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12. THE SANCTUARY OF BEL IN PERSPECTIVE SELECTIVE DESTRUCTIONS, SELECTIVE MEMORIES, SELECTIVE REALITIES

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ABSTRACT In this chapter, we trace how the actions of Western archaeologists created a classical vision of the Temple of Bel in Palmyra at the expense of other histories. We draw on archival documents and photographs to demonstrate how the lenses and pens of the archaeologists working at the site since its ‘discovery’ in the eighteenth century transformed the complexity of the sanctuary into a single narrative that paid insufficient attention to the living population of Tadmor-Palmyra. We argue that a consistent practice of heritagizing the sanctuary, emptying the sanctuary, and divorcing it from its local community have led to actions in the present, both by Da’esh, but also by Western institutions, that continue that process of emptying and the disenfranchisement of local communities.

KEYWORDS Syria; Tadmor; Palmyra; Sanctuary of Bel; cultural heritage; Mandate period

Introduction

The Sanctuary of Bel in Palmyra is among the best-known archaeological monuments of Syria.¹ Initially documented by Western travellers in the eighteenth century as ‘The Temple of the Sun’, the temple set within its monumental temenos walls was built in the Roman period as a major civic sanctuary on the site of much older structures. Those temenos walls were occupied continuously from Antiquity up until the late 1920s, when French mandatory authorities created the archaeological site of Palmyra by removing inhabitants, their homes, a mosque, and many other post-Roman structures in order to showcase the classical past. Much of that removal was accomplished using the labour of local workers, many of whom had likely themselves lived in homes within the temenos. After that dispossession, the only people who lived within the walls were foreign archaeological teams who until the start of the current conflict occupied one of the only post-Roman structures left standing, an Ottoman-era house nestled into an interior corner of the sanctuary walls.²

Before the Syrian conflict which broke out in 2011, the Sanctuary of Bel was at the heart of the archaeological site of Palmyra. It was a key stopping place on the tourist trail through Syria, which as a whole was responsible for more than 10 per cent of the country’s GDP.³ The sanc-

¹ The first well-documented publication on Palmyra was by Wood in 1753. While the ‘Temple’ was used by Wood for the whole complex and continues to be popularly used to refer to the whole structure, strictly speaking the temple is the central building set within the larger sanctuary complex, contained within temenos walls. For the sake of precision, in this chapter we use ‘sanctuary’ for the whole structure, and ‘temple’ only when referring to the temple building itself.

² Gawlikowski 2021, 269.

³ Before the Syrian conflict, Palmyra was the most visited tourist site in Syria, and the temple was a main stop within the site for tourists; entrance was ticketed. In Syria as a whole, by 2011

tuary specifically, like the site of Palmyra more broadly, has since become infamous for its deliberate destruction, including the catastrophic explosions which occurred during the temple's occupation by Da'esh in August 2015.⁴ While this destruction was much discussed in both popular and academic discourse, it was in fact only one in a long line of destructive interventions at the site by a variety of actors, including the French Mandate Service des antiquités and its successor the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM), many of which aimed to showcase Roman-era monuments at the expense of other histories.⁵ Arguably, the deliberate destruction of the heritagized Roman-era monument by Da'esh was the mirror image of the way the monument had been transformed into an ancient classical site in the Mandate era, at the expense of all other pasts, and at the expense of local communities.⁶ That is, the destruction by Da'esh was one more in a long line of destructive interventions in the material remains of the Sanctuary of Bel in which contemporary political motivations were played in the guise of valuing particular pasts.⁷

This contribution examines the complex usually known as the Temple of Bel and asks why and how certain parts of its history have come to be seen as the most important ones. Drawing on archival documents and photographs, we focus on its transformation since its 'discovery' in the eighteenth century, including through the

tourism was worth almost two billion USD annually, according to World Bank data: <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL?locations=SY>> [accessed 22 August 2023].

⁴ AlJazeera reported the use of more than 30 tonnes of explosives: <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/8/31/isil-blows-up-part-of-main-temple-in-syrias-palmyra>> [accessed 22 August 2023]. Reports indicated not only such deliberate explosions, but also extensive damage caused by the use of the building as a defensive position, as recorded in a 2015 report by ASOR's CHI initiative: <<https://www.asor.org/chi/reports/special-reports/Update-on-the-Situation-in-Palmyra>> [accessed 22 August 2023].

⁵ On the destruction of Palmyra's monuments as one in a line of transformations, see Holtorf 2015. A critical response to the calls for reconstruction was made by Schmidt-Colinet 2019.

⁶ On the continuous occupation of the Temple of Bel from Antiquity up until the clearance of the village, Mulder 2017, 231–37. On its use as a Christian structure, Jastrzębowska 2013.

⁷ In the words of Hutchings and La Salle (2015, 699), 'archaeology is a form of disaster capitalism, characterized by specialist managers whose function is the clearance of Indigenous heritage from the landscape, making way for economic development'. On the chronological range of destructions (selective and otherwise) at the Syrian archaeological site of Dura-Europos, see Baird 2020; on the motivations of Da'esh in Syria and the changing utility of antiquities for them, see Almohamad 2021.

lenses and pens of the archaeologists who worked at the site, and what they did — or did not — record. Through an analysis of archival material, including photographic records, diaries, and published sources including guidebooks, we will explore the ways in which the building and its immediate surroundings have been emphasized, ignored, appropriated, and heritagized. We will demonstrate that the built Roman-era heritage of the Sanctuary of Bel has long been the focus of attention, resulting in a concomitant lack of attention to the living population. This focus has had severe consequences in the events of the recent past where the images of the destruction of the building have been emphasized, while the voices, stories, and experiences of those who lived through those events have been sidelined or ignored.⁸ The visual production of a classical site was successful in terms of tourism revenue, but not in terms of archaeological knowledge, and despite centuries of attention, a full study of all phases of the sanctuary has never been made.⁹

Looking Past the Present in the Sanctuary of Bel

Archaeologists look with a certain eye — they spend years developing it. They come to know, through training and through looking, how to tell whether a break in a ceramic pot is fresh or was made millennia ago; how to tell when a shadow in the soil they excavate is a pit; how to tell when one wall is later than another. That archaeological eye also trains them to look *past* things, to intuitively ignore that which is not 'archaeology'. That distinction, between what is archaeology and what is not also defines what archaeologists value and what they do not.

The detailed engraving, published in Robert Wood's 1753 *Ruins of Palmyra*, based on the sketches made at the site by Giovanni Battista Borra, is amongst the earliest recordings of the Sanctuary of Bel (Fig. 12.1). The images became *the* views of Palmyra, framings which recur again and again. They were in fact among the images which came to define how Antiquity should be

⁸ A Syrian archaeologist has described how her grandparents once lived in the sanctuary: Tharoor 2016.

⁹ There have been a great number of partial studies. The main publication remains the two volumes of Seyrig, Amy, and Will 1968; 1975. A useful overview of the ancient phases can be found in Gawlikowski 2021, 113–28. Al-Maqdissi's work on the archives of Du Mesnil's 1960s trenches has shown the sanctuary was built on a much earlier Tell site, with remains as early as at least the Bronze Age, see Al-Maqdissi 2000, and Al-Maqdissi and Ishaq 2022.



