, from vast ruins to smaller individual items. Islam itself has a long history of destroying cultural heritage for ideological reasons, from the very beginning of Islam, as Muhammad conquered Mecca and proceeded to destroy the false idols within the Kaaba, which the Islamic State considers a source of inspiration for their own actions, as pointed out by Ömür Harmanşah:

"These performances highlight a direct and bodily attack on the statues, and can be imagined as a re-enactment of the 7th century destruction of idols in the Ka'aba, which they frequently and explicitly cite. This is an atavistic performance that deliberately abducts the legacy of a medieval heritage and appropriates it as religious genealogy to serve the very enrichment of ISIS's ultra-modern imagery-machine."<sup>1</sup>

The earlier destruction of the Buddhas of Bamyán in Afghanistan by the Taliban in 2001 also show that Islamic extremists are no strangers to these methods. This is not to say, of course, that all extremist groups, or groups in general, inspired by Islam participate in these iconoclastic activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Harmanşah 2015.

While the rest of the world has repeatedly condemned the actions of the Islamic State towards cultural heritage, words have been ineffective in protecting the inanimate victims of the extremists. The Islamic State's rampage seems to have come to a stop only with the destruction of the caliphate itself. Yet the fall of the caliphate around 2017-2018 in the Middle East does not mark an end to the destruction of cultural heritage.

The overall goal of this study is to find out how English-speaking newspapers reported on the destruction of cultural heritage within Palmyra at the hands of the Islamic State. Specifically, it is interested in the secondary narratives found within the articles. As will be soon made evident, it is by no means rare for the articles to steer away from the primary narrative at hand, or to weave a secondary narrative within the story of cultural heritage destruction<sup>2</sup>. Themes such as motives, worth of antiquity versus humanity, doling out blame and politics are prevalent within the articles.

As the Islamic State pushed a narrative of its own<sup>3</sup> via the destruction of cultural heritage, it was my hypothesis that English-language newspapers could not resist the temptation of embedding their own narratives when reporting on the atrocities committed by the Islamic State. While the original plan was to look into multiple cultural heritage sites affected by ISIS, it turned out that Palmyra alone provided plenty of material, and therefore I chose to limit this thesis on that location.

Therefore, in short, the research questions which inform this thesis are the following:

1. How did English-language newspapers report on the destruction of cultural heritage in Palmyra between 1st of June, 2014 - 31st of December, 2017?
2. What kinds of secondary narratives are woven within these articles?

While answers to the first question will become apparent throughout the thesis on their own, the secondary narratives of the second research question will take the majority of the spotlight in this thesis, as the answers to the first question will support the task of finding answers to the second question.

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of narratives is further discussed in section 1.6.

<sup>3</sup> As Harmanşah puts it in his article, "ISIS's performative acts of destruction appropriate these transnational associations and value systems of global heritage to choreograph effective spectacles in an attempt to allure their sympathizers and patrons, recruit further fanatics, humiliate local communities while annihilating their sense of heritage, and offend the humanitarian West. This is the multi-directional goal and effect of ISIS's acts of heritage destruction." Harmanşah 2015. ISIS's motives are further examined in section 3.

## 1.2. Previous Research

As a historical research topic, the Islamic State is rather new. At the time of writing, the Islamic State has been present in the public consciousness for approximately eight years<sup>4</sup>. Despite its relatively recent emergence, however, there is a significant amount of research available on the Islamic State, due to its significance in recent history.

There are a number of studies regarding the various themes that appear in this study. On the topic of cultural heritage destruction by the Islamic State, Ömür Harmanşah's 2015 article discusses, among other things, the Islamic State's destruction of cultural heritage, and specifically the archaeological kind<sup>5</sup>. This study is perhaps the closest to my own topic that I have been able to find, though it concerns itself mainly with the media spectacle aspect of the topic, as in the reasons, effects and reactions to the filmed footage of the destruction.<sup>6</sup> Another study by Ganie and Khalid<sup>7</sup> is in theory very similar to my study, but the scope and methodology are quite different, as it focuses on a smaller temporal frame (ten days) but a larger amount of primary sources (English-language dailies *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *China Daily*, and *The Times of India*). The study also uses content analysis to reach its conclusions, a method quite similar to close reading<sup>8</sup>.

Due to the high amount of media content produced by the Islamic State during the war for an international audience, the topic of the relationships between media and the Islamic State seems to be one of the more popular topics regarding the Islamic State, and there exist a good number of studies focusing on this. Some examples which are close to my topic are an article by Boyle and Mower, which looks into the differences and similarities of American, British and Middle Eastern media in their reporting on the Islamic State, by utilizing framing theory and "corpus-based critical discourse analysis", a blend of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis<sup>9</sup>. Another example, which studies the differences between two newspapers,

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<sup>4</sup> Dated from the declaration of the caliphate in June of 2014 to June of 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Harmanşah 2015.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Harmanşah's article is a very early example of research into the topic of ISIS, having been published in September of 2015, a bit over a year after the declaration of the caliphate, and as such is much more "reactive" in its approach, whereas later studies have the benefit of greater hindsight.

<sup>7</sup> Ganie and Khalid 2021. "Coverage of Syrian Conflict in the International Print Media: A Review", *Global Media Journal – Arabian Edition*, Volume 3, Issue 3.

<sup>8</sup> This is discussed in more detail in section 1.5.

<sup>9</sup> Boyle and Mower 2018. "Framing terror: A content analysis of media frames used in covering ISIS", *Newspaper Research Journal*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 205–219.

written for the journal *Media, War & Conflict*, looks into the differences between the Islamic States English-language propaganda publication *Dabiq* and their Arabic-language newspaper *al-Naba*<sup>10</sup>. Philippe-Joseph Salazar's "*Words Are Weapons: Inside ISIS's Rhetoric of Terror*" goes even deeper into examining the rhetoric the Islamic State uses<sup>11</sup>.

Based on my research, the usage of narrative analysis (the kind used in this study, described in section 1.6.) is not very common in historical research. In fact, narrative analysis as a method is perhaps most commonly used in the field of psychology, though it is by nature cross-disciplinary as it can be easily utilized in many research topics. Therefore, I am naturally not the first to employ it, and as it happens, another study by Pfeifer and Spencer employs narrative analysis while studying the Islamic State<sup>12</sup>. In this specific study, Pfeifer and Spencer discover how Islamic State's romantic narratives of foreign jihadists employ a very Western romantic genre style, possibly explaining in part why Islamic State propaganda is effective even in the West, resulting in large numbers of foreign volunteers joining the war, as well as numerous terror strikes within Western nations themselves.

### 1.3. Temporal and Quantitative Scope

The temporal scope of this study is from the 1st of June, 2014 to the 31st of December, 2017. This scope is based on the fact that the Islamic State was declared on the 29th of June, 2014<sup>13</sup>, marking the beginning of events that can be considered "officially" Islamic State-related. The end date is not based on any specific date, but on the fact that by the end of 2017, the Islamic State in the Middle East was all but vanquished. By October, the capital of the Caliphate, Raqqa, had been liberated, and in November, Islamic State lost its last major city of Deir ez-Zor in Syria as well as the last town they held in Iraq, Rawa. This scope handily encompasses the topic of this study.

As representatives of Anglophone media, I have chosen two newspapers: one from the United States and one from Great Britain. For the American newspaper, I have chosen *The New*

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<sup>10</sup> Winkler, ElDamanhoury, Dicker and Lemieux 2019. "Images of Death and Dying in ISIS Media: A Comparison of English and Arabic Print Publications." *Media, War & Conflict* 12 (3): 248–62.

<sup>11</sup> Salazar. "Words Are Weapons : Inside ISIS's Rhetoric of Terror". Yale University Press, 2017

<sup>12</sup> Pfeifer and Spencer 2019. "Once upon a Time." *Journal of Language & Politics* 18 (1): N.PAG.

<sup>13</sup> Griffin 2015. To be precise, the Islamic State had been active in one form or another for a long time prior to this: For instance, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, one of the figures behind the Islamic State, had founded "*Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*" in 1999, which in turn would evolve into the al-Qaeda-affiliated "*Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn*" in 2004, and so on until the declaration of the caliphate.

*York Times*, and for the UK, *The Guardian*. The specific choice of these two newspapers is due to their reputation as being fairly liberal in their domestic media fields, and as such they are more fit for comparison between each other than, say, a liberal and a conservative newspaper. The fact that I've chosen liberal newspapers over conservative newspapers has no deeper purpose, and is simply a matter of convenience. By using two newspapers with similar ideological outlooks I can eliminate any troublesome differences that may come out of using newspapers of competing ideologies, though the American and British newspapers do have political differences regardless of their ideological similarities, as discussed further especially in the final section.

The specific topics/narratives examined in this paper are chosen based on the source material. After a thorough inspection of the articles<sup>14</sup>, a number of narratives presented themselves naturally, and as such I have chosen to focus on them. In order to avoid overextension, my analysis is limited to the contents of the two newspapers within the timeframe, avoiding venturing into external sources.

#### 1.4. Primary Sources

For primary sources, I have chosen to use two databases for newspapers: *International Newsstream*<sup>15</sup> and *US Newsstream*<sup>16</sup>. *International Newsstream* includes content from newspapers<sup>17</sup> outside the United States and Canada, and the database consists of English-language content from all over the world. This is the source of the articles from *The Guardian*. *US Newsstream* focuses on content from American newspapers, which in turn is the source for the articles of *The New York Times*. I decided in favor of these two databases over the individual databases of newspapers for two reasons: practicality and more fitting coverage. In terms of practicality, it is quite simply easier to use fewer databases over a more numerous selection. Additionally, web-based databases often provide a robust search engine, as is the case for both of these databases. Utilizing the search engines eases the workflow remarkably. As for coverage, in many cases, the individual databases of newspapers are seemingly more suited for

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<sup>14</sup> More on which in section 1.5.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.proquest.com/internationalnews1> Accessed 15.6.2022.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.proquest.com/usnews> Accessed 15.6.2022.

<sup>17</sup> Specifically, both databases also include content from a wide spectrum of platforms, such as wire feeds, trade journals, magazines, blogs and podcasts. I have however chosen to only focus on newspapers.



longer-term historical research, while the *Newsstream* databases fit my temporal needs perfectly<sup>18</sup>.

## 1.5. General Methodology

In order to find articles useful for this study, I used the database search engines in the following manner: firstly, I limited the search to a specific time period, from the 1st of June, 2014 to the 31st of December, 2017; secondly, I devised an effective search string<sup>19</sup> that gave results that were relevant to my interests.

To extract the required information from the search result articles, I have employed two qualitative methods: close reading and narrative analysis. When it comes to close reading as a method, in this thesis it mostly means a careful reading through of the materials. While a very basic approach, it proved sufficient for the needs of this thesis. Barry Brummet's "Techniques of Close Reading"<sup>20</sup> was the main methodological work instructing the use of close reading.

Close reading is the method which saw the most use simply due to the volume of articles (more articles results in more close reading, even if some of the articles are not used for narrative analysis), and by using this method to comb through the initial search results, I narrowed the number of articles from the original 100 returned by the search engines into a more manageable and relevant 45. After this first read-through, I then read through the articles once again as I researched the articles to find results for each of the sections. This second reading is where narrative analysis entered the stage. The methodological basis of narrative analysis utilized in this thesis is further expanded in the next 1.6. section.

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<sup>18</sup> For example, *The Washington Post's* own archive covers the years 1877-2002, which of course does not fit into the timeframe of this study, while the US Newsstream database provides issues of *The Washington Post* from the 4th of December, 1996, all the way to the present (At the time of writing, at least). The two primary sources at hand face a similar situation.

<sup>19</sup> Specifically the following search string: (ISIS OR ISIL OR daesh OR Islamic State) AND Palmyra AND (cultural heritage OR ancient OR antiquity) AND (destruction OR destroy). In practice, this limits the resulting articles into those that have a mention of the Islamic State, Palmyra, cultural heritage and destruction.

<sup>20</sup> Brummet 2018.

## 1.6. On Narrative Analysis

As Pfeifer and Spencer<sup>21</sup> explain, "what narrative exactly is" is an open question to some degree. This is echoed by Molly et al.<sup>22</sup>, who note that the chaotic past<sup>23</sup> of narrative research has produced a number of theories with differing answers to the aforementioned question. With this in mind, it may be prudent to give an answer to the question before proceeding.

As per Ilona Pikkanen<sup>24</sup>, the difference between a *story* and a *narrative*, very simply put, is that a story answers the question of *what* happened and *to whom*, while a narrative explains *how* the events happened. Furthermore, a narrative in its simplest form is a description of events with a beginning and an end. The precise answer to what a narrative is, as said, up for debate, and tends to change from discipline to discipline as required, but this ongoing discussion does not, essentially, affect this thesis.