Figure 12.1. Sketch of the Temple of Bel by Giovanni Battista Borra (Wood 1753, pl. 21, via Heidelberg digital library <<https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.4569#0081>>).



Figure 12.2. Gate of the courtyard of the Temple of Bel, photograph by Louis Vignes, 1864 (Getty Special Collections <<http://hdl.handle.net/10020/2015r15>>).



Figure 12.3. North of the Bel temple, with contemporary mud-brick structures in the foreground (Wiegand 1932, pl. 164).

represented.¹⁰ Small and deliberately out of scale, but nonetheless visible in the engraving, were what Wood's plate captioned as 'the hutts [*sic*] of the Arabs'. There's much to unpack in this simple description, including the dismissive and pejorative use of the term 'hut'. But nonetheless, from these early views, it is clear that the place that was being discovered and recorded was in fact clearly a place teeming with life, a place of homes with flat roofs and arched doorways, of mud-brick houses protected by massive stone walls. The archaeological eye, however, means archaeologists are trained to look past the 'hutts', paying them no more attention than we do the clouds engraved in the sky above.¹¹

Unmistakable too, just over a century later, when photographs could finally capture scenes with an authenticity that Wood had only dreamed of, was that same active, living, place. In photographs of Louis Vignes, the modern captions given to the photographs by the Getty direct us to believe with archaeological authority and assertion that this photograph captures the 'Gate of the Courtyard of the Temple of Bel' (Fig. 12.2). But that gate is not the only, or even the primary, thing captured by Vignes's haunting photograph. Another version of the story of the place we call the Sanctuary of Bel has been there all along, even if an archaeological eye has

slid off it and paid attention instead to the rectilinear masonry of earlier times, and even if archaeological captions occluded what was clearly visible within the frame: the homes of contemporary people (Fig. 12.3).¹² As archaeologists we have been unseeing the contemporary existence of the Sanctuary of Bel for as long as we have been studying its past. But it has never really been out of focus.

The sanctuary was not only consumed by foreigners in photographs, but increasingly visited. Half a century after those first photographs to pre-WW1 Syria, in a Baedeker travel guide, visiting tourists were advised on what antiquities it was possible to buy at the site (in contravention of Ottoman antiquities law). The guide also confidently advised visitors to

Palmyra they need have 'no hesitation in entering the houses or climbing on their roofs'.¹³ In the same era, the density of images increases along with tourists and the increasing ease of photographs and ease of travel, with those such as from the studio of Felix Bonfils circulating widely in the form of *cartes des visites* or stereoscopic views (Fig. 12.4), in which contemporary habitation is also visible. While there was little interest, then, in the contemporary population living within the sanctuary walls and no structured programme of recording, their sheer existence meant that they were incidentally recorded by many visitors. Those records form a valuable but very dispersed collection of testimonies and images.

The archive of the British School of Archaeology at Jerusalem, now held by the Palestine Exploration Fund in London, provides a useful example of such evidence, in John Garstang's photographs. Garstang was himself deeply integrated in the colonial project and was Palestine's antiquities director in the 1920s.¹⁴ Garstang's photographs reveal local people — even if his lens was focused on revealing the carved lintel of the ancient temple with the crispest clarity: we see children playing in the streets, and look through arched windows and doorways of the mud-brick walls into homes (Fig. 12.5).

¹² Wiegand 1932.

¹³ Baedeker and others 1912, 344.

¹⁴ Chevalier 2002, 228–29; Thornton 2012, 197; Griswold 2020.

¹⁰ Bahrani, Çelik, and Eldem 2011, 21–22.

¹¹ On the fabrication of ruins as unpeopled landscapes, Brusius and Rico 2023.



Figure 12.4. Entrance to the Temple of Bel, surrounded by contemporary buildings. Captioned in French as ‘Palmyra, Temple of the Sun, Lateral View’ (Maison Bonfils, <<https://lcn.loc.gov/2004670476>>).



Figure 12.5. Interior of the Temple of Bel before clearances (John Garstang G1432, c. 1929, Archive of the British School of Archaeology at Jerusalem, used by kind permission of the Palestine Exploration Fund (previously PAL 26.33)).

Sometimes, when his photographs fail as archaeological images — that is, when they fail to provide adequate archaeological detail due to a poorly framed composition or an error in focus — they accidentally give us a view of a different place and provide, as here, a view across rooftops and into plastered courtyards (Fig. 12.6). Contemporary maps similarly show not only the inhabitations of local buildings but also the settlement’s extensive field systems.¹⁵ Other photographs were made for foreign public consumption, for instance those taken by the photographic department of the American Colony.¹⁶ Among these images are views down narrow streets, active with the movement of inhabitants, young and old. The streets take their width from the intercolumniations of the stone-column shafts of the ancient structures (Fig. 12.7). Against those Roman-era columns are braced mud-brick walls, whose plastered surfaces are smoothed up against the ancient stone. The fabric of contemporary life in early twentieth-century Palmyra was interwoven with the ancient remains before it was removed in the name of archaeological authenticity.

¹⁵ For example, the plan included in Gabriel 1926.

¹⁶ Awad 2015.



Figure 12.6. View from precinct of the Temple of Bel towards the citadel, taken from the roof of the temple (John Garstang G1428, c. 1929, Archive of the British School of Archaeology at Jerusalem, used by kind permission of the Palestine Exploration Fund (previously PAL 26.29)).



Figure 12.7. Street in village of the Temple of the Sun (Library of Congress, Matson Collection (American Colony), LC-M33-771).

The disregard for the rights and even existence of local people at Palmyra, as shown in the Baedeker guide, came to a logical head, almost inevitably, in the late 1920s under Director of Antiquities Henri Seyrig, with the removal of those inconveniences to appreciating the ruins.¹⁷ Driven by the need to create an archaeological site and a tourist location, ultimately successfully, the people who had for generations lived within the mud-brick houses within the sanctuary walls were forced out of them. They were relocated to rectilinear structures in the new town to the north, a colonial organizational model the French authorities had also employed in North African Algeria.¹⁸ This was of course not a phenomenon unique to Palmyra. At the very same time, destructions of contemporary lives in the name of selective archaeological pasts were underway in many places; demolition of houses in the place we know as the Athenian Agora started in 1931, for example.¹⁹ By 1939, the French plan of the site of Palmyra, made from an aerial photo-

¹⁷ Baird, Kamash, and Raja 2023; Seyrig 1930, 203–05. The removal of people from their homes is often euphemistically termed an ‘evacuation’, see e.g. presentation in <<https://archeologie.culture.gouv.fr/palmyre/en/studying-temple-bel>> [accessed 22 August 2023]. The removal of local populations for the creation of cleansed archaeological sites was a global phenomenon through expropriation and dispossession. Herzfeld 2006; Salas Landa 2018.

¹⁸ Neep 2012, 147.

¹⁹ Dumont 2020.