For the purposes of this study, I have formed two different types of narrative categories largely separated from this grander conceptual conflict: primary and secondary. In this context, I consider the topic of "destruction of cultural heritage in Palmyra" to be the primary narrative of the articles, while all other topics discussed within said articles form the secondary narratives. Generally speaking a primary narrative already presents itself in the title of the articles at hand. The secondary narratives could be considered embedded narratives, stories within stories, as they are most often effortlessly woven within the primary narrative but are still strictly speaking different stories.

To clarify this distinction further, here is an example from one of the articles examined within this thesis:

*"The historic city of Palmyra has fallen almost entirely under the control of Islamic State (primary narrative), after forces loyal to the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, collapsed under a seven-day siege that has left the magnificent ruins there exposed to near-certain destruction by the terror group.*

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<sup>21</sup> Pfeifer and Spencer 2019. "Once upon a Time." *Journal of Language & Politics* 18 (1): N.PAG.

<sup>22</sup> Molly et al. 2013, 5-14.

<sup>23</sup> "The historically-produced theoretical bricolage in narrative research is largely responsible for the current wide variability in how researchers conceptualize what is narrative, [...]" Molly et al. 2013, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Ihalainen and Valtonen 2022. "Sanat Siltana Menneeseen: Kielelliset Lähestymistavat Historiantutkimuksessa." Pikkanen's chapter is "Kerrontateoreettisia lähestymistapoja historiantutkimuksessa." Unreleased at time of writing.

*Activists from the city and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group, said most of Palmyra fell on Wednesday shortly after the Assad regime evacuated most of its civilians and began withdrawing towards regime strongholds in the west.*"<sup>25</sup>

Here we can see that the primary narrative presents itself in the first sentence, as heralded by the title of the article, "*Historic Syrian City Falls Under Control of Isis*". Secondary narratives then appear right after the primary narrative, and in this case we can see examples of secondary narratives concerning the Syrian government, the "magnificent" ruins which relates to the worth of cultural heritage, and the human tragedy all these events are unfolding within. Keeping in mind Pikkanen's definition above, the "what happened" and "to whom" of the primary narrative is "Palmyra has been nearly captured" and "to Palmyra", while the "how" is not really explained in this instance. However, the "how" appears in the secondary narratives, but the secondary narratives also contain their own "what happened" and "to whom". It is specifically these "what happened" and "to whom" within the secondary narratives that this thesis is interested in, as they tell a *story* of their own within the *story* of the primary narrative.

To define further the process of narrative analysis which I have used in the thesis, here is a general "workflow" of the process:

1. Define the **Primary Narrative**.
2. Once the **Primary Narrative** is defined, define and separate **Secondary Narratives**.
3. With the **Narratives** defined and separated, they can now be used for the purposes of this thesis, for instance to answer the **Research Questions**.

Analyzing narratives is by definition a subjective exercise. I have therefore decided to not apply any specific narratological method of narrative analysis towards the narratives themselves. This method is not, of course, completely innovative, and shares similarities with a number of other approaches<sup>26</sup>. Instead, within sections 3-6 I merely gather the findings, contrast them with each other and provide some light commentary on them. The key arguments of the thesis are

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<sup>25</sup> Shaheen 2015. "Palmyra: Historic Syrian City Falls Under Control of Isis." *The Guardian*, May 21, 18.

<sup>26</sup> For example, my method of analyzing narratives is quite close to rhetorical analysis of classical structuralist narratological theory, which focuses on the linguistic and stylistic choices made within a narrative in order to find out how they form the meanings and effects a text has. Postclassical narratology is also present in the sense that I have taken steps to consider the context the narratives are told within. Additionally, as presented by Pikkanen (Ihalainen and Valtonen 2022. "Sanat Siltana Menneeseen: Kielelliset Lähestymistavat Historiantutkimuksessa." Pikkanen's chapter is "Kerrontateoreettisia lähestymistöpoja historiantutkimuksessa." Unreleased at time of writing), many of the themes of historical narratology can be found within this thesis, such as analysis of the story-level, naming conventions or the poetics of narrative. As said however, I have not limited myself to any one theme.

presented in the final section, as I examine the results in more depth and contrast them to previous research.

The next section is a brief summary of the history of Palmyra prior to the rise of ISIS, which is important in order to understand the significance of the site as cultural heritage. Subsequently, a summary of the conflict in Syria is presented to provide further context to the events described in the following sections.

- Section 3 "*'God willing' - Islamic State's motives and reasoning*" analyses how the newspapers report (or fail to report) the motives and ideologies that drive the Islamic State's quest to destroy cultural heritage.
- Section 4 "*Islamic State, also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh - Differing naming conventions*" seeks to find out the ways in which the newspapers refer to the Islamic State in their articles.
- Section 5 "*'Saddest director-general in the world' - The role of the Syrian government*" focuses on the role of the Syrian government's involvement (or lack thereof) in the events leading up to and following the initial fall of Palmyra, and how the matter has been handled in the newspapers.
- Section 6 "*Turning Ozymandian - Placing worth on cultural heritage and humanity*" looks into how the aspect of human suffering is handled in the articles.
- Section 7 "*Concert in the Ruins - Russian involvement in Palmyra*" focuses on how the newspapers report on Russian involvement in the battles for Palmyra, and Syria in general.
- Finally, in the eighth section, I will gather the results of the previous sections in order to answer the main research questions, and further discuss the results.

## 2. Bride of the Desert - Palmyra

### 2.1. Historical Background

*"Among the great cities of antiquity, Palmyra is comparable only to Petra in Jordan, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, and the Athenian Acropolis in Greece," argues GW Bowersock (...)*<sup>27</sup>

Believed to have been settled to some extent for as long as 4,000 years, Palmyra, originally and currently known as Tadmor, was founded on an oasis in the middle of the Syrian desert<sup>28</sup>. This strategic location, a midway point between the Fertile Crescent and the Syrian coast, helped Palmyra develop into an important trade hub. Palmyra's existence is referenced in both Assyrian sources from the second millennium BCE<sup>29</sup> and the Bible, wherein King Solomon is credited with the foundation of the city<sup>30</sup>. The first mentions of Palmyra as a city come from the historian Appian, who tells of Mark Anthony's<sup>31</sup> unsuccessful attempt to loot it in 41 BCE<sup>32</sup>. Palmyra would begin to develop as a proper city during the Roman imperial period, as it was steadily and deliberately built up into an important urban center of the Near East. By the time emperor Hadrian visited the city in 129 CE, it had already grown immensely wealthy, and such grand building projects as the Temple of Bel and the Temple of Baalshamin had been completed during the 1st century CE<sup>33</sup>. Undoubtedly the greatest period in Palmyrene history came when Zenobia, widow and successor of the assassinated Palmyrene hero and ruler

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<sup>27</sup> Jeffries 2015. "Isis's Destruction of Palmyra: 'the Heart has been Ripped Out of the City'." *The Guardian*, Sep 02, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Drijvers 1976, 1. As is noted in Bryce 2014 (275), this oasis location is reflected in the name Palmyra, which refers to the palm trees growing in the area.

<sup>29</sup> Drijvers 1976, 1.

<sup>30</sup> "He also built up Tadmor in the desert and all the store cities he had built in Hamath." 2 Chron. 8: 4. New International Version.

<sup>31</sup> Marcus Antonius (83 BCE-30 BCE).

<sup>32</sup> "It was wealthy enough to rouse the greed of Antony, who sent his horsemen to the oasis in 41 B.C. under orders to loot it (Appianus, Bell.Civ. V, 9)." Drijvers 1976, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Bryce 2014, 279.

Odaenathus<sup>34</sup>, invaded Egypt in 270 CE<sup>35</sup>. Already prior to this Zenobia had been campaigning in the Near East "on Rome's behalf"<sup>36</sup>, but the invasion of Egypt was effectively the queen's declaration of war towards the Roman empire<sup>37</sup>. This proved to be the final straw for the Romans, and soon enough, in 272 CE, Aurelian besieged Palmyra after defeating the queen's forces twice before<sup>38</sup>, with the defeated Zenobia trapped inside. While the city remained defiant, Zenobia opted to escape and allow the city to surrender, but her escape was cut short, resulting in her being captured by the Romans. The city surrendered, and Aurelian chose mercy, not plundering Palmyra<sup>39</sup>. However, the very next year, in 273 CE, Palmyra would once again revolt<sup>40</sup>. Literary and archaeological sources differ on the fate of the city afterwards. Literary sources tell that this time Aurelian showed no mercy and razed the city to the ground, but

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<sup>34</sup> Odaenathus (circa 220 CE-267 CE) was responsible for setting the stage for Zenobia's future ventures. In his lifetime, Odaenathus managed to not only strengthen Palmyra's position in the Eastern frontier of the Roman empire, but succeeded on a personal level as well. For his successes, Odaenathus was granted the titles of senator, Ruler of Palmyra, and after soundly defeating the Persians, King of Kings. His personal power eventually grew to such heights that his troops began calling him *imperator*. After his assassination in 267 BCE, his prestige was inherited by his family, including Zenobia. Watson 1999, 29-32 & 57-59.

<sup>35</sup> Bryce 2014, 303-304.

<sup>36</sup> Bryce 2014, 302.

<sup>37</sup> Bryce 2014, 303. This marked the beginning of the Palmyrene Wars. Unlike how emperor Gallienus had dealt with Odaenathus, the new emperor Aurelian (who had become emperor just prior to the invasion of Egypt) was not willing to risk an unknown factor in charge of valuable territories of the empire. Egypt was especially the soft underbelly of the empire, as it continued to act as the breadbasket of Rome. By controlling the province Zenobia could have starved Rome to submission. Watson 1999, 59-70.

<sup>38</sup> Despite early success in actions against the Romans, Aurelian's arrival turned the tide quickly. Once the empire got on the move, Egypt was recaptured in a matter of weeks, and Zenobia was forced to retreat from Anatolia as Aurelian headed the Roman forces towards Syria. The two major battles that followed, Immae and Emesa, ended in Palmyrene defeat, forcing Zenobia to retreat back to Palmyra. Watson 1999, 70-76.

<sup>39</sup> Facing a desperate situation, Zenobia decided that the only chance at victory laid with the Persians, the very enemies his late husband had humiliated time and time again. Though Persian aid was unlikely due to the political situation within the nation, Zenobia nevertheless escaped the city in order to negotiate in person. A Roman cavalry detachment caught up to her on the Euphrates, and she was returned to Aurelian. News of the queen's capture soon led to the surrender of the city's defenders en masse. While the general population of Palmyra was spared, the key leaders of Palmyra were likely all executed, with the major exception of Zenobia herself, who was kept alive for the purposes of a cautionary example and the coming triumphal parade in Rome. Watson 1999, 76-80.

<sup>40</sup> Aurelian received word of a revived revolt in Palmyra on his way back West, and wasted no time in turning around. His forces arrived at Palmyra with such speed that the Palmyran defenders were very much unprepared to defend the city once again. Aurelian's treatment of the populace was only a tad bloodier than on the first occasion, but the treatment of the city was much more destructive. At the very least, Aurelian's troops proceeded to loot the entire city, diminishing any wealth that was still left after the first visit of the legions. Palmyra would never truly recover from this event. Watson 1999, 80-82.

archaeological sources show no signs of such destruction<sup>41</sup>. At any rate, this marked the point from where Palmyra's importance would begin to wane.

The second revolt marked the end of Palmyra's role as a hub of trading, as the Syrian trade routes between Rome and the East were moved away from the city. The city regained some of its status during the reign of Emperor Diocletian (242/245-311/312, ruled 284-305), as the city was included in his project of fortifying the empire's Eastern frontier. Henceforth Palmyra's life centered around its military importance; for instance, during the relatively peaceful 5th century, Palmyra's population shrunk in tandem with the decreasing military garrison. During the following century the trend was reversed, as relations between Byzantium and Persia deteriorated, and the city gained new life with a growing garrison. Palmyra left Roman control in the first half of the 7th century, as invading Islamic armies conquered the city. Palmyra's defenses were reportedly too much for the Muslim forces to overcome, and Palmyra was peacefully transferred over to its new ruler. The city would then have some interactions with the rest of the Muslim world, especially during the various internal conflicts of the Umayyad dynasty, which came to an end in 750. As a matter of fact, the fall of the Umayyads marked the beginning of the end of Palmyra, as the city had been a base of support of some importance for the dynasty, a fact the following Abbasid dynasty did not forget. Additionally, the center of Muslim power was moved from Syria to Iraq, which further diminished Palmyra's importance. In the following centuries, Palmyra's population shrunk so low that its inhabitants lived within a local fortress. Eventually, in the 1930's, the French moved the surviving population to the location of the modern Tadmur.<sup>42</sup>

The city's distinctive blend of cultures, namely Roman, Greek, Persian, Muslim and the local Syrian to name a few<sup>43</sup>, have turned the ruins of the city into an invaluable historical and archaeological location. This importance was well acknowledged by the rest of the world, and the systematic destruction of the priceless cultural heritage of the city in the hands of the Islamic State caused shocks around the world, especially the Western world.

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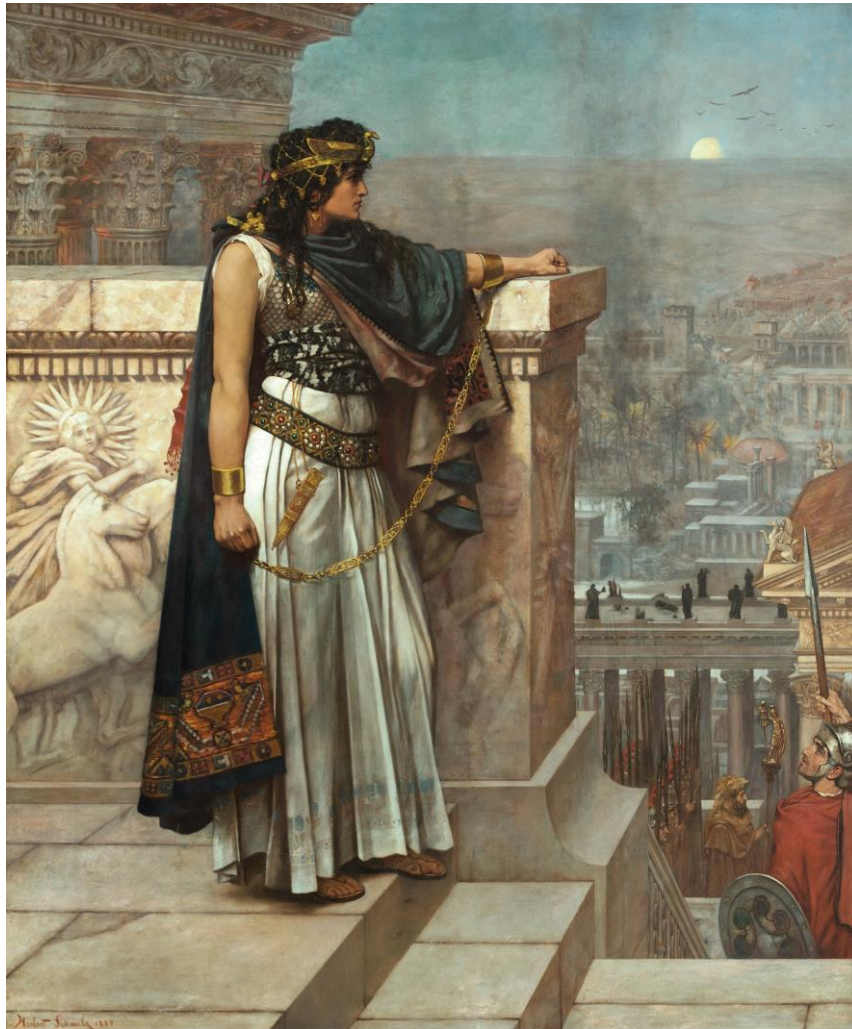
<sup>41</sup> Or rather, there is no evidence of destruction on such a scale as described in literary sources. A number of archaeological sites in Palmyra imply that there is no fire damage to be found in the buildings that existed during the time of the second conquest. Drijvers 1976, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Intagliata 2018, 97-108.

<sup>43</sup> For more on Palmyra under Roman rule, see Edwell 2008.

## 2.2. Palmyran Cultural Heritage

*Zenobia was so popular in the seventeenth century that Alain Lanavère's contribution to the 2001 Paris exhibition on Zenobia was concerned solely with this aspect of the Queen as a seventeenth-century heroine.<sup>44</sup>*



*Zenobia's last look on Palmyra* (1888) by Herbert Gustave Schmalz (1856-1935).

The matter of cultural heritage from Palmyra mainly circles around the legend of Queen Zenobia, and to speak of the cultural impact and heritage of Palmyra without mentioning her is reductive at best. The legend of a warrior queen in the East, who dared to defy Rome, has two main perspectives. The first view of Zenobia originates from the *Historia Augusta*, which chronicles Roman history from 117 to 284, portraying Zenobia as a virtuous woman and wife, as well as a capable leader in both politics and military matters. The motives for such high

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<sup>44</sup> Southern 2009, 14.



praise aimed towards a rebellious woman are quite clear<sup>45</sup>: As the *Historia Augusta* lauded Zenobia, it created a clear contrast to the Emperor Gallienus (218-268), whose rule had seen the Roman Empire fracture to a dangerous degree. This way Gallienus could be considered as a weaker and lesser leader than a mere woman.

When the *Historia Augusta* begins recounting the history of Emperor Aurelian, it faced a problem. On the one hand, praising the enemy of a well-liked emperor was out of the question, but portraying Zenobia as too weak would take away from the glory of Aurelian's victory. As such, the *Historia Augusta* constructed an alternative version of Zenobia: "cowardly and guilt-ridden, but proud and insolent, and treacherous enough to threaten to ally with the Persians against Rome."<sup>46</sup> Lacking in political autonomy with her advisors effectively in charge of decision making, yet in command of a large and powerful Palmyrene army, this second view of Zenobia served well as a villain for Aurelian to face and ultimately defeat without his victory being seen as a foregone conclusion. Outside of Roman recollection, these two types also appear in Jewish and Arab tales. The Talmud favors the second kind of Zenobia when it tells of an event where Zenobia refused to release a Jewish prisoner, while Arab sources lean towards the first type, although Arab tales of Zenobia, or "al-Zabba'", are very much tales rather than historical reports<sup>47</sup>.

While Zenobia temporarily faded from common consciousness, her legend began gaining strength in the 17th century. European travelers stopped by Palmyra on their voyages East, and books about their travels often proved popular, as in the case of the French traveler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689), whose 1676 book<sup>48</sup> about his ventures was a success. More travelers entered Palmyra in the 18th century, and drawings of Palmyra's ruins influenced European architecture to some extent<sup>49</sup>. Another major impact these travel books had was on

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<sup>45</sup> To clarify, *Historia Augusta* depicts historical events in a way that places legitimate emperors of Rome in a positive light. It is therefore clear that piling praise upon Zenobia, a woman and a traitor just like Gallienus, is done simply to drive home Gallienus' weakness.

<sup>46</sup> Southern 2009, 11-12.

<sup>47</sup> "The Arab sources lean strongly towards romance and fabulous stories. [...] The Arabs probably conflated Zenobia with other heroic queens." Southern 2009, 12.

<sup>48</sup> "*Les six voyages de Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Ecuyer Baron d'Aubonne, qu'il a fait en Turquie, en Perse, et aux Indes, pendant l'espace de quarante ans, & par toutes les routes que l'on peut tenir: accompagnez d'observations particulieres sur la qualité, la religion, le gouvernement, les coùtumes & le commerce de chaque païs, avec les figures, le poids, & la valeur des monnoyes qui y ont cours: premiere partie, où n'est parlé que de la Turquie [et] de la Perse.*"

<sup>49</sup> "Recognition of the splendour of the ruins of Palmyra by travellers in the 17th and 18th centuries contributed greatly to the subsequent revival of classical architectural styles and urban design in the West". Unesco <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/23/> . Accessed 15.6.2022.

Influence on architecture and design mainly came from the 1753 book *The Ruins of Palmyra*, produced by Robert Wood and James Dawkins. Southern 2009, 13.

literary culture. Starting with the 1647 tragedy *Zenobia*, written by François Hédelin, abbé d'Aubignac (1604-1676), the legend of Zenobia became a popular topic for authors, poets and artists.

In the eighteenth century, painters began using Zenobia as a subject for their works, starting with Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's (1696-1770) tableaux-series commissioned by the Zenobio family of Venice (no relation<sup>50</sup>). Writers took note of the queen's story as well, as exemplified by Joseph Jouve's (1701-1758) *Histoire de Zenobie, Impératrice-reine de Palmyre*, released in 1758, which provides a romanticized version of Zenobia's story. Gaetano Sertor's (1760-1805) libretto *Zenobia in Palmira* was first performed in 1789 in Venice, and gained wide popularity around Europe. The most famous operatic performance of Zenobia's story is Gioachino Antonio Rossini's (1792-1868) *Aureliano in Palmira*. Based on Sertor's libretto, *Aureliano in Palmira* was first performed in 1813 at Milan's La Scala theater. While the opera ended up as something of a failure, Rossini went on to use *Aureliano in Palmira*'s overture in the more famous 1816 opera, *Il barbiere di Siviglia (The Barber of Seville)*. As it happens, on the same year a certain Lady Hester Stanhope visited Palmyra on her travels:

*In the early 19th century of this era, a titled Englishwoman, Lady Hester Stanhope, [...] set forth from her homeland and travelled East. Here she adopted Oriental ways. On 20 March 1813, she departed the city of Damascus and travelled to Palmyra, dressed in exotic eastern garb. Already a charismatic figure among the local Arab peoples, she made an extraordinary entry into the city, still magnificent in its decayed ruins. Hundreds escorted her on her progress, the first European woman to enter Palmyra, as she rode along the Grand Colonnade. [...] For the great queen Zenobia had come back to her people. It was a role Lady Hester relished. Zenobia was her model and inspiration, as Cleopatra had been Zenobia's. And as the procession honouring her halted beneath the city's great monumental arch, the loveliest of the living statues leant down from her pedestal and placed a wreath on her head. And old prophecy had been fulfilled. Zenobia reborn had been crowned Queen of the East.<sup>51</sup>*

Though the story is more than likely to have some amount of hyperbole, it is certain that the memory of Zenobia had lasted in her hometown for the past millennia and beyond. Zenobia's story was not only important to Western culture.

Following *Aureliano in Palmira*, the 19th century saw the continuation of Zenobia's popularity as a subject matter, notable examples including Anna Brownell Jameson's (1794-1860) 1831 book *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns*, which contains biographies of

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<sup>50</sup> "There is no genealogical proof that the Venetian family had any connection with the Palmyrene queen". Southern 2009, 15.

<sup>51</sup> Bryce 2014, 317.

female rulers from Cleopatra to Mary, Queen of Scots and Zenobia herself, as well as William Ware's (1797–1852) *Zenobia: or the fall of Palmyra, in letters of Manlius Piso to his friend Marcus Curtius in Rome*, originally published in 1837. Zenobia's influence lasted into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with plays such as Nick Dear's (1955-) *Zenobia*, published in 1995 and following the *Historia Augusta* interpretation of Zenobia's fate post-Palmyra, and books such as Judith Weingarten's 2006 book *The Chronicle of Zenobia: The Rebel Queen*. Zenobia found her way into film as well, portrayed by famous actress Anita Ekberg (1931-2015) of *War and Peace* and *La Dolce Vita* fame in the 1959 movie *Nel Segno di Roma (Sheba and the Gladiator)*, and the 1997 Syrian soap opera *Al-Ababeed (The Anarchy)*, in which the role of Zenobia was performed by Raghda Mahmoud Na'na (1957-).

As is evident from the previous examples, Palmyra's primary cultural export was the story of Zenobia. However, Palmyra had more to offer to the outside world. The ruins of Palmyra have become a popular tourist destination, and they were designated as a world heritage site by Unesco in 1980. To quote Unesco:

*"The grand monumental colonnaded street, open in the centre with covered side passages, and subsidiary cross streets of similar design together with the major public buildings, form an outstanding illustration of architecture and urban layout at the peak of Rome's expansion in and engagement with the East. The great temple of Ba'al is considered one of the most important religious buildings of the 1st century AD in the East and of unique design. The carved sculptural treatment of the monumental archway through which the city is approached from the great temple is an outstanding example of Palmyrene art. The large scale funerary monuments outside the city walls in the area known as the Valley of the Tombs display distinctive decoration and construction methods".*<sup>52</sup>

In addition to tourism, the ruins of Palmyra have been a wealth of information for archaeologists, both architecturally as seen in Unesco's statement, and culturally<sup>53</sup>. The multicultural nature of Palmyra has especially made it fertile ground for the study of religion, as religious buildings from all surrounding faiths were erected within the city<sup>54</sup>. More contemporarily, the ruins of Palmyra, specifically the Roman Theatre, have been the scene of annual musical performances as a part of the annual festival held in Palmyra<sup>55</sup>. Both tourism

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<sup>52</sup> Unesco <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/23/> . Accessed 15.6.2022.