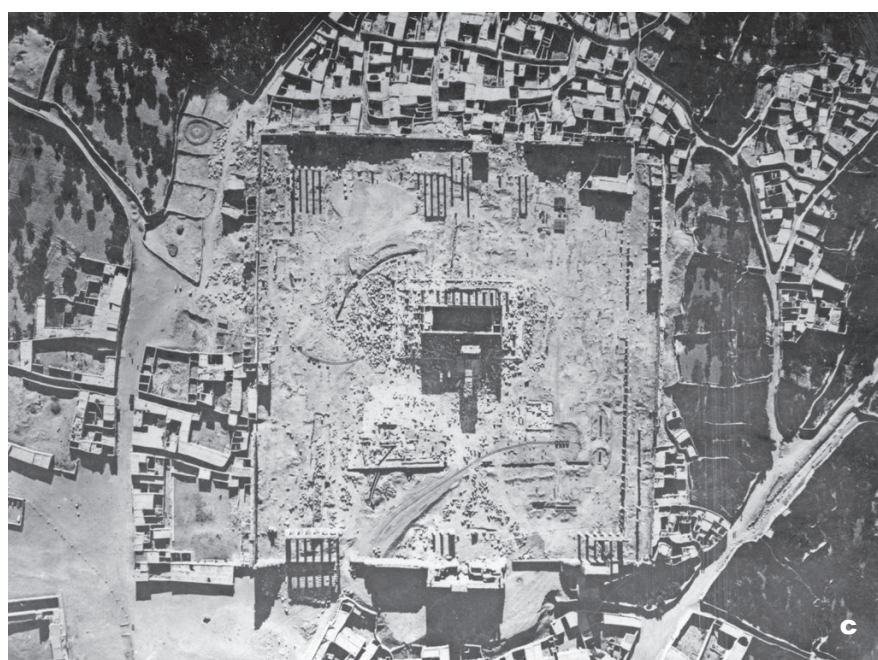


Figure 12.8. Aerial view of the Bel temple in Palmyra a) before the restoration, 1929; b) during clearing, 1930; c) after the restoration, 1934 (courtesy of Rolf Stucky © Private Collection, Switzerland).

graph (Fig. 12.8), showed a ‘pure’ archaeological view of the Roman-era Temple of Bel (Fig. 12.9), emptied of post-Roman material, and with the orthogonal plan of the new town where people were resettled visible to the north. But, as we proceed into a new era of considering Palmyra, it is important to remember this is a view made not in the era of Zenobia but rather in the era of the Mandates, at a time when links to a supposedly European past were privileged above all others.

Harald Ingholt and Selectivity in the Field Diaries: The Place of the Sanctuary of Bel

Alongside the dispersed photographic records testifying to the presence of communities within the Sanctuary of Bel are incidental records in archaeological diaries. In the early Mandate period, the French took up large-scale archaeological work in various parts of Syria. Palmyra was one of these places where intense, long, and very differently focused archaeological projects were undertaken.²⁰ Harald Ingholt was one of the few non-French scholars who through his strong network in the French-speaking academic world was granted concession to conduct archaeological fieldwork at the site.²¹ Apart from his French network, it was also his Danish funding which enabled his work, and his campaigns

²⁰ On the history of Syrian archaeology during this period, Chevalier 2002; Al-Maqdissi 2008; Gillot 2010. On heritage in the Mandate period, Ouahes 2018.

²¹ In general for Harald Ingholt’s work in Palmyra, see Chevalier 2002, 313; Raja and Sørensen 2015b; Raja 2021. Furthermore, see Bobou, Raja, and Steding (in this volume) on the reports by Ingholt to the French Director of Antiquities in Syria from 1924 and 1925.

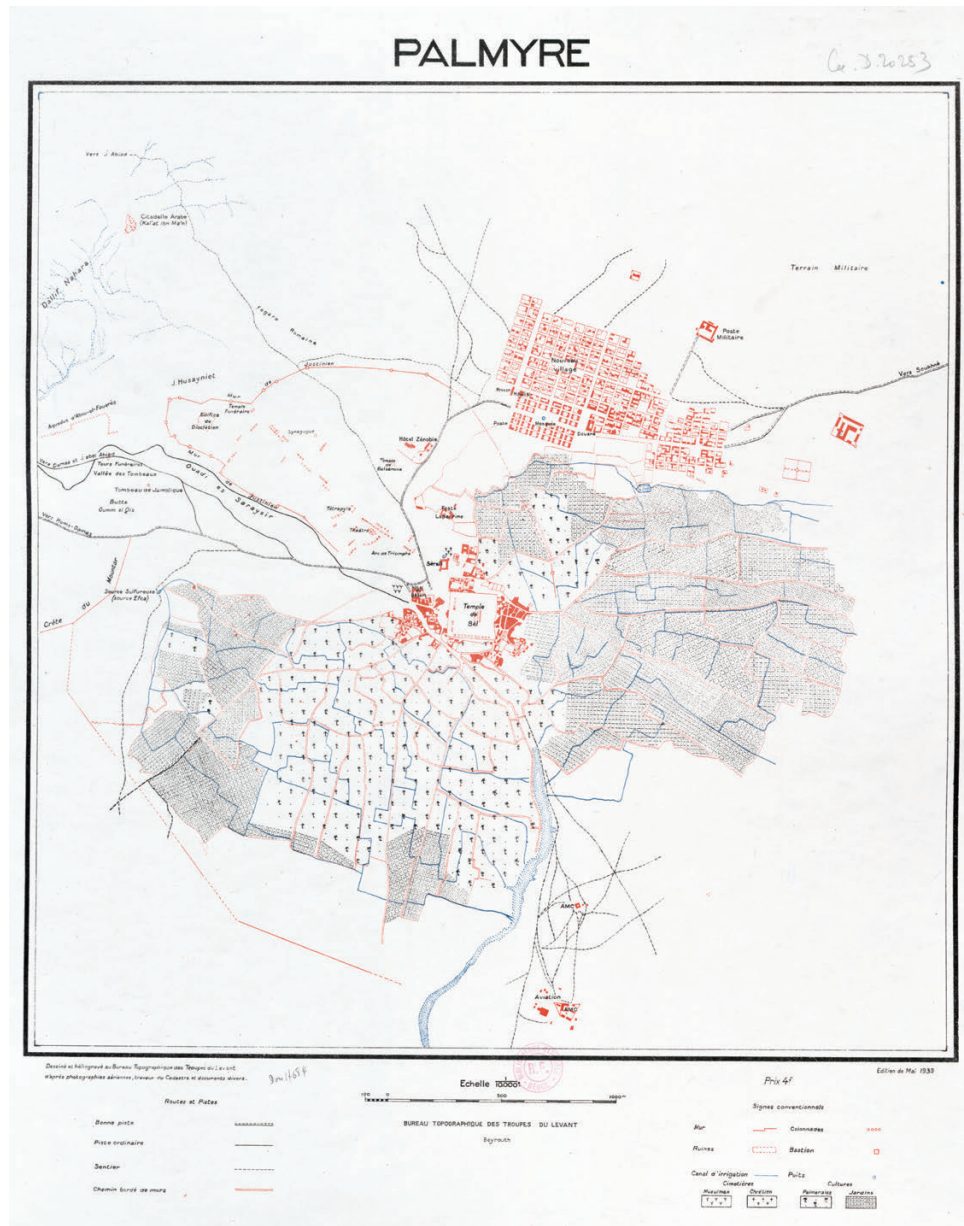


Figure 12.9. French map from 1939 made by the topographic unit in the French troops in the Levant showing the new settlement, the oasis, and the ancient site including the Sanctuary of Bel (collection of the Institut français du Proche-Orient (Ifpo), from gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque nationale de France).

in Palmyra were financed through grants from the Rask-Ørsted Foundation.²² In 1923 he had spent a year studying in Paris, and in 1924–1925 he was a fellow at the American School of Archaeology in Jerusalem. It was in 1924 that Ingholt undertook his first campaign in Palmyra under the French concession. This was also the first time he visited Palmyra. His interest in Palmyrene funerary sculpture, however, had developed earlier and was continued intensively after he began work at Palmyra, a period from 1925–1930 when he was also

a curator at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, a museum which now holds the largest collection of Palmyrene funerary sculpture outside of Syria, based in part on material collected by Ingholt.²³ During the years of fieldwork in Palmyra, Ingholt finished his higher doctoral degree, which was published in Danish with the title *Studier over Palmyrensk Skulptur* in 1928 and which until recently has been the standard work on Palmyrene funerary sculpture.²⁴ During his fieldwork campaigns Ingholt compiled diaries detailing the work he undertook with a team of local workers and colleagues, and

²² See Bobou, Raja, and Steding (in this volume) on this foundation, which was instituted to promote collaborative work between the nations after WWI.

²³ Raja 2019.

²⁴ Ingholt 1928; Bobou and others 2021.

these diaries give insight into everyday life on the excavation and at the site in the early Mandate period. However, only recently has it also begun to be discussed whether, and if so how, Ingholt curated the site — knowingly or unknowingly — in his diaries.²⁵

Ingholt's focus was primarily on the epigraphic habit in Palmyra, its funerary sculpture, and tomb architecture. He was trained as a philologist and theologian but not an archaeologist. However, he had strong interests in archaeology and carried out archaeological explorations in the vast necropoleis around the city and excavated more than eighty tombs during his campaigns in Palmyra.²⁶ He far from published all the tombs he studied; often he only studied parts of them or some finds which he considered to be important. He also failed to find any tomb which had not been disturbed or looted in some form. The tombs had long been the target of foreign explorers and travellers for the objects they could provide. Ingholt's diaries focus on the graves of the city and therefore do not provide much information on the cityscape of Palmyra as a whole, either modern or ancient.

Ingholt's diaries also do not provide much direct or detailed information about the Sanctuary of Bel. However, through closer reading of the diaries it does become clear that there are important mentions of this building complex, which at the time that Ingholt was first working in Palmyra was still occupied by a local population. The large sanctuary temenos, more than 205 m × 205 m, was home to an entire village, which was destroyed and cleared for scholarly and touristic purposes from 1929 onwards, as documents from the time show.²⁷ In the field diaries kept by Ingholt, there are several mentions of the village in the sanctuary temenos. These mentions are largely incidental, given in the context of Ingholt's search for inscriptions and archaeological objects that were in the possession of locals or *in situ* in and around the Temple of Bel itself. The mentions, however, are restricted to certain diaries and, within these, also to particular parts of his campaigns: from 1924 in Ingholt's first diary, from 1925 in his second diary, and in his fourth diary written during November 1928. The mentions are most often made in descriptions related to objects — notations which could help Ingholt to locate the objects and places again, both on site and in his memory.

Exploring the Village in the Sanctuary of Bel: Ingholt's First Campaign in Palmyra in 1924

In Diary 1 from 1924 there are seven passages, where the context of Ingholt's notes and comments allows us to connect these sections to the village within the Sanctuary of Bel. Furthermore, there is one brief mention of 'Chez Mohammed' and then an inscription in Palmyrene Aramaic, which might indicate that this inscription was found inside the village (Fig. 12.10).²⁸ This short mention does not explicitly state that the house of Mohammad was located within the temenos; however, based on the following sections which clearly mention houses within the temenos as 'Chez [name]' it is not unlikely that this house was also located there.²⁹ Some objects are explicitly recorded as being 'Dans une maison du temple' (Fig. 12.11),³⁰ or found 'in a garden to the right of the road behind the great temple' (Fig. 12.12).³¹ It is also clear from some of the pages that Ingholt — at a later point, indicated by a different writing instrument — added a number to some of the houses prefixed with the notation 'd.'. These 'd. numbers' could refer to a map of the village, perhaps made by the French, and could designate numbers to houses or plots, potentially also later used when the French displaced the local community from their houses in the temenos to newly built structures outside.³² Other descriptions in the same year describe objects Ingholt recovers in contexts related to the sanctuary, such as deposits of debris outside the walls (Fig. 12.13).³³

Some inscriptions come from specific parts of houses, such as one which is found 'dans la cour d'une maison arabe, d. 69', noted in Ingholt's hand to be 'Chez Fayadelfares-el-Darddich'. On the same diary page, he describes a sculpture in the other wall of the temple *cella*, 'visible when one ascends onto the roof of the mosque and looks eastwards'.³⁴ Ingholt's diary makes clear that in this first season, many finds are found through his movement

²⁸ Diary 1, 21 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 138–39).

²⁹ Diary 1, 64–80 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 222–57).

³⁰ Diary 1, 50 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 194–95), referring to an inscription now known to be *PAT* no. 0260.

³¹ Diary 1, 71 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 236–37), referring to Greek inscription now known as *IGLS* xvii.1, 314.

³² For example, Diary 1, 58, 59, 62 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 210–13, 218–19).

³³ Diary 1, 62 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 218–19).

³⁴ Diary 1, 64 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 222–23). Ingholt often struggles to transliterate Arab names. The sculpture Ingholt

²⁵ Baird, Kamash, and Raja 2023.

²⁶ Raja, Schnädelbach, and Steding 2021.

²⁷ Measurement based on Raja 2022, 14.

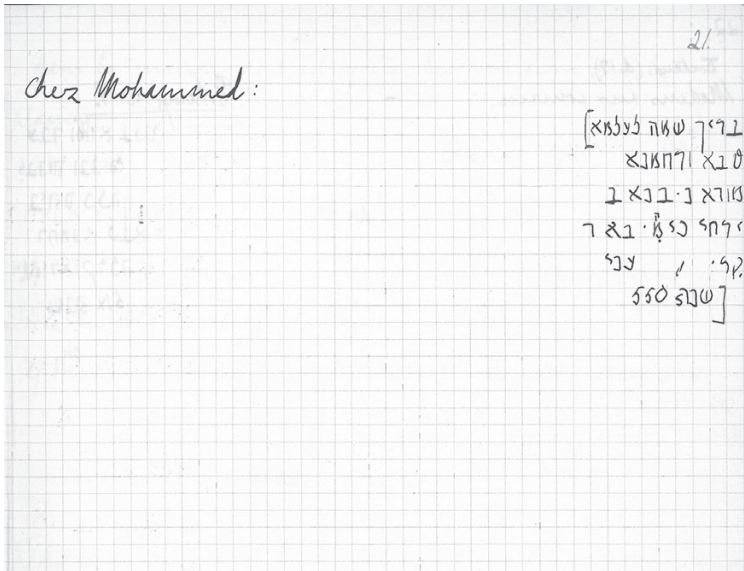


Figure 12.10. Diary 1, page 21, with an inscription, possibly found inside the village (All diary images in this chapter: Rubina Raja and the Palmyra Portrait Project, courtesy of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).

within the living village, into the courtyards of homes, and onto the roof of the mosque. While Ingholt's notes are brief and somewhat incidental to his true subject, they nonetheless document the context in which his ancient finds are recovered, and clearly relate to visits and work within the village in the temenos. Diary 1, from 1924, pertains to the first campaign that Ingholt undertook in Palmyra, and several parts of the diary give insight into the exploratory work undertaken by Ingholt at this point in time. Ingholt was familiarizing himself with the site and the local situation, with a focus on exploring which objects the locals potentially had in their private houses. He did so through the help of the local interpreter and later on through the help of local contacts, with whom he came to have a trust-based relationship.³⁵ Diary 1 is the most explicit about houses in the village, the names of the owners, as well as the numbering of the houses.