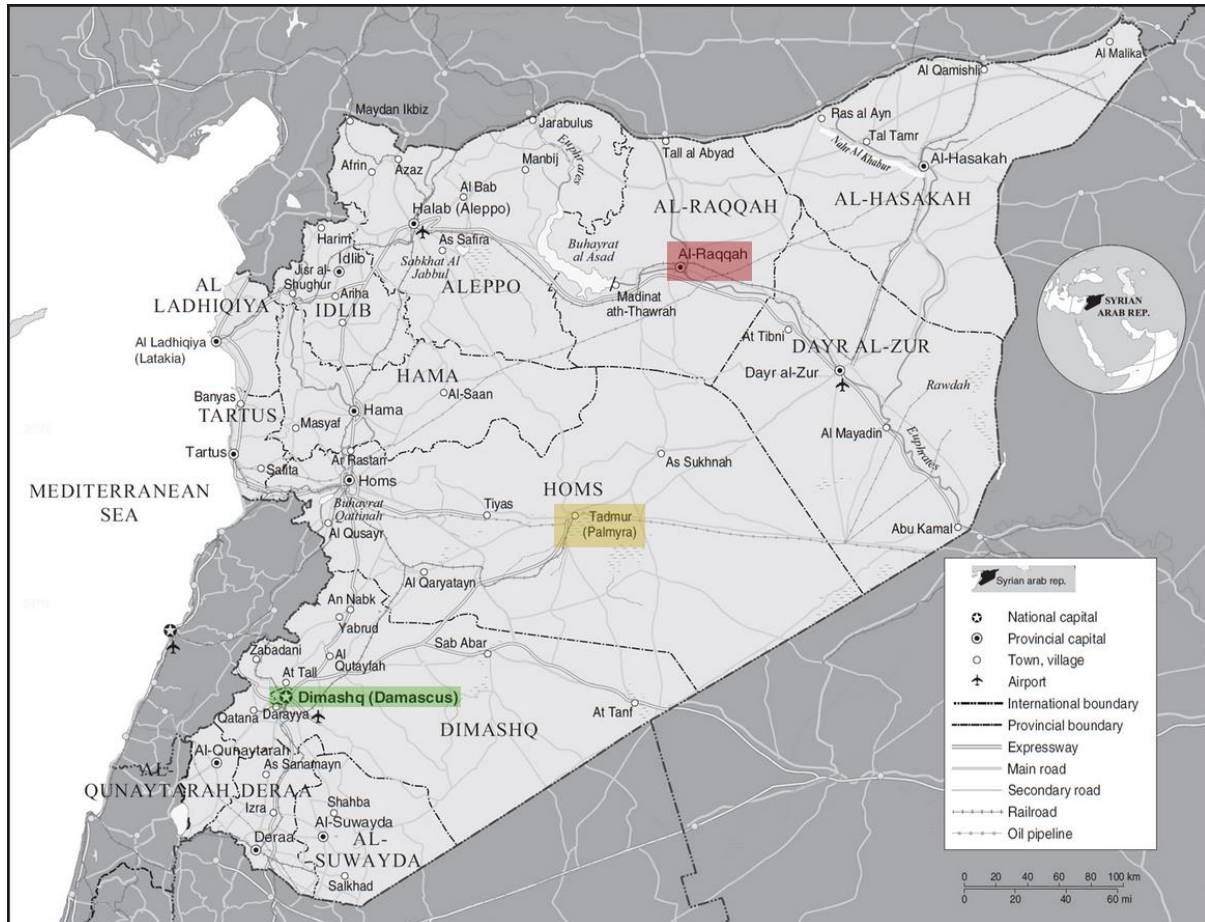
<sup>53</sup> For examples on how the ruins of Palmyra have been used in cultural studies, see Intagliata 2018, sections 1-6.

<sup>54</sup> For a more detailed look into the religious findings from Palmyra, see Drijvers 1976.

<sup>55</sup> Information on the festival is scarce on the internet, though Reuters wrote a piece on it in 2009: <https://reuters.screenocean.com/record/278792> Accessed 15.6.2022.

and local festivals were however put on hold due to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011.

### 2.3. War in Syria



The map of Syria. Palmyra highlighted in yellow, Al-Raqqah highlighted in red and Damascus highlighted in green. Original image from van Dam (2017).

The following section is a general overview of the relevant events in Syria starting from 2011 up to May of 2015, when the Islamic State captured Palmyra for the first time. This section will help in understanding the underlying context that the primary sources are working within.<sup>56</sup>

As the Arab Spring<sup>57</sup> swept into Syria in early 2011, protests and demonstrations quickly turned into armed conflict, thus starting the Syrian Civil War. The precise starting point

<sup>56</sup> The overview is based on *Encyclopaedia Britannica's* article on the Syrian Civil War. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War/Civil-war> Accessed 15.6.2022.

Additional details from both van Dam (2017) and Rabinovich (2021).

<sup>57</sup> The Arab Spring refers to a series of protests and revolts, usually against the local government, in the Arab world in the period of 2010-2012. For more on the Arab Spring, see for example Paul Danahar's 2015 book "*The New Middle East: The World After the Arab Spring*".

of the war is hard to pinpoint<sup>58</sup>, but by September<sup>59</sup> the conflict was already well underway.<sup>60</sup> Both sides were riddled with internal problems from the start; while the Syrian government suffered from desertions and low morale, the rebel forces lacked central leadership in addition to the problems posed by the numerous ideologically differing groups not seeing eye-to-eye.

As 2013 rolled around, the rebel forces had managed to gain significant victories and territorial expansion. However, the nearly two years of fighting had exhausted both sides, caused considerable damage to the civilian population and infrastructure, and the situation was approaching a stalemate. International supporters of both sides eventually stepped in to fill the coffers and armories of the combatants. International diplomacy heated up in August of 2013, when reports of chemical attacks in Damascus began circulating. Both sides blamed each other, and as supporters of the rebel cause such as the United States and France threatened action against the Syrian government, the supporters of the government such as Russia and Iran objected to their plans.<sup>61</sup>

While both loyalists and rebels were stuck exchanging exhausted blows, Islamist elements within the rebel coalition were all but tired of the fighting. The al-Nusra Front, al-Qaeda's<sup>62</sup> Syrian branch, emerged as the main group within rebel forces<sup>63</sup>, with a reputation of being an effective fighting force within the rebel coalition. Soon afterwards, al-Qaeda's Iraqi branch and its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared their intentions to form the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The two Islamist groups ended up fighting against each other.

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<sup>58</sup> For instance, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the main military wing of the rebel cause, was formed on the 29th of July, but large-scale combat had not yet begun.

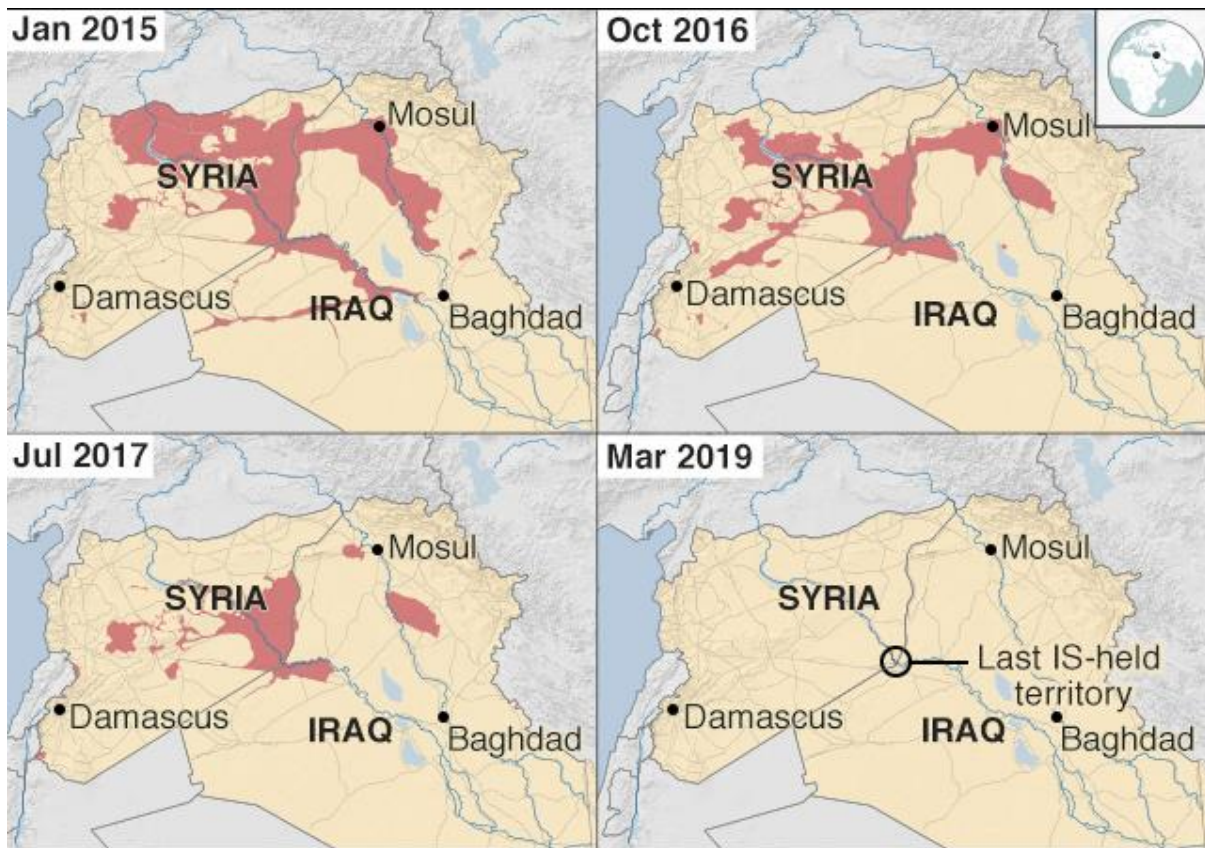
<sup>59</sup> In September, the FSA occupied the city of al-Rastan, just North of Homs. This soon led to combat in Homs itself.

<sup>60</sup> Despite the confident front put up by Bashar al-Assad, Syria's president, when interviewed about the events of the Arab Spring potentially reaching Syria, the government was well aware of the incoming danger. For years, Syria's population had been struggling with poverty and serious droughts, which had created a fertile ground for the spreading of both Arab Spring-inspired reformist demands as well as radical Islamist sentiments. Unlike in nations such as Egypt, where the Arab Spring had resulted in massive protests appearing virtually overnight, the Syrian development of protests was a much more gradual process. The underlying factors that lead to the nation being divided the way it was are however too complex to explain here in the detail they deserve. Rabinovich 2021, 41-53.

<sup>61</sup> At this pre-ISIL stage of the conflict, major nations of the world were content with sanctions and diplomatic support for their chosen side of the civil war. Though the United Nations had declared the conflict in Syria a civil war in July of 2012, Russia, with occasional Chinese help, blocked any Syria-related resolutions. The Syrian government found early concrete support from both Iran and the Hezbollah. Rabinovich 2021, 53-58.

<sup>62</sup> Al-Qaeda was born out of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1988. The Sunni Islamic extremist group came to the world's greater attention with the September 11th attack against the United States in 2001. Al-Qaeda, like ISIS, is a multinational organization, operation in various locations around the world. For more on al-Qaeda, see for example Fawaz Gerges' 2011 book "*The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda*".

<sup>63</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra was officially formed on the 23rd of January, 2012.



Source: Conflict Monitor by IHS Markit



Map detailing the areas under ISIS control from January 2015 to March 2019. ISIS territory marked in red. Original source Conflict Monitor, as seen on the BBC article “IS ‘caliphate’ defeated but jihadist group remains a threat”.<sup>64</sup>

As both parties of the Syrian Civil War had already exhausted each other, the Islamic State could not have picked a better time to invade. Al-Raqqah fell fast, and from there ISIL began expanding their territory. ISIL’s cruel conduct convinced the international community to act against it, and starting with the United States, air strikes began to be performed against the Islamic State’s forces, especially those threatening the Kurdish rebels<sup>65</sup>, with whom the United States had been working especially closely.

Despite international bombardment, ISIL continued gaining ground in Syria, and by May of 2015, their forces were approaching the city of Palmyra from the North. Palmyra/Tadmur was surely targeted by ISIL for strategic purposes rather than the presence of

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-45547595>. Accessed on 14.06.2022.

<sup>65</sup> For a time, the Kurds in Syria had remained neutral in the conflict, but eventually they too joined the war. Their main motivation was to defend themselves against the increasing pressure from Islamist militias rather than the Syrian government.

cultural heritage; The city is located on a major intersection, and roads from the city lead directly to both Homs and Damascus. It is therefore fair to say that Palmyra was a city of some strategic importance to both the Syrian government, who controlled the city prior to ISIL and through it guarded much of the traffic in the province of Homs, as well as the Islamic State for whom controlling Palmyra would open avenues of further attack into the major Syrian cities of Homs and Damascus. The immediate events that preceded and followed the first conquest of Palmyra will be discussed in future sections as the events become relevant.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> For more detailed explanations of the conflicts in Syria that began in 2011, see van Dam 2017 and Rabinovich 2021.

### 3. "God willing"- The motives and reasoning of ISIS

*An Islamic State commander in Palmyra said in a radio broadcast on May 27 that the group had no plan to bulldoze the ruins, "God willing." The mine-laying may have been part of a strategy to discourage any attempt by the Syrian government or other armed groups to recapture the ruins.<sup>67</sup>*

The "why" of the Islamic State's actions (in general, but also in relation to cultural heritage) is one of the most common topics of studies regarding the Islamic State, and is present in the articles reporting about the destruction of cultural heritage within Palmyra as well. Often reduced to a vague sidenote<sup>68</sup>, a more detailed description of the Islamic State's motives behind the destruction are rather rare. This by itself is already indicative that the newspapers do not feel the need to continuously explain the Islamic State's actions, as everyone ought to already be aware as to why they act the way they do. As a secondary narrative, the relatively small presence of the explaining motives is not by itself very interesting, however when combined with the rest of the secondary narratives, an interesting dynamic emerges<sup>69</sup>.