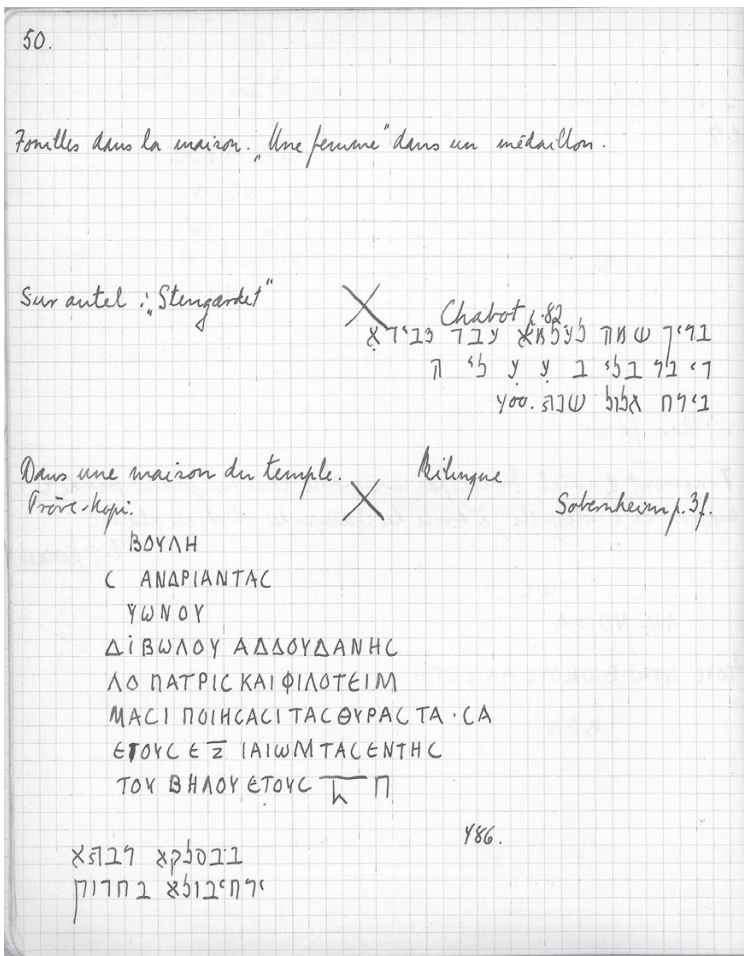


Figure 12.11. Diary 1, page 50, with an inscription found 'Dans une maison du temple'.

Diary 2: The Second Campaign 1925

In Ingholt's second diary, written in 1925, there are only two explicit mentions of visits to the village. Early on in that campaign, 16 March, Ingholt visited houses in the village in order to refind inscriptions already known to him from the campaign of 1924. After work that day in the necropolis, he writes: 'In the afternoon, went around in the houses to once again find the inscriptions. Inscription arabe chez Hussein, inscription sur le presseur chez Hussein' (Fig. 12.14).³⁶ The other mention is from more than a month later, 27 April, and refers to an inscription found in one of the houses inside the Temple of Bel itself simply as 'dans une maison à l'intérieur du grand temple' without further detail.³⁷

describes as being in the outer wall of the *cella* is 'a lion being pierced with a lance by a man with two wings'.

³⁵ Baird, Kamash, and Raja 2023.

³⁶ Diary 2, 4 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 508–09). Original in Danish and French, here with the Danish translated to English. For Hussein's home, no 'd.' notation is given.

³⁷ Diary 2, 61 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 622–23).

April 10.
 Inscr. gr. trouvée par moi, encastrée dans un mur moderne. 71
 9 enlève, tel højre forkjæn bagom det store Tempel.
 Fragment d'autel. - larg. 30 cm. Est. 100.
 JAΘMAΛEXHΛI
 ATPWNAN
 Set of photographies Relief, rom nær med Anon. Sent paa Efters
 midtbyen
 Autel rotif.
 Dans la poche des officiers, apporté d'une maison à côté
 d'aut. 53 - larg. 36. Est. 1678.
 Sur orientale Rand: AKAMAΘHMA... - 382X
 - nerte: EΛABHΛOY
 Dernier Relief: 2 adreventte Raand flader
 og derunder en palling. Indskrift paa 6 dænger:
 757251 X318W
 5771 5162X X577M
 X20727 757251 2727W (2727X)
 72 5 1 51
 751757257 75 X57
 1250 75 X5727
 4ph.

Figure 12.12. Diary 1, page 71, with note of an altar found in a garden to the right of the road behind the great temple.

62.
 On a trouvé dans le temple ka'al-Samin, autrefois, un petit
 ocreux ca. 35-40 cm. - un petit bas-relief, une fille arabe, jus-
 qu'à la ceinture.
 U. Lantier RA, no. 117, 200
 Sur une colonne dans un jardin à end
 du grand temple, inscription au-dessous un bas-relief
 d. 65.
 725 57 272X (572 5772 727 27... 7) 725 5772X
 727 2727 727 2727
 *2 or 3 inches paa Fordelingen af dængerne. X 72727
 3/1 mes.
 Un petit paa toppen af højnen paa det store bel-Tempel.
 1,65 m. - Stykker af Mur. Stykke af Hjørneskal 200
 Dans l'apéro-midi
 30. dæmpe 31. Style 32. Mængde - 13 cm
 33 Mængde - 10 cm. 34 Pate d'Atter - 15 cm.
 35 Pate - 9 cm.

Figure 12.13. Diary 1, page 62, with note of deposits of debris outside the walls of the Temple of Bel, such as pieces of a wall and a piece of human skull.

Græsk-palmyrensk Gravindskrift. Hos Cherman, senere brygt
 til-stollet.
 Maalet: 67 x 43 (højde). Ræmme: 6 Højstørrelse: 2 1/2 cm.
 TO ΜΝΗΜΕΙΟΝ ΑΝΩΚΟΔ
 ΟΜΗΣΑΝ ΒΩΛΕΗΣ ΜΟΚΕ
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Figure 12.14. Diary 2, page 4 with the description of Ingholt's search for inscriptions in the houses of the village in the temenos of the Temple of Bel.

Farewell to the Terrace: The 1928 Campaign

The campaign in 1928 was the one in which one of Ingholt's teams discovered the now-famous funerary portrait known as the 'Beauty of Palmyra' in the Qasr Abjad.³⁸ Ingholt was not there himself when this loculus relief was discovered, but returned after lunch to find it at the grave. The 1928 campaign was, as far as we can see from his diary, dominated by work in the necropolis and on inscriptions as well as the compilation of a collection of tesserae. There are not many mentions of work in the village, except for the practice of photographing inscriptions there as well as looking for a local person and showing some visitors around.³⁹

³⁸ Raja and Sørensen 2015a.

³⁹ Diary 4, 8, on 13 November 1928 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 896–97), on 'walking about in the town with Avvar to search for Sannem. No luck'. He does not note his purpose in searching for Sannem. On page 12 of the same diary (20 November; Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 912–13), he describes in Danish 'The entrance portal to the temple, "boom"'. 'Boom' seems to be an onomatopoeic notation used throughout the diaries to describe an area of rubble or collapse (brought up in discussion about the diaries between the authors and Olympia Bobou). On

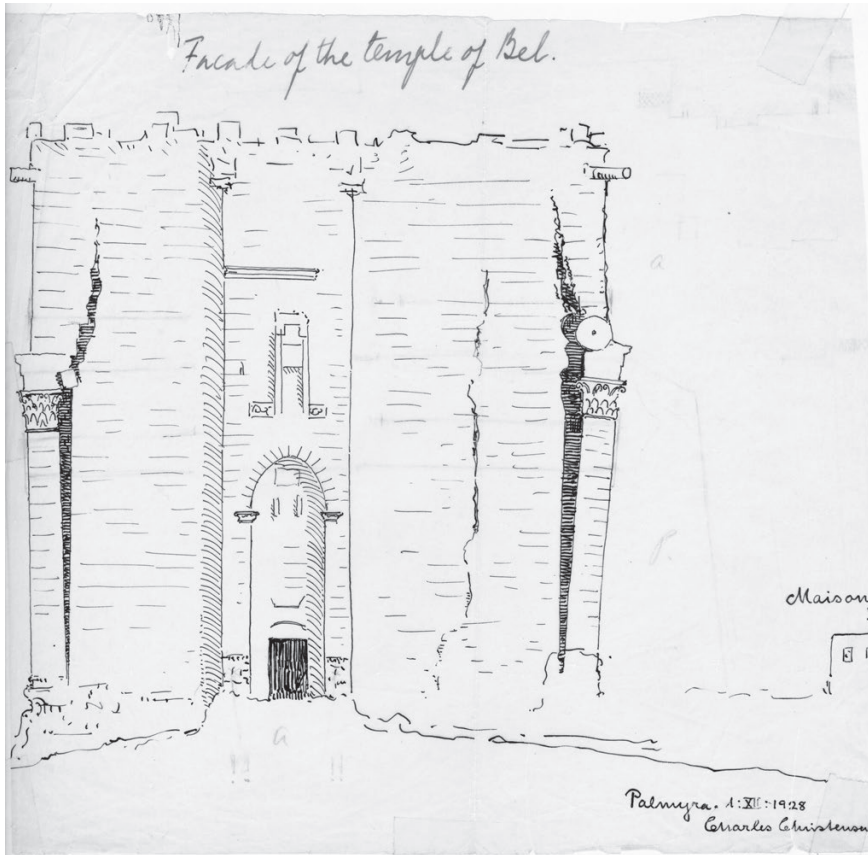


Figure 12.15. Charles Christensen's sketch of parts of the Temple of Bel as a fortress in 1928 (Rubina Raja and Palmyra Portrait Project, courtesy of Mary Ebba Underdown).

There is also a peculiar mention of the entrance portal to the temple (Fig. 12.15), which potentially implies that parts of it were destroyed or collapsed, and a sculpture is described in relation to its location outside of the temenos.⁴⁰

In the fourth, 1928, diary, Ingholt's visits to the village do not reveal much, but he writes that he delivered a report on the Temple of Bel, indicating that he did work in the village during that campaign; work that does not seem to have been described in the preserved field

22 November 1928, page 13 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 914–15), Ingholt notes in Danish that he 'Delivered the report about the Bel temple', and on page 15 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 918–19) in Danish, on 23 November 1928, that he 'Showed Prip-Møller around: the Bel Temple. Inscription on column behind Bel temple.' On making photographs of inscriptions 'behind the temple', see 28 November 1928, Diary 4, 24 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 934–35).

⁴⁰ Diary 4, 18 (Raja, Steding, and Yon 2021, 924–25), on 24 November 1928, in Danish Ingholt notes that he 'Saw the relief of Vorod, which was set in a wall, between the road behind the Bel temple and a threshing floor'. The description is accompanied by a very schematic drawing.

diary. The report itself is not known to be preserved, but if it was an official report, like the two others found in his papers, then it must have been one which was made for the Service des antiquités.⁴¹ Ingholt's mentions of the village inside the temenos relate strictly to his work there — both objects in and around the temple itself and objects in houses of the local population. He does not write about the village as the core entity of modern life in Palmyra at that time, nor does he give any detailed descriptions of the village, its composition, or its population — although we know that it must have been a bustling place, as some photos from the time show us.

For Ingholt the village and its inhabitants were tools through which he could conduct his research and make new findings. He went with a local guide or several guides, which he also notes in his diaries. In that way we may speculate that the village and its population in fact were closed to him, had he not had a local

interlocutor to open it to him. This was not only an issue of language, although his Arabic does not seem to have been good, at least at the point in time when he worked in Palmyra, judging from the few Arabic phrases he uses in his diaries and his misunderstandings of basic phrases.

Ingholt did not return for extensive fieldwork at Palmyra after his 1928 campaign, and so he was not on site when the large-scale clearing of the Sanctuary of Bel was initiated in 1929. However, he visited the site in 1937 to work in the Grave of Malku together with the surgeon Cruikshank, who worked in Beirut at the American Hospital.⁴² He would have been aware, however, that the clearing of the sanctuary had already been in the planning when he was working in Palmyra, and surely he knew about it, as we know from an article he wrote for a Danish magazine in 1930, where he praised the initiative and underlined that this clearing would

⁴¹ The reports were found in the archival material digitized within the framework of the Palmyra Portrait Project; see Bobou, Raja, and Steding (in this volume) on these two reports.

⁴² Ingholt 1941, 508.

make Palmyra one of the largest tourist attractions in the region when the Sanctuary of Bel was restored to its former glory.⁴³ In Ingholt's narrative, although mentioning several of his workers and the sheikh of the village, he does not once mention the losses of the private homes of hundreds of local families, who were relocated by the French army from their long-standing family homes, which he had visited in order to locate antiquities. Ingholt's diaries thus make clear that the village homes and people were a source of antiquities for Ingholt, and were documented on that basis, but were not of interest in and of themselves. Nonetheless, the diaries do demonstrate that the people of the settlement had an awareness of the ancient environment in which they lived, and had curated elements of it within their homes. Through Ingholt's notes and sketches, locating so many objects in specific — to him — spaces, perhaps implicitly shows that he presumed that those locations would remain useful contexts.