As said, while most mentions of motives remain brief, there are a number of articles that go deeper within the Islamic State's thinking. *The Guardian* goes into detail about the motives in three articles, which discuss Unesco's condemnation of the destruction<sup>70</sup>, Palmyra's status as a multicultural city opposing the Islamic State's "fascistic monoculturalism"<sup>71</sup> and a

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<sup>67</sup> Hubbard 2015. "Islamic State Militants Appear to Destroy Two Historic Tombs in Syria: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Jun 25.

<sup>68</sup> For example: "...the Islamic State has attacked a number of historic sites, blowing up tombs and destroying statues that are forbidden by its extremist interpretation of Islam."

Rosen 2015. "Militants Damage a Temple in Palmyra: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Aug 31.

"The Isis brand of puritanical Islam sees the preservation of such artefacts of ancient culture as a form of idolatry, and has destroyed numerous antiquities and sites in Iraq and Syria."

Shaheen 2015. "Temple of Bel Still Standing, Says Syria's Antiquities Chief." *The Guardian*, Sep 01, 16.

<sup>69</sup> For more on this, see section 8, the summary.

<sup>70</sup> Shaheen 2015. "Palmyra: destruction of ancient temple is a war crime, says Unesco chief." *The Guardian*, Aug 25, 14.

Unesco's impotence when it comes to protecting the ruins is a topic discussed in a number of articles, but as it happens, *The Guardian* has also published a brief article strictly about the subject. "Unesco is rightfully outraged by the Islamic State militants' ongoing destruction of Palmyra (...). But the UN's cultural organisation did not seem to care when Azerbaijan acted similarly a decade ago."

Maghakyan 2015. "Palmyra and Unesco's Approach to Heritage." *The Guardian*, Aug 27, 40.

<sup>71</sup> "Palmyra is not just a spectacular archaeological site, beautifully preserved, excavated and curated. It also offers antiquity's best counterexample to Isis's fascistic monoculturalism. The ancient city's prosperity arose thanks to its citizens' ability to trade with everyone, to integrate new populations, to



general and extensive overview of the whole topic, from Palmyra's history to recent events<sup>72</sup>. Meanwhile *The New York Times* also tells of the Islamic State's motives a number of times, in articles which discuss the Islamic State's strategic timing of destroying cultural heritage<sup>73</sup>, the reason why the Islamic State slowed down the rate of destruction<sup>74</sup> and the role destroying cultural heritage plays in the Islamic State's grander schemes<sup>75</sup>. Finally, Unesco's director general at the time, Irina Bokova, is quoted in a short "Quotation of the Day" in *The New York Times*: "I call on the international community to stand united against this persistent cultural cleansing."<sup>76</sup>

As these articles show, the newspapers evidently did have extensive knowledge about the Islamic State's motives and reasoning, but as we can see from the majority of the articles, they chose not to include explanations of the motives in most narratives. This further reinforces the earlier research result.

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take on board diverse cultural influences, to worship many gods without conflict. Painful though it is to say it, and unlikely though it is that its asinine followers realise it, Isis have chosen their target exceptionally well."

Whitmarsh 2015. "Tolerant and Multicultural, Palmyra Stood for Everything Isis Hates." *The Guardian*, Aug 26, 17.

<sup>72</sup> "But in May, in an interview with an anti-Assad radio station, Abu Laith al-Saoudy, the nom de guerre of the Isis military commander in Palmyra, pledged not to damage the city's historic buildings but only destroy statues. "Concerning the historic city, we will preserve it and it will not be harmed, God willing," he said. "What we will do is break the idols that the infidels used to worship."

(...)

There were hopes, then, that (...) much of Palmyra's ruins might survive the stewardship of Isis. But that promise of its military commander in Palmyra was detonated last month when photographs released by Isis showed that Palmyra's second most important temple, the Temple of Baal Shamin (...), had been dynamited."

Jeffries 2015. "Isis's Destruction of Palmyra: 'the Heart has been Ripped Out of the City'." *The Guardian*, Sep 02, 6.

<sup>73</sup> "The Islamic State has not released a video or otherwise announced the demolition. But typically, it has sought to maximize the propaganda value of such acts, often waiting to carry out or publicize them when it has suffered military defeats."

Barnard 2015. "ISIS Accelerates Destruction of Antiquities in Syria: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Aug 25.

<sup>74</sup> "Mr. Abdulkarim said that in October, after the militants destroyed the arches, the Islamic State had begun to regard its campaign as potentially dangerous provocation to locals, for whom the ancient city was not just a treasure, but also a central pillar of the local economy."

(...)

"I think Daesh understood very strongly that if they continued to destroy buildings, they would be attacked by the local community," he said, using an Arabic acronym for the Islamic State."

Fahim 2016. "Scenes from Palmyra Indicate ISIS Slowed Assault on Treasures: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 29.

<sup>75</sup> "To ISIS, the destruction of the Palmyra temple, like the destruction of ancient statues and monuments in Nimrud, Hatra and other regions under its control, is of a part with the destruction of "apostates," the decimation of communities like the Assyrian and Yazidi religious minorities, or the enslaving of women, or the beheading of Western hostages: It is an ethnic, religious and cultural cleansing of anything the zealots deem alien to the pure Islamic state."

The Editorial Board 2015. "The Crimes of Palmyra: [Editorial]: [Editorial]." *New York Times*, Aug 26.

<sup>76</sup> No author 2015. "Quotation of the Day: [Quote]: [Quote]." *New York Times*, Aug 25.

## 4. Islamic State, also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh - Differing naming conventions

The official name of the Islamic State is "The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL), or "the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS), but is most commonly referred to as the Islamic State (IS) or by any one of its acronyms. In addition to these, the group's acronym from Arabic, Daesh, is also used<sup>77</sup>. Both *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* most commonly refer to the Islamic State as just that or by its common acronym ISIS<sup>78</sup>. Between the two newspapers, there are however two major differences.

Perhaps for cultural or linguistic reasons, *The New York Times*, an American newspaper, enjoys repeating a certain mantra in over half of the articles under consideration: "The Islamic State, also called ISIS or ISIL"<sup>79</sup>, with some minor variations. The reason I believe this to be a cultural or linguistic feature is that *The Guardian*, a British newspaper, does not follow this style. In fact, in the research material, *The Guardian* never strays from referring to the Islamic State as "Isis" or "Islamic State". Of interest here is (What I presume to be) the American spelling of "ISIS" and the English "Isis", which remain consistent throughout the articles. The second major difference is the usage of the word "Daesh". Not once does *The Guardian* use the derogatory term, however, *The New York Times* employs it a number of times<sup>80</sup>.

When it comes to the relationship between terminology and narrative, the two newspapers have a clear difference. *The New York Times*' repetition of the various names creates a sense of chaos, as nobody seems to know which way is the proper one when referring

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<sup>77</sup> The word "Daesh" is considered somewhat derogatory by the Islamic State themselves, as it resembles the Arabic words for "to crush" or "to bruise". Therefore it should be considered that any usage of the word in English-speaking media is intentionally insulting. Bandopadhyaya 2019.

<sup>78</sup> For an example in which both are used, see Bilefsky 2017 "Under Siege in Syria, ISIS Inflicts More Damage on Ancient Structures in Palmyra: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." for *The New York Times* and Shaheen 2015 "Palmyra: destruction of ancient temple is a war crime, says Unesco chief." for *The Guardian*.

<sup>79</sup> Barnard and Saad 2015. "Frantic Message as Palmyra Fell: 'We're Finished': [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, May 22.

<sup>80</sup> It ought to be noted that in all cases but one where "Daesh" is used in the research material of *The New York Times*, the journalist in charge of the article is Anne Barnard. However, as I would not consider this research material as representative of *The New York Times*' general reporting on the Islamic State (as my material focuses only on Palmyra, not the wider war), I do not believe this to be significant. One such example, where "Daesh" is attached to the mantra mentioned earlier, see Gladstone and Saad 2016 "ISIS Fighters Laid Mines Around Palmyra's Ancient Ruins before Retreating, Syrians Say: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 30.

to the group. Whether this subtle criticism is targeted towards the Islamic State themselves or Western perceptions of the group remains unclear, or perhaps the newspaper itself is not sure which name to use and errs on the side of caution. However, the fact that *The New York Times* refers to the group with enough care to mention all possible names may testify to some amount of respect or legitimacy towards the group, unlike in the case of *The Guardian*. This possible show of respect or legitimacy is at odds with the usage of "Daesh".

While referring to the Islamic State as "Islamic State" is nothing out of the ordinary, *The Guardian*'s specific spelling of "Isis" remains a curious choice. This is quite possibly a linguistic feature as, for instance, "UNESCO" is referred to as "Unesco" in various articles of *The Guardian*<sup>81</sup>, however, *The New York Times* uses the same "Unesco" spelling<sup>82</sup>. If the choice of "Isis" is a narrative one, it would mark an important distinction from *The New York Times*. Whereas the American newspaper appears to refer to the group "properly", by using "Isis" *The Guardian* appears to be somewhat belittling towards them, as if they do not deserve a capitalized acronym like NATO or IRA.

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<sup>81</sup> As an example, Maghakyian 2015. "Palmyra and Unesco's Approach to Heritage." *The Guardian*, Aug 27, 40.

<sup>82</sup> As an example, Gladstone and Samaan 2015. "Islamic State Destroys More Artifacts in Iraq and Syria: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Jul 04.

## 5. "Saddest director-general in the world" - The role of the Syrian government

*"I feel very weak, very pessimistic," Maamoun Abdulkarim, Syria's director general of antiquities, said Monday in a phone interview from Damascus, adding that with his inability to protect Palmyra, "I became the saddest director general in the world."* <sup>83</sup>

- Maamoun Abdulkarim, director-general of the Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums

On the 20th of May, 2015, the Islamic State conquered Palmyra<sup>84</sup>. By practically all non-government accounts, the Syrian government failed to put up a proper fight against the Islamic State when trying to defend Palmyra. After a week-long siege the fall of the city became a certainty and government forces retreated from the city, leaving behind both civilians and a number of soldiers, soon to be executed by the Islamic State who began digging in within the city on the 21st.<sup>85</sup> The conquest of the city marked the beginning of the destruction of cultural heritage within Palmyra<sup>86</sup>. Of interest in this section, however, is how the articles reporting on said destruction spoke of the Syrian government and its role in this destruction.

Maamoun Abdulkarim, Syria's director general of antiquities during the events is often quoted as the voice of the Syrian government regarding the status of the ruins within Palmyra.<sup>87</sup> The quote at the beginning of this section is quite characteristic of his opinions regarding the destruction, and should his voice be considered the official voice of the government<sup>88</sup>, it

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<sup>83</sup> Barnard 2015. "ISIS Accelerates Destruction of Antiquities in Syria: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Aug 25.

<sup>84</sup> Barnard and Saad 2015. "ISIS Seizes a City Pivotal in Syria and in History." *New York Times*, May 21 & Shaheen 2015. "Palmyra: Historic Syrian City Falls Under Control of Isis." *The Guardian*, May 21, 18.

<sup>85</sup> Shaheen 2015. "Isis Seizes Syrian Military Base Near Palmyra as it Consolidates Grip on City." *The Guardian*, May 23, 24. For a more detailed account of the events that unfolded, see Barnard and Saad 2015. "Frantic Message as Palmyra Fell: 'We're Finished': [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, May 22.

<sup>86</sup> Worth mentioning is also that Palmyra was the first city the Islamic State managed to capture from the Syrian government. The conquest also marked a point where the Islamic State was believed to control over half of Syria.

<sup>87</sup> While Abdulkarim is by far the most quoted of the two, his colleague on the side of the Syrian opposition, Amr al-Azm, is also an important authority quoted in the articles, for instance, Shaheen 2015. "Palmyra: destruction of ancient temple is a war crime, says Unesco chief." *The Guardian*, Aug 25, 14.

<sup>88</sup> And at times, there is reason to believe his views are his own: "Such efforts, Mr. Abdulkarim said, "defend the honor of Syrian identity, heritage and memory." "With the opposition, we will have some kind of compromise," he said, in striking remarks for an official in Damascus, where the government sometimes refers to all opponents as terrorists. "At the

appears that the government is in fact not happy about forfeiting the ruins to the Islamic State. However, the message that the newspapers are delivering seems quite the opposite.

As mentioned, government forces made themselves scarce without much of a fight as the Islamic State pushed into Palmyra, and this fact is often mentioned by the newspapers. While the efforts of the government to save what they could are mentioned a few times<sup>89</sup>, their rout gets the majority of the spotlight. Out of the two newspapers, *The Guardian* seems much more forgiving in this regard, or at least less confrontational. While *The Guardian* puts the military competence and decision making abilities of the government forces into question<sup>90</sup> and calls the government out for a lie regarding civilian evacuations from Palmyra<sup>91</sup> early on after the fall of the city<sup>92</sup>, the government's role in future articles is minimal at best.

On the other end of the scale stands *The New York Times*. Like *The Guardian*, they also highlight the incompetence of the government forces immediately after the fall of the city<sup>93</sup>, but unlike *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* continues using the government's failures in Palmyra extensively in future articles. In a telling example, an article published on the 29th of May<sup>94</sup> appears to put the Islamic State into an almost positive light in comparison to the Syrian government<sup>95</sup>, while numerous eyewitness accounts are reported on, highlighting the actions (or lack thereof) of the government troops and officials prior to the fall of the city. While this kind of courtesy towards the Islamic State is very much an exception rather than a rule, future articles continue mentioning government failures<sup>96</sup>.

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end of the day, it is politics," Mr. Abdulkarim added. "But with ISIS, it is different. ISIS will attack all things." "

Barnard 2015. "ISIS Accelerates Destruction of Antiquities in Syria: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Aug 25. However, this seems to be an isolated case of placing Abdulkarim's motives into question, and therefore I consider his opinions to be those of the government, especially so when it comes to discussing the news regarding the cultural heritage itself.

<sup>89</sup> For example, Pogrebin 2015. "Concern about a Region's Ancient Riches: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, May 21.

<sup>90</sup> Shaheen 2015. "Palmyra: Historic Syrian City Falls Under Control of Isis." *The Guardian*, May 21, 18.

<sup>91</sup> Shaheen 2015. "Isis Seizes Syrian Military Base Near Palmyra as it Consolidates Grip on City." *The Guardian*, May 23, 24.

<sup>92</sup> The two articles above are from the 21st and 23rd of May respectively, and therefore right after the fall.

<sup>93</sup> Barnard and Saad 2015. "ISIS Seizes a City Pivotal in Syria and in History: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, May 21 and Barnard and Saad 2015. "Frantic Message as Palmyra Fell: 'We're Finished': [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, May 22.

<sup>94</sup> Barnard and Saad 2015. "ISIS Alternates Stick and Carrot in Captured City: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, May 29.

<sup>95</sup> Granted, the group is still described for what it is, with the atrocities committed within Palmyra and elsewhere not being ignored.

<sup>96</sup> "The Syrian government rushed to bring as many antiquities as possible from the city to the relative safety of Damascus before it fell to the Islamic State, but left behind many more of the city's archaeological treasures, not to mention thousands of its residents."

As the conflict continued, the Syrian government's counterattacks would eventually reach Palmyra as well. After nearly a year of the Islamic State occupation, during which numerous cultural heritage targets had been destroyed or damaged by the group, the Syrian government recaptured Palmyra on the 27th of March, 2016<sup>97</sup>. The advance of the Syrian troops was reported on by both newspapers, and neither fail to mention the past failures in defending the city.<sup>98</sup> While *The Guardian* does not really report on the situation afterwards<sup>99</sup>, *The New York Times* continues reporting after the fact. Following the previously set precedent, government failures do not go without notice<sup>100</sup>.

However, when it comes to secondary narratives including the government, there is another one in play within the articles regarding the recapture of the city. Namely, the symbolic weight of the victory. Exclusively<sup>101</sup> present within *The New York Times*, the victory in Palmyra is described as "a turn in the five-year-old war and an enormous propaganda victory for President Bashar al-Assad of Syria and the Russians."<sup>102</sup> Additionally, it is mentioned that the victory has placed anti-Assad countries in an awkward position, having to praise him for liberating the city from Islamic State rule<sup>103</sup>.

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Stack 2015. "Islamic State Blows Up Temple at Palmyra Ruins in Syria: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Aug 24.

"Residents of Palmyra, both supporters and critics of President Bashar al-Assad, described an ill-equipped local government and its forces, many of whom fled during the onset of the attack."

Rosen 2015. "Militants Damage a Temple in Palmyra: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Aug 31.

<sup>97</sup> Saad and Fahim 2016. "Syrian Army Claims it Fully Recaptured Historic Palmyra from ISIS: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 28.

<sup>98</sup> Shaheen 2016. "Assad Forces Close in on Islamic State at Palmyra." *The Guardian*, Mar 23, 30 and Barnard 2016. "Syrian Forces and ISIS Clash at Edge of Ancient Palmyra: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 25.

<sup>99</sup> Apart from an article published on the 29th of March, which focuses on the reconstruction of the ruins using 3D technology. Jenkins 2016. "After Palmyra, the Message to Isis: What You Destroy, we Will Rebuild." *The Guardian*, Mar 29, 31.

<sup>100</sup> "Lost in the celebrations was a discussion of how Palmyra had fallen in the first place. When the Islamic State captured the city in May, the militants faced little resistance from Syrian troops. At the time, residents said officers and militiamen had fled into orchards outside the city, leaving conscripted soldiers and residents to face the militants alone."

Saad and Fahim 2016. "Syrian Army Claims it Fully Recaptured Historic Palmyra from ISIS: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 28.

<sup>101</sup> An exception, however minor, is found in the following two articles of *The Guardian*, which merely mention the possibility of a great symbolic victory, without further relevant comments:

Chulov 2016. "Syrian forces make further gains in attempt to wrest Palmyra from Isis." *The Guardian*, Mar 24, 27.

Shaheen 2016. "Assad forces close in on Islamic State at Palmyra." *The Guardian*, Mar 23, 30.

<sup>102</sup> Gladstone and Saad 2016. "ISIS Fighters Laid Mines Around Palmyra's Ancient Ruins before Retreating, Syrians Say: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 30.

<sup>103</sup> "The Palmyra news also has left the United States and other Western and Arab opponents of Mr. Assad in the awkward position of welcoming it while still insisting that the Syrian president's autocracy and suppression of dissent was the underlying cause of the Syria war."

Regarding the news of the recapture, this duality of repeatedly bringing up past failures while also (seemingly) reluctantly praising the liberation is an interesting one. While *The Guardian's* reporting is fairly clear-cut and uncontroversial, the said duality is especially present in *The New York Times*. As a popular American newspaper, the newspaper's opposition towards Assad is something of a foregone conclusion<sup>104</sup>. While the failed defense of Palmyra can be considered an essential part of reporting about the initial fall of the city, bringing these events up while at the same time being forced to report on the government's victories in a positive light may be an effort to balance the narrative. In other words, an attempt at making sure that Assad's victories are not glorified too much in order to retain the anti-Assad sentiment.

In December of 2016, Palmyra would once again fall into the hands of the Islamic State, as the government was occupied with larger battles elsewhere<sup>105</sup>. The Islamic State would, once again, lose the city on the 2nd of March, 2017<sup>106</sup>, marking the final liberation of Palmyra. As the fall of the city took place as the battle for Aleppo was ongoing, the event was not reported on as extensively as the first time (*The Guardian* did not report on it at all). As per usual, *The New York Times* did not miss the opportunity of reminding how the city was lost once before<sup>107</sup>. Similarly the final recapture of the city brings up the past battles for Palmyra<sup>108</sup>.

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Gladstone and Saad 2016. "ISIS Fighters Laid Mines Around Palmyra's Ancient Ruins before Retreating, Syrians Say: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 30.

<sup>104</sup> After all, the United States backed the Syrian opposition, rather than the government, which in turn was backed by Russia.

<sup>105</sup> Bilefsky 2017. "Under Siege in Syria, ISIS Inflicts More Damage on Ancient Structures in Palmyra: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Jan 21.

<sup>106</sup> Gladstone 2017. "Ancient City of Palmyra Swings Back to Syrian Government Control: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 03.

<sup>107</sup> "The activist group said that residents were being abandoned by government forces, which had withdrawn from several areas. The events echoed those of spring 2015, when most government forces left the area, leaving residents and a few junior soldiers at the hands of the Islamic State. Many of those who remained were executed."

Barnard 2016. "ISIS Poised to Recapture Palmyra from Syrian Troops: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Dec 11.

<sup>108</sup> "The group's fighters first seized Palmyra in May 2015, routing Iraqi [sic?] security forces who fled in a chaotic retreat. The fighters were expelled by Syrian forces and their Russian allies a year ago, in what was seen as an important victory by President Bashar al-Assad. But they recaptured Palmyra nine months later when the Syrians and Russians were preoccupied with retaking the northern city of Aleppo, another front in the war."

Gladstone 2017. "Ancient City of Palmyra Swings Back to Syrian Government Control: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 03. As far as I'm aware, ISIL did not rout any Iraqi units in Palmyra. This is most probably an error on the writer's part.

## 6. Turning Ozymandian - Placing worth on cultural heritage and humanity

*It's not surprising that people who do not hesitate to hack into a human neck should also have no compunction in hacking into a Greco-Roman pillar. But actually, it's not surprising either that so many people find it easier to mourn the loss of a pillar than of a person. A pillar can stand -- or fall -- for an abstract idea of civilisation.*

*A person, an individual, someone like you or me -- that's too horrible, too upsetting to dwell upon.<sup>109</sup>*

In addition to destroying cultural heritage, the Islamic State is even more notorious for the wanton slaughter that it has wrought in the territories under its control (and even outside of them). As the Islamic State captured Palmyra, among its first actions as the new rulers of the city was to execute a number of government soldiers<sup>110</sup>, which took place prior to the destruction efforts towards the cultural heritage site. However, despite the human suffering that took place in Palmyra, it was not the focus of the articles<sup>111</sup>.

As is fitting for a primary narrative, the fate of the cultural heritage takes center stage. The human cost of the events is usually reduced to a short mention. However, there are a number of articles from both newspapers that discuss this conundrum. A quote from an article in *The Guardian* summarizes the problem, "Why it's all right to be more horrified by the razing of Palmyra than mass murder"<sup>112</sup>.

Out of the two newspapers, *The New York Times* spends noticeably less time on the topic. In two articles, one of which brings to light the cultural meaning of the ruins to the local populace<sup>113</sup>, and one of which speaks of how mourning the loss of the ruins in face of the

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<sup>109</sup> Orr 2015. "Isis's Murderous Rampage Continues. so Why is it the Lost Artefacts that make the Headlines?" *The Guardian*, May 22, 7.

<sup>110</sup> "On Wednesday, for example, several residents reported that the Islamic State had killed 20 army soldiers in an ancient amphitheater. Others recalled seeing the bodies of soldiers burned alive or beheaded by militants."

Barnard and Saad 2015. "ISIS Alternates Stick and Carrot in Captured City: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, May 29.

<sup>111</sup> It ought to be noted that this may well be a consequence of the search string used (see footnote 12), which would most likely exclude articles specifically about the human suffering within Palmyra. Then again, Palmyra's cultural heritage and ancient ruins are a major feature of the city, so it's likely they'd be mentioned in an article no matter the topic.

<sup>112</sup> Baggini 2015. "Why it's all Right to be More Horrified by the Razing of Palmyra than Mass Murder." *The Guardian*, Aug 28, 18.

<sup>113</sup> "When lamenting the masonry and sculpture destroyed by the Islamic State, we can easily overlook this shifting human story. We too readily consign antiquities to the remote province of the past. But they can remain meaningful in surprising and ordinary ways. "This is the meaning of



human suffering seems like the wrong thing to do, drawing connection into a similar past event<sup>114</sup>. *The Guardian* has a number of articles regarding this topic: a rather pessimistic article seemingly dismissing the mourning of the ruins as part of a weaker Western mentality towards human suffering<sup>115</sup>, the aforementioned article justifying the fact that some are more worried about the destruction of cultural heritage than the massive loss of human life<sup>116</sup>, and an article discussing how it is appropriate to mourn the loss of the temple of Bel specifically due to its cultural importance to both the world and Syrians<sup>117</sup>.

It is therefore clear that while the newspapers are well aware of the human suffering taking place in Palmyra, they are opting to leave extensive details about them out of the articles. A curious exception to this rule is the case of one Khaled al-Asaad. Al-Asaad had served as the caretaker of the antiquities of Palmyra for 40 years<sup>118</sup>, and was retired by the time the Islamic

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heritage," Ms. Kuntar said. "It's not only architecture or artifacts that represent history, it's these memories and the ancestral connection to place." "

Tharoor, Kanishk. 2016. "Life among the Ruins: [Op-Ed]: [Op-Ed]." *New York Times*, Mar 20.

<sup>114</sup> "The Islamic State, the ultrafundamentalist group better known as ISIS, has laid a trail of unspeakable horrors in its march through Syria and Iraq -- videotaped beheadings, ritualized rape and all manner of grisly torture and murder of anyone who does not subscribe to its extreme version of Islam.

After yet another such atrocity -- (...) -- it seems somehow disrespectful to bemoan ISIS' parallel and systematic destruction of historical sites, as if the two were on a par."