Emptying the Sanctuary of Bel

Ingholt's diaries did not record the acts of clearance of the sanctuary, but aerial photographs capture the progress of wiping its surface clean (Figs 12.8a–c). That cleaned sanctuary would become the focus of the tourist trail in Syria: a monument with a recognizable image, a key monument in UNESCO's description of the site's 'universal value.'⁴⁴ On 30 August 2015, Da'esh set off an explosion in the Sanctuary of Bel, destroying the *cella*, with the exception of the western gateway; the precinct walls also remained standing. This destruction by Da'esh was widely reported in Western media. What was less well documented in Western media reports — but is noted in the useful American Schools of Oriental Research Cultural Heritage Initiative reports, which collated information about the destruction in Syria (and other areas) from 2014–2018 — are the actions of the Syrian regime and their Russian allies relating to the Sanctuary of Bel.⁴⁵ Two years before the Da'esh explosion, in August 2013, the Syrian regime fortified the building as a defensive position; arguably, this militarization of the structure may have contributed to it being an early target for Da'esh. Later in the struggle over

Tadmor-Palmyra, on 10 February 2016, an airstrike by Russian and Syrian forces destroyed three columns and part of what is described as the fencing around the temple, probably the precinct wall. At some point before 28 March 2016, unknown perpetrators also graffitied the Temple of Bel — something which of course is not a new thing; a lot of ancient graffiti was found in the sanctuary — and engaged in looting the area of the temple. Very particular, highly edited accounts, then, were generated in Western media, which told overly simple narratives about the sanctuary and its fate in the Syrian Civil War and about who was involved in shaping that fate.

Those simplified narratives were also supported by selective, supporting imagery with three main foci: images of the explosion itself; before- and after-images; and images of the western gateway of the *cella*. The imagery of the explosion itself used Da'esh videos to show the moment of the explosion, rendering these Western media reports effective tools of the Da'esh propaganda machine.⁴⁶ The before- and after-images focused on aerial photographs of the temple. These photographs zoom in on the temple and its precinct with no wider views of the archaeological site visible, so there is an emphasis on the emptiness of the temple precinct after the explosion.⁴⁷ This overwhelming sense of emptiness is deepened in the images of the western gateway: it stands alone, lonely and unsupported in a seemingly empty wasteland. Some versions of this highlight this loneliness even more strongly by including a hand holding a photograph of the temple as it was before the explosion, echoing the before and after aerial shots.⁴⁸ This strong emphasis on emptiness was the sad next step in the emptying of the sanctuary, which we have tracked through this chapter. The ruined landscape of Palmyra created by the engravings published in Wood's eighteenth-century volume in some ways reached its apogee in these photographs.

The vacuum left by these haunting images of physical emptiness were rapidly filled by digital reconstruction projects. Before the Institute of Digital Archaeology settled on their version of the monumental arch from Palmyra (destroyed by Da'esh on 4 October 2016 over a year later than the *cella* of the Sanctuary of Bel), it seems that this company originally planned to reconstruct the western gateway of the temple's *cella*.⁴⁹

⁴³ Ingholt 1930.

⁴⁴ <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/23/>> [accessed 22 August 2023].

⁴⁵ ASOR CHI reports: <<https://www.asor.org/chi/reports/weekly-monthly/2014/>> [accessed 22 August 2023].

⁴⁶ e.g. *CBS News* 2015.

⁴⁷ e.g. *BBC News* 2015.

⁴⁸ e.g. Worley 2016.

⁴⁹ e.g. McKnight 2015. Though notably in this particular article, the model shows the western gateway from the *cella* of the

The mock-up imagery of how their reconstruction would look in Trafalgar Square shows strong visual similarities with the images of the gateway that had been propagating in Western media: a lone gateway standing without support. In another article in *Apollo Magazine*, the digital mock-up of the gateway is also shown standing alone and unsupported, this time in a desert — and a deserted — landscape.⁵⁰ No people now, but also no place — Palmyra is becoming emptier and emptier.

A 3D model of the Sanctuary of Bel by Maxim Atayants has also been part of the wider Russian project aimed at reconstructing Palmyra and was announced in a blog post on 20 December 2020.⁵¹ This announcement was made on the same day that the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg opened an exhibition about the reconstruction of the temple. The model is described as being ‘done entirely by hand in Blender 3D’ and ‘based on numerous references, drawings, satellite imagery, and photogrammetry of objects captured at the scene of the tragedy in the paramilitary zone’; we are given no more detail about these references. The blog post contains an unlabelled image showing part of the roof of the reconstruction model. There is also a video (one hour 34 minutes) of the exhibition at the State Hermitage Museum, which is in Russian and filmed by a handheld camera. Forty-five minutes into the video we see what is described in the blog as a ‘satellite photogrammetry model’, which is a small 3D print placed onto some satellite imagery on a large table. A partial 3D-printed model of the Temple of Bel is shown after fifty-three minutes. The 3D print comprises the front façade, the interior of the temple with a golden ceiling, but no back wall. The blender model follows fifty-nine minutes thirty seconds into the video, where we are shown footage of a video being played on a large TV screen in the museum next to the 3D print. The video shows a fly-through of what was 3D printed as well as architectural drawings with different renders. The film then shows a demonstration of someone using a computer to fly through a photorealistic reconstruction model of the temple, as well as a fly-through showing the current state of the archaeological site. Overall, we are only given glimpses of this reconstruction model. While it would have been available to view, one assumes, to anyone who visited the exhibition

at the State Hermitage Museum, the people who might most want to engage with such a model, people from Syria and especially those from Tadmor-Palmyra, are left at a significant distance and without access.

In addition to the Russian project, an Australian insurance company, Budget Direct, has also been involved in a reconstruction of the Sanctuary of Bel. In July 2020, Budget Direct posted a piece on their blog entitled ‘Reconstructing 6 UNESCO cultural sites in danger of disappearing forever’.⁵² This appeared in their ‘Live Life’ section, which they describe as ‘your one-stop shop for health and wellness advice, entertainment and everyday life inspiration’ and was part of a series that sat alongside other pieces, such as ‘7 ruined palaces around the world reconstructed’ and ‘Asian Royalty; 6 ruined castles across Asia, reconstructed’. Some information is given about the selection process: they had to be on the UNESCO World Heritage in Danger list; they had to be cultural, rather than natural; and there had to be sufficient data to create a reconstruction, though we are not given any further information about the sources used. Why Budget Direct have undertaken this mission seems to be twofold. First, it seems that there is a desire to address accessibility, as we are told: ‘most of us won’t get to see them in person. Budget Direct decided to bring them to your home instead.’ It is also worth noting that, timewise, this happened at the height of the global coronavirus pandemic, which prevented almost all international travel. Second, a case is made for a moral imperative: ‘taking care of the centuries of knowledge and meaning embedded in UNESCO’s most endangered sites seems a pretty good way to progress as a culture.’ Their response to these issues was to create a GIF animation for each site, which shows one part of a site ‘from how it looks now to how it looked when first built’.

The short GIF sequence for the Temple of Bel starts with a current view of the temple, then adds a wire frame over which a reconstruction is layered. We end with a full building that we assume represents how they think it looked in ‘its former glory’. Any sense of the past, however, is disrupted by the inclusion of three people in modern, Westernized clothing, and what looks like a privet hedge. It is easy to critique this GIF reconstruction. The inclusion of modern people in the final

Temple of Bel, but the arch shown standing at the site of Palmyra is actually the monumental arch and not the gateway.

⁵⁰ Cameron 2016.

⁵¹ Nikita 2020. On the wider Russian project, see Kamash (in press).