The Editorial Board 2015 "The Crimes of Palmyra: [Editorial]: [Editorial]." *New York Times*, Aug 26.

<sup>115</sup> "Again and again, apologetically, people explain how they understand that the destruction of artefacts is not as terrible as the destruction of people. Nevertheless, it's the artefacts that make the headlines. They are important to the people of Syria and Iraq as well, the argument goes. Their loss hurts everyone. Everyone but Isis. The more disgust and contempt the people of Isis generate, they more they like it.

(...)

The sadness that is felt for the destruction of Unesco world heritage sites is a sadness that's uncomplicated by uncomfortable thoughts such as the idea that Syrians can't be saved because the modern civilisation we have built in Europe is not one we want to share -- even, tremendously much, with each other. Palmyra may belong to all of humanity, but Britain most certainly does not."

Orr 2015. "Isis's Murderous Rampage Continues. so Why is it the Lost Artefacts that make the Headlines?" *The Guardian*, May 22, 7.

<sup>116</sup> "The destruction of people and places might appear to be quite different, but the distinction is not as neat as it first seems. You can harm people in many ways, and targeting their bodies is only one. "Part of me died today," tweeted the Pakistan-born writer Tarek Fateh in response to the demolition in Palmyra. Sentiments like these are more than merely metaphorical. There is a literal sense in which we are not just atomised animals but minds who are connected to others in different times and places by compassion, history and values. The destruction of historical sites is an assault on this aspect of our humanity."

Baggini 2015. "Why it's all Right to be More Horrified by the Razing of Palmyra than Mass Murder." *The Guardian*, Aug 28, 18.

<sup>117</sup> "Which is why, even amid all the agonies of the Syrian people, the murders inflicted on them, and the bombings and the multiple horrors of a seemingly endless civil war, it is fitting to mourn the temple of Bel. That it has been pulverised after standing intact for 1,983 years serves as an apt and terrible symbol of the destruction that is continuing to tear all of Syria apart."

Holland 2015. "The Fate of the Temple of Bel is a Symbol of the Tragedy Engulfing Syria." *The Guardian*, Sep 01, 32.

<sup>118</sup> Holland 2015. "The Fate of the Temple of Bel is a Symbol of the Tragedy Engulfing Syria." *The Guardian*, Sep 01, 32.

State came knocking. Al-Asaad was captured and possibly interrogated by the Islamic State in order to force al-Asaad into revealing the locations of hidden artifacts<sup>119</sup>. Evidently, the interrogations proved unfruitful, and al-Asaad was publicly beheaded and strung up on a traffic light<sup>120</sup>.

This singular case of tragedy in Palmyra has been taken up by newspapers to represent in part the human suffering of the Palmyrans by placing a name for the dead. As it happens, al-Asaad's position as a retired "globally respected keeper of the ancient ruins"<sup>121</sup> handily connects both the primary narrative of cultural heritage destruction and the human suffering aspects of the story, likely the reason both newspapers seem so fond of mentioning him.

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<sup>119</sup> Fahim 2016. "Scenes from Palmyra Indicate ISIS Slowed Assault on Treasures: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 29.

<sup>120</sup> Rosen 2015. "Militants Damage a Temple in Palmyra: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Aug 31.

<sup>121</sup> The Editorial Board 2015 "The Crimes of Palmyra: [Editorial]: [Editorial]." *New York Times*, Aug 26.

## 7. Concert in the Ruins - Russian involvement in Palmyra

*"The deployment of classical musicians in territory reconquered, with Russian help, by Syrian forces just two months ago reprised a performance conducted by Mr. Gergiev in August 2008 to celebrate Russia's victory in a brief war with the former Soviet republic of Georgia over South Ossetia. That Georgian region, also with Moscow's help, has declared itself an independent state, like the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine."<sup>122</sup>*

After their first defeat in Palmyra, resulting in the takeover of the area by the Islamic State, the Syrian government came back with a vengeance on the 28th of March, 2016<sup>123</sup>. This time, the government's forces were not alone, as they had received "significant help" from Russia. In practice, this meant airstrikes conducted by the Russian Air Force, with a presence by the Russian military on the ground as well<sup>124</sup>. The successful operation was a considerable propaganda victory for the Syrian government, as well as the Russian government, which even orchestrated a concert to be held in Palmyra after it had been secured<sup>125</sup>. Although Palmyra was once again lost in December of 2016<sup>126</sup> and then recaptured by the government in March of 2017<sup>127</sup>, the first offensive by the government to capture Palmyra is where most of the attention towards Russia is given<sup>128</sup>.

The first article mentioning Russia in the source material was published on the 23rd of March, 2016<sup>129</sup>. This first article by *The Guardian* is a good example of articles talking about Russia, as the two most common secondary narratives are both present in the article. For one, whenever Russia is mentioned, allegations of civilian casualties caused by Russian bombing

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<sup>122</sup> Kramer 2016. "A Russian Concert in Syria's Ruins: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, May 06.

<sup>123</sup> Hwaida 2016. "Syrian Army Claims It Fully Recaptured Historic Palmyra From ISIS: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 28.

<sup>124</sup> "And on Thursday evening, Russia's Interfax news agency reported that a Russian special forces officer had been killed near Palmyra while directing airstrikes."  
Barnard 2016. "Syrian Forces and ISIS Clash at Edge of Ancient Palmyra: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 25.

<sup>125</sup> Kramer 2016. "A Russian Concert in Syria's Ruins: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, May 06.

<sup>126</sup> Bilefsky 2017. "Under Siege in Syria, ISIS Inflicts More Damage on Ancient Structures in Palmyra: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Jan 21.

<sup>127</sup> Gladstone 2017. "Ancient City of Palmyra Swings Back to Syrian Government Control: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 03.

<sup>128</sup> As noted in section 5, the subsequent offensives on Palmyra likely did not receive greater news coverage due to grander battles happening at the same time elsewhere.

<sup>129</sup> Shaheen 2016. "Assad forces close in on Islamic State in Palmyra." *The Guardian*, Mar 23, 30.

campaigns are usually not far behind<sup>130</sup>. Secondly, especially concerning the first operation to retake Palmyra, the fact that a victory there would be a major propaganda victory for Moscow is often cited<sup>131</sup>. This feature is present in articles both before<sup>132</sup> and after<sup>133</sup> the first recapture of Palmyra, when the propaganda victory becomes reality, as well demonstrated by the Russian concert held in Palmyra:

*"The orchestra played [...] in a second-century Roman amphitheater, the set for a 2015 film produced by the Islamic State that featured the execution of 25 people. The contrast was intended to underscore what Russia sees as its underappreciated role in helping Syrian forces liberate Palmyra from zealots and fighting on the side of civilization against barbarism. The Russians were so eager to make that point that they flew a group of reporters from Moscow to Syria and then bused them to Palmyra to see the performance. The production [...] was broadcast live on Russian state television."<sup>134</sup>*

Though most articles contain one or both of these two secondary narratives, there are some noteworthy exceptions. A number of articles fail to mention neither the alleged war crimes or the propaganda value of the victory for Russia<sup>135</sup>. Russia is usually not in the limelight in these articles, which may explain the lack of details regarding their role<sup>136</sup>. As a rule then, whenever Russia is focused upon, either both or one of the aforementioned secondary narratives generally speaking make an appearance.

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<sup>130</sup> For example, "But opposition activists from the city, which fell to Isis control nearly a year ago, accused Russian forces of indiscriminate bombing of civilians and destruction of homes and infrastructure." Shaheen 2016. "Assad forces close in on Islamic State in Palmyra." *The Guardian*, Mar 23, 30.

<sup>131</sup> For example, "It would also be a propaganda victory for Moscow, which launched a campaign to safeguard Assad's rule last October." Shaheen 2016. "Assad forces close in on Islamic State in Palmyra." *The Guardian*, Mar 23, 30.

<sup>132</sup> For example, Barnard 2016. "Syrian Forces and ISIS Clash at Edge of Ancient Palmyra: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 25.

<sup>133</sup> For example, Gladstone 2016. "ISIS Fighters Laid Mines Around Palmyra's Ancient Ruins Before Retreating, Syrians Say: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 30.

<sup>134</sup> Kramer 2016. "A Russian Concert in Syria's Ruins: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, May 06.

<sup>135</sup> For example, see:

Chulov 2016. "Syrian forces make further gains in attempt to wrest Palmyra from Isis." *The Guardian*, Mar 24, 27.

Fahim 2016. "Scenes From Palmyra Indicate ISIS Slowed Assault on Treasures: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 29.

Bilefsky 2017. "Under Siege in Syria, ISIS Inflicts More Damage on Ancient Structures in Palmyra: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Jan 21.

<sup>136</sup> Russia is often mentioned only as a supporter of government forces, for example, "The Hezbollah militiamen with whom I traveled were eager to show that their group had helped rescue Palmyra, a site important to world heritage. Russia, which provided air support; the Syrian Army; and other allied militias that helped fight the Islamic State are all claiming part of the credit for driving its forces out of the city." Denton 2016. "A Syrian Jewel, Where 'Ruins Have Been Ruined': [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Apr 05.

Out of the two secondary narratives, the topic of war crimes is the less discussed one. This narrative mainly appears in articles written during the first reconquest of the city, and the allegations are usually sourced to the government's opposition<sup>137</sup>, international observers<sup>138</sup> or the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights<sup>139</sup>. It's notable that no "official" allegations or condemnations are present, for example from the UN. As such, the alleged war crimes do not take much away from the other narrative, the propaganda value, which is a much more discussed narrative.

As established previously, the *New York Times* and *Guardian* are no great fans of the Syrian government. Considering the fact that Russia is a major ally of the Syrian government, it should therefore come as no big surprise that a similar opinion is held by the newspapers towards Russia. Much like how the military success of the Syrian government in first retaking Palmyra was a tough pill to swallow for the newspapers, Russia's role and gains from said victory are similarly begrudgingly acknowledged.

This secondary narrative contains a number of differing topics, all relating to what and how Russia is to gain from the reconquest of Palmyra. Naturally the fact that a victory in Palmyra would be a large propaganda victory is often mentioned<sup>140</sup> prior to the reconquest, and fulfillment of the prediction is well exemplified by the earlier article regarding the concert orchestrated in Palmyra. Another focal point is Russia's motives. As is often mentioned, Russia's goal in Syria is to support its ally, the Syrian government<sup>141</sup>. Another, more globally-minded motive is a cultural one, as Russia claims the victory in Palmyra to be a victory for all

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<sup>137</sup> For example "But opposition activists from the city, which fell to Isis control nearly a year ago, accused Russian forces of indiscriminate bombing of civilians and destruction of homes and infrastructure." Shaheen 2016. "Assad forces close in on Islamic State at Palmyra." *The Guardian*, Mar 23, 30.

<sup>138</sup> For example, "The Russians, who have been widely criticized by Mr. Assad's opponents and international aid groups for intensive bombing in Syria [...]" Gladstone 2016. "ISIS Fighters Laid Mines Around Palmyra's Ancient Ruins Before retreating, Syrians Say: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 30.

<sup>139</sup> "The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group, said Russia had carried out dozens of airstrikes on the city on Wednesday alone [...]" Shaheen 2016. "Assad forces close in on Islamic State at Palmyra." *The Guardian*, Mar 23, 30.

<sup>140</sup> "It [victory in Palmyra] would also be a propaganda victory for Moscow, which launched a campaign to safeguard Assad's rule last October." Shaheen 2016. "Assad forces close in on Islamic State at Palmyra." *The Guardian*, Mar 23, 30.

"Taking back Palmyra would be a political and military victory for the Syrian government and for Russia, its most powerful ally." Barnard 2016. "Syrian Forces and ISIS Clash at Edge of Ancient Palmyra: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 25.

<sup>141</sup> For instance, "[Palmyra] was recaptured with significant help from Russia's military, which carried out dozens of airstrikes - highlighting the central role of President Vladimir V. Putin in solidifying Mr. Assad's hold on power since Russia intervened in the war in September." Hwaida 2016. "Syrian Army Claims It Fully Recaptured Historic Palmyra From ISIS: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 28.

of mankind, as the Palmyran cultural heritage has been saved, which of course serves Russia's propaganda further<sup>142</sup>. This notion of Russia as a defender of cultural heritage is also reinforced by the critique aimed towards Unesco, whose apparent inaction in the face of the danger aimed towards the Palmyran ruins does not go unnoticed<sup>143</sup>.

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<sup>142</sup> "His benefactor and Syria's principal ally, Russia, has compared Palmyra's restoration with that of Leningrad after the second world war [sic]. [...] The director of the Hermitage museum, Mikhail Piotrovsky, has no intention of relinquishing Russia's triumph. Last week he declared : "We will never find anything more beautiful in the annals of Russian history in the Middle East" than the liberation of Palmyra. [...] With Putin's explicit support, Piotrovsky sees Russia's "reconstruction and restoration" of the temples as a project "to raise the spirit of not only the Syrian people but of all mankind". Jenkins 2016. "After Palmyra, the message to Isis: what you destroy, we will rebuild." *The Guardian*, Mar 29, 31.

"The Russians, who have been largely criticized by Mr. Assad's opponents and international aid groups for intensive bombing in Syria, have sought to portray the recapture of Palmyra as a triumph of civilization over barbarism." Gladstone 2016. "ISIS Fighters Laid Mines Around Palmyra's Ancient Ruins Before Retreating, Syrians Say: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 30.

<sup>143</sup> "The Palmyra ruins are supposedly under the aegis of Unesco as a "world heritage site". Few hold out much hope that this body, to whom all parties pay lip service, will be an agile party to what happens next. With security uncertain and Syria's government beholden not to the west but to Russia, the likelihood is that Unesco will retreat into its familiar indecision and bickering. It has already fallen back on what it does best, summoning a conference later in the spring. So far Unesco's director, Irina Bokova, has struggled to hold the ring. She spoke at the weekend to Putin, who promised to de-mine the Palmyra site and send experts from the Hermitage." Jenkins 2016. "After Palmyra, the message to Isis: what you destroy, we will rebuild." *The Guardian*, Mar 29, 31.

"On Sunday, the director general of Unesco, Irina Bokova, said she had been offered help to restore Palmyra, in a personal telephone call from Mr. Putin." Gladstone 2016. "ISIS Fighters Laid Mines Around Palmyra's Ancient Ruins Before Retreating, Syrians Say: [Foreign Desk]: [Foreign Desk]." *New York Times*, Mar 30.

## 8. Summary

Before delving deeper into the research results, let us take a moment to review the major points of the previous sections:

**Section 3** - Though the Islamic State's motives and reasoning are evidently known to both newspapers, they have chosen to omit the majority of these details from the majority of their articles, treating them as a self-evident fact.

**Section 4** - The naming conventions of the Islamic State are twofold: *The New York Times* appears to place more "respect" or "legitimacy" unto the group by referring to them with most/all of their known names, while *The Guardian* has opted to refer to them by either "Islamic State" or "Isis". As discussed, the differences may be linguistic or cultural, and may in fact not hold any deeper meaning.

**Section 5** - While the efforts of the Syrian government are sometimes shown in a positive light, the majority of the attention focuses on the failures of the government in handling the Islamic State assault on Palmyra, even if the events happened a longer time ago.

**Section 6** - The human suffering in Palmyra generally takes a step back in favor of the destruction of cultural heritage, as the newspapers delegate the human cost into a background detail. Even the choice of using Khaled al-Asaad's murder as a way of making the suffering more personal may be just another way of directing more attention towards the cultural heritage.

**Section 7** - Russia's actions in Palmyra are treated in a similar way to those of the Syrian government, where their alleged war crimes are often brought up in the midst of talking about their successes, while their positive actions against the Islamic State and whatever they may have gained from the victory are begrudgingly acknowledged.

The results presented for section 4 remain inconclusive. It will require more research into determining whether the naming conventions are intentionally meant to convey an opinion of the Islamic State, or if they are in fact such as they are due to linguistic and cultural differences. At the moment, I would lean towards the latter explanation, as I find it somewhat unlikely that two English-speaking newspapers with liberal leanings would differ this much on

the subject. However, Boyle and Mower's study<sup>144</sup> would appear to partially contradict this. In their study, they note that *The New York Times* is "much more cautious and politically correct in its coverage, condemning brutal actions but taking a much more objective view of the events", while the *The Daily Mail*, another British newspaper comparable to *The Guardian*, is "unabashedly oppositional toward ISIS". The possible reason behind this difference in tone, as given by Boyle and Mower, is the United Kingdom's notable need to counteract ISIS recruitment efforts within the nation, a factor that is practically nonexistent within the United States<sup>145</sup>. Therefore, at the very least, the results from section 4 appear to conform to the understanding regarding coverage of ISIS by American and British media presented by Boyle and Mower.

Section 6's results together with the results of section 3 raise an interesting question: Clearly the newspapers are not lacking in information, so what is the reason behind them leaving out so much information? My first presumption, which I consider to be quite likely, is that the newspapers are simply restricted in the amount of words and letters one article can contain. Ergo, they must prioritize the primary narrative over secondary narratives. This answer seems like the obvious one, but it may be worth researching further, and if it does turn out that leaving out information has another motive apart from editorial standards<sup>146</sup>, it could elevate the research results of these two sections on par with the next section. In his study, Rayeheh Alitavoli<sup>147</sup> notes how the focus of news media tends to fluctuate according to current events<sup>148</sup>, which would in part explain the focus the newspapers at hand have chosen.

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<sup>144</sup> Boyle and Mower 2018. "Framing terror: A content analysis of media frames used in covering ISIS", *Newspaper Research Journal*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 205–219.

<sup>145</sup> "One reason for the hard-line stance and extremist frames of ISIS by the Mail is the increased need to counteract ISIS recruiting efforts. While there were isolated examples of Americans becoming radicalized and traveling to Syria and Iraq to fight with ISIS, these were rare and occurred much less often than in Great Britain, which had a real problem with youth traveling to the Middle East to fight with ISIS. Many fighters in the notable recruiting videos spoke in British accents and the executioner in the execution videos also spoke in a British accent, leading to expressions of embarrassment by U.K. leaders and many voices in the British news media. Terror frames may have been motivated by the hope that news coverage could help to stem the flow of radicalized British nationals into the ranks of ISIS." Boyle and Mower 2018.

<sup>146</sup> For instance, Boyle and Mower's article may imply that *The New York Times* for instance could be leaving out details of ISIS's motives in order not to cause harm to domestic Muslims. "Similarly, the absence of "Islam vs. the West" and other anti-Islamic frames show an effort to avoid equating ISIS's violent action with Islam as a whole and an effort not to exhibit any anti-Muslim or "Islamophobic" framing." Boyle & Mower 2018.

<sup>147</sup> Alitavoli 2019. "Framing the news on the Syrian War: A comparative study of antiwar.com and cnn.com editorials", *Media, War & Conflict* 13, no. 4 (December 2020): 487–505.

<sup>148</sup> "Meanwhile, in time interval one of cnn.com, before the news of the strike, frames of the disastrous situation of the Syrians and the rise of refugees caused by the war are presented. After the strike decision in time interval two, cnn.com sees a rise in frames that depict Bashar al-Assad as a brutal villain and that stress the negative consequences of an attack. The third time interval also included the negative image of Assad while stressing the fact that he was the one who used chemical weapons



The research results of sections 3, 5 and 7 are of special interest. If we consider as facts that a) The newspapers consider the Islamic State's motives to be self-evident, and b) The newspapers keep bringing up both the Syrian government's failures and the alleged war crimes of Russia, a new plausible secondary narrative emerges: *Whose fault is it really that the cultural heritage within Palmyra was destroyed?* By treating the Islamic State as something of a natural disaster, an inevitability, or a beast simply acting according to its instincts, and by maintaining the secondary narrative of government failure to protect Palmyra, it appears that the newspapers are painting an image where the Syrian government, and Russia by association, is the one to blame for the destruction. To put it in metaphor, the fox that killed the hens is not at fault, the fault lies on the farmer who let the fox into the henhouse.

Generally speaking, the Western world has opposed al-Assad's faction of the civil war, and seeing these two Western newspapers shifting the blame for the destruction of the cultural heritage from the Islamic State unto the government is not very surprising. As per Ganie and Khalid<sup>149</sup>, Western newspapers are quick to latch on to a narrative when it suits them<sup>150</sup>. Said study highlights the fact that when there's a chance to jump on the Syrian government, Russia, or better yet both, the newspapers are very likely to send other narratives to the background in order to focus on the possibility of covering the Syrian government and Russia in a bad light<sup>151</sup>.

It is however noteworthy that this narrative has been hidden between the lines: Instead of stating their opinions straight, perhaps the newspapers are attempting to preserve some notion of objectivity, while not being able to resist the temptation of taking the chance of besmirching the Syrian government? This would, at least on *The New York Times's* part, be supported by Boyle and Mower's claim that *The New York Times* is attempting to remain

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on the Syrian people and a reminder that Iran and Syria are the supporters of the Syrian government and their plans." Alitavoli 2019.

<sup>149</sup> Ganie and Khalid 2021. "Coverage of Syrian Conflict in the International Print Media: A Review", *Global Media Journal – Arabian Edition*, Volume 3, Issue 3.

<sup>150</sup> "International media initially gave a very limited view of the Syrian conflict prior to chemical attacks. [...] Western media had a pattern of covering the Syrian conflict which kept on fluctuating. The coverage included reporting only selective events and leaving out other equally important issues in the conflict [...]." Ganie and Khalid 2021, 10.

<sup>151</sup> "An analysis [sic] of the show that the frames applied by these top selected international newspapers of the Syrian conflict primarily focused on the following news frames. "Chemical attack", "regime", "Russia and Iran", "civilian deaths", "child deaths", "criticism", "war crimes", "nerve gas", "chlorine gas", "intervention", "responsibility" and "outrage" were the most highlighted frames by all of the selected samples based in the west." Ganie and Khalid 2021, 6.

objective in its coverage<sup>152</sup>. Additionally, as per Lyse Doucet<sup>153</sup>, the newspapers were well aware that their reporting could and did have an active effect on the policies of Western governments, which may have tempered their approaches. On the other hand, it could have emboldened them as well, if we were to consider the approach they've taken towards the Syrian government and Russia.

With that, I've come to the following results regarding the original research questions.

*How did English-language newspapers report on the destruction of cultural heritage in Palmyra between 1st of June, 2014 - 31st of December, 2017?*

In general, both newspapers in my sample report extensively (especially during the first ISIS occupation) on the destruction of Palmyran cultural heritage. Reporting following the first retaking of the area by the Syrian government is scarcer, as events elsewhere take precedence, and the topic of cultural heritage destruction is already an old one.

*What kinds of secondary narratives are woven within these articles?*

The following major secondary narratives were discovered during research:

- Section 3, the motives and reasoning of ISIS:
  - The motives of the Islamic State as a secondary narrative is present in both newspapers, even though it is not very extensively utilized.
- Section 4, differing naming conventions:
  - As a secondary narrative, *The New York Times* refers to the Islamic State in a more official way ("The Islamic State, also called ISIS or ISIL"), which may imply some amount of respect or legitimacy given towards the group. Alternatively, as discussed above, it may be an attempt at remaining objective.

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<sup>152</sup> "When it comes to the Middle East, the U.S. government has a history of advocating for military solutions to conflict. So U.S. newspapers, such as the Times, have responded by focusing coverage on military options and actions. However, in this case, the objective frames and tone of the Times coverage goes against this trend, referring to the military less often than the other two publications. These objective frames are reflective of the public's wariness of a rushed, passionate decision of intervention after the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003." Boyle and Mower 2018. It should be noted that their study is temporally scoped between June 10, 2014 and December 10, 2014, which fits into the timeframe of my study, but the earliest articles in my study come from 2015.

<sup>153</sup> Doucet 2018. "Syria & the CNN Effect: What Role Does the Media Play in Policy-Making?" *Daedalus*, vol. 147, no. 1, 2018, pp. 141–57.

- *The New York Times*' usage of the word "Daesh", an insulting name for ISIS, is likely not a secondary narrative, as it only appears in the articles written by a single journalist.
- *The Guardian*'s more informal way of referring to ISIS ("Isis" or "Islamic State") is likely a secondary narrative aimed at diminishing the legitimacy of the group in relation to Britain's domestic needs (as discussed above).
- Section 5, the role of the Syrian government:
  - The past military failures of the Syrian government regarding the defense of Palmyra are a constantly present secondary narrative in both newspapers.
  - *The New York Times*' articles contain a secondary narrative concerned with the symbolic or propaganda value of the victory for the Syrian government.
- Section 6, placing worth on cultural heritage and humanity:
  - Human suffering as a secondary narrative is, similarly to ISIS' motives, present in both newspapers, yet does not receive a lot of attention.
- Section 7, Russian involvement in Palmyra:
  - Alleged Russian war crimes are a scarcely discussed secondary narrative present in both newspapers, and they are treated similarly to the Syrian government's past failures.
  - As with the Syrian government, the secondary narrative of symbolic and propagandistic weight of the victory in Palmyra for Russia are often discussed by both newspapers.

Therefore, the results of this research have brought me to the following conclusions. Generally speaking, it is clear that both newspapers<sup>154</sup> use secondary narratives in addition to the primary narrative of a given article. For anyone familiar with newspaper articles, this may come as no big revelation. However, it is clear from the results that these secondary narratives are not entirely innocent context-creation, but instead are often used to modify the perception a reader would have of the primary narrative. That is to say, the context these secondary narratives create is one that fits the needs of the newspapers. Once again, the claim that newspapers have their own agendas should shock nobody, but in the opinion of this researcher, it is important to confirm the things we take for obvious truths from time to time.

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<sup>154</sup> And Western media in general, if one was to consider these two newspapers as a representative of the whole.

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