⁵² Budget Direct 2020. The sites chosen for the piece were: Hatra, Iraq; Leptis Magna, Libya; Palmyra, Syria; Portobelo-San Lorenzo Fortifications, Panama; Nan Madol, Micronesia; and the Old City of Jerusalem, Israel. The original blog post does not now seem to be available; the reconstructions and some information about their creation can be found at: e-architect 2020.

view is incongruous and the privet-style greenery suggests a lack of research into the climate and environment of the archaeological site during the Roman period. We could also fault their information provision: What specific period of the temple are we being shown in the final image ('first built' could mean many things) and why is that privileged over other periods of its history? Both of these elements would contravene the Seville Charter's principles for computer-aided visualization, specifically principle 4.5 on historical rigour.⁵³ Their preservation mission is also open to critique: In what sense are these GIFs taking care of these sites? Budget

Direct is an easy target in all of these ways, but are they substantially worse than other projects offering to reconstruct the Temple of Bel, such as the Russian project? The Russian project and Maxim Atayants also do not tell us anything substantial about the sources they used and their design choices.

What the Russian project might have that Budget Direct is lacking is perceived authority in the sense of a kind of borrowed or reflected authority gained from influential backers, for example prestigious universities, world-leading museums, and institutional heavyweights, such as UNESCO. Budget Direct does not have this borrowed authority and shows that, in effect, anyone with access to a small amount of tech and resources can get in on the reconstruction game. The trouble with this is that there is no control over what is produced. We need to have more awareness of what we are doing and ensure clear communication of that awareness. If we deliberately



Figure 12.16. Mosaic showing the destroyed Bel temple, made by Sawsan Hamada (reproduced by kind permission of the Palmyrene Voices Initiative).

engage in a creative response that expresses our emotions, we need to make that clear. Equally, if we create something that we believe to be a faithful and accurate representation, then we need to be transparent about our methods, choices, and sources, as well as the limitations of our knowledge. More thought and attention also must be given as to whom we are doing this for and why: Who benefits most from a GIF of the Temple of Bel or a 3D model at the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg?

These responses to the destruction experienced at the archaeological site of Palmyra fall foul of Western, global heritagization that has been heavily critiqued by Syrian scholars working in this sphere. Demonstrated most powerfully, perhaps, through the Russian project is the thinly veiled link between geopolitics and heritage, where heritage is being weaponized to exert cultural influence alongside military might.⁵⁴ In addition, the exploitative nature of reconstructions such as these has led Ammar Azzouz to observe incisively: 'our pain, their heritage project.'⁵⁵ These projects that were born out of the vacuum of physical absence have not filled that emptiness; they have created more emptiness and allowed a continued process of claiming by the West heritage that speaks most meaningfully to Syrians. While some may

⁵³ Seville Principle 4.5.2: 'All historical phases recorded during archaeological research are extremely valuable. Thus, a rigorous approach would not be one that shows only the time of splendour of reconstructed or recreated archaeological remains but rather one that shows all the phases, including periods of decline. Nor should it display an idyllic image of the past with seemingly newly constructed buildings, people who look like models, etc., but rather a real image, i.e. with buildings in varying states of conservation, people of different sizes and weights, etc.'; Lopez-Manchero and Grande 2013.

⁵⁴ See e.g. Munawar 2022; also Plets 2017.

⁵⁵ Azzouz 2022.

have good intentions, good intentions may no longer be enough — if they ever were.

Instead, we should look to other projects, such as ‘The Palmyrene Voices Initiative’, as examples of best practice.⁵⁶ Set up by displaced Syrian archaeologists, this initiative places the people of Tadmor-Palmyra at the heart of everything it does: ‘to provide a platform for the voices of the Palmyrene people to reach the international community; to support all Palmyrene people in the diaspora in their efforts to come back to Palmyra; and to help them to rebuild their city in a way that guarantees their dignity and preserves their identity.’⁵⁷ One aspect of this work is to provide displaced craftspeople and artisans from Palmyra with opportunities to reignite their craft practices, including an online platform for the sale of their creations. The tendrils of these visuals and reconstructions expand far and wide, however, until they are even absorbed into the consciousness of these displaced artisans: on sale from the Palmyrene Voices website is a mosaic depicting the ‘destroyed Bel Temple’ — or, more accurately, that lone western gateway from the *cella* (Fig. 12.16).

Filling the Void: Recontextualizing the Sanctuary of Bel's French Mandate History

So, what are we left with when reconsidering the post-Mandate history of the Sanctuary of Bel, potentially the most iconic monument from ancient Syria — at least seen from a Western perspective? One conclusion is that despite centuries of work, the interventions in the Sanctuary of Bel have not been successful, archaeologically speaking. The building's phases remain poorly understood, and its archaeological sequence is patchy. It is unclear whether we will ever be able to understand the sanctuary's development in higher resolution. As far as the post-Mandate period is concerned, the evidence was thoroughly cleared in the early twentieth century without much documentation — as far as is known — except a few mentions here and there and some aerial photographs documenting the progress over the years. Other documentation was lost during the Syrian conflict. The clearing of the sanctuary was seen as a positive step towards curating the classical past and presenting it to tourists, and on its own terms this was successful until the start of the Syrian conflict.

Piecing back together a history of the Sanctuary of Bel — not only as one of the most monumental sanctuaries in the ancient world but also as a monument with many, continuing lives and meanings, means having to knit together evidence which is dispersed and often incidentally recorded. Evidence for the life history of the structure and its settlements must be gleaned from drawings, writings, notes, and photographs which are dispersed and fragmented. We have taken one small step in this contribution to begin such a process with a point of departure in the diaries of Harald Ingholt and archival photographs, but much evidence remains at large. It is also necessary to look past the creation of the site as it was fashioned into a classical ruin, a fashioning in drawing, photographs, and finally in material clearance, which has persistently trumped the collection of actual information about the archaeological past of the sanctuary. That is to say, the depictions of the site, and its ‘preservation’ as a Roman-era monument, was never really about understanding the ancient past. There was, however, a process of extraction, and Ingholt's diaries document a focus on the classical heritage, in which he extracted inscriptions from homes within the sanctuary with little regard for their contemporary context. This led to another shape of curation of the ancient material, in the case of Ingholt's diary passages about the sanctuary focused mostly on inscriptions and a few other objects, putting them into a format which separated them from the living community and reduced their ‘owners’ or ‘keepers’ to sheer names and notations.

This project of ruin creation and curation of the Sanctuary of Bel as a tourist destination showcasing a single Roman-era phase of its history has, sadly, been successful. From the moment of contact with European travellers and archaeologists, the deliberate selectivity of one kind of past has led to repeating waves of emptying and loss with disturbing contemporary consequences. The images of a classical ruin, valued by the West, that have been created from Wood onwards have fundamentally shaped the targeting of the monument by Da'esh. The pain of the deliberate creation of loss by Da'esh has been deepened by the emptying processes of digital reconstructions and media images that parallel the emptying of the temenos in the twentieth century. This seemingly inexorable journey towards emptiness has allowed loss to become ever more deeply entwined into the Sanctuary of Bel.

⁵⁶ <<https://palmyrenevoices.org/>> [accessed 22 August 2023].

⁵⁷ <<https://palmyrenevoices.org/vision-and-objectives/>> [accessed 22 August 2023].

